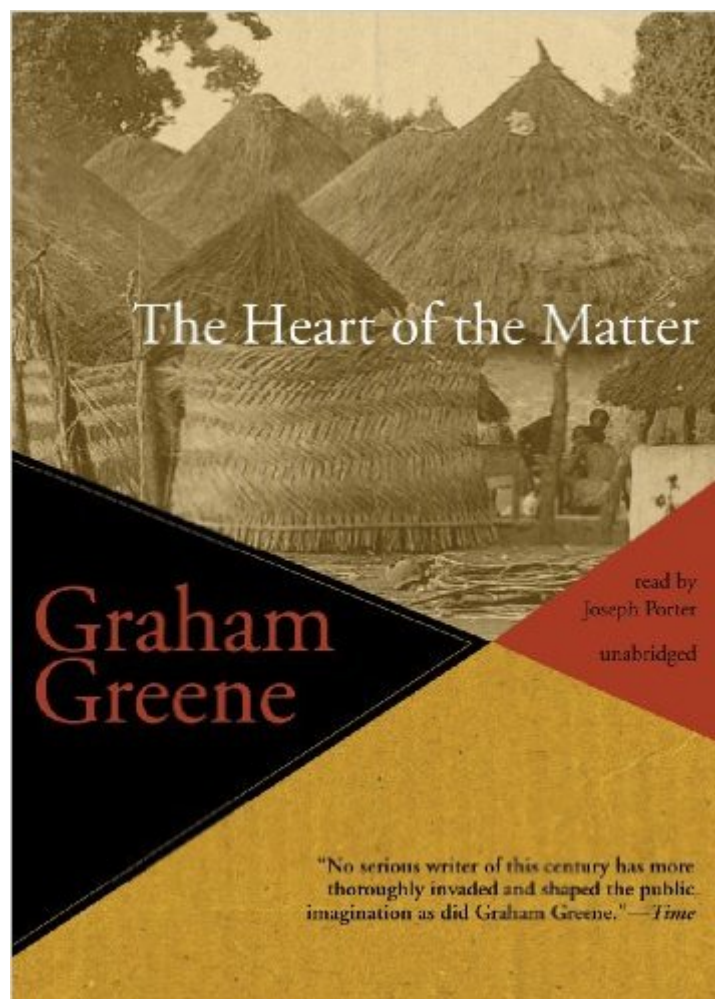


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The Heart Of The Matter



Synopsis

In this widely acclaimed modern classic, Graham Greene delves deep into character to tell the dramatic, suspenseful story of a good man's conflict between passion and faith. *The Heart of the Matter* is one of Graham Greene's most enduring and tragic novels. A police commissioner in a British-governed, war-torn West African state, Scobie is bound by the strictest integrity and sense of duty both for his colonial responsibilities and for his wife, whom he deeply pities but no longer loves. Passed over for a promotion, he is forced to borrow money in order to send his despairing wife away on a holiday. When in her absence he develops a passion for a young widow, the scrupulously honest Catholic finds himself giving way to deceit and dishonor. Enmeshed in love and intrigue, he will betray everything he believes in, with tragic consequences.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Heart of the Matter is not a mystery, a high-octane adventure, nor does it center on an extraordinary event. Rather it is a story of one man whose faith and character is put to the ultimate test. That man is Henry Scobie. Henry Scobie is a British assistant police commissioner stationed in a West African coastal town during World War II. Scobie is a devout catholic who is unhappily married but feels obligated to fulfill his wife Louise's needs and make her happy. An honest man, Scobie has remained faithful to his wife in their fifteen years of marriage and has upheld his duties as an officer of the law. But when Louise decides to get away for a while because she does not like the town they are in, Scobie's beliefs and convictions get challenged and he fails to measure up to the man he thought he was. He winds up falling in love with a nineteen-year old girl and during the affair he

feels torn over his desire to be with her yet continue to keep his wife happy and to honor God. At the same time his work also suffers, as he begins to do business with some unscrupulous characters. His good reputation and sense of self-worth deteriorates day by day. Distraught and at the end of his rope, Scobie takes extreme measures to overcome his conflicts and the story wraps up with a shocking conclusion that leaves the reader with plenty to ponder. At times the plot moved slowly, however, Greene did a fabulous job at capturing the ambiguity of the human condition and providing insight into the inner demons that plague us all. Many of Greene's famous quotes came from this book, including my favorite, "Point me out the happy man and I will point you out either egotism, selfishness, evil--or else an absolute ignorance." I think William Golding said it best when he stated, "Graham Greene will be read and remembered as the ultimate chronicler of twentieth-century man's consciousness and anxiety."

The Heart of the Matter, as do many of Greene's novels, considers the questions of faith, good and evil from a Catholic point of view. Greene, a convert to Catholicism himself, imbues the character of Major Scobie with a fierce sense of justice, duty and responsibility. He is alone as an honest man in the less than honest world of the Ivory Coast during the early days of the Second World War. As the assistant commissioner of police, he sifts evidence and weighs the scales of justice carefully, but as with all of Greene's protagonist he suffers from a fatal flaw, his relationships with women. His duty towards a wife he no longer loves forces him into a compromising position with a well know Syrian moneylender in order to fulfill her wish to be sent away from the colony. Falling in love with a newly-widowed woman thirty years his junior and the affair that follows plunges him into further turmoil, worsened by the return of his wife. Throughout, Scobie fails to resolve his love and duty towards the two women. In seeking to place their happiness above his own, and please them both, he damns himself before his maker, and falls ever deeper into the tangle of lies in which he finds himself. Greene's protagonist arouses pathos in the reader, as we watch an essentially good man ground down by conflicting emotions and responsibilities. Simple solutions seem outside Scobie's ken, and no amount of wishing can prevent the end towards which he rushes headlong. If you have never read any of Graham Greene's fantastic novels, may I suggest that you make "The Heart of the Matter" your first, it won't be your last.

This is a sad book. We watch the decline of a good man trapped in an impossible spiritual impasse. The book lays out, in lucid prose, all the fine moral lines faced by those with faith. Not only are we treated to the Catholic guilt of Scobie, who commits moral sins out of the need to help

others, but we are shown the hypocrisy of his "good" Catholic wife--who follows all the rules but loves no one but herself. Pay special attention to the reactions of all the characters to Scobie's final action. They reveal all the complexity of the issues involved and all the blindness produced by human limitations. A terrific book that will leave you thinking, whether you're religious or not.

This novel is a brilliant masterpiece which speaks directly to the reader's heart. The writing is of such finesse and the plot so powerful that you won't be able to put down the book until you find out how Major Scobie "resolves his problems" in the end (his problems centre on how to ensure his wife's, his mistress's AND [even] God's happiness even if it means he has to pay the ultimate price for it). The novel will evoke every kind of feelings in the reader. I know I felt love, tenderness, sadness, sometimes impatience but always PITY for Major Scobie, a deeply religious man who is merciful, responsible and kind towards everyone else but whom nobody really cares about, what more pities. Even though "everyone" claims to love Scobie or to value his friendship, they are actually selfish, ordinary people who have their own hidden agenda (even if they don't realize it) and want something or other from Scobie. All these "demands" weigh the poor man down so badly that in the end, he is driven to commit the final act of damnation so that (or so he thinks) the ones he loves will be free of him and they will no longer be unhappy. It's truly wonderful and fulfilling to read a novel which offers such a great insight into the mind's psychology and the human heart. I've been a fan of Greene's works since I read "The End of the Affair" which I loved dearly. I believe that one doesn't have to be a Catholic to appreciate and understand the novel, despite its heavy references to the religion (eg. about sins, confession, communion, repentance, etc). I can't praise this novel highly enough! Just pick it up! It may even transform some of your views on life (for the better). If not, at the very least it'll transform you instantly into a Graham Greene fan (that is, if you aren't one already)!

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