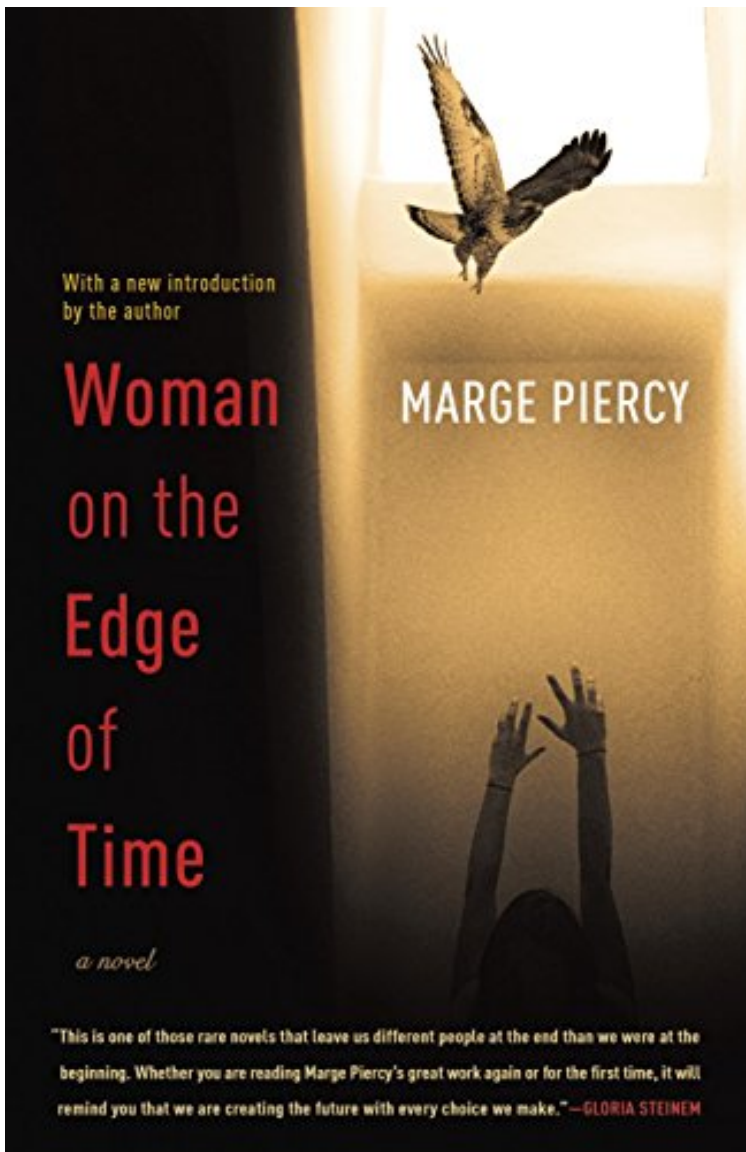


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Woman on the Edge of Time



Par Marge Piercy
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurHailed as a classic of speculative fiction, Marge Piercys landmark novel is a transformative vision of two futuresand what it takes to will one or the other into reality. Harrowing and prescient, Woman on the Edge of Time speaks to a new generation on whom these choices weigh more heavily than ever before. Connie Ramos is a Mexican American woman living on the streets of New York. Once ambitious and proud, she has lost her child, her husband, her dignityand now they want to take her sanity. After being unjustly committed to a mental institution, Connie is contacted by an envoy from the year 2137, who shows her a time of sexual and racial equality, environmental purity, and unprecedented self-actualization. But Connie also bears witness to another potential outcome: a society of grotesque

exploitation in which the barrier between person and commodity has finally been eroded. One will become our world. And Connie herself may strike the decisive blow. Praise for *Woman on the Edge of Time* This is one of those rare novels that leave us different people at the end than we were at the beginning. Whether you are reading Marge Piercys great work again or for the first time, it will remind you that we are creating the future with every choice we make. Gloria Steinem An ambitious, unusual novel about the possibilities for moral courage in contemporary society. The Philadelphia Inquirer A stunning, even astonishing novel . . . marvelous and compelling. Publishers Weekly Connie Ramoss world is cuttngly real. Newsweek Absorbing and exciting. The New York Times Book From the Trade Paperback edition. Extrait CHAPTER ONE Connie got up from her kitchen table and walked slowly to the door. Either I saw him or I didnt and Im crazy for real this time, she thought. Its me Dolly! Her niece was screaming in the hall. Let me in! Hurry! Momentito. Connie fumbled with the bolt, the police lock, finally swinging the door wide. Dolly fell in past her, her face bloody. Connie clutched at Dolly, trying to see how badly she was hurt. Qu pasa? Who did this? Blood was oozing from Dollys bruised mouth and she grasped a wad of matted paper handkerchiefs brown with old blood and spotted bright red with fresh. Her left eye was swollen shut. Geraldo beat me. Dolly let her peel off the blue winter coat trimmed with fur and press her broad hips in pink pants back into the kitchen chair. There Dolly collapsed and began to weep. Awkwardly Connie embraced her shoulders, her hands slipping on the satin of the blouse. The chairs warm, Dolly said after a few minutes. Get me a handkerchief. Connie brought toilet paper from the hall bathroom she had nothing else and carefully locked the outside door again. Then she put some of the good Dominican coffee she saved for special into the drip pot and set water to boil in a kettle. Its cold in here, Dolly whimpered. Ill make it warmer. She lit the oven and turned on the burners.

Soon itll be like that hothouse of yours.... Geraldo beat you? Dolly opened her mouth wide, gaping. Loo...Loo ...As gently as she could she poked into Dollys bloody mouth. Her own flesh cringed. Dolly jerked away. He broke a tooth, didnt he? That dirty rotten pimp! Will I lose a tooth? I think you have one broken and maybe another loose. But who am I to say? Im no dentist. Youre still bleeding! Hes crazy, that pig! He wants to mess me up. Connie, how come you wouldnt let me in? I was screaming in the hall forever. It wasnt five minutes.... I thought I heard voices. Is somebody here? Dolly looked toward the other room, the bedroom. Who would be here? I had the TV on. It hurts so much. Give me something to kill the pain. Aspirin? Oh, come on. It hurts! Hija ma, how would I have anything? Connie lifted her hands to show them empty, always empty. Those pills they made you take, from the State. Let me give you ice. Dolly had heard her talking with Luciente: therefore he existed. Or Dolly had heard her talking to herself. Dolly had said the chair was warm: she had been sitting in the other chair, in front of the plate from her supper of eggs and beans. She must not think about it now, with Dolly suffering. His story was unbelievable! No, dont think about it. She wrapped ice cubes in a kitchen towel and brought them to Dolly. That prescription ran out a year ago. Not that she had taken the tranquilizers. She had sold the pills for a little extra money, for a piece of pork or chicken once a week, soap to wash with. She found it hard to believe anybody would take that poison intentionally, but you could peddle any kind of pill in El Barrio. Still, there had been the nuisance of going down to Bellevue, since she had been living near Dollys when she had been sent away and never could get her case transferred. Consuelo! Dolly leaned her swollen cheek on Connies shoulder. Everything hurts! Im scared. He punched me in the belly, hard. Why do you stay with him? What good is he? With your daughter, why have such a cabrn hanging around? Dolly gave her the mocking glance that would greet any comment she might make for the rest of her life on the subject of the welfare of children; or did she imagine it? Consuelo, I feel so sick. I feel lousy through and through. I have to lie down. Oh, if he makes me lose this baby, Ill kill him! As she supported her nieces weight into the bedroom she felt a flash of fear or perhaps of hope that Luciente would still be there. But the tiny room held only her swaybacked bed, the chair with her alarm clock on it, the dresser, the wine jug full of dried flowers, the airshaft window incompletely covered with old curtains from better days. She undressed Dolly tenderly as a baby, but her niece groaned and cursed and wept more. The satin polka dot shirt was streaked with blood and blood had soaked through her black satin brassiere with the nipples cut out. But it wont show on your nice bra, Connie promised as Dolly mourned her clothes, her body, her skin. Bruises had already clotted under the velvety skin of Dollys belly, her soft arms, her collarbone. Mira! Is there blood on my panties? See if he made me bleed there. You arent bleeding there, I promise. Get under the covers. Oye, Dolly, it isnt that easy to lose a baby! In the sixth month, if he beat you, maybe. But in the second month that baby is better protected than you are. She put the alarm on the floor and sat in the straight chair beside the bed to hold Dollys limp hand. Listen, I should take you to emergency. To Met. Dont make me go anyplace. I hurt too much. They can give you something for the

pain. Ill get a gypsy cab to take us. Its only fifteen blocks. Im ashamed. What happened to you? Oh, my pimp beat up on me. In the morning Ill go to my own dentist. You take me down to him in the morning. Otera on Canal. You call him up at nine-thirty in the morning and tell him to take me right away. Now hold the ice against my cheek. Dolly, how do you know Geraldo wont come charging up here? Consuelo! Dolly drawled her name in a long wail of pain. Be nice to me! Dont push me around too! I hurt, I want to rest. Be sweet to me. Give me a little yerbaits in my purse. At the bottom of the cigarette pack. Dolly! Youre crazy to run around with your face bleeding and dope in your purse! Suppose the cops pick you up? I had a lot of time to sort my purse when I was leaving! Come on, get it for me! She was fumbling through Dollys big patent leather bag, clumsy prying in another womans purse, when she heard heavy steps climbing. Men in a hurry. She froze. Why? Men ran up and down the steps of the tenement all night. But she knew. Geraldo pounded the door. She kept quiet. In the bedroom Dolly moaned and began to weep again. Geraldo hit the door harder. Open the door, you old bitch! Open or Ill break it down. Bust your head in. Come on, open this fucking door! He began kicking so hard the wood cracked and started to give way. He would break it down. She yelled, Wait! Wait! Im coming! Not a door opened in the hallway. Nobody came to look out. She undid the locks and hopped back, before he could slam the door to the wall and crush her behind it. He strode in, thumping the door to the wall as she had known he would, followed by a scrawny older man in a buttoned-up gray overcoat and a hulking bato loco named Slick she had seen with Geraldo before. They all crowded into her kitchen and Geraldo slammed the door behind. Geraldo was Dollys boyfriend. He had been a vendadero and done well enough, keeping Dolly and her little girl, Nita, from her marriage. But some squeeze in the drug trade had cut him off after he had been busted, although he had not ended up serving time. Now he made Dolly work as a prostitute, selling her body to all the dirty men in the city. He had three other girls that perhaps he had been running all the time on the side. Dolly made four. Connie hated him. It flowed like electric syrup through her veins how she hated him. Her hatred gave her a flush in the nerves like speed coming on. Geraldo was a medium-tall grifo with fair skin, gray eyes, kinky hair, a lambré that he wore in a symmetrical Afro. He was elegant. Every time her eyes grated upon him he was attired in some new costume of pimpish splendor. She dreamed of peeling off a sleekly polished antiques lizard high-heeled boot and pounding it down his lying throat. She dreamed of yanking off his finger the large grayish diamond he boasted matched his scheming eyes and using it to slit his throat, so his bad poisoned blood would run out. Ta Consuelo, he crooned. Caca de puta. Old bitch. Get your fat and worthless ass out of my way. Move! Get out of my house! You hurt her enough. Get out! Not anything like Im going to hurt that bitch if she doesnt shape up. The back of his arm striking like a rattlesnake, he shoved her into the sink. Then he strolled over to lounge blocking the bedroom door. Always he was playing in some cold death-head mirror, watching himself, polishing his cool. Hey, cunt, stop blubbering. I brought you a doctor. What kind of doctor? Connie shrieked. She had slid under his blow and caught only the edge of the sink. She cowered, half crouching. A butcher! Thats what kind of doctor! That bughouse taught you all about doctors, um? You leave her alone, Geraldo! She wants to have your baby so bad, she can stay with me. So you can cut it up, you nut? Now turn it off or Slick will bust your lip. Geraldo leaned on the doorframe, lighting a cigarette and dropping the lit match on the floor, where it slowly burned out, making a black hole in the worn linoleum. Time to rise and fly. I brought a doctor to fix you. Up now. Move! No! I dont want him to touch me! Geraldo honey, I want this baby! What shits you pushing? You think I sweat bricks for the kid of some stupid trick with dragging balls? You dont even know what color worm you got turning in the apple. Its your baby! It is. In Puerto Rico I didnt take my pills. Woman, so many men been into you, it could have a whole subway car of daddies. In San Juan I never took my pills. I told you already! You tell me? Not in this life, baby. How you pass the time while I was busy in La Perla, um? He flicked lint from his vest. You wouldnt take me to meet your family! Geraldo had taken Dolly with him on vacation. Connie felt pretty sure Dolly had tried to get pregnant, believing that Geraldo would let her quit whoring. Dolly wanted to have another baby and stay home. Like figures of paper, like a manger scene of pasteboard figures, a fantasy had shone in Connie since her conversation with Dolly that morning: she and Dolly and Dollys children would live together. She would have a family again, finally. She would be ever so careful and good and she would do anything, anything at all to keep them together. She would never be jealous of her niece no matter how many boyfriends she had. Dolly could stay out all night and go off on weekends and to Florida even and she would stay with Nita and the baby. As if anyone would ever again leave her alone with a child. The dream was like those paper dolls, the only dolls she had had as a child, dolls with blond paper hair and Anglo features and big paper smiles. That she knew in her heart of ashes the dream was futile did not make it less precious. Every soul needs a

little sweetness. She thought of the stalks of sugar cane the kids bought at the fruit and vegetable man. Sweet in the mouth as you chewed it, and then you spat out the husks and they lay in the street. Hollow, flimsy, for a moment sweet in the mouth. Cane with which her grandmother had sweetened the chocolate long ago in El Paso. Shut off that fucking kettle! Geraldo shouted at her and she jumped to put out the flame. The coffee she had never finished making. The kettle had boiled almost dry. She shut off the oven and the burners because now her two small rooms felt stifling hot. How she had jumped to the stove when he rapped out that curt command. She resented obeying him automatically, instinctively jerking at the loud masculine order. His beauty only made him more hateful. His face with the big gray eyes, the broad nose, the full cruel mouth, the hands like long talons, the proud bearing he was the man who had pimped her favorite niece, her baby, the pimp who had beaten Dolly and sold her to pigs to empty themselves in. Who robbed Dolly and slapped her daughter Nita and took away the money squeezed out of the pollution of Dolly's flesh to buy lizard boots and cocaine and other women. Geraldo was her father, who had beaten her every week of her childhood. Her second husband, who had sent her into emergency with blood running down her legs. He was El Muro, who had raped her and then beaten her because she would not lie and say she had enjoyed it. She had had the strength then to run, to cut her losses and run. On the evening bus the next day she had left her home in Chicago, her father and sisters, the graves of her mother and her first (her real) husband, Martn. Dolly lacked the coarse strength that had saved her that time. But Dolly had Nita already and a baby in the oven. Fjate, Geraldo, she screamed. She's carrying your child. She came back that way from San Juan. I told her she was carrying the first time I saw her back here. What kind of tailless wonder are you to have your own child butchered by that doctor of dogs? Pivoting, Geraldo cuffed her back into the stove. The hot metal seared her back in a broad line and she clamped her lips tight, unable to scream, unable to issue a sound from the suddenness of the pain. She sank to the floor and could not speak or move. Puta, get up and go with Dr. Medias, or Ill have him do it on you right in that witch's bed. Move! No! No! Dolly was thrashing around in bed, screaming and sobbing. Geraldo stepped into the bedroom, out of Connie's line of sight. She tried to roll to her feet. The scrawny doctor sat on the edge of a kitchen chair. He was in his fifties. His clothes were new and conservative, his manner was tense, and his foot tapped, tapped. Slick was leaning against the outer door smoking a joint and grinning. From the Trade Paperback edition. *Revue de presse* This is one of those rare novels that leave us different people at the end than we were at the beginning. Whether you are reading Marge Piercy's great work again or for the first time, it will remind you that we are creating the future with every choice we make. *Gloria Steinem* An ambitious, unusual novel about the possibilities for moral courage in contemporary society. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* A stunning, even astonishing novel . . . marvelous and compelling. *Publishers Weekly* Connie Ramoss world is cuttngly real. *Newsweek* Absorbing and exciting. *The New York Times Book* From the Trade Paperback edition.