



The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells: A Novel

By Andrew Sean Greer

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From the critically acclaimed author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Confessions of Max Tivoli* comes *The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells*, a rapturously romantic story of a woman who finds herself transported to the “other lives” she might have lived.

After the death of her beloved twin brother and the abandonment of her long-time lover, Greta Wells undergoes electroshock therapy. Over the course of the treatment, Greta finds herself repeatedly sent to 1918, 1941, and back to the present. Whisked from the gas-lit streets and horse-drawn carriages of the West Village to a martini-fueled lunch at the Oak Room, in these other worlds, Greta finds her brother alive and well—though fearfully masking his true personality. And her former lover is now her devoted husband...but will he be unfaithful to her in this life as well? Greta Wells is fascinated by her alter egos: in 1941, she is a devoted mother; in 1918, she is a bohemian adulteress.

In this spellbinding novel by Andrew Sean Greer, each reality has its own losses, its own rewards; each extracts a different price. Which life will she choose as she wrestles with the unpredictability of love and the consequences of even her most carefully considered choices?

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The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells: A Novel By Andrew Sean Greer Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, July 2013: Like many books about time travel, including Stephen King's *11/23/64* and the author's own *The Confessions of Max Tivoli*, this achingly lovely novel examines the power of nostalgia and longing and hope. When we first meet Greta Wells, she lives in 1985 Greenwich Village and is mightily depressed by the death of her beloved gay twin brother from an unnamed disease that is clearly AIDS. On the advice of her psychiatrist, she begins shock treatments, which somehow let her travel to her would-have-been life in 1918, and one in 1943. Surrounded by the same people in the garb and custom of the various eras--her dead brother's lover, a slightly nutty Aunt who made me think of Endora from TV's *Bewitched*, and the lover who eventually leaves her in 1985--Greta (and we) come to see that things never really change and that, as they say, Wherever you go, there you are. Deftly and with great heart, Greer shows us that sadness is universal and timeless. But then, so is love. --*Sara Nelson*

The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells Playlist



9 Songs that Inspired Andrew Sean Greer

I lived through 1985, but I didn't live through 1941 or 1918, the other eras of Greta's life, so I tried to imagine what I would have listened to back then. A mad mix of everything, it turns out—from swing to classical to vaudeville.

1. When Tomorrow Comes by The Eurythmics

1985 was full of pop sounds, but for me I always loved a brokenhearted woman who sang like a robot. Annie Lennox helped me survive adolescence with her lovelorn lyrics and cold cold heart. And yet—so full of hope. If there were a movie of *Greta Wells*, it would begin with this song about “tomorrow.”

2. Close To Me by The Cure

Almost as good as a robot lady for me was a man falling apart. Being fifteen, putting this into my Walkman, and hearing The Cure *breathing into my ear*. Shocking. Raw and sad and full of desperate love, just like Greta. Listen to the swinging brass section—echoes of the past.

3. La Vie En Rose by Grace Jones

Grace Jones, the ultimate robot chanteuse. This patient nostalgic remake (she doesn't sing for two and a half minutes): I picture Greta playing it as she lies in bed and thinks about her life.

4. Chattanooga Choo Choo by The Andrews Sisters

I just had to. 1941. What could better capture the spirit of America on the brink of war? They are really swinging on this one by the two minute mark.

5. Lady in the Dark: The Saga of Jenny by Gertrude Lawrence

It wasn't all swing swing swing in 1941—there was wit and elegance to the era, including this Kurt Weill number. It pretends to be a moral tale about how a woman should not make up her mind. Of course it really does quite the opposite.

6. Everything Happens to Me by Billie Holiday

Oh Billie. A comical journey through the mishaps of a woman's life, but Billy Holiday gives it real despair. I imagine this playing in Greta's kitchen as she smokes a cigarette while the casserole heats in the oven.

7. Darktown Strutter's Ball by The Original Dixieland Jazz Band

1918 had a sense of freedom, and this song (disturbingly titled) shows undeniable joy. Picture young women tapping their feet, unlacing their corsets and getting up to dance! Greta's Aunt Ruth would have played this hit during one of her notorious parties.

8. Firebird Suite: The Infernal Dance by The Budapest Festival Orchestra

Jazz, ragtime, dixieland—music that many Americans didn't understand. But classical was quite in vogue. This piece was thoroughly modern, and its drama reminds us of the horrors of 1918: war, famine and plague.

9. You Ain't Heard Nothing Yet by Al Jolson

Subtly risqué vaudeville. Jolsen sang like nobody before—people wept and screamed—and he influenced Crosby, Sinatra, Elvis, and every kid on American Idol who croons a note. What better way to end a soundtrack than with a promise of better to come?

From [Booklist](#)

Greer (The Confessions of Max Tivoli, 2004, and The Story of a Marriage, 2008) cleverly reinvents that always popular staple: the time-travel novel. The story opens in 1985 as a severely depressed Greta Wells undergoes electroshock therapy in order to cope with the death of her beloved twin brother and a devastating personal betrayal by her long-term significant other. With each treatment, she is whisked back and forth through three different lives, landing in 1918, 1941, or 1985. As the eras change, she carries her circle of family and friends with her, and the setting—New York's charming West Village—remains a paradoxically

evolving constant. Despite the fact that she is essentially the same person in every life, her choices, dictated as much by time and place as by personality and free will, are radically dissimilar. Philosophically intriguing as well as gorgeously imagined and executed, this novel will catch fire with the same audience that propelled Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2003) to the top of the best-seller list. --Margaret Flanagan

Review

"Elegiac in tone, this tale of time travel, loss and compromise is as precisely engineered as a Swiss watch. [Greer] manages the complexities of this temporal round robin with precision and panache...a generous novel..." (*New York Times Book Review*)

"This novel is a guilty pleasure of sorts for anyone who has ever wondered, What if? We're taught not to dwell on paths not taken, but this book weaves a tale about the magical possibility of what could have been." (*Real Simple*)

"...The magical conceit here is well earned and imagined rather than gimmicky, and Greer writes with an acute sensitivity for the wonderment that underpins the human experience." (*The Daily Beast*)

"...elegant and wistful..." (*Time Out New York*)

"Greer is a deep thinker and a fine stylist...consider reading Greta Wells for sentences like these: 'It is almost impossible to capture true sadness; it is a deep-sea creature that can never be brought into view.'" (*USA Today*)

"...emotionally rich...Greer is an artful, elegant writer...*The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells* is a deeply romantic book." (Miami Herald)

"The premise of this novel isn't that a woman travels through time: it's that 'the impossible happens once to each of us'...What this wonderful novel teaches us is how magic works." (John Irving)

"Andrew Sean Greer is one of the most talented writers around, feeling and funny, with a genuinely fine prose style and a sensibility to match." (Michael Chabon)

"Greer's imaginative treatment of love and relationships shines again in his third novel. **VERDICT** Fans of Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife* will delight in following the thought process of time traveling while maintaining a hold on a singular identity." (Library Journal (starred review))

"Andrew Sean Greer writes with an intelligent joy that encompasses a truly kaleidoscopic vision, reminding me of the work of Peter Carey and David Mitchell. This novel is beautifully sewn together." (Colum McCann)

"No one tells the secrets of the human heart more bravely or eloquently than Andrew Sean Greer. He has been called our Proust, our Nabokov, but with this novel he transcends all comparison. This is a genius-stroke of a book. Read it and weep." (Julie Orringer, bestselling author of *The Invisible Bridge*)

"Andrew Sean Greer's *The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells* is a luminous inquiry into time itself, and Greta Wells, in her transit between three lives, is his most assured creation. What a lovely novel: stirring, inclusive, forgiving, and extraordinarily hopeful." (Jayne Anne Phillips)

"Philosophically intriguing as well as gorgeously imagined and executed, this novel will catch fire with

the same audience that propelled *The Time Traveler's Wife* to the top of the bestseller list.” (Booklist)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Tyson:

Information is provisions for individuals to get better life, information currently can get by anyone at everywhere. The information can be a expertise or any news even a concern. What people must be consider when those information which is inside former life are difficult to be find than now could be taking seriously which one would work to believe or which one the resource are convinced. If you get the unstable resource then you buy it as your main information it will have huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen inside you if you take *The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells: A Novel* as your daily resource information.

Marc Starr:

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Lynn Gallagher:

The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells: A Novel can be one of your basic books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to get every word into pleasure arrangement in writing *The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells: A Novel* however doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource information that maybe you can be one among it. This great information may drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial pondering.

Marjorie Calhoun:

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