
The Nature and Significance of the Kindness

Kindness, when given out, is habitually expected to be returned. More often than not it is seen that kindness, in fact, is given so that something else of value may be returned. Kindness is often exchanged for similar invaluable things like favouritism and prosperity, making the giver of such manners manipulative. When one contains the hidden motive to receive something in return for expected kindness, one has the ability to control not only the relationships around them, but their own singular destiny as well. For example, the character Offred of *The Handmaid's Tale* treats her masters Serena Joy and The Commander, as well as her only friend Ofglen, with kindness merely to achieve a sure confirmation of her own well-being. In Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred uses kindness to mask her inner thoughts and feelings in order to ensure her survival and her believed destiny as a handmaid.

Though Offred's gentleness and quite nature are expected in her ranking as a Handmaid, Offred's treatment towards Serena Joy differs from her attitude. Having known Serena Joy previously to be an enthusiastic pioneer of the new Gilead regime, Offred works dutifully to live up to her mater's expectations. Understanding that "it was best not to speak unless [asked] a direct question", Offred secures her status in the household in her silence and servitude, though inside she holds the belief that as long as she presents herself well, she will eventually be rewarded. This inner belief results in Offred's small acts of rebellion; although she speaks and acts as she should, Offred still identifies herself as an independent and free thinking woman, her only rebellion. This discrepancy between her inner non-conformity and her outward manners toward Serena Joy is what Offred believes will ultimately bring her some amount of freedom. By operating under the guise of servitude, Offred can eventually gain small amounts of independence, at the will of Serena Joy. Offred does achieve this soon enough in the form of a cigarette and match given to her by Serena Joy, demonstrating that in order to truly manipulate someone, one must be truly kind and hide their inner motives.

Offred's kindness to her only friend Ofglen originally is performed to ensure her social status among the other Handmaids, but quickly Offred learns that in order to gain information from her partner, she must act accordingly. Ofglen reveals herself as a veritable source of rebellion, and if Offred is to share this rebellion, she needs to show her willingness. Offred does this by kindly greeting Ofglen with the forbidden greeting of "Hello" and by mocking the Gilead enthusiasts with "I thought you were a true believer." By acting in this "old fashioned" way and speaking their minds, both Offred and Ofglen are ensuring their friendship and stating their superficial commitment to each other. Though Offred only complies to gain information of the underground resistance, it is this behaviour that associates Offred with no one. She displays kindness to Ofglen only to manipulate her, conveying to the reader that though Offred does not identify with the traditional Gilead regime, she doesn't identify with the resistance movement either. Here it is displayed that though Offred possesses the traits of rebellion and kindness, she only does so to secure the survival of only herself.

Towards her ultimate master, The Commander, Offred is kind and almost invisible, in this way securing her destiny as a Handmaid. Offred recalls the story of a Nazi guard who "was not a monster", at least not to his wife. By comparing the wife's situation to her own, Offred realizes that although the Commander is the agent of her oppression, she can use his affection to her

advantage. By displaying kindness towards the Commander and complying to his wishes to see her after acceptable hours, Offred secures her relationship with him. Offred, succeeding in gaining the Commander's kindness, now uses it to gain whatever she wishes. Magazines and moisturizer among her rewards, Offred's kindness has secured her destiny, at least for the time being. For while she is living in the house of the Commander and Serena Joy, even if she is failing to produce offspring Offred can be sure that her survival is guaranteed because of the relationship she has with the Commander. Her kindness is her only weapon, and here it is seen that Offred uses it to her every advantage in winning the affection of the Commander.

Kindness is often expected, and no saying is more true than in the life of the Handmaid Offred. Offred uses her kindness in exchange for possessions such as cigarettes and magazines, but also in exchange for intangible things such as information, affection, and control. For it is seen that when one can receive power when they display kindness, said person can achieve ultimate subsistence. As seen in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred ensures her survival and control of her own destiny through her behaviour in her relationships, thereby allowing her the ability to achieve ultimate freedom, if she so chooses.

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