

The Hour of Judgment

In chapter 13 we are introduced to Testifying. A special event led by the Aunts in which the Handmaidens gather together and criticize women from the before times. Their actions, what they wore, anything that wouldn't be accepted in Gilead today. In today's Testifying Janine is telling a story about how she got gang raped when she was 14 and had an abortion. Offred mentions that Janine had told the same story last week. She then says, "She seemed almost proud of it ... It may not even be true" (pg 71). When I first read this sentence I was shocked that Offred had said something like that. To me her tone had one of no remorse in it, no empathy for Janine. The words "proud of it" stuck with me as being gang raped at such a young age isn't a thing most would be proud of. I took it as Janine being proud of the fact that she was fertile at such a young age. That this story proves that she can create a baby because she has done it before. Which is important because Handmaidens are expected to produce babies for Gilead. To see Janine even mention an abortion was surprising as well since we know that having an abortion is illegal in Gilead. Doctors have been hung on a wall for giving women abortions so for Janine to talk about it I thought there would be some sort of punishment. I related it to the fact that since they were talking about the before times they were allowed to talk about such things.

Offred starts critiquing the story's credibility saying, "It may not even be true. At Testifying, it's safer to make things up than to say you have nothing to reveal" (pg 71). When I first read this section I skipped this sentence as I was still shocked at Janine's story and Offred's thoughts on it. But when I reread this section I started having questions. Offred uses the term safer which leads me to believe that punishments are given to the Handmaidens if they don't participate. It made me start to think of the hierarchy system, who has power? What if a

Handmaiden becomes pregnant but does something illegal? Does the system still punish them or do they put the baby first? Offred says it's better to reveal something than nothing so what has she said during these Testifyings? Does she mention her affair with Luke, her daughter, her college life, her mother, or does she not mention those things at all? Maybe lying is better so people don't find out too much about your past, to avoid being criticized like Janine. Maybe it's a way to forget your past.

During the Testifying it seems as if the Handmaidens are ganging up against Janine. It's as if they don't feel any sympathy for her in this moment even though she is being blamed for being gang raped. I gathered this from Offred's thoughts, "even though we knew what was being done to her, we despised her" (pg 72). I believe the reason the Handmaidens despised Janine was because of the fact she was able to get pregnant before them, which leads to having special privileges. We know that Offred's time to have a baby is running out. In chapter 11 the doctor tells us that most of the old men are sterile. He says that some Handmaidens have taken him up on his offer to impregnate them so they can have a baby. Could Janine have taken him up on his offer?

I believe Testifying shows a lot about the relationship between Handmaidens, specifically Janine and Offred. There seems to be jealousy Offred (and other Handmaidens) have towards Janine. I always noticed the difference in their names. We learn that the women's names were changed from their previous names but Offred still refers to Janine as Janine even though we learn later on that Janine's new name is Ofwarren. It leads me to think that Offred knew Janine in the before times. Maybe they didn't have the best relationship in the before times which is why, in Gilead, Offred still has some hatred towards Janine.