

College English

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Hidden Power

A specific moment or idea I found interesting was in chapter 23 where Olfred reflects on the Commander's request to meet privately. (142) "There is no doubt who holds real power. This line stuck with me because it perfectly sums up the tension between the characters in Gilead, especially between Olfred and the Commander. Even though it seems that the commander has all of the status due to his power, this line made me realize that things are a lot more complicated than that. Olfred might not have official power, but she understands how to play her cards in the messed-up system, and that gives her some control, even if the control that she has is small.

I am starting to think that Olfred uses this knowledge to survive. When the commander invites her to play Scrabble in secret, it's a fascinating situation. On one hand, it's just a game and on the other hand, it's forbidden to have fun. This is a reminder of how trapped Olfred is from being able to do things that she enjoys. Olfred can't really say no to the commander, but by agreeing to play along, she's able to gain a bit more freedom, even if it's still limited. It's confusing because you wonder if she is actually getting power, or if she is being manipulated into thinking that she has power.

The whole situation reminds me of old situations in the book. In chapter fifteen when the handmaids are forced to kneel while the commander reads the bible. They have no change in this situation, but in the secret meetings, Olfred has a lot more freedom, even if it's minimal. I find it extremely strange that something as simple as playing Scrabble is an act of Rebellion. If my mom saw me playing Scrabble she would probably be impressed that I am finding

something that has great stimulation to my brain. Instead of being on your phone and playing video games. Olfred knows that the commander is breaking the rules as well by meeting with her, and by knowing that uses that knowledge to her advantage.

When reading this section of *The Handmaid's Tale*, I'm conflicted. On one hand, I can understand why Olfred is playing along since she wants to stay alive. On another hand, I also wonder if she's letting herself get comfortable with these small freedoms. Is she really gaining power, or is she getting herself pulled deeper into the Commander's game?

A larger theme in the book is how resistance doesn't always have to be obvious. Olfred's storytelling is a form of rebellion as well. By narrating her experiences, she's fighting back in her own way, even if she can't overthrow the system. I think of it as she's holding on to hope that one day someone will hear her story and understand what truly happened.

When reading this section of the book, it made me think about how complicated power dynamics can be even when it seems like someone has no power. There might be different ways to push back which is a quiet kind of resistance, but it still matters.