

Through the Night, Undone: Offred's Soundtrack

Pushing it Down and Praying - Lizzy McAlpine

McAlpine writes about craving touch, but receiving it from someone she feels no true connection to. She admits she wants to feel guilty, or wrong, but is too hungry to resist the temptation. Her lyric, "When I close my eyes, you replace him. Wearing no disguise, you erase him" confesses that she pretends the person she's currently intimate with is the man she longs for, but can't have. In Chapter 17 of the *Handmaid's Tale*, Offred leaves her bedroom at night and runs into Nick, where they share a kiss. She writes, "It's so good to be touched by someone, to be felt so greedily, to feel so greedy. Luke, you'd know, you'd understand. It's you here, in another body" (99.) She is so overwhelmed by the outlawed pleasure, "greedy" for touch, she imagines it's Luke she's being intimate with, much like McAlpine does. This scene aligns their expression of hunger without guilt for using someone else as a placeholder.

Heavy - The Marias

This song deeply mirrors Offred's grief for her memories. The lead vocalist, Maria Zardoya, begins the song with, "I'm heavy, alone inside" followed by, "Maybe I'm living in my head, maybe I'm living to pretend." Here, she references her heavy heart, living vicariously through memories that are now painful to recall. Offred experiences similar grief throughout the novel, often melancholically drifting into her past recollections. At the song's climax, Zardoya sings, "Can someone tell me it's alright to be covered, underneath the covers." She yearns for someone to affirm her humanity, while also longing for sex to be decentered from her life, as it haunts her, leaving her feeling constantly exposed. This aligns with Aunt Lydia's words, drilled into Offred: "To be seen is to be penetrated" (28.) Under this ideology, every physical interaction is intentional and therefore prohibited. Sex in Gilead is no longer emotional, but Offred still struggles with the loss of authentic intimacy, replaced with manufactured intercourse.

Bag of Bones - Mitski

A song synchronized with Offred's sense of emptiness and detachment from her own body. Mitski wrote this song, describing scenes of intimacy, yet returning to her chorus, "After everything's done, and I'm all undone, through the night, I'm carrying my bag of bones." She strips herself of depth, expressing that her only belongings are her bones. She dehumanizes herself for the sake of being a resource. That disconnect relates to Offred's view of herself, where she narrates, "I avoid looking down at my body. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely" (63.) Her body is machinery in Gilead, and determines how useful she is on this earth. She is merely an object, much like how Mitski describes herself. The song captures her deep disassociation, being seen as functional, not meaningful.

Doomsday - Lizzy McAlpine

This track encapsulates the inevitability of punishment and loss in Gilead. McAlpine refers to

her fate being out of her control: "Pull the plug in September, I don't want to die in June." Her lack of agency mirrors Offred's awareness that, no matter how careful and obedient she is, her survival is never guaranteed. "Under his Eye" (45) is referred to as the "right farewell" (45) in Gilead, but its meaning is a threatening reminder that you are always at risk, and any attempt at choice could result in your erasure. Together, Atwood and McAlpine craft a representation where death comes not through personal failure, but because autonomy has been stripped away. It's haunting, that punishment is the natural outcome of being powerless.

Sidelines - Phoebe Bridgers

This song resonates with Offred's passivity, her state of being forced into the background of her own existence. Bridger sings, "I'm not afraid of living on a fault line, cause nothing ever shakes me, nothing makes me cry." The fault line can be read as Offred's precarious reality, where division of opinion could result in execution or put her in immediate danger. Yet, she is unafraid, due to her inability to make room for fear. She reflects, "I try not to think too much. Like other things now, thought must be rationed" (8.) She numbs herself, rationing thought to cope. Offred remains on the "sidelines" of her own life, watching it rather than living it. Bridgers' detachment embodies the emotional suppression required to survive in Gilead. Offred feels not fear, but muted sorrow.