

# Luke impact on offred's life



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

It is only when everything one loves is taken away, that a person is able to appreciate what they once had. In the *Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood, the narrator must learn this the hard way. The novel takes place in a futuristic society, known as the Republic of Gilead.

This city was created after the United States Government had been overthrown and replaced by a totalitarian government. In this society, people have no choice in their role or power, especially women whose role in society is subjective and seemingly unimportant. When Offred, the narrator, tries to escape the collapsing former world, she is captured, separated from her family, and turned into a handmaid. Handmaids have the role of sleeping with Commanders in order to provide children to empowered, infertile parents. While Offred made several new influential relationships, none compared to one from her past life. Offred's experience as a handmaid in Gilead was most influenced by Luke, her husband in the former republic. Luke holds a major impact on Offred's choices, emotions, relationships, and outlook on life throughout the book.

Offred's memories of her former life with Luke, often bring back waves of emotions that impact how she feels in her present life as a handmaid. When Offred was captured, she was separated from Luke and her daughter. Offred often worries about if they are alive and if she will ever be able to see them again. Not knowing if either is alive remained a great mystery throughout the novel. At the beginning of the story, Offred is walking through Gilead and witnesses hanging dead bodies on a wall. She wonders if any could be her husband, although she notices they are all marked as doctors. Offred describes the feelings they evoke, "What I feel towards them is blankness."

What I feel is that I must not feel. What I feel is partly relief, because none of these men is Luke. Luke wasn't a doctor. Isn't, (Atwood 33).

Offred doesn't want to feel anything towards the dead bodies, because she knows it will not help her as she adjusts to her new life. However, she is extremely relieved that none of these men is Luke. This gives her hope that he may still be alive, along with their daughter. While she initially holds out this strong hope, you can see it dwindle as the story progresses. A bit later in the book Offred narrates, Luke, I say. He doesn't answer. Maybe he doesn't hear me. It occurs to me that he may not be alive, (Atwood 74). The longer Offred is in Gilead, the harder it is for her to believe that she could ever successfully escape and find her husband again, who may not even be alive. Offred is motivated to stay alive and keep her cover, because there is always a chance of seeing Luke again. Although, Offred is often discouraged by not knowing if Luke is even alive. The uncertainty of Luke being alive has a major impact on Offred's emotions and actions throughout the novel.

Throughout the story, Offred reminisces several special moments from her life with Luke. These memories bring different emotions to the surface that Offred probably would not be experiencing otherwise. The feeling Offred desires the most is the love she had for Luke. In the present society, families are no longer made out of love, often exemplified by the Commander and Serena Joy who never show affection to one another. During one of Offred's meetings with the Commander, she recalls what it was like to fall in love. Offred describes, Falling in love, I said. Falling into it, we all did then, one way or another. How could he have made such light of it?...It was the central thing; it was the way you understood yourself, (Atwood 225).

Offred remembered why falling in love was so special. Years prior, Luke was still married and they were having an affair. Luke had left his wife, because of his love for Offred. During this passage, the Commander had made light of falling in love. Offred scoffed at him, for making light of something that used to be so important to people's relationships and lives. In another passage, Offred reflects on the comfort and safety she used to feel with Luke. She explains, So the hotels, with Luke, didn't mean only love or even only sex to me. They also meant time off from the cockroaches, the dripping sink, the linoleum that was peeling off the floor in patches, even from my own attempts to brighten things up by sticking posters on the wall and hanging prisms in the windows, (Atwood 172). Offred explains how her relationship was even more than love and sex; it was about safety and comfort. Even in a hotel, a totally foreign setting, she had Luke to make her feel at home. Offred misses how Luke made her feel. She felt much safer with Luke, wherever they were, than she does in her current situation as a handmaid in Gilead. The loving relationship Offred had with Luke, reflects a healthy relationship that their child was born into. When Offred has to take part in a birthing ceremony of a handmaid, she compares what families were like in the old republic, to how they are now. You can understand Offred's emotions as she described the ceremony and the newborn. Aunt Elizabeth, holding the baby, looks up at us and smiles. We smile too, we are one smile, tears run down our cheeks, we are so happy. Our happiness is part memory. What I remember is Luke, with me in the hospital, standing beside my head, holding my hand, in the green gown and white mask they gave him, (Atwood 126). Seeing the birth of a newborn baby brings Offred joy and optimism. She remembers what it was like to have a baby out of love, with Luke right there

by her side the whole time. While babies in Gilead are no longer made out of love, Offred is still joyful when she remembers what life used to be like. Old memories of Offred's life with Luke arise both cheerful and dismal emotions. Remembering the love and safety Luke provided causes Offred to resent her current situation, but also cherish what she used to have.

Some memories from Offred's life prior to the overturn of the government, affect Offred's current outlook on her life in Gilead and the society that surrounds her. Luke's impactful role in Offred's old life, often affects her thoughts and perspective. Some memories that Offred looks back on, cause her to recognize the lack of freedom she holds in her current role in society. Women in the former republic had many more rights, than women in Gilead, especially handmaids. Offred looks back on the simple liberties she used to have, like arguing with Luke or imagining their future together. Often describes, I'd like to have Luke here, in this bedroom while I'm getting dressed, so I could have a fight with him. Absurd, but that's what I want. An argument, about who should put the dishes in the dishwasher, whose turn it is to sort the laundry, clean the toilet; something daily and unimportant ... What a luxury it would be, (Atwood 200). Offred yearns for the ability to have unimportant arguments with Luke. She misses these simple freedoms in life that she no longer has. She reflects on what it used to be like to have such privileges throughout the novel. In another passage, she recalls what it was like to take such freedoms for granted. Offred explains, We used to talk about buying a house like one of these, ... We would have children. Although we knew it wasn't too likely we could ever afford it, it was something to talk

about, a game for Sundays. Such freedom now seems almost weightless, (Atwood 23-24).

Offred continues to realize how many rights she used to take for granted. She is saddened by these memories that are now impossible for her to even consider. She calls the freedoms weightless; they were simple liberties Offred and Luke never thought they would have to go without. Luke's presence in Offred's former life shows her what she must now go without. Along with many freedoms and rights, Offred must go without love. Offred longs for Luke and what it felt like to be in love. But this is wrong, nobody dies from lack of sex. It's lack of loved we die from. There's nobody here I can love, all the people I could love are dead or elsewhere, (Atwood 103). Offred recognizes that she is surrounded by foreign people who she do not know or care for. She misses having the people she loved in her life. Now she must live with the fear that those people may be gone forever, and she will die in solitude. Even if they are alive, Offred doesn't think she would ever be able to find them. Her lack of ability to ever see the people she loves again, makes her doubt the chances of her finding happiness, especially in this new, forced society. It is Luke's presence in Offred's memories that causes her to realize the lack of rights and abilities she is forced to live with as a handmaid.

For the most part, It is Offred's past that makes her question her current life and society she lives in. Although in a more rare scenario in the novel, her present surroundings are what cause her to question parts of her past. As Offred observes many societal changes, she questions her relationship with Luke. Offred wonders, So Luke: what I want to ask you now, what I need to

know is, Was I right? Because we never talked about it. By the time I could have done that, I was afraid to. I couldn't afford to lose you, (Atwood 182). While most of the time Offred embraced (good) her loving relationship with Luke, she has a realization that causes her to bitterly question their relationship. Offred is reflecting on the rights she slowly began to lose as a woman as the Republic crumbled to pieces. In the moment, Offred was concerned with not losing her husband. Looking back at the case scenario though, Offred wonders if Luke really cared about her rights being taken away or if he did not mind. Offred rarely thinks of her loved one in such a negative manner, but the changes that had been happening in society cause her to change her perspective on not just her present life but also her past.

Luke does not just have an impact on the emotions Offred feels and her outlook on her new life, he also influences the decisions she makes in Gilead. Luke causes Offred to miss the way things used to be and resent her current role in society. She aches for Luke and being a person who is worth something. Offred exemplifies this when she says, I want Luke here so badly. I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name, remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me. I want to steal something, (Atwood 97). Offred thinks these thoughts after the ceremony. She hates how powerless she is in her current life and misses having a valuable relationship. This loss of power causes her to go find something to steal so she can feel some sort of power and control. Offred continues to find ways throughout the story to feel some sort of the importance that she used to have with Luke in the old republic.

The relationships Offred forms in Gilead is heavily influenced by her former husband Luke and the mystery of if he is dead or alive. The more time she spends in Gilead, the more her faith dwindles. She aches for the love and compassion she used to know so well. When she is presented with the opportunity to feel this type affection again, she does not want to turn it down. Although, Luke's presence in her mind makes her feel regretful for moving on. Offred first encounters this dilemma when Nick kisses her. Offred described, 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...Bullshit, (Atwood 99). Offred does not want to admit to having feelings for anyone but her husband, Luke. After Nick kisses her, she tries to convince herself that Luke would be okay with it. She misses having a valuable relationship, unlike the forced one she has with the commander. Later in the book, Offred starts sleeping with Nick. Initially, the set-up is set up by Serena Joy, in hopes of helping get Offred Pregnant. The result is Offred sneaking off to see Nick regularly for pleasure. Offred narrates, And I thought afterwards: this is betrayal. Not the thing itself but my own response. If I knew for certain he's dead, would that make a difference? I would like to be without shame. I would like to be shameless. I would like to be ignorant. Then I would not know how ignorant I was, (Atwood 263) Offred feels guilty for enjoying the love she feels when she is with Nick, when she doesn't know the state of her husband. Offred feels guilty, but not guilty enough to stop seeing Nick. While she continues to enjoy the love she feels with Nick, Luke always has a presence in her mind, causing her to constantly feel apologetic.



Throughout the Handmaid's Tale Offred's life is impacted by many people. The Commander, Serena Joy, Nick, and her daughter are all great influences on her emotions and daily actions. Although, it is her former husband Luke that is the most influential person in her new life in Gilead. During the novel, Offred's memories and thoughts regarding Luke, influence her emotions, choices, relationships, and outlook on her life. Memories of Offred's former life with her husband bring back waves of different emotions that cause her to resent her current role in society, but appreciate the life she used to have. These memories are also impactful, because they make Offred aware how poorly she is treated in her current society. She loathes the life she has, because she remembers what it was like to have even simple rights and liberties. She is often reminded of how powerless she is in her current position. Offred recalls how appreciated she felt when she was with Luke. She misses being a valued person in her home and in society. Offred makes choices throughout the story, that reflect on her want for the power that she used to have. Luke's presence in Offred's mind has a major impact on how Offred feels, views and pursues life. He is not just impactful when Offred is choosing a way to obtain a feeling of power, but he is influential when Offred is seeking the feeling of love. Offred deeply misses the love, compassion, and comfort she had with Luke. When she is presented with the opportunity to feel any part of this type of relationship again, she does not want to turn it down. Luke's presence in Offred's mind does not stop her from forming a relationship with Nick, but it creates a deep feeling of guilt that Offred must live with. There are many ways in which Luke is able to influence Offred's life as a handmaid without him physically being there with

her. Even in his absence, Luke has the greatest effect on many of the emotions, decisions, and perspectives Offered has.