

The Handmaid's Tale – Margaret Atwood

GVV Quotes

Opening – Key moment

“We slept in what had once been the gymnasium.” – Ch. 1

“We had flannelette sheets, like children’s, and army-issue blankets, old ones that still said U.S.” – Ch. 1

“They had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts.” – Ch. 1

“We learned to whisper without sound.” – Ch. 1

Relationships

Offred & the Commander

Key moment: the Ceremony

“This is not recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty.” – Ch. 16 (The Ceremony)

“Kissing is forbidden between us. This makes it bearable.” – Ch. 16

“It was like being on an operating table.” – Ch 26

Key moment: the first meeting & Scrabble

“My presence here is illegal. It’s forbidden for us to be alone with the Commanders. We are for breeding purposes: we aren’t concubines, geisha girls, courtesans.” Ch. 23

“Now it’s something different. Now it’s forbidden for us. Now it’s dangerous. Now it’s indecent. Now it’s something he can’t do with his Wife. Now it’s desirable. Now he’s compromised himself.” Ch. 23

“This is like being on a date.” – Ch. 23

“He wanted me to play Scrabble with him, and kiss him as if I meant it.” – Ch. 24

“I am the outside woman. It’s my job to provide what is otherwise lacking. Even the Scrabble. It’s an absurd as well as an ignominious position.” – Ch 26

Key moment: reading Vogue magazine

“I felt the Commander watching me as I turned the pages. I knew I was doing something. I shouldn’t have been doing, and that he found pleasure in seeing me do it...I didn’t feel evil. Instead I felt like an old Edwardian seaside postcard: naughty.” – Ch. 25

Key moment: reading Hard Times by Dickens

“While I read, the Commander sits and watches me doing it, without speaking but also without taking his eyes off me. This watching is a curiously sexual act, and I feel undressed while he does it.” – Ch. 29

Key moment: Jezebel’s

“Twice, when he thinks no one is looking, he winks at me. It’s a juvenile display, the whole act, and pathetic; but it’s something I understand.” – Ch. 37

“‘Enjoying yourself?’ he says. He wants me to. This after all is a treat.” – Ch. 38

“Some of them do that, they get a kick out of it. It’s like screwing on the altar or something: your gang are supposed to be such chaste vessels. They like to see you all painted up. Just another crummy power trip.” – Ch. 39 (Moira re Jezebels)

“The Commander puts his hand to his head.” – Ch. 46

Fulfilment

Key moment: Offred settling in in the Commander's Home

“They’ve removed anything you could tie a rope to.” – Ch. 2

“A return to traditional values... I am not being wasted. Why do I want?” – Ch. 2

“Like other things now, thought must be rationed.” – Ch. 2

“Thinking can hurt your changes, and I intend to last.” – Ch. 2

“Where I am is not a prison but a privilege.” – Ch. 2

“It’s not that bad. It’s not what you’d call hard work.” – Ch. 2

“I hunger for the act of touch.” – Ch. 2

Key moment: Offred delivers the shopping to Rita

“The knife she uses is sharp and bright, and tempting. I would like to have a knife like that.”

Ch. 8

Key moment: Aunt Lydia explaining the future of Handmaids in the Red Centre

“They will accept their duties with willing hearts. She did not say: Because they will have no memories, of any other way. She said: Because they won’t want things they can’t have.” – Aunt Lydia, Ch. 20

Key moment: Janine giving birth

“She’s crying helplessly, burnt out, miserable tears.” Ch 21

“She’ll never be sent to the Colonies, she’ll never be declared an Unwoman. This is her reward.” – Ch 21

Key moment: Serena Joy knows about Offred’s child

“She’s known all along. Something chokes in my throat. The bitch, not to tell me, bring me any news, any news at all. Not even to let on. She’s made of wood, or iron, she can’t imagine.” – Ch. 31

Key moment: Ofglen’s suicide

“‘She hanged herself,’ she says. ‘After the Salvaging. She saw the van coming for her. It was better.’” – Ch. 44

Society

Key moment: Offred meeting Ofglen

“She may be a real believer, a Handmaid in more than name. I can’t take the risk.” – Ch. 3

Key moment: Offred’s reflection of the past

“Women were not protected then.” – Ch. 5 (Offred reflecting on the past)

Key moment: Ofwarren’s pregnancy at the market

“She is a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire.” – Ch. 5

Key moment: Japanese tourists

“We are fascinated but also repelled. They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like that. Then I think: I used to dress like that. That was freedom. Westernised they used to call it.” – Ch. 5

“He’ll be telling them that the women here have different customs, that to stare at them through the lens of a camera is, for them, a violation.” – Ch 5

Key moment: the Ceremony

“I wait, washed, brushed, fed, like a prized pig.” – Ch. 13

“Each moment I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others.” – Ch. 13 (re: menstruation)

“My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems out-dated. Did I really wear bathing suits at the beach? I did, without thought, among men, without caring that my legs, my arms, my thighs and back were on display.” – Ch. 12

“Blessed are the meek.” – Ch. 15 (Bible sentence, distorted to subjugate.)

Key moment: Offred’s reflection of “before”

“The spectacles women used to make of themselves. Oiling themselves like roast meat on a spit, and bare backs and shoulders, on the street and in public, and legs, not even stockings on them, no wonder those things used to happen.” -Ch. 10

Key moment: the loss of women’s right

“We are not each other’s, any more. Instead, I am his.” – Ch. 28

Key moment: Prayvaganza

“We’re off to the Prayvaganza, to demonstrate how obedient and pious we are.” – Ch. 33

“This way they’re protected, they can fulfil their biological destinies in peace. With full support and encouragement.” – Ch. 33

“What we’re aiming for, says Aunt Lydia, is a spirit of camraderie among women. We must all pull together.” – Ch 34

Ending

“‘Trust me,’ he says; which in itself has never been a talisman, carries no guarantee. But I snatch at it, this offer. It’s all I’m left with.” – Ch. 46

“And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light.” – Ch. 46

Brooklyn GVV Quotes

Opening

Key moment: Eilis is leaving

Miss Kelly: your poor sister

Eilis: my sister?

Miss Kelly: oh, mothers are always being left behind in this country. But Rose? That's the end for her now, isn't it? She'll be looking after your mother for the rest of her life.

Key moment: on the ship

Georgina: the mistake was coming home.

Eilis: how long do letters from Ireland take to arrive?

Georgina: don't be too rude, or nervous... think like an American. You have to know where you're going.

Relationships

Eilis and Tony

Key moment: Parish Hall Dance

Tony: I came to the dance because I really like Irish girls. Can I date you next week?

Tony: All I want to do is travel home with you. No drink, no food, no nothing. I know you have to study, and get some sleep. I'll take you to your house and then say goodnight. Otherwise it's too long to wait.

Key moment: Dinner at Tony's House

Eilis: you remember that after I had dinner at your house, you told me you loved me? Well I didn't know what to say. But I know what to say now. I have thought about you and I like you and I like seeing you, and maybe I feel the same way. So the next time you tell me you love me, if there is a next time, I'll...I'll say I love you too.

Key moment: Letter to Rose

Eilis: I still miss you and mother, and I think about you every day. But I think I can say that for the first time since I've been in America, I'm really happy. This is a lot to do with Tony.

Key moment: Rose's Death

Tony: Marry me. Marry me. We don't have to tell anybody. Just keep it between us.

Eilis: why do you want to do that?

Tony: Because if you don't I'm going to go crazy.

Key moment: telling her mother

Eilis: mammy I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I'm married. I got married in Brooklyn before I came home, I should have told you, I should have told you as soon as I got back. I want to be with him. I want to be with my husband.

Key moment: Miss Kelly Knows

Eilis: my name is Eilis Fiorello.

Fulfilment

Key moment: arriving in New York

Eilis: I wish I could stop feeking that I want to be an Irish girl in Ireland.

Fr. Flood: homesickness is like most sickness. It will pass.

Key moment: Christmas at the Parish Hall

Fr. Flood: these are the men who built the tunnels, the bridges, the highways. (christmas at the parish hall, solidifies Eilis' loneliness, makes her feel like she may end up like them.)

Key moment: Letter to Rose

Eilis: I still miss you and mother, and I think about you every day. But I think I can say that for the first time since I've been in America, I'm really happy. This is a lot to do with Tony.

Society

Key moment: Eilis is leaving

Miss Kelly: your poor sister

Eilis: my sister?

Miss Kelly: oh, mothers are always being left behind in this country. But Rose? That's the end for her now, isn't it? She'll be looking after your mother for the rest of her life.

Key moment: on the ship

Georgina: The mistake was coming home

Georgina: they'll put you in quarantine looking like that.

Georgina: Think like an American. You have to know where you're going.

Key moment: Getting married

Tony: there's a lot of you in Brooklyn

Eilis: Sometimes it seems as if there can't be anyone left at home.

Key moment: Mrs. Lacey attempting to influence Eilis re: Jim

His parents are moving you know, they're retiring, moving the county. He'll be in that big house on his own.

Ending

Key moment: Miss Kelly knows

Eilis: I'd forgotten, I'd forgotten what this town is like. What were you planning to do, Miss Kelly? Keep me away from Jim? Stop me from going back to America? Perhaps you didn't even know. Perhaps it was enough for you to know that you could ruin me. My name is Eilis Fiorello.

Key moment: Back to Brooklyn

Eilis: you have to think like an American. You'll feel so homesick that you'll want to die, but there's nothing you can do about it. And one day the sun will come out – you might not notice it straight away, it'll be that faint. And then you'll catch yourself thinking about something or someone who has no connection with the past. Someone who's only yours. And you'll realise...that this is where your life is.

By the Bog of Cats GVV

Opening

Key moment: Hester meets the Ghost Fancier and Monica

Ghost Fancier: I'm too previous. I mistook this hour for dusk. A thousand apologies.

Hester: in a house, though I've never felt at home in it.

Hester: I'm goin' nowhere. This here is my house and my garden and my stretch of the bog and no wan's runnin' me out of here.

Hester: thinks yeas all she's got too many notions, built her life up from a caravan on the side of the bog. Thinks yeas all she's taken a step above herself in getting' Carthage Kilbride into her bed.

Hester: Ah, how can I lave the Bog of Cats, everythin' I'm connected to is here. I'd rather die.

Relationships

Hester and Carthage

Key moment: Hester confronts Carthage about marrying Caroline

Hester: it was you wooed me, Carthage Kilbride, not the other way around as ya'd like everywan to think. In the beginnin' I wanted nothin' to do with ya, should've trusted me first instinct, but ya kept comin' back. You cut your teeth on me, Carthage Kilbride, gnawed and sucked will all that's left is aul bone ya think to fling on the dunghill, now you've no more use for me.

Carthage: I've watched ya now for the best part of fourteen year and I can't say I know the first thing about ya. Who are ya and what sourt of stuff are ya made of?

Hester: the same as you, and I can't abide to lose ya.

Hester: tell me what to do Carthage, and I'll do it, anythin' for you to come back.

Hester: anythin', Carthage, anythin', and I'll do it if it's in me power.

Carthage: It's not in your power – look I'm up to me neck in another life that can't include ya any more.

Hester: You're sellin' me and Josie down the river for a few lumpy auld acres and notions of respectability.

Carthage: An ya know what they're sayin about ya? That it's time you moved onto another halting' site.

Key moment: Hester interrupts the wedding reception

Hester: You're plentiful with the guilt money alright, showerin' buckets of it on me. There's your auld blood money back. Ya think you're getting away with that aisy! Money won't take that guilt away, Carthage, we'll go to our grave with it!

Key moment: Hester and Carthage talk about killing Joseph Swane

Hester: ya promised me things! Ya built that he for me. Ya wanted me to see how normal people lived. And I went along with ya again' me better judgement. All I ever wanted was be by the Bog of Cats. A modest want when compared with the wants of others. Just let me stay here in the caravan.

Carthage: And have the whole neighbourhood makin' a laughin' stock of me?

Hester: that's not why ya won't let me stay. You're ashmaed of your part in me brother's death aren't ya?

Carthage: I had no part in it?

Hester: you're afraid I'll tell everywan what ya done. I won't. I wouldn't ever, Carthage.

Key moment: Hester kills Josie and then herself

Hester: ya won't forget me now Carthage, and when all of this is over or half remembered and you think you've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie ghostin' ya.

Fulfilment

Cultural Context

The Handmaid's Tale – Margaret Atwood

Setting

KEY MOMENT – Flashback to the day women lost their rights

“Any account with an F on it instead of an M. All they needed to do is push a few buttons. We're cut off.”

“Women can't hold property anymore. It's the new law.”

“You don't know what it's like, I said. I feel as if somebody cut off my feet.”

“You know I'll always take care of you.”

“We are not each other's any more. Instead, I am his.”

KEY MOMENT – Freedom

(Aunt Lydia) “There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.”

(Aunt Lydia) “We seemed to be able to choose, then. We were a society dying, said Aunt Lydia, of too much choice.”

1. Leads onto next scene...

KEY MOMENT – Commander tells Offred how much better things are now

(Commander) "Think of the trouble they has before. Don't you remember the singles bars, the indignity of high school blind dates? The meat market? Don't you remember the terrible gap between the ones who could get a man easily and the ones who couldn't? Some of them were desperate, they starved themselves thin or pumped their breasts full of silicone, had their noses cut off. Think of the human misery."

(Commander) "This way they're protected, they can fulfil their biological destinies in peace. With full support and encouragement."

(Commander) "all we've done is return things to Nature's norm."

Society (Wealth, Class, Poverty etc)

KEY MOMENT - Offred and Ofglen go shopping and to the Wall

Only allowed to travel in hers, (protection.)

"the truth is that she is my spy, and I am hers."

Citizens inform on one another, this is how the system of government is able to perform its function so cohesively.

Ofglen: "I think of her as a woman for whom every act is done for show, is acting rather than a real act... But that is what I must look like to her, as well. How can it be otherwise?"

(Aunt Lydia on the Wall) "This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary."

KEY MOMENT - Offred's reaction to Offglen's suicide

"Dear God, I think, I will do anything you like. Now that you've let me off, I'll obliterate myself, if that's what you really want; I'll empty myself, truly, becoming a chalice. I'll give up Nick, I'll forget about the others, I'll stop complaining. I'll accept my lot. I'll sacrifice. I'll repent. I'll abdicate. I'll renounce."

Gender Roles/The Role of Women

KEY MOMENT – Attitude towards Handmaids in the Commander's house

(Aunt Lydia) "You must realise that they are defeated women. They have been unable..."

Serena Joy: "I want to see as little of you as possible, she said. I expect you feel the same way about me."

Serena Joy: "As far as I'm concerned, this is like a business transaction."

(Cora and Rita) "They're talking about me as though I can't hear. To them I'm a household chore, one among many."

(Offred on Serena Joy) "Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay at home... She doesn't make speeches anymore. She has become speechless... How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word."

1. Suggests the divisions between women
2. No sense of sisterhood and support. These women are competing. They do not help each other.

KEY MOMENT: Ofwarren going shopping:

"She's a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire, we covet her."

"She's come to display herself. She's glowing, rosy, she's enjoying every minute of this."

1. Ofwarren's symbolises what so many of them cannot achieve. She is an object of envy and lust.
2. Suggests the divisions between Handmaids.

(Aunt Lydia) "What we are aiming for, says Aunt Lydia, is a spirit of camaraderie among women. We must all pull together."

3. If this IS what they were hoping for, I think we can safely say they failed.

Moral Stance/Values

"Praise be"

"Which I receive with joy."

"Under his eye."

"May the Lord open."

Family

KEY MOMENT – Serena's Plan for Offred

"She's like me to the pregnant though, over and done with and out of the way."

"Maybe he can't."

"It's only women who can't, who remain stubbornly closed, damaged, defective."

"It's my life on the line... We both know this."

"She's known all along. Something chokes in my throat. The bitch, not to tell me, bring me news, any news at all. Not even to let on. She's made of wood, or iron, she can't imagine."

1. Serena shows herself to be no mother. If she had any idea of how it was to be a mother, surely she would help Offred. She has known about her daughter for all this time and never said a word.

Sex & Marriage

KEY MOMENT – THE CEREMONY

"My arms are raised, she hold my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product."

"One detaches oneself. One describes."

"I would pretend not to be present, not to be in the flesh."

"There is a loathing in her voice as if the touch of my flesh sickens and contaminates her... which of us it is worse for, her or me?"

KEY MOMENT – SCRABBLE

"Now it's dangerous. Now it's indecent. Now it's something he can't do with his Wife. Now it's desirable. Now he's compromised himself. It's as if he's offered me drugs."

"The feeling is voluptuous. This is freedom, an eyeblink of it."

"This is one of the most bizarre things that's happened to me, ever."

"Context is all."

"So there is was, out in the open: his wife didn't understand him. That's what I was there for, then. The same old thing. It was almost too banal to be true."

"I don't love the Commander or anything like it, but he's of interest to me, he occupies space, he is more than a shadow.

"The fact is that I'm his mistress. Men at the top have always had mistresses, why should things be any different now?"

When Serena finds out...

"You could have left me something... Just like the other one. A slut. You'll end up the same."

KEY MOMENT – Ofglen's relationship with Nick

"They cannot be exchanged, one for the other. They cannot replace each other. Nick for Luke or Luke for Nick. Should does not apply."

"Context is all; or is it ripeness? One or the other?"

"We make love each time as if we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there will never be any more, for either of us, with anyone, ever."

"I tell him my real name, and feel that therefore I am known."

"The fact is that I no longer want to escape, cross the border to freedom, I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him."

Brooklyn – John Crowley Cultural Context

Setting

Key moment: Eilis is leaving

Miss Kelly: your poor sister

Eilis: my sister?

Miss Kelly: oh, mothers are always being left behind in this country. But Rose? That's the end for her now, isn't it? She'll be looking after your mother for the rest of her life.

Key moment: Miss Kelly knows

Eilis: I'd forgotten, I'd forgotten what this town is like. What were you planning to do, Miss Kelly? Keep me away from Jim? Stop me from going back to America? Perhaps you didn't even know. Perhaps it was enough for you to know that you could ruin me. My name is Eilis Fiorello.

By the Bog of Cats – Marina Carr Cultural Context

Setting

"...The real Midland accent is a lot flatter and rougher and more guttural than the written word allows"

"I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I'll end me days."

"Ah, how can I lave the Bog of Cats? Everythin' I'm connected to is here. I'd rather die."

Society (Wealth, Class, Poverty etc)

"Thinks ye all Hester Swane with her tinker blood is gettin' no more than she deserves..."

Thinks ye all she's taken a step above herself in gettin' Carthage Kilbride into her bed."

Mrs Kilbride: "All tinkers understands is the open road and where the next bottle of whiskey is comin' from."

"And as for me tinker blood, I'm proud of it. It gives me an edge over all of yeos around here, allows me see yeos for the inbred, underbred, bog-brained shower yeos are."

"the whole neighbourhood makin' a laughin' stock of me?"

Waiter: "I want to be an astronaut but me father wants me to work on the bog like him and like me grandfather"

Marina Carr Re Hester: "She's been pared away, pared to the bone, and the mask has slipped a huge deal. At times I think the mask is off. So what you have is this walking amalgam of feeling and powerful volition because of what she feels, and that carries to the nth degree. There's no time for messing or games or pretence."

Carthage: "Who are ya and what sourt of stuff are ya made of?"

Hester: "The dame stuff as you and I can't abide to lose ya."

Carthage: "That it's time ya moved onto another haltin' site."

Hester: "I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I'll end me days... And as for me tinker blood, I'm proud of it, it gives me an edge over all of yeos round here, allows me to see yeos for the inbred, underbred, bog-brained shower yeos are."

Hester: "I'm as settled as any of yeos."

Gender Roles/Role of Women

Xavier: "let's see the leftovers of Carthage Kilbride

Xavier: "ya can't control a mere woman"

Xavier: "she was a loose wan, loose and lazy and aisy, a five-shillin' hoor".

"Listen to me now, Caroline, there's two Hester Swanes, one that is decent and very fond of ya despite your callow treatment of me. And the other Hester, well, she could slide a knife down your face, carve ya up and not bat an eyelid."

Moral Stance/Values

Mrs. Kilbride: "Seven auld years. When I was seven I was cookin' dinners for a houseful of men, I was thinnin' turnips twelve hour a day, I was birthin' calves..."

"didn't frig it away on crame buns and blouses."

"I'll break your spirit yet and then glue ya back the way I want ya"

"Enter Mrs Kilbride in what looks extremely like a wedding dress, white, a white hat, with a bit of a veil trailing off it, white shoes, tights, bag, etc."

"And that if Carthage will be as good a son to Caroline as he's been a husband to me then she'll have no complaints."

Xavier re Caroline: "Now I don't care for the whiny little rip that much, but she's all I've got"

Xavier: "Children! If they were calves we'd have them fattened and sould in three weeks."

Monica: "And Father Willow seems to have lost the run of himself entirely... The state of him with his hat on all durin' the Mass and the vestments inside out and his pajamas peepin' out from under his trousers."

Xavier: "Did you hear he's started keeping a gun in the tabernacle?"

Father Willow: "...almost a groom meself wance."

Father Willow: "The grace, yes, how does it go again?"

Father Willow: "... sure they even lie the box. Ya know what I do? I wear ear-plugs."

Family

Hester: "There's a longing in me for her that won't quell this whole time."

Hester: "And I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her return."

Hester: "I made a... promise to meself a long while back. All them years I was in the Industrial School I swore to meself that wan day I'm comin' back to the Bog of Cats to wait for her there and I'm never lavin' again."

"All me life people have walked away without a word of explanation."

"Was it somethin' I done on her? I was seven, same as me daughter Josie, seven, and there isn't anythin' in this wide world Josie could do that'd make me walk away from her".

Hester to Joseph: "If ya hadn't been such an arrogant git I may have left ya alone but ya just wouldn't shut up talkin' about her as if she wasn't my mother at all... And she even called ya after her... Hester's after no wan. And she saves her own name for you... Should've been with her for always and would have only for you."

"I can't go till me mother comes. I'd hoped she'd have come before now and it wouldn't come to this. Don't make me lave or somethin' terrible'll happen. Don't."

Hester re Josie before murder/suicide: "But she's mine and I wouldn't have her waste her life dreamin' about me and yeas thwartin' her with black stories against me"