**Chapter 44 Close Read**

We go to Milk and Honey, and to All Flesh, where I buy chicken and the new Ofglen gets three

pounds of hamburger. There are the usual lines. I see several women I recognize, exchange with them

the infinitesimal nods with which we show each other we are known, at least to someone, we still

exist. Outside All Flesh I say to the new Ofglen, "We should go to the Wall." I don't know what I

expect from this; some way of testing her reaction, perhaps. I need to know whether or not she is one

of us. If she is, if I can establish that, perhaps she'll be able to tell me what has really happened to Ofglen.

"As you like," she says. Is that indifference, or caution?

On the Wall hang the three women from this morning, still in their dresses, still in their shoes, still

with the white bags over their heads. Their arms have been untied and are stiff and proper at their sides.

The blue one is in the middle, the two red ones on either side, though the colors are no longer as

bright; they seem to have faded, grown dingy, like dead butterflies or tropical fish drying on land. The

gloss is off them. We stand and look at them in silence.

"Let that be a reminder to us," says the new Ofglen finally.

I say nothing at first, because I am trying to make out what she means. She could mean that this is

a reminder to us of the unjustness and brutality of the regime. In that case I ought to say yes. Or she

could mean the opposite, that we should remember to do what we are told and not get into trouble,

because if we do we will be rightfully punished. If she means that, I should say praise be. Her voice

was bland, toneless, no clues there.

I take a chance. "Yes," I say.

To this she does not respond, although I sense a flicker of white at the edge of my vision, as if

she's looked quickly at me.

After a moment we turn away and begin the long walk back, matching our steps in the approved

way, so that we seem to be in unison.

I think maybe I should wait before attempting anything further. It's too soon to push, to probe. I

should give it a week, two weeks, maybe longer, watch her carefully, listen for tones in her voice,

unguarded words, the way Ofglen listened to me. Now that Ofglen is gone I am alert again, my

sluggishness has fallen away, my body is no longer for pleasure only but senses its jeopardy. I should

not be rash, I should not take unnecessary risks. But I need to know. I hold back until we're past the

final checkpoint and there are only blocks to go, but then I can no longer control myself.

"I didn't know Ofglen very well," I say. "I mean the former one."

"Oh?" she says. The fact that she's said anything, however guarded, encourages me.

"I've only known her since May," I say. I can feel my skin growing hot, my heart speeding up.

This is tricky. For one thing, it's a lie. And how do I get from there to the next vital word? "Around

the first of May I think it was. What they used to call May Day."

"Did they?" she says, light, indifferent, menacing. "That isn't a term I remember. I'm surprised

you do. You ought to make an effort…" She pauses. "To clear your mind of such…" She pauses again.

"Echoes."

Now I feel cold, seeping over my skin like water. What she is doing is warning me. She isn't one of

us. But she knows.

I walk the last blocks in terror. I've been stupid, again. More than stupid. It hasn't occurred to me

before, but now I see: if Ofglen's been caught, Ofglen may talk about me among others. She will talk. She

won't be able to help it.

But I haven't done anything, I tell myself, not really. All I did was know. All I did was not tell.

They know where my child is. What if they bring her, threaten something to her, in front of me?

Or do it. I can't bear to think what they might do. Or Luke, what if they have Luke. Or my mother or

Moira or almost anyone. Dear God, don't make me choose. I would not be able to stand it, I know

that; Moira was right about me. I'll say anything they like, I'll incriminate anyone. It's true, the first

scream, whimper even, and I'll turn to jelly, I'll confess to any crime, I'll end up hanging from a hook

on the Wall. Keep your head down, I used to tell myself, and see it through. It's no use.

This is the way I talk to myself, on the way home.

At the corner we turn to one another in the usual way.

"Under His Eye," says the new, treacherous Ofglen.

"Under His Eye," I say, trying to sound fervent. As if such playacting could help, now that we've

come this far.

Then she does an odd thing. She leans forward, so that the stiff white blinkers on our heads are

almost touching, so that I can see her pale beige eyes up close, the delicate web of lines across her

cheeks, and whispers, very quickly, her voice faint as dry leaves. "She hanged herself," she says.

"After the Salvaging. She saw the van coming for her. It was better."

Then she's walking away from me down the street.

**Prompt: How does Atwood use dialogue to characterize the new Ofglen?**