

College English

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Beyond My White Wings

I have always been viewed as the “innocent” friend of the group. I am the one who does not smoke, who does not drink and does not partake in sexual activities. This stemmed from the expectations taken out by my family and even myself. I have always wanted to be different. I thought if I were to fit in with the others, I would be doing myself a disservice. I believed my voids would be filled with only temporary things, and I did not want to take the risk specifically because I saw what it did to those around me. My family suffers from addiction, and it has ruined relationships and aspirations from many angles. I was just like Offred in Chapter 4, page 18 when she is walking by Nick who she believes might be an Eye, “I drop my head and turn so that the white wings hide my face, and keep walking.” I tried my best not to engage in something that could put me in a situation I did not want, just as Offred did so that she would not be sent away. However, as time went on, I began longing for something more. Something that would no longer consider me as the “innocent” one. I began to think what it could be like if I stopped hiding, and explored maybe what I have been missing. This is what Offred begins to do on page 21 referring to Nick, “What if I were to come at night when he’s on duty alone – though he would never be allowed such solitude – and permit him beyond my white wings?” This kind of questioning that I did, did not help me do what was ultimately best for me. Sexual temptation began to overwhelm me in a way I never thought it would, and you could say it is just because I am a teenager, and I

was ashamed. Despite this, I decided to ignore it because I always felt good in the moment. Slowly, this started to change the way I thought and behaved.

As I was exposed to this side of the world, I noticed specific ways in which women gained attention from men and slowly began adapting to them. One thing that I noticed was if women changed the way they present themselves, men gravitated towards them. Not necessarily just through clothing, but even certain sexual gestures and mannerisms caused men to look their way and fall to their knees. This idea of having the ability to control felt like I would always be two steps ahead. I will not ever have to fully give myself up because I would simply lure boys closer, and leave them to feed on their temptation so that I would feel better about myself. This part of my history was brought to mind when Offred walked past the Guardians on page 22. She states, "I enjoy the power; the power of a dog bone, passive but there." She is expressing that she enjoys the power of her sexuality. The fact that she can walk by and possibly cause a man to stumble feeds her ego. I can relate to this feeling and the sensation that it brings you that ultimately erases any shame. It is something that many women choose to speak about because we want to portray ourselves and our minds as "clean," however that is ultimately not always going to be the truth. We live in a world that is filled with things of this nature, making it hard to run away from.

That exact fact is what also turned me away from feeding into sexual temptation and using it to cause others to fall into it as well. I came to the realization was not bringing me up at all but turning me into someone who's priorities were not aligned with where they needed to be. Before Offred says that she enjoys the power, her initial reaction is to say that she is ashamed of

her actions. She states, "I move my hips a little, feeling the full red skirt sway around me. It's like thumbing your nose through a fence or teasing a dog with a bone held out of reach, and I'm ashamed of myself for doing it because none of this is the fault of these men, they're too young." What Offred states here shows the true stronghold of sexual temptation. She understands that sex is ultimately a part of our human nature, but instead uses that to her advantage to make herself feel superior. Just like her, I would rather bring others down to build myself up in an extremely unhealthy way. Seeing shadows of what I have experienced within this section of *The Handmaid's Tale* filled me with a sense of comfort, as it was almost like a confirmation of what I have felt is something that others experience, specifically other women. Instead of trying to hide the truth, we should be aware of thoughts and actions like these, and how they ultimately affect us and those who surround us.