

The Heart Goes Last Study Guide

The Heart Goes Last by Margaret Atwood

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Plot Summary

“The Heart Goes Last” is a contemporary dystopian novel by Margaret Atwood which follows the efforts of husband and wife Stan and Charmaine to survive and help bring down the Positron Project, supposedly aimed at ending unemployment and crime but in reality performing illegal organ harvesting and sexually altering the minds of people. When the novel begins, Stan and Charmaine are living in their car somewhere in the American Northeast, having both lost their good jobs to an economic downturn. Charmaine takes work at a local bar, where she sees a commercial for a call for applications for the Positron Project. Pay, work, and a good house are promised. Charmaine convinces Stan to apply with her, but Stan’s criminal brother, Conor, warns them about attending. Conor says he has heard bad things about the program, but Stan and Charmaine are desperate to stop living in their car.

Stan and Charmaine apply to - and are accepted into - the Positron Project. The CEO of the project, Ed, explains the Positron Project as seeking to eliminate unemployment and crime. The Project is occurring in the revamped town of Consilience, which includes the newly-constructed Positron Prison. For alternating months, people will spend the month either in Positron Prison, or in Consilience. Those in the prison will work for pay at jobs that range from agriculture to cutting-edge robotics, while those living on the outside in houses in the town will work for pay doing jobs dedicated to maintaining the prison, the town, and daily life in general.

A year passes by for Stan and Charmaine, spending one month in prison and one month out. Charmaine especially comes to love life in the Project, while Stan has some doubts and reservations. In the community, Stan handles electric scooter repair while Charmaine handles work in a bakery. In the prison, Stan works in poultry while Charmaine works in the hospital, handling the Procedure – administering a lethal injection to criminals and dangerous elements in the Project. The injections always ensure the heart is the last organ of the body to stop functioning

As Stan comes to learn, Charmaine is having a sexual affair with a man named Phil who goes by the name of Max, Stan’s monthly alternate. Phil’s significant other, Jocelyn, confronts Stan before he can do anything about the affair. Jocelyn reveals herself to be a member of Surveillance, which keeps an eye on the population. For the next few months, she forces Stan to have sex with her while Charmaine is kept on beyond her monthly rotation in the prison. Jocelyn later explains that Stan’s willingness to do what had to be done to survive is proof she can trust him. She reveals herself to be a founding member of the Project, noting that Ed and the Project have lost their way. The Project is now a front for illegal organ, DNA, bone, and body part harvesting. She also reveals that Positron, which is producing popular sex robots, has engineered a mind-altering program which forces the patient to become sexually obsessed with the first person the patient sees. This is often done against the patient’s will. Because Jocelyn helped to build Positron, she reveals she now has a responsibility to help bring it down.



To smuggle Stan out of Positron, he is put before Charmaine for the Procedure. This horrifies Charmaine, who has been told she is being watched by her superiors for loyalty to Positron. Charmaine has no choice but to administer the drug, which she is unaware will only knock out Stan. With Stan's removal, Ed sets his sights on Charmaine, seeking to have her mind altered to imprint on him. Ed and Charmaine travel to Las Vegas for this to occur, not knowing that Stan has been smuggled to Las Vegas ahead of them with secret documents exposing the entire operation at Positron. Conor and his criminal buddies assist Stan in getting the information to elderly TV star and news reporter, Lucinda Quant.

Upon arrival in Vegas, Ed is overpowered and given the operation, after which he imprints on Lucinda. Charmaine voluntarily undergoes the operation so she can imprint on Stan. A year later, Charmaine and Stan are happily living out their lives, having had their first child and looking forward to another. Jocelyn drops by to tell Charmaine she never actually had the operation, meaning that the entire past year has been entirely genuine love. But this also causes Charmaine to think about Max again.



Part I, Where? – Part III, Switch

Summary

Part I, Where?

Cramped – Stan and his wife, Charmaine, have been living in an old Honda. Charmaine feels hopeless, but refuses to say this to help keep Stan's spirits up. Charmaine often finds herself thinking about Grandma Win, and how she would tell Charmaine her mother did not kill herself, and that her father cannot be held accountable for anything because he drank too much. Her grandmother used to say "Let's make popcorn!" to lighten the mood and cheer Charmaine up.

Where? – Stan feels like a helpless failure, wondering where to turn and what can be done. He hates that his wife must deal with the terror of their living situation, having to frequently find new places to park in the middle of the night because criminals often close in on their car. Stan remembers how they were both employed once – Charmaine by Ruby Slippers Retirement Homes and Clinics, and Stan by Dimple Robotics where he tested the Empathy Module automated Customer Fulfillment bots. He also thinks of better times – of his wedding, the honeymoon in Georgia, and their first house. Stan also remembers how they both lost their jobs in the recent recession and how they soon lost their house. Stan thinks it is time to contact his brother, Conor, a scam artist, for financial help.

Part II, Pitch

Brew – Charmaine urges Stan to focus on the things they have, such as each other. Charmaine heads to work at a bar called PixelDust, originally meant for nerds, but which went downhill fast after the digital mini-boom. It is now known for drugs and hookers, including two girls named Sandi and Veronica, both under nineteen. They have tried to convince Charmaine to get into prostitution, but Charmaine has refused. Charmaine usually works the afternoon shift with Deidre, who has had an even worse time than Charmaine.

Stumped – While Charmaine is at work, Stan finds Conor in a trailer park, and is directed to Conor by a man named Herb. Conor is doing well and immediately agrees to give Stan some money, because Stan has always helped him out in the past. Conor offers Stan work, but Stan says maybe later. Conor also gives Stan a backup phone, which he says has been wiped and can't be traced.

Pitch – The afternoon shifts are slow, which Charmaine likes sometimes. A television ad of a man in a suit asks viewers if they are tired of living in their cars, and want to live like they used to. This catches Charmaine's attention immediately. She sees footage of beautiful houses in a beautiful neighborhood. The man announces that the Positron Project is accepting new members now, urging viewers that if accepted into the



program, they can be everything they always wanted to be. Charmaine, Veronica, and Sandi are all paying attention by now. Charmaine is determined to apply.

Part III, Switch

Gateway – Charmaine, Stan, Sandi, and Veronica are among those on the shuttle bus for the Positron Project in the quiet, gated town of Consilience. They are given rooms at the Harmony Hotel and given a social reception that evening. Stan notices that over the course of the evening, the crowd thins out. He imagines these are people who have been weeded out already.

Night Out – Stan and Charmaine participate in their first workshop the following morning, featuring PowerPoint presentations about Consilience, Positron Prison, and all the happy people who participate in the program. Stan and Charmaine are both a little uneasy about the whole thing, but believe it to be better than the alternative – living in their car in the world outside. In order to remind participants about the outside world, they are forced to spend the night in a dumpy motel. Conor shows up at the motel, urging Stan not to go into the program, saying he has heard bad things about it. Conor says that once people go in, they never come out except dead.

Twin City – The next morning, Stan and Charmaine sign contracts to begin participation in the program. There are many more workshops that follow, some intended only for men, some intended only for women. It is explained that the Positron Project is an experiment involving both Consilience and Positron Prison which aims to eliminate unemployment and crime together at once. The project must be a success, participants are told by the project's young think-tank managers. One of them, Ed, explains how serious the situation is. He explains that statistics for the public, such as on unemployment, are doctored while the true statistics are much more terrifying. For example, 40% of the region's residents are actually unemployed. This has led to horrible crimes ranging from robbery to rape and murder. Ed says that big cities cannot help, tax dollars are running out, prisons are overflowing, and that collapse seems unavoidable. Ed stresses the importance of secrecy within the project, which causes Stan to want to contact Conor to see what else Conor knows about Positron. The solution to the problem, Ed says, are towns built around penitentiaries, of prisoners and guards. The prisoners would do work, while the guards would tend to them and to each other. Each month, the roles would reverse. Half the people would become prison-workers, while the other half could live in middle-class luxury in the suburbs, Ed explains. It is then revealed that Consilience is a combination of the words Con (for convicts) and Resilience. Stan imagines that someone must be making money off of all of this.

A Meaningful Life – The town, Ed, explains, is designed to look like the 1950s since that is when most Americans self-identified as being happiest. There has been overwhelming support and approval online and from applicants and participants, Ed notes. He goes on to explain that new cellphones which only work in Consilience will be given to residents, housing assignments will be given, paychecks will be in Posidollars, and that maintenance staff will handle day-to-day issues such as plumbing. Stan also discovers, in the green orientation folders they are given, that things like porn, violent



movies, hip-hop, and rock music are banned to avoid overexcitement. Stan applies for jobs in Robotics, IT, and scooter repair, with scooters being the main source of transportation. That night, Charmaine is thrilled to be in their new home, but Stan has a feeling that something, somewhere is wrong.

I'm Starved For You – About a year passes. Stan and Charmaine adjust relatively well to life in Consilience. Stan dislikes the time in prison because it separates him from Charmaine, who must go to the women's wing. He also wishes their sex life was more exciting. Stan and Charmaine pack away their things in storage lockers in the house as they prepare to move into the prison for the next month. They do their best to leave the house clean, though the alternate couple is never as clean. Stan reflects on a printed note he found for Max from Jasmine, which was sexually charged and sealed with a hot pink lipstick kiss, saying Jasmine was “starved” for Max. Stan often wonders about Max and Jasmine, imagining that they must have an amazing sex life. Still, Stan loves his wife and hopes they may one day have kids.

Switch – Charmaine happily runs errands on Switchover Day, and is happy to see so many other people out and about. Every so often, a dark-colored Surveillance car comes past. Charmaine feels as if her alternate lives are work and vacation, but she can never tell which is which. After coming out of the pharmacy, Charmaine finds a note in her scooter with an address in the older part of Consilience. Each month, the address is different, and is where Charmaine meets Max to have wild sex with him. She loves Stan, but sex with him is different. With Max, Charmaine uses the name “Jasmine”, while she knows “Max” is not a real name, either.

Tidy – Charmaine remembers how she had lingered at home a little longer on Switchover Day some months before to continue tidying up the house when Max arrived early. Within moments of meeting each other, sexual chemistry was apparent, and they arranged to meet at a vacant house. After their sexual encounter, Charmaine was surprised to find she doesn't feel guilty, but jubilant instead. To this day, she only regrets that Stan found the note she left for Max. Yet, Charmaine knows her affair with Max is forbidden by the powers in charge, and knows that she is endangering herself, Max, Max's wife Jocelyn, and Stan. She knows she needs to break it off with Max, but can't find the will to do it.

Analysis

“The Heart Goes Last” is a contemporary dystopian novel by Margaret Atwood which follows the efforts of husband and wife Stan and Charmaine to survive and help bring down the Positron Project, supposedly aimed at ending unemployment and crime but in reality performing illegal organ harvesting and sexually altering the minds of people. Stan and Charmaine are willing to endure whatever they must at Positron in order to have a better life. It is clear that, although their situation is desperate, Stan and Charmaine love one another. They may not have much, Charmaine notes, but they have each other – and this is important and indicative of love. Love itself will become an immensely important theme in the novel through Stan and Charmaine. (The car in which



they live represents what they believe to be their lowest point early in the novel, but they have no idea how far they have yet to fall. The tragedy of being forced to live in their Honda also means, however, that Stan and Charmaine truly only have each other, and so value the other more for this.)

Stan and Charmaine both want to make life better for the other because of their love for the other. Yet, the achievement of stable jobs, a stable place in the Positron Project, a stable home, a stable paycheck, and stability in general challenges the love Stan and Charmaine share more than not having anything materially at all. As the reader discovers before Stan does, Charmaine is having a torrid sexual affair with Max, the house's alternate. It is heartbreaking to see that Stan discovers a note from Charmaine (as Jasmine) to Max – but also disheartening to learn that Stan would cheat on Charmaine if given the chance. Oddly, Charmaine doesn't feel guilty at all about the affair she is having – but does worry that it could endanger everyone.

And the danger is real, though not overt at first. It is through this subtle danger, through the suspicions that Stan has, that the theme of dystopianism comes into play. Small human rights (which becomes a theme in itself) are taken away. For example, contact with the outside world is prohibited, smartphones are exchanged for Positron phones which work only in Consilience, American dollars are done away with for Posidollars, and Surveillance cars are seen moving through the streets from time to time. These cars are not actual police cars dedicated to the protection of the public, but are methods of control and protection for the Project itself.

After all, crime is something which the Project aims to do away with. It is through the Positron approach to crime that Stan also suspects something else to be deeply wrong with Positron. Crime becomes a theme in its own right, though it also strongly informs the themes of dystopianism and human rights as well. The citizens of Consilience are given one month in, and one month out of prison. This acts as a deterrent to prevent citizens from ending up in prison permanently as a result of crime by showing them what their life could be like in real prison (the Positron Prison is nothing compared to real prison, but is a potent reminder) – but also takes away their rights to live permanently outside of a prison.

Crime also proves to be a powerful deterrent for those who wish to drop out of Positron after the first night. The reader will note that the applicants are required to spend one last night outside Consiliences as a reminder of everything they will either leave behind, or will return to. Stan and Charmaine have had to flee roving bands of thugs and criminals in the past, getting away in their car in the nick of time. Ironically, while Stan and Charmaine struggle to make ends meet legally and morally, Stan's brother, Conor, is flourishing, as crime has become mainstream. It is Conor who helps Stan to get by with a couple hundred bucks – partially a payback for Stan's kindness in the past, and primarily because Conor is Stan's brother. It is Conor, the reader will remember, who warns Stan about participating in the Positron program. Stan is unnerved by this, but rationalizes that a program like Positron could not possibly be allowed by the government if it was not truly safe.



Discussion Question 1

Why do Stan and Charmaine decide to participate in the Positron Project? One year into the program, how do Stan and Charmaine feel about their decision? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Charmaine decide to have a sexual affair with Max? Why does Stan contemplate having a sexual affair with Jasmine?

Discussion Question 3

What are Stan's concerns and suspicions about the Positron Project? What evidence suggests that there might be something truthful to Stan's worries?

Vocabulary

supersaturated, irritable, dingy, flaunting, impersonally, ingratiating, contemptuous, ambience, imperative, posterity, indignant, malcontents, stagnant, derelict, disenfranchised, stratagem, deduces, jubilant



Part IV, The Heart Goes Last – Part VI, Valentine's Day

Summary

Part IV, The Heart Goes Last

Haircut – Stan checks into Positron Prison, gets the routine haircut from Clint the barber, and the two talk about their month on the outside. Clint's wife works in the prison hospital on hearts, while Charmaine works in the hospital as Chief Medications Administrator. Stan finds himself wondering who Max could possibly be, and hopes to find Jasmine in the future. In the past, Stan thinks about how he disliked the prison part of the experience due to actual hardcore criminals being a part of the experiment, but over time, these thugs vanished without a trace.

Duty – Stan works his shift at the poultry facility. He knows that the ultimate goal of the town is to become totally self-sufficient, and that town is well on the way now. He remembers how in the time of the violent criminals, they would come in to have sex with the chickens, threatening Stan's life if he wouldn't step away from the cages.

The Heart Goes Last – Charmaine gets to work dispensing medications to Procedures, the violent criminals and people dangerous to Positron and Consilience. These men and women are killed by injections fed into machines by Charmaine and her fellow workers. Their causes of death are always listed as things like "heart attack", since the injection causes the heart to stop last. Charmaine enjoys her work, knowing it helps the project.

Scooter - It is mid-September, halfway through Stan and Charmaine's next month outside the prison. Stan enjoys going for walks in the evenings after work at the electric-scooter repair depot, and after dinner. Charmaine's scooter has been giving her problems, so Stan volunteers to bring it in to fix it for her. Stan does this in order to use a smartphone GPS tracker, Consilience Wi-Fi, and his own smartphone to trace the movements of Jasmine, who will use the scooter when he and Charmaine are in Positron. He hopes this will lead him to meeting Jasmine on a Switchover Day.

Pushover – It is October 1, Switchover Day. Charmaine has again met Max for sex. Max tells Charmaine her husband is lucky, but Charmaine says she is different with him sexually. Charmaine also tells Max that Stan has been looking at her differently lately, making her think he suspects something. She also tells him that Stan has a temper and might become violent. She considers murdering Stan with smuggled Procedure serum, but wonders what she'd do with the body.

Part V, Ambush

Town Meeting – On evenings before Switchover Day, Town Meetings are broadcast on television to let residents know how well the town is doing. They always emphasize the



positive, and talk about new plans and goals. During the broadcast, Stan wonders about the detours Charmaine has been making on her scooter on Switchover Days to larger, older houses. He wonders if she is planning to push the authorities to let them move into a bigger house, or if she wants a baby and is looking for a bigger house because of this. He wonders how this will affect his plans to find Jasmine. Stan also wonders about who is making money off Positron, and how much. Stan wonders whether it is true if the only way out of Positron is through a box.

Ambush – It is Switchover Day. Rather than leaving ahead of Charmaine as usual, Stan decides to pretend to leave early and hide in the garage, only to await the moment when Charmaine’s scooter is picked up and used by Jasmine. Suddenly, a woman comes into the garage. She introduces herself as Jocelyn, not Jasmine. Jocelyn is the house’s alternate. Stan is stunned to learn this, and stunned to learn that Max’s real name is Phil. Jocelyn explains she knows about the tracking device and Charmaine’s affair. She reveals that she is Surveillance and knows everything. Stan is again stunned, thinking that he is now in trouble and realizing that Charmaine has been having an affair. Jocelyn explains that Phil will be going to Positron in Stan’s place, because Stan is now considered a wild card. Stan will now be forced into Positron in opposite months of Charmaine, to avoid violence due to the sexual affair. Jocelyn also reveals that Stan’s locker is now the red one.

Chat Room – On January 1, Charmaine is told to stay behind at the prison to speak with Human Resources. She is immediately fearful she is in trouble, but also worried what Max will be thinking when she doesn’t show up to meet him, or when she is late getting back to Stan.

Choke Collar – Stan knows that Jocelyn owns him, and that he is still alive only by her good graces. He has lived the past month on a leash under her watchful eye. She has also goaded him into sex with her, and has demanded he get himself into better shape. Stan considers killing himself with the electric hedgeclippers while he is outside tending to the lawn.

Human Resources – Aurora of Human Resources meets with Charmaine. She explains Charmaine is in limbo since her identity, codes, and cards have all been deactivated while the database is crosschecked. Aurora explains that Charmaine will receive new cards when she is re-verified. Until then, she will be placed in Laundry-Towel-Folding, in order to reflect on her after-work “pursuits”. Charmaine wishes Stan was around to tell her what to do. After work, Charmaine is put into a cell by herself. She wonders if this is the beginning of her punishment, and begins to cry.

Houseboy – Stan continues to work in electric-scooter repair, telling the others that his information and schedule were simply mixed up. He is aware that one man in particular is the one who has been having sex with Charmaine. At home, Stan is forced into watching footage of Charmaine and Phil having sex, and is then forced to do the same things with Jocelyn. He knows Jocelyn is playing head-games with him. He is angered by the fact that Charmaine will be with Phil now, but does his best to focus on Jocelyn’s body instead.



Part VI, Valentine's Day

Limbo – Stan is worried because Charmaine hasn't reappeared on Switchover Day. He wonders what she would think about the entire situation. Jocelyn has decided that he and Charmaine need more time apart. Stan wonders why Jocelyn doesn't just order herself a sex robot. However, as time goes on, Jocelyn takes to reading rather than requiring sex all the time. Still, he knows he will need to perform well as Valentine's Day approaches.

Turban – Charmaine is called back into the Human Resources Chat Room with Aurora. Aurora reminds Charmaine to be patient. The good news is however, explains Aurora, that Charmaine will be put back into medications administration. Charmaine asks about Stan. Aurora says that Stan is not information she has access to, but is sure Stan has been taken care of. Charmaine asks that a Valentine's Day message be sent to Stan, but Aurora says this is impossible. Later, Charmaine gets to meet Lucinda Quant, star of one of Charmaine's favorite television shows, "The Home Front", who is being given a guided tour by Ed. Ed explains Lucinda is considering making a show describing how good Positron and Consilience are.

Shuffle – Stan and Jocelyn watch the Town meeting. Ed appears on the show, talking about negative things for a change. This consists of enemies of Positron and Consilience, including muck-raking journalists insisting on human rights, transparency, and freedom of the press. Ed says these are not real human rights, but that real human rights are having a job, enough to eat, and a decent place to live. These people and their networks, Ed continues, must be identified and neutralized. Ed encourages all residents to go about their lives normally, though there may be interruptions from time to time as the Positron Project is protected. Stan is amazed to think there may be subversives. Jocelyn then asks Stan if he believes in free will. The next day, a collection of prisoners arrives in town and is shepherded through the streets by guards.

Threat – Charmaine is worried by the Town Hall broadcast, especially because not everyone on the outside would be able to understand the Procedure should word of it be transmitted by journalists. Ed come into the women's wing of Positron to address them, saying he will go to the outside world to address scrutiny while protecting the inmates from being bothered and slandered. He also explains that some dangerous reporters and others have been taken prisoner, that these new prisoners are not to be associated with, and that all unusual sounds are to be ignored. Ed says that, regrettably for the time being, Positron will be a less open, less trusting place because of the crisis.

Valentine's Day – It is Valentine's Day. Stan is annoyed by whatever it is he knows Jocelyn will be planning for the day. Jocelyn has prepared breakfast for him, then tells him she will be coming into work with her in the car. Jocelyn then speaks to Stan pointedly. The sex games were a test. She says his database entries have been switched around, and that she is going to make it possible for him to smuggle information to the outside. She reveals herself to be Ed's founding partner in the Positron Project, noting that the project as it was conceived was different from how it has turned out. She explains that greedy investors have done this. The true purpose of



the place now is for the harvesting of body parts, which are then sold to millionaires and those that can afford transplants, DNA, or whatever is needed. Ed has been setting up transplant clinics inside retirement facilities, specifically in Ruby Slippers Retirement Homes and Clinics. The average citizens and prisoners of Consilience and Positron will live normally and unknowingly as a front for the transplant operations, which bring in new prisoners from the outside only for the purpose of being hacked up. Ed's job will be to deliver a flash drive with a digital document dump and videos to a key media target. Jocelyn explains that, although she can come and go freely in Positron, she helped build it and is now responsible for fixing it.

Sandbag – It turns out that Jocelyn's driver is Phil, who is also in on the plot to get information out. They have deliberately concocted the affairs with Charmaine and Stan so that it would be a cover for motive in case of an emergency. Stan will be given a non-lethal version of the Procedure so that he can be taken to the outside world. Charmaine will be forced to believe it is real so that it protects them all. Jocelyn then knocks Stan out with a sedative.

Analysis

The jobs that Stan and Charmaine work in Positron Prison become crucial to the plot as it unfolds, though Stan's job in rearing poultry will not make sense to the reader until later. Charmaine's job, however, is one of truly deadly purpose. She is the chief administrator of the Procedure, essentially the delivery of lethal injections to criminals and dangerous elements to the Positron Project. Here, the themes of crime and dystopianism intertwine. While the criminals and dangerous elements that Charmaine eliminates are indeed the committers of crime against the Positron Project, it is clear that these individuals have not been through the regular American legal process, for their deaths are covered up with fake causes of demise. Even though they are criminals, the Procedure denies them their basic rights as people. Additionally, the people considered dangerous to the Project are denied their human rights as well by being killed without any legal recourse.

Charmaine's role – due to the soft tyranny and mind-twisting carried on by Ed and the leaders of the Project – is considered by Charmaine to be both moral and legal, not highly illegal and immoral. Indeed, Charmaine herself is committing serious crimes in pursuit of preserving the Project. In dystopian societies, everything must be done for the preservation of the society, no matter how immoral or illegal such actions may be. As the reader notes, Charmaine believes the outside world won't "understand" the importance of what she is doing. To Charmaine, it is not her, but the outside world that is wrong.

The truth behind Charmaine's affair finally comes out in what is conceivably the most dangerous form possible. Stan's plans to intercept Jasmine, and discovery of the affair are made apparent when Jocelyn confronts him. Jocelyn emerges as a decidedly dangerous character, for she seems to have the keys to Stan's freedom – and very life. The repeated sexual encounters between Stan and Jocelyn serve a purpose, however,



in that Jocelyn wants to make sure that she can trust Stan, and that Stan is willing to do whatever is necessary to bring down Positron. Stan will have to pretend to be killed in order to get him out of Positron in order to take out the Project. As Jocelyn reveals, Stan's suspicions that something, somewhere is wrong are revealed to be true.

Jocelyn explains that she is one of the founding members of Positron, which is why she is so determined to bring it down. She reveals that the Project could originally be taken at face value, but that greedy investors and Ed's desire for wealth, power, and prestige affected his thinking. Positron is now only a front for two real operations going on behind closed doors. The second is not revealed until later, but the first is revealed to be an organ-harvesting operation. The injections that Charmaine delivers to those who must undergo the Procedure ensure that the heart goes last for a reason – because the heart is such a valuable organ. (This is only one of many ways the heart will come to be important in coming chapters, both figuratively and literally.)

The criminals and dangerous elements have run out, so people are now forcibly being taken from outside for the organ harvesting. These are the prisoners that Ed warns regular residents to remain wary of, and to not speak to. This is a denial of their human rights and freedoms, and is very much in keeping with a dystopian situation. Everything is done for the greater good. In this case, it is for the greater good of Positron and the wealth of the investors.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jocelyn choose Stan to help her bring down Positron? How does Stan feel about helping her do this? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What does Jocelyn reveal to be the truth behind Positron? How does Jocelyn say such illegal and immoral activities can be carried out without people finding out?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Charmaine believe that the outside world won't "understand" the work she does in the hospital? How would you respond to Charmaine?

Vocabulary

interlude, reverie, annihilating, ingenious, retributions, furtive, assignations, conjunction, surreptitiously, mirthlessly, tremulous, conducive, maladjusted, scurrilous, imperceptible, mortifying



Part VII, White Ceiling – Part IX, Possibilibots

Summary

Part VII, White Ceiling

White Ceiling – When Stan comes to, he is strapped down. He can't speak or move, but he can see and think. Charmaine, meanwhile, returns to her job as Medication Administrator. She begins to have doubts about the work she is doing.

Hood – Charmaine is stunned to discover Sandi in her cell, tied up and hooded. Sandi urges Charmaine to pretend she doesn't know her. Sandi says she tried to get out by sleeping her way out, but failed. Sandi explains that Veronica went missing after she refused to take on work handling the Procedure, leading Sandi to want to leave. Sandi then tells Charmaine she must call for a guard, and ask why an unknown prisoner has been put into her cell.

Cherry Pie – Stan wonders how Charmaine will react to seeing him in the room. Meanwhile, Charmaine thinks about Stan, and realizes she truly does love him. She believes the episodes with Max were just temporary absences from normality. She is determined to recommit herself to Stan when she sees him again. Aurora, from Human Resources, tells Charmaine she must now undergo a test in order to re-validate herself. It will be a test of loyalty and professionalism. She must back out now and go back to folding, or go through with the test. Charmaine, feeling annoyed, says she is up to the test. She is then given her written assignment for the Procedure like normal, but the name on the slip of paper isn't hers.

Choice – Charmaine collects the items for the Procedure as listed. She then goes to the Procedure room. She is horrified to find Stan strapped down to the bed. She has no idea why he is there. She does her best to hold back her tears, knowing she is being watched and tested. She does her best to go through the motions as usual, but it is increasingly difficult for her to do so. She kisses Stan, apologizes for what she must do, and begins the Procedure. She then feels a spasm and passes out.

Part VIII, Erase Me

Binned – When Stan wakes up, he is in a bin full of blue teddy bears, the kind that the sewing circles in the women's wing of the prison make by hand. Stan feels horribly hung over. He emerges from the bin and finds himself in a warehouse full of bins and crates. Stan worries about Charmaine, then burrows down into the teddy bears and goes to sleep.

Teatime – Charmaine awakens back in her own house, remembers her husband is dead, and begins to cry. Aurora suddenly arrives with tea, prompting Charmaine to



wonder how and why Aurora has come into her house. Aurora compliments her on the job she has done, but Charmaine tells Aurora she should leave. As Aurora goes, she tells Charmaine that Stan's funeral will be in two days, and his death will be written off as an electrical accident in poultry.

Coffeetime – Jocelyn wakes Stan up, giving him coffee and painkiller pills. She explains that Charmaine will be taken care of. Jocelyn says Stan's name is now Waldo, and he will be replacing a Waldo that has died. He will go to work on the Possibilibots team, who manufacture female sex robots. Jocelyn tells him he will be approached on the inside by a contact, and that the password will be "tiptoe through the tulips".

Ajar – While Charmaine awaits a car to bring her in for a CAT scan, she notices there is something ready to be played in the DVD player. When she plays it, she is horrified to see herself and Max having sex. She then goes downstairs to her storage locker to take out her things. She then notices that Stan's locker is empty. It hurts her deeply.

Erase Me – Charmaine is picked up for the CAT scan by the woman from reception in the Procedure department. Charmaine unloads on her, demanding to know why Stan was killed. The woman says that Stan was very brave dying in an electrical fire like he did. In the car, Charmaine is horrified to learn that the driver is Max. When she speaks to him, he says his name is Phil. Charmaine believes now that she is all alone.

Part IX, Possibilibots

Lunch – Stan gets to work with his team, working on the Possibilibots. He spends downtime with them, drinking beer and sharing wings with the guys in the cafeteria. Stan is awaiting his contact who will give him the flash drive and directions on how to get out and where to go. Gary, Derek, Tyler, Budge, and Kevin talk about the posters of the Possibilibots that will be sold to the Dutch, who have just approved legislation for the sex robots. Budge insists on the group giving Stan a real tour, and then giving him a trial run with a robot.

Egg Cup – Charmaine still feels horrible, and does her best to think of Grandma Win and the past as she wakes up after being dropped off at home after the scan. Aurora once again appears with tea and brunch. Aurora then tells her they will be going shopping for the funeral.

Tour – Budge and the others show the factory off to Stan, noting that the shipping facility of the factory opens up directly to the outside world for delivery trucks, whose drivers believe they are picking up plumbing materials. The sex robots are all customized, and can even be designed to look like real people.

Black Suit – Charmaine tries on dresses for the funeral, and wonders how attractive she is. She reprimands herself for thinking this way because she has caused Stan's funeral. The day of the funeral arrives. Aurora, and Ed himself come to pick up Charmaine.

Tiptoe Through the Tulips – Stan is brought to Customization in the Possibilibots factory. There, he is chilled to find that one of the sex robots has been made to look like



Charmaine. Budge and the others explain that they have really had to be meticulous about this order, according to their bosses, to the point that they have had to tiptoe through the tulips.

Analysis

The importance of Stan's job in poultry is revealed in this section of the novel. It provides a convenient excuse for the powers that be to write off his death as an electrical accident. Meanwhile, the scene of Stan's "death" is especially poignant, for it fully returns the theme of love to the plot. The disruption in Charmaine's schedule, as well as the potential danger that she faces, cause her to rethink her life and her marriage to Stan. She comes to realize that she truly does love him. It is ironic that only when she is without him does she recognize what she had in Stan. She hopes that she will soon be reunited with Stan, during which time she will recommit to him. Everything may have been taken away from Charmaine at this moment, except for her heart. It is the last to go.

And indeed, Charmaine's heart is the last thing to go. Charmaine's role as administrator of the Procedure comes to haunt her and shock her conscience like nothing else when Stan is the person she is ordered to give the Procedure to. Suddenly, the dystopian world comes crashing down around Charmaine. She has no idea who she has given the Procedure to dozens, if not hundreds of times before – but she knows it has been for the good of Positron. Now, she is forced to deliver the Procedure to somebody that she does know, and wonders how it could possibly be for the good of Positron. She knows that if she doesn't follow through with the Procedure, she will be held to account for her failure. With Stan's "death" goes Charmaine's heart.

Charmaine now truly understands that Positron is deceptively peaceful and positive, and is really a wolf in sheep's clothing. She recognizes that all of Stan's fears and concerns were well-grounded. This is further demonstrated to her by way of the fact that Stan will receive the same treatment as any other Procedured individual. He will be given a funeral and falsified cause of death. This is done shortly after Charmaine sees that Sandi and Veronica have been ferreted away by the Project, which further underscores the danger that Charmaine realizes that Positron poses. Additionally, the forcefulness of Ed and his associates in ensuring that Charmaine carries through a perfect public persona through the funeral only reinforces the point already made – that Charmaine is in over her head.

Meanwhile, Stan is reintegrated into the Possibilibots factory. He is befriended by Budge and other members of the workforce staff there. There are disturbing things going on in the Possibilibots factory, which manufactures sex robots to look like real people. Most notable to Stan is the robot that has been designed to look like Charmaine. This comes in conjunction with Budge's use of the password. It is clear that Budge is part of the resistance that has formed against the dystopian Positron, which Positron itself would consider a crime punishable by death. Stan has only one option: he must succeed in getting information to the outside world.



Discussion Question 1

How does Charmaine consider her job as Procedure administrator before Stan's arrival for the Procedure? How does she consider her work after Stan? Why? What causes the shift in opinion?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe it is that only without Stan, and when she is in danger that Charmaine comes to realize that she loves him? Do you believe her love for Stan is real, or a product of the fear of her current situation? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

When does Charmaine come to realize that her husband was right in his suspicions about Positron? What evidence further underscores the danger that Positron poses? Why do you believe it took so long for Charmaine to come to the truth of things?

Vocabulary

perforating, terminate, tedious, visualize, spontaneous, nostalgic, frivolous, deceptive, demurely, dithering



Part X , Grief Therapy – Part XII, Escort

Summary

Part X, Grief Therapy

Handcreep – Charmaine thanks Ed for coming with her to the funeral. Ed says it is the least he could do, and puts his hand on her arm. Charmaine realizes how dangerous her situation is, but also realizes she truly is in mourning for her husband.

Quality Control – Budge and the others bring Stan to Quality Control. Stan declines a test run, which the others all say they declined as well. They then move into Wardrobe and Accessories. There, Stan learns the blue teddy bears knitted in the Positron are included with little girl sex robots. Stan is sickened by that particular line, as are Budge and all the others. It is then that Budge tells Stan he will indeed have to have a trial run. He brings Stan into his office, alone, and then immediately says his job is to ship Stan out. Budge will only go as far to say that Conor has helped to arrange everything. Stan will be dressed up like an Elvis robot, and will be watched over by a female guide. He notes that Possibilibots is working on something far more advanced than just sex bots. Budge reveals that real women are having their brains altered to be programmed to be imprinted by their owner, whom they serve and have sex with. It is a forced kind of love. Some women willingly sign up for it. The procedure doesn't always work, as is the case with the woman who will be Stan's guide.

Sacrifice – Stan's funeral is held. Charmaine is stunned to see that Max has also attended the funeral. Aurora remains by Charmaine's side, guiding her through everything. She then tells Charmaine she will need grief therapy.

Perfect – The young woman Stan meets through Budge is Veronica. She is stunningly gorgeous. Veronica tells Stan she will be taking him to the other side. She says she simply didn't feel a spark for the man she was intended for. She says she is now only turned on by a little blue teddy bear she keeps in her bag.

Grief Therapy – Charmaine insists she does not need grief therapy, but Aurora insists she does. At home, Charmaine is stunned when the girl from reception appears in the kitchen with Aurora and a blue teddy bear. The girl introduces herself as Jocelyn from Surveillance, and says there isn't much time to explain. Charmaine realizes that Max is Phil, and they are the house's alternates. Jocelyn explains that Stan isn't dead, and plays her a recorded message from Stan in the bear, saying he is okay and that Charmaine needs to do as she is told. Jocelyn reveals Ed is having a sex robot of Charmaine made up, preparing to move on to the real thing. Charmaine has a choice: she can stay and take her chances with Ed, or she can take a chance with Jocelyn, her people, and Stan. She agrees to help. Her mission, they explain, is to cozy up to Ed as a grieving widow, and to spy on him. Charmaine agrees to this, knowing she has no choice because there are sex tapes of her which could ruin her.



Dressups – Veronica reports that Ed has discovered some files have been copied from the system, meaning a search will be coming. Stan will be shipped out as part of an order of five Elvises for Las Vegas with Veronica. The flash drive will be hidden in his Elvis belt buckle. While Stan dresses up as Elvis, Veronica dresses up as Marilyn Monroe from the movie “Niagara”. They are then packaged up into the boxes which have been fitted with small airholes. They will communicate by microphones in her teddy bear, and his shoulder pad.

Part XI, Ruby Slippers

Flirt – Charmaine and Ed have dinner at the restaurant Together. Charmaine knows her cover for her spy work is convincing because much of it is real. She is still in shock from everything. Ed explains that there have been doubts and rumors about Charmaine, but says he will take care of them. Charmaine thanks him for being so kind and supportive. Ed then offers Charmaine work as his personal assistant, to make sure she adjusts well and has a good, new job.

Shipped – Stan does his best to sleep as much as he can for the drive to Vegas. He hears Veronica over the microphone sexually pleasuring herself with the teddy bear.

Fetish – The next day, Jocelyn and Aurora come to see Charmaine. She reveals the details of her dinner with Ed, then asks about Stan. They assure her Stan is safe. She then begins work as Ed’s personal assistant, keep track of Ed’s appointments, handling his mail, and doing simple secretarial work. She notes that numerous Positron communities are being erected around the country. Aurora and Jocelyn report over the next few days that Ed is slowly sizing Charmaine up so that he might determine when to make a move on her. They also report that Charmaine’s sex robot is nearly finished. Jocelyn says she will pay a visit to the robot to make sure nothing happens to it.

Malfunction – The next day, Ed isn’t at work. At home, Charmaine learns from Jocelyn that Ed is in the Positron hospital, having been electrically shocked by his Charmaine robot after Jocelyn threw the robot off balance by sticking a random pin into the robot’s skin. Ed has ordered the robot destroyed, meaning he will now be focusing on Charmaine herself.

Unpacked – Stan wakes up in a bright room full of Elvises, some robotic, and some real. He realizes the real Elvises are mostly gay. Stan learns he has been shipped to UR-ELF, an Elvis-fetish escort service.

Ruby Slippers – The Elvises reveal they will be taking care of Stan as directed and paid for by Budge at the Elvisorium. They reveal that Elvis’s Marilyn will be by soon to collect him. In the meantime, he is sent out to do flower deliveries and dances for the elderly women in Ruby Slippers Retirement Home.

Part XII, Escort

Elvisorium – Stan comes to learn the real names of the Elvises at the Elvisorium, including founding member and CEO Rob; Ted, who oversees daily maintenance such



as groceries and dry-cleaning Elvis outfits; and Pete, who is second-in-command and handles finances. Stan is promoted to escort service, where he arranges for meetings with clients, but then pretends to be gay so that he can bring in the Elvis robot to handle the sex aspect of things.

Why Suffer? – Ed is out of the office for the next several days. Charmaine meets with Aurora and Jocelyn once more. It is decided that Aurora will spend the weekend with Charmaine in case Ed shows up unannounced. Over the weekend, Aurora says that Ed is planning a trip with Charmaine, and that Aurora's face isn't her real face. She has had work done because her face was scraped off in a roller derby accident. The insurance company would not cover it, but Positron was willing to give her an entire face transplant for signing up. She explains it has been difficult for her to find love, but a new Procedure is retooling the brain to make such things possible. Aurora has agreed to help Jocelyn in order to find a match to love.

Escort – Stan takes a walk. When he returns, Rob explains that four bald men with sunglasses came by looking for him. Stan realizes that Ed's people must be after him. Stan is given his first escort assignment – a woman in Vegas for a broadcaster convention named Lucinda Quant. Stan meets up with her. She appears to be in her fifties or sixties, and doesn't buy his line that he is gay. They go to a Russian-themed casino to see a show.

Requisition – Monday morning, Jocelyn reports to Aurora and Charmaine that Ed will have Charmaine arrange for the trip to be to Vegas. She plays a video of Ed speaking to a group of businessmen about the possibilities of rewiring the brain. Ed then unveils video of Veronica, who he says was sabotaged with a bear. The men in the video are thrilled with this idea, not only because it marks a woman for them and them alone, but because it erases previous memories of love. Jocelyn explains that this could also be done for women who want a man imprinted as well. It is believed that Charmaine will be undergoing the operation for Ed in Vegas. Jocelyn will also be going along as Charmaine's bodyguard, as ordered by Ed.

Analysis

Charmaine is thrilled to learn that Stan is still alive. Interestingly enough, this only increases the love that she feels for Stan. The reader will recall that when Charmaine had a quiet life with Stan during their first year in Positron, she clearly took him for granted by engaging in a sexual affair that she didn't feel the least bit remorseful about. Having lost Stan, she realized what she had lost only too late – or so she thought. Now that he is alive again, Charmaine's sole purpose becomes reuniting with him. As a result, she will do whatever is necessary in order to see Stan again. This includes cozying up to Ed and helping Jocelyn and Aurora seek to bring down Positron. Everything beyond Stan is irrelevant to Charmaine.

The dystopian reach of Positron is alarming. As Charmaine comes to discover, dozens of such communities are popping up across the country. Meanwhile, the organ



harvesting operation has been using Ruby Slippers medical clinics as a cover. As noted earlier, the organ harvesting is only one of two true purposes for the Positron cover. The second is just as disturbing, for it results in altering the brain to be imprinted by the first set of eyes seen by the altered, creating a sexually-charged obsession and forced love. For Veronica, this tragically ends up being a stuffed bear, and has been done against her will.

That this could be done to anyone against their will is certainly a violation of human rights – while it may even be argued that having the procedure done at all is a violation of human rights because the love felt is not truly genuine. This means that the person who is being loved is not truly being loved, while the person doing the loving is not truly loving. In the process, the mind is altered first, while the heart is altered last. The mind forces the heart to believe in a feeling that is not truly present. Such will be the case for Charmaine.

Aurora, however, does not see things this way. She is so desperate to fall in love at all that she is willing to undergo the procedure, even if she does not genuinely fall in love. The motivation for love is certainly a powerful thing. But in Charmaine's case at the moment, her motivation is borne of a genuine love. Likewise, a mistake or act of sabotage – such as Veronica and the bear – can irreversibly ruin someone's life. As Veronica later states in the novel (in the next section), she doesn't want to be fixed because she is in love with her bear.

Interestingly enough, Stan is given a leg up by the criminal underworld of which his brother is a part. Indeed, it is Conor who works through Budge to ensure that Stan is kept safe. Ironically, it is the very thing which Positron is officially seeking to undo – crime – which is now being taken up by Positron itself. This even becomes a form of hypocrisy on Positron's part, as it takes an official stance against crimes which Positron itself commits (such as murder). Yet, ironically, it is the criminal world which now aspires to help bring Positron down by working with Stan and Jocelyn – and it is the criminal underworld which, in this instance, is on the side of good.

Discussion Question 1

What is the second secret purpose of Positron, as both Stan and Charmaine come to find out? How do Stan and Charmaine react to this information? Why?

Discussion Question 2

It can be argued that imprinting is not genuine love, and that imprinted love violates the human rights of both the lover, and the loved. Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Explain.



Discussion Question 3

Why is Aurora so willing to help bring down Positron? Is her reasoning sound or desperate? Why?

Vocabulary

tentative, crescendos, malfunction, deplorable, sulkily, discreet, outlawry, piously, ravenous, blatant, palliative, continuum, impetuous, ensconced, undifferentiated, carapace



Part XIII, Green Man – Part XV, There

Summary

Green Man – The show that Lucinda has taken Stan to is a performance by the Green Man Group, a spinoff of the Blue Man Group. One of their first songs is “Tiptoe Through the Tulips”. Ed knows it cannot possibly be a coincidence. When Lucinda goes to the restroom, Veronica grabs Stan, saying he will be replaced with another Elvis. She then deposits him in the Green Man Group dressing room, which is empty.

Gong for Hire – A few moments later, Lucinda Quant comes into the dressing room. She demands the belt buckle from Stan, saying its contents are going to be the source of her comeback. He asks for the password, and she delivers it. She then extracts the flash drive from the belt buckle and leaves. The Green Men then enter the room. Stan is stunned to see that one is Conor, two are Conor’s buddies, and one is Budge. Stan is then put into a Green Man outfit and told he will be playing the gong when the group goes to the local Ruby Slippers facility to play a show for the old folks. It will be a cover for a snatch.

In Flight – Charmaine is unable to relax on the flight to Vegas, wondering what exactly is in store for her ahead. Jocelyn reveals the plan was for her to slip Charmaine a knock-out drug, leading to an operation at Ruby Slippers-Vegas, where Charmaine would then wake up, see Ed, and imprint on him. As they land, Charmaine realizes she has been drugged, and passes out.

Part XIV, Snatch

Snatch – Conor reveals to Stan that they were the four bald men who came looking for Stan at the Elivsorium. Conor and his boys have been given two rooms at Caesar’s Palace Hotel. Stan, Conor, and the rest of the group travel from the hotel to Ruby Slippers in full costume, where they set up at the Atrium. An ambulance comes in with its sirens blaring. At this, Budge and the other two buddies, Rikki and Jerold rush out. Con and Stan then follow. Out of the back of the ambulance emerges Budge with an unconscious Ed, and Charmaine on a gurney. They are rushed into the medical clinic.

Flamed – That night at six on the evening news, Lucinda Quant breaks the story on the Positron Project. Stan watches from Charmaine’s bedside. Veronica is interviewed on television as a Positron experiment gone wrong. Aurora reveals to Stan that Ed is having an operation, while the news reports he has had a heart attack. Charmaine comes to, demanding that Stan have sex with her right away.

Charm – Stan shares the good news about his wife with Conor and his buddies who are now pretending to be security to keep Ed’s room sealed off. Jocelyn and Lucinda arrive, dressed as nurses. Jocelyn explains that Ed simply can’t be killed because it wouldn’t be fair with all the other shareholders responsible for operations at Positron. It will also



protect people like her, and allow legitimate parts of the company, such as Possibilibots, to be sold off. Inside Ed's room, Ed wakes up and sees Lucinda, begging her to have sex with him immediately.

Floral – Max and Aurora are married shortly thereafter, while Stan and Charmaine renew their wedding vows. Rob, in Wedding Elvis attire, performs the ceremonies. Charmaine can't remember ever feeling happier. She has no residual feelings for Max. Veronica and Sandi are also present. Sandi reveals that it was Jocelyn who saved her life by ordering the guards to let her go. Jocelyn then tells Charmaine she has a wedding gift for her, but it won't be ready for another year. Jocelyn and Conor then head out together.

Part XV, There

There – Stan is now Empathy Module adjustor for the newly-opened Possibilibots Vegas factory. His current project is perfecting the Elvis grin. He and Charmaine have had a daughter, now three months old and named Winifred. They call her "Winnie" for short. Charmaine is already ready to have another baby. Stan and Charmaine's sex life has never been better.

Gift – Charmaine is thrilled with her love life and is looking forward to the Positron Survivors Reunion with Sandi and Veronica. Max and Aurora may also attend. Jocelyn arrives at Charmaine's house a short time later with her wedding gift. Jocelyn reveals it to be a piece of information that Charmaine can choose to hear or not hear. If the information is heard, it will mean she is more free but less secure. If she refuses to hear it, she will be less free but more secure. Charmaine insists on hearing the truth. Jocelyn then reveals that Charmaine never had the mind-sex operation she wanted. Charmaine is stunned, saying that everything has changed. Jocelyn contends that the human mind is "infinitely suggestible" and that it is probably the case that Charmaine loved Stan all along, and merely needed help with it. Charmaine then has sudden thoughts of Max. She tries to push them away, but they will not go. Jocelyn tells Charmaine the world before her is hers to choose what to do with.

Analysis

As the novel comes to an end, the theme of dystopianism does as well. The subduing of Ed, Veronica's appearance on television, and the major comeback report of Lucinda Quant form a trifecta that brings down Positron. As Jocelyn explains, the legitimate businesses considered subsidiary to Positron will survive, while the secret work of the company is itself secretly done away with. This will be to protect good people who had no idea what they were doing, and to protect people like Jocelyn who found their conscience along the way. This, however, does little to bring about justice for the human rights that have been violated all along by Positron –but perhaps Positron's demise and the avoidance of a truly dystopian future are justice enough for those still alive.



As it is revealed, Charmaine actually goes through with the mind-altering operation. She does this because she wants to erase feelings for Max that may linger, wants to be able to focus wholly on Stan, and is because she has fallen in love with him all over again. Despite Charmaine's willingness to go through with the procedure (and Stan's satisfaction with the procedure), it still calls into question human rights and love because the love expressed is not necessarily genuine. Meanwhile, Max and Aurora are married. Charmaine has no feelings about this at all, but only has feelings for Stan. This makes both Charmaine and Stan very happy.

But as Jocelyn reveals at the end of the novel, Charmaine never actually had the operation. All the love, sex, and sense of family given to Stan from Charmaine has been utterly genuine for the past year. This is a startling thing to Charmaine, who has imagined that she has been so successful due to the operation, not to her own free will. However, the novel ends on a disturbing note, as Charmaine's recognition of her freedom causes her to think of Max again. With the mind freed, the heart goes last.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Positron's end is fitting and just? Or do you believe greater justice should have been served? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Stan agree to let Charmaine have the operation on her mind? Do you believe he is fair in not trying to stop Charmaine? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe that Jocelyn ensured Charmaine never had the operation? How does this make Charmaine feel, both with respect to the news and respect to her life?

Vocabulary

moronic, equivalent, vigorously, plaintive, prowling, repertoire



Characters

Stan

Stan is the husband of Charmaine and brother of Conor. He seems to be in his late twenties or early thirties, and is described as focused, driven, and decisive. Having worked successfully in robotics prior to the economic crash, Stan feels like a failure because he loses his job and must live in a car with Charmaine. As a result, he is desperate to make things good for her, so agrees to participate in the Positron Project.

Stan comes to be envious of the alternate couple who share his house, and in his desire to meet the woman, discovers that Charmaine is having an affair. He then encounters his alternate, Jocelyn, who secures his support in her plans to break apart Positron. Stan's death is staged at the hands of Charmaine, where he is shipped out disguised as an Elvis sex robot to Las Vegas. There, Stan hands off secret documents to Lucinda Quant to air on television, helping to bring down Positron. Stan is ultimately reunited with Charmaine, where their sex-love life is seemingly reignited by Charmaine's desire to have the mind-change operation.

Charmaine

Charmaine is the wife of Stan and the sister-in-law of Conor. Charmaine appears to be in her late twenties or early thirties, and is described as gentle, loving, and wholesome. Having worked previously in the retirement industry, Charmaine now works for tips at a bar to help her and her husband survive. Seeing an ad soliciting applications for the Positron Project, Charmaine convinces Stan to apply.

Because of Charmaine's impressionable nature, she quickly falls in love with the Project, and with her work as the chief administrator of the Procedure. She begins an illicit sexual affair with Max because it is something she has never done before, and because it is something she does not have with Stan. She is later separated from Stan and forced to administer a fake Procedure to him. She only belatedly comes to realize how much she loves Stan, and is thrilled to learn he is still alive when she becomes part of the plan to bring down Positron.

Charmaine decides to have the mind-imprint operation done so she will be Stan's, and Stan's alone –but learns later that she was never actually given the operation. As a result, she begins considering a sexual affair with Max once more.

Jocelyn

Jocelyn is one of the founding members of Positron, and is in charge of Surveillance and Identification at the first Positron installment. Jocelyn later comes to learn that Ed has warped the true purpose of Positron to be a cover for making money through mind-



sex-imprint operations, and organ harvesting. This turns her against Ed and Positron, bringing on Phil, Aurora, and later Stan and Charmaine to help bring Positron down. Jocelyn is calculating but serves a higher moral purpose in her work. As Jocelyn explains, she was responsible for helping to create Positron, and so now she has the responsibility to break it apart.

Aurora

Aurora is head of Human Resources at the first Positron installation, and is first encountered by Charmaine at the prison. Aurora, having suffered a horrible face accident in roller-derby, was inducted into Positron for a free, new face transplant. She turns against Positron because she is desperate to fall in love, and so chooses to side with Jocelyn in exchange for a free imprinting operation. Aurora assists Jocelyn's plot to bring down Positron, after which she is imprinted by Max and becomes his wife.

Ed

Ed is one of the founding members and CEO of the Positron Project. Ed appears to be in his mid-to-late thirties. He is handsome, suave, and an effective leader. Having originally developed Positron for the genuinely good purpose of ending crime and unemployment, Ed is corrupted by money, power, and wealth, and so uses Positron as a mask for illegal organ harvesting and sex-imprinting operations. Ed sets his sights on Charmaine for the imprint operation, but this backfires when Ed himself is given the operation, and imprinted with Lucinda Quant.

Ed

Conor is the brother of Stan, and the brother-in-law of Charmaine. Conor has, in past years, lived off of Stan and Charmaine's good graces – and their cash – and has become a fixture in the criminal world. As such, Conor has made good money and has access to important information that he sends Stan's way. He warns Stan about getting involved with Positron, and later helps in the plot to expose Positron and get Stan out.

Budge

Budge is one of Conor's fellow criminals who works in helping to bring down Positron. Budge works a regular job at the Possibilibots factory in Consilience, where he becomes the contact for Stan to smuggle Stan out of the town. Budge later travels to Vegas to ensure Stan is safe, and to ensure that Positron is broken up.



Sandi

Sandi is a beautiful girl of about 18 who, together with her friend Veronica, drops out of college because of the economy and turns to prostitution. Sandi and Veronica turn tricks at PixelDust until they, like Charmain, see an ad for the Positron Project. Sandi is accepted into the Project, but tries to escape by sleeping her way out when Veronica disappears. Sandi is then captured and slated for execution, but escapes when Jocelyn intervenes to save her life.

Veronica

Veronica is a beautiful girl of about 18 who, together with her friend, Sandi, drops out of college because of the economy and turns to prostitution. Veronica and Sandi turn tricks at PixelDust until they, like Charmain, see an ad for the Positron Project. Veronica one day mysteriously disappears, as she is selected for a forced imprinting operation. Unfortunately, the imprinting is sabotaged, leading to Veronica being imprinted with a blue teddy bear. Veronica becomes part of the resistance that brings down Positron, but refuses to have corrective surgery on her mind because she claims she is in love with the bear. Her character demonstrates the dangers and negation of free will in imprinting. Veronica helps to smuggle Stan to Vegas, where she then helps him to navigate the delivery of the secret information.

Lucinda Quant

Lucinda Quant is a television news reporter and TV star who is over the hill and looking for a comeback. She becomes the media outlet for the secret document dump that Jocelyn has spirited out of Positron by Stan. Lucinda goes on to break the story on television, leading to the disintegration of Positron. She then has herself imprinted in Ed's mind.

Symbols and Symbolism

Honda

Stan and Charmaine live in a Honda at the beginning of the novel. The Honda is described as being cramped, smelly, and full of the few possessions that Stan and Charmaine hold. The Honda represents what they believe to be their lowest point early in the novel, but they have no idea how far they have yet to fall. The tragedy of being forced to live in their Honda also means, however, that Stan and Charmaine truly only have each other, and so they value the other more for this.

Positron PowerPoints

Positron PowerPoints form the core of new resident orientation at Positron-Consilience. The PowerPoints describe daily life and operations in the Project, as well as rules, regulations, and requirements. Stan and Charmaine are required to attend numerous orientation classes to view these PowerPoints, giving them an idea about what to expect about life in the Project. These PowerPoints make Stan think that someone, somewhere, must be making a ton of money off Positron.

Posidollars

Posidollars are the standard currency for the Positron Project, replacing the United States Dollar. Posidollars are earned for work in the Project, and are usable anywhere in Positron Prison and the town of Consilience. Posidollars are a symbol of a dystopian government that seeks to exercise total control over its people, for the Posidollars earned are only good in the Project, meaning that people may not take a paycheck to go with them and leave the Project. This keeps them dependent on the town and the Project.

Phones

The existing smartphones and cell phones of Positron Project applicants are taken away from their owners, who are given Positron Project smartphones for use in the Project. The phones only work in Positron and Consilience, and are accessible only by way of Consilience Wi-Fi. This means that it is next to impossible to have contact with the outside world, or to get information to the outside world. It is symbolic of dystopian control.



Consilience Wi-Fi

Consilience Wi-Fi is the wireless internet and phone service for the Positron Project. Consilience Wi-Fi restricts access to the outside world, making the flow of information and communications highly-regulated at best. It is only through Consilience Wi-Fi that Project-issued phones and electronic devices operate. The Wi-Fi network is demonstrative of dystopian control.

Electric scooters

Electric scooters are the primary form of transportation in Consilience. These scooters allow people to get around as needed, and are designed to limit the carbon footprint of the Project. The scooters also allow the Project's managers, and Surveillance, to keep a closer watch on things by ensuring the residents are constantly visible and unable to make fast getaways. Forcing people to use scooters is another symbol of the dystopian power of the Project.

The Procedure

The Procedure is essentially execution by lethal injection. It is administered by Charmaine and other specified individuals at Positron Hospital, and is done in the name of the greater good to people declared criminals or dangerous to the Project. Charmaine believes her work as Procedure administrator is crucial and important, even though it is immoral and illegal. Charmaine is later horrified when she must carry out a Procedure on Stan, though she doesn't know the Procedure is not real. This causes her to rethink her opinion on the Procedure in general.

Possibilibots

Possibilibots are sex robots being designed and produced by the Possibilibots corporation, a subsidiary of the Positron Project. The sex robots are designed to reduce sex crimes by giving would-be sex offenders a sex alternative, while making the sex lives of law-abiding citizens better. The sex robots chillingly range from children and high school cheerleaders to celebrities and regular people. Possibilibots are demonstrative of the abrogation of human rights because robots are given the physical identities of people who never consented to having this done.

Imprinting

Imprinting is one of the two secretive processes being undertaken by the Positron Project. Imprinting involves the rewiring of the human brain so that the first person seen by the patient will become the object of their total desire and affection, creating a kind of love-obsession. Imprinting, however, may be seen as a violation of human rights

because it forces love –or what passes for love. Charmaine undertakes the operation so that she might fall more deeply in love with Stan, but only later learns from Jocelyn that the operation was never actually carried out on her.

Flash drive

A flash drive containing secret documents, photos, and videos, is smuggled into an Elvis belt buckle, and then smuggled out of the Possibilibots factory with Stan, disguised as Elvis. The documents are handed off to Lucinda Quant in Las Vegas. The documents, photos, and videos are then used by Lucinda in a news broadcast that breaks apart Positron and ends their reign.

Settings

American Northeast

The American Northeast serves as the main, general setting of the novel. The American Northeast is home to Stan and Charmaine, though where in that section of the country is never actually said. According to evidence presented in the novel, the American Northeast has been hardest hit by the economic downturn, which is why 40% of the region's population is out of work – including Stan and Charmaine. The Northeast becomes host to the Positron Project and becomes headquarters for the management of the Positron Project by way of the revamped town of Consilience.

Consilience

Consilience is a revamped American town in the regional Northeast. Though its precise location is never given, references to “upstate” are made. (Arguably, this could be any state, but the state most commonly referred to with such terminology is New York.) By all appearances, Consilience was an economically-devastated town that the Positron Project purchased and took over with the blessings of the government to begin their work. Since then, much of the city has been cleaned up, renovated, and transformed. Derelict sections of town still remain, but the crime has all been rooted out. Consilience becomes the first of many Positron communities across the country.

It is to Consilience that Stan and Charmaine move when they are accepted into the program. The town's remodeled sections are described as quaint and charming, leading many people to be drawn in simply by the appearance of the community alone. Stan, however, is suspicious of these appearances. He considers it too good to be true. These suspicions later turn out to be well-founded.

Positron Prison

Positron Prison is constructed in the town of Consilience, and serves as the monthly alternative living arrangement for members of the Project. The Prison is not a prison in the traditional sense of the word or concept. While residents sleep in cells and are cordoned off for a month from their spouses, they work important factory-like jobs that sustain the prison and the town. Their cells are relatively comfortable, and are luxurious compared to a real prison. The Positron Prison reminds people of the pitfalls of committing crime. Charmaine enjoys her work and time in the prison so much she cannot tell whether life in town or life in the prison is vacation.

The house

The house shared by Stan and Charmaine, and Jocelyn and Phil, is a detached, single-family home that is modern, sleek, and well-furnished. For one month at a time, Stan and Charmaine share the house before alternating a month in the prison. During this time, Phil and Jocelyn live in the house. The house becomes the dream that Charmaine was longing for while living in a car, and becomes the source of her affair with Phil when Phil arrives at the house early on Switchover Day. While hiding in the house's garage, Stan is confronted by Jocelyn, who unveils the truth about herself and later, Positron.

Las Vegas

Las Vegas is the city to which Ed is smuggled out of Positron and Consilience dressed as an Elvis sex robot. Las Vegas is largely unaffected by the economic downturn, for it is still bustling and vibrant. It is in Vegas that Ed meets with Lucinda Quant to pass off the secret documents Jocelyn has him smuggle out of Consilience. It is to Vegas that Ed travels with Charmaine, seeking to have Charmaine's mind imprinted. It is in Vegas that Stan and Charmaine later come to live when Stan takes work on in the Possibilibots factory there.



Themes and Motifs

Dystopianism

Dystopianism is an important theme in the novel “The Heart Goes Last” by Margaret Atwood. Dystopianism involves a government, organization, association, or company, that exercises tremendous or total power and influence in the lives of everyday people, often denying their human and legal rights in the name of the greater good. Those in power will do whatever it takes to retain power, and will do whatever is necessary to secure their own ends. On the surface, those with power have the stated goal of helping the people, but in reality, all they do is harm people.

In the novel, the Positron Project is the dystopian entity which seeks to extend its power and control around the world. Originally formed by Ed, Jocelyn, and other members of the academic and think-tank classes, Positron was initially designed to do two things in one – eliminate crime and eliminate unemployment. These goals were noble and moral goals, but as Jocelyn explains to Stan in the novel later on, Ed and the Project lost their way when greedy investors got involved. The Project became a front for the secret and lucrative illegal organ harvesting operation, and the mind imprinting operation.

The Positron Project maintains control of its residents to ensure they are kept as an orderly front by taking away rights. They do this through various ways. They take away the personal phones and electronic devices of participants, replacing them with Project products that work only within Positron circles, and which are only usable through Consilience Wi-Fi. They heavily restrict, and usually forbid contact with the outside world. They always refuse to let any negative information leave the city by cutting off access to outside internet and communications networks. They also heavily monitor the people through ominous Surveillance patrols, and instill fear by causing people to disappear.

Positron further negates human free will and human rights by illegally and immorally taking executions upon itself, let alone the imprinting operation. Under Charmaine and a select few others, criminals and dangerous individuals are killed. As it turns out later, this is in order to harvest their organs, blood, DNA, bones, and whatever other body parts are needed at the moment. Though these people may be criminals, their legal rights and their human rights are violated because they do not receive fair trials in the American legal system. Likewise, as time wears on and demand for body parts increases, people are kidnapped on the outside and brought in to be killed for their bodies. This is all done for the power and profit of Positron and denies the human rights and legal rights of even purely innocent individuals by that point. It underscores Jocelyn’s desire to take down Positron.



Love

Love is an important theme in the novel “The Heart Goes Last” by Margaret Atwood. Love comes in various forms, but it is primarily romantic and familial love that matter most in the novel. Love comes to strongly influence the plot and course of the story, especially where Stan and Charmaine are concerned.

When the novel begins, Stan and Charmaine are living in their car. They do not have much, Charmaine says, but they have each other. This demonstrates the importance of their love in that, in such a dire situation, they have their love which helps to drive them both to survive for the other. It is desperation borne of love that compels Stan and Charmaine to participate in Positron so that they may have greater material ease in their lives. However, once they gain the world, so to speak, they lose their souls. With stability in finances and living arrangements provided by Positron, Charmaine cheats on Stan, and Stan considers cheating on Charmaine. Charmaine has no guilt about this at all, feeling jubilant about her affair. However, when Charmaine’s schedule is disrupted, and when she is forced to administer a Procedure on Stan, she reconsiders her affair, realizing she truly does love Stan. Her sole driving motivation through the rest of the novel becomes reuniting with Stan, and making things right by him.

This is why she seeks to undergo the imprinting operation toward the end of the novel. She wants all emotions relating to Max erased so that she may be wholly, and unequivocally, Stan’s. However, the imprinting operation brings to mind questions of human rights and human free will. If love is not freely given, is it truly love? If love is forced on the part of the lover, and not genuinely given to the loved, does it violate the free will of each? While the novel does not answer these questions, Jocelyn reveals that Charmaine never actually had the operation. This means the love she has had for Stan for the past year has indeed been genuine and utterly real – but without the operation, Charmaine now comes to reconsider the affair with Max. Whether or not this means that Charmaine has ever truly been in love with Stan is left unanswered.

Familial love also matters greatly in the novel. Early in the novel, a desperate Stan seeks out his criminal and morally-suspicious brother, Conor. In the past, out of love of family, Stan and Charmaine helped Conor out numerous times. In the present, Conor, out of love of family and in the spirit of payback, gives a couple hundred bucks to Stan, and warns him about Positron. Conor later goes to great lengths to use his criminal network to help Stan and Charmaine escape from the clutches of Positron – all out of love of family.

Rights

Rights are an important theme in the novel “The Heart Goes Last” by Margaret Atwood. Rights– including natural, human rights, and the rights of citizens – are challenged, denied, and restored through the course of the novel. The denial of these rights goes hand-in-hand with the theme of dystopianism, and to a lesser extent, crime.



Human rights, which are seen as being endowed by God and are therefore natural, include life, liberty, and happiness. In the novel, human rights are extensively questioned – and denied – by the Positron Project through the Procedure, organ harvesting, and imprinting. Criminals and those considered to be criminal are given the Procedure without due process or a fair trial. Their lives and liberties are taken away through their executions, and their bodies are turned into a cash crop without their consent. Later, the Procedure is extended to include truly innocent people who have been rounded up specifically for the Procedure, which is the grossest violation of human rights of all.

Human rights are also questioned and challenged by the imprinting procedure. The imprinting procedure guarantees that the imprinted will become sexually and lovingly obsessed with the first pair of eyes seen by the imprinted. Some, like Veronica, are denied their human rights and freedom by being forcibly imprinted, while others like Aurora and Charmaine voluntarily seek to have the process performed out of desperation to love. However, this poses serious ethical and moral questions regarding human rights. If love is not freely given, is it truly love? If love is forced on the part of the lover, and not genuinely given to the loved, does it violate the free will of each? The imprinting procedure means that the person who is being loved is not truly being loved, while the person doing the loving is not truly loving. Because this is forced, there is no freedom.

Meanwhile, the daily rights of people are also heavily challenged and taken away. The right to travel beyond the walls of Consilience and the Prison are taken away from residents. The right to have unmonitored communications, or to receive or transmit any uncensored information from the outside world is forbidden. The right to privacy is taken away from the constant monitoring of Surveillance in Consilience and the Prison. Posidollars replace real money, forcing people to remain dependent upon life in the Project. Private devices are taken away and replaced with Project-approved phones and networks. All of this is done to ensure order and provide a plausible front for the true operations of Positron.

The Human Heart

The heart is an important theme in the novel “The Heart Goes Last” by Margaret Atwood. The human heart is historically known as the center of love, passionate emotion, and romance in the human body. The human heart becomes not only an important symbol of love in the novel, but an important theme in relation to the plot as well.

Charmaine is given the task of administering the Procedure. This is done for criminals, those considered dangerous, and later innocent individuals who have been kidnapped. Charmaine notes that, in the Procedure, the heart is the last organ to stop functioning. (This is where the novel draws its name.) Here, the heart serves a truly physical and physiological purpose, in that it is among the organs in hottest demand on the black



market for body parts. As such, it is important the heart goes last so that it can be saved and transplanted quickly.

That the heart goes last is also symbolically important in terms of love. When the novel begins, Stan and Charmaine are living in their car and do not have much. But, Charmaine contends, they have each other. The love of their hearts is what is compelling them to survive so that each may help the other. It drives them into the Positron Project. There, Charmaine begins an affair, for she now has everything needed for stable life because she doesn't only have Stan in her life. Yet, when Charmaine loses everything – her freedom, her moral conscience, and her husband – she realizes she still loves him. As a result, the heart stands alone and stands last as a testament to everything Charmaine has lost.

That the heart goes last is also symbolically important by way of the imprinting operation. The imprinting operation is designed to force the mind to influence the heart. As such, the entire outlook of the body is changed beginning with the mind, and ending with the heart. As it is later revealed, Charmaine never had the imprinting operation, meaning that her love for Stan had actually been genuine. However, with her mind freed, her heart is freed last – meaning that she may still indeed have feelings for, and a desire to be with, Max.

Crime

Crime is an important theme in the novel “The Heart Goes Last” by Margaret Atwood. In the novel, the American Northeast has been hardest hit by an economic downturn. As a result, crime – from rape to robbery to murder – has skyrocketed. Crime has also become more mainstream, as the ease with which criminal groups and organizations work is disturbingly apparent (consider how Conor and Jocelyn manage to infiltrate Positron with their criminal network).

The Positron Project is conceived of as a way to eliminate crime and unemployment. It specifically targets the good people in the world, because they are unlikely to commit crimes, anyway, and are likely to obey laws – whatever laws those may be. Criminals are the first to be weeded out and killed in Positron through the Procedure process. As Stan notes, early on in his time at Positron, real criminals living among the good people made life untenable and difficult. Only after the criminal element is removed does harmony occur.

However, despite the fact that Positron is executing criminals, Positron is denying them due process and legal rights. By executing criminals criminally, Positron is engaging in criminal behavior. This is both ironic – that a project designed to end crime should end up committing crimes to do it – and hypocritical – that a project opposed to crime should commit crimes. Likewise, the Positron Project's embracing of illegal organ harvesting and involuntary mind imprinting makes the Project no better than a criminal organization. The greed of power and wealth have totally undermined the Project.



Ironically, it is the criminals that Positron is trying to stamp out that come to the rescue of Stan and Charmaine by way of Conor. Conor has known from the start that there is something not right about Positron. Upon learning the truth of things, Conor works with Budge and Jocelyn to ensure that information leading to the downfall of Positron is smuggled out by Stan, ensuring that Stan will make it out alive. Conor and his criminal buddies then assist Jocelyn in rescuing Charmaine, and putting Ed under the imprinting operation.

Styles

Point of View

Margaret Atwood tells her novel “The Heart Goes Last” from the third-person limited-omniscient perspective. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the third-person narrator acts as a unifying voice between the characters of Stan and Charmaine so that the reader may understand the actions, thoughts, and feelings of each character at the same time. Usually, an entire chapter is devoted to either Stan or Charmaine, so the reader is able to jump back and forth between both characters thanks to the common narrative voice. Secondly, the limited-omniscient aspect of the novel means that the reader only learns about things as either the narrator is willing to reveal them, or as Stan or Charmaine figure them out. This adds to the suspense, drama, and mystery of the novel as step by step, the true nature of the Positron Project is uncovered.

Language and Meaning

Margaret Atwood tells her novel “The Heart Goes Last” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the target audience of the novel is adult readers in the 2010s, so the language is reflective of the day and age in which the novel is written. This makes the novel easily accessible for contemporary readers, and helps to keep the novel moving, making events and situations seem brisk and forward-moving. Secondly, the novel itself takes place in contemporary times, or in a time in the very near future. As a result, the language employed is reflective of the contemporary era (the 2010s) in which simple, straightforward language is common. This language therein gives the book a sense of realism and believability.

Structure

Margaret Atwood divides her novel “The Heart Goes Last” into 15 primary parts, with each part further subdivided into chapters. There are 15 parts, assigned Roman numerals (from I to XV) and a title drawing on the events of the plot contained within that particular part of the novel. Each chapter within each part is unnumbered but titled, drawing the title from events that occur within that chapter of that part of the novel. The chapters themselves are relatively short, often more than several pages in length. This simple and straightforward structure to the novel allows the reader to easily follow events between Stan and Charmaine, and also adds to the briskness achieved by the simple and straightforward language.



Quotes

What's the use of anything?

-- Charmaine (Part I, Cramped paragraph 5)

Importance: Charmaine and her husband, Stan, are living in their car. Charmaine is very depressed by this, for the living space is cramped and it is difficult to wash clothes or take showers. She feels as if nothing can possibly get better, and so she begins to wonder what the use is in anything. It is from this very low, very dark place that the stage will be set for Charmain and Stan who will ultimately be drawn in by the Positron Project.

So what can he do? Where can they turn? There's no safe place, there are no instructions.

-- Narrator (Part I, Where? paragraph 1)

Importance: Stan feels as if he has failed himself and his wife because he no longer has all the answers, and doesn't know what to do now that he is living in his car. He feels horrible about the fact that his wife must deal with the situation they are in at all. His desperation for things to be better will help draw him into the Positron Project.

We have each other.

-- Charmaine (Part II, Brew paragraph 1)

Importance: As the novel gets underway, Stan and Charmaine know they have very little. Charmaine tries to stay upbeat, urging Stan to remember the things that they do still have – such as each other. This is a statement of bad omens, however, as the coming trials through the Positron experience may even take them away from each other.

The Consilience/Positron twin city is an experiment... if this model comes to be adopted at the highest levels, of the nation as a whole... Unemployment and crime solved in one fell swoop...

-- Think-Tank Managers (Part III, Twin City paragraph 6)

Importance: When Stan and Charmaine become participants in the Positron Project, they are told what they are doing is designed to eliminate unemployment and crime simultaneously. However, despite these hopeful messages inspiring participation, the truth is far darker. Conor tries to tell Stan that the project is dangerous, but Stan won't hear of it because he wants a better life, regardless if the project is trying to help the country socially and economically.

Everyone seems quite happy: having two lives means there's always something different to look forward to. It's like having a vacation every month. But which life is the vacation and which is the work? Charmaine hardly knows.

-- Narrator (Part III, Switch paragraph 2)



Importance: One year into the program, Stan and Charmaine have settled into life in Consilience. But Charmaine is far happier and far more content with life in Consilience than Stan. She genuinely has difficulty distinguishing work and vacation in her life. This speaks volumes about the level to which Charmaine has come to trust, believe in, and participate in the system. She even seems brainwashed. This will prove to be dangerous in coming chapters.

Then he's unconscious. Then he stops breathing. The heart goes last.
-- Narrator (Part IV, The Heart Goes Last paragraph 19)

Importance: Charmaine's loyalty and dedication to the project is further described here. Officially, she is a medication administrator, but in reality, she delivers fatal injections to criminals and people who prove to be dangerous to the project. Their hearts are always the last things to stop working. Charmaine loves her job, but this particular quote underscores a metaphorical point that will only later become clear in the novel: the heart, in which love and human freedom thrive, is the most difficult thing to conquer or subdue, and because of this it is in such high demand on the black market for organs.

You're the wild card.
-- Jocelyn (Part IV, Ambush paragraph 21)

Importance: Stan decides to wait out Jasmine to learn who she is, but is confronted instead by Jocelyn. Jocelyn is part of Surveillance, and reveals she knows everything from Charmaine's affair to Stan's tracking of her scooter. Jocelyn explains that Phil will be going to the Positron in Stan's place, because Stan is now considered a wild card. Stan will now be forced into Positron in opposite months of Charmaine, to avoid violence due to the sexual affair. It is one of the many freedoms that are being stripped away from Stan.

What if some reporter happened to find out about the Procedure? Not everyone would understand about that; they wouldn't understand the reasons for it, the good reasons.
-- Narrator (Part VI, Threat paragraph 2)

Importance: After Charmaine is forced to remain in Positron when she and Stan are separated, Charmaine learns that subversive reporters are trying to get inside and reveal the inside to the outside world. Charmaine is terrified by this because she knows her own role on the inside is the kind that could be singled out. She knows that the outside world won't understand why it is important the people considered dangerous to society are killed.

I'm Ed's founding partner. I supported the Project in the early stages. I believed in it; I believed in Ed.... But then Ed brought in a different group of investors, and they got greedy.
-- Jocelyn (Part VI, Valentine's Day paragraph 25)

Importance: Here, Jocelyn reveals some startling facts to Stan. She reveals that the



Positron Project is now no longer what it once was. It has become a cover story for a black market transplant operation, for organs, DNA, blood, bones, and anything that is needed by wealthy customers. While the citizens of Positron and Consilience go about their lives as normal, new prisoners, the unwitting organ donors, are being transported in solely for the purpose of having their bodies harvested. Jocelyn wants Ed to break the news to the outside world.

Get hold of yourself, Charmaine, she tells herself. Don't be sentimental. Remember it's a test.

-- Narrator (Part VII, Choice paragraph 23)

Importance: Charmaine has no idea of the plot hatched by Jocelyn and Phil, and does not know that Stan is in on the plot as well. Charmaine is told she is being tested by delivering the Procedure to Stan. This horrifies her because of her affair and because she has recently determined that she still loved Stan. She knows she must go through with the Procedure because she is being watched, and knows her own safety is on the line.

All he has to do is stay Waldo until someone hands him the flashdrive with the hot-potato crap he's supposed to be smuggling out and reveals what he's supposed to do to get himself past the wall.

-- Narrator (Part IX, Lunch paragraph 2)

Importance: Here, Stan's next step is revealed by the narrator. Having been implanted into the Possibilibots team as "Waldo", Stan awaits his contact who will deliver the documents on a flash drive to him, and directions for getting out. Stan is impatient, thinks about Charmaine often, and knows his very life is on the line. It underscores the desperation of his situation, a far cry from being forced to live out of his car less than two years before.

If you hear it, you'll be more free but less secure. If you don't hear it, you'll be more secure, but less free.

-- Jocelyn (Part XV, There paragraph 17)

Importance: At the end of the novel, Jocelyn comes bearing an important piece of information for Charmaine, which she says Charmaine may choose to learn or ignore. Charmaine chooses to hear, and learns she never had the mind alteration she desired. The past year of amazing sex and love with Stan has been totally genuine. However, Charmaine suddenly begins to think of Max once more, endangering everything she has built over the last year.