The Lottery, By Shirley Jackson Essay, Research Paper

The Lottery

by Shirley Jackson

The Lottery, by Shirley Jackson, is about a small-minded village that savors on tradition. The town holds a lottery once a year where all the families gather around in a big crowd in the Village Square. The lottery is conducted by Mr. Summers, a man who often leads the town’s activities such as square dances, Halloween parties, charities, etc. In the crowd, wives gabber about the daily gossip. Fathers chat about tractors, crops, and taxes, while the kids playfully gather small smooth stones, piling them in a clearing behind the crowd.

Mr. Summers calls their attention to get the lottery started, and the scattered family members hurry about and find each other. Mr. Summers brings out an old black box that has been used for the lottery even before Old Man Warner (the oldest man in town) was born. Back in the days when the village was a lot smaller, pieces of wood chips were used to put in the box. However, since the village ws growing, they discovered to use paper slips instead. Mr. Summers mixed up the paper slips in the box with his hand while reciting some long ritual that had been used ever since the lottery was founded. During the recital, kids looked innocently about, the voice of people talking was kept at a low whisper, but the majority held their tongue with heavy nervous thoughts on their mind. Finally, Mr. Summers started calling out each family’s name that lived in the village, having the head of each family put their hand in the box and tightly grab a slip of paper which was not to be opned until each family had received their slips. Once the papers were distributed, the families opened their slips. An uproar of questions about whom had “gotten it” came swiftly through the crowd. In a matter of minutes, it was found that the Hutchinson family picked the plain white slip with the coal-black dot drawn in the center.

A burst of objection came from Terri Hutchinson (the wife), pleading with Mr. Sumers to do the lottery over again. He explained, as it was always known, that everyone got a fair chance at picking his or her own slip from the black box. Mr. Summers took the slip with the balck dot and four blank slips back into the box. Bill Hutchinson, Terri, and their three small children each put their hands back into the box and picked a slip. The crowd circulated around Terri, gathering stones in both hands. The cries from Terri held no avail as the crows came upon her.

A town that goes to church, celebrates holidays, holds dances, and seems to niche together as a whole, performs an execution by stoning once a year? How can such a village support such a nomadic act? Why was this ritual invented, and for what purpose does it serve? These questions were not answered in the story, but left to our imagination instead. This town act of stoning is similar to the acts of tribal rituals, accounted for in long ago tales. The tribe would sacrifice one member, despite their age or sex, to death for their “God(s).” It ws believed if they kept sacrificing, the tribe would have a prosperous year. Could this in some way yarn in with the villages’ religious beliefs? On the other hand, maybe they strictly study Christain methods and make one person die for the town’s sins. The people obey the religois beliefs that have endured in their town foe decades but do they fear change?

I would have liked Shirley Jackson to have explained more about how the town operated and to be given a description about what the throwers were thinking when they held the stone in their hands. Did they know it was morally wrong, but felt no completion to stop it because they weren’t the victims this year? Could the villagers be oblivios to the fact that they might get that fatal slip one-day? Maybe they accepted that someone is picked for the lottery every year, but when their time comes, they’ll decide to speak up, just like Terri did. But at that time, they will be spared.

Does the chosen one always cry and plea “its not fair” right before they’re executed? If Terri felt just opposition to the lottery, why didn’t she move her family out of the town a long time ago? Does not one of the townspeople feel remorse and guilt for killing someone? For this, I’m not sure. If one person felt remorse, he may be inclined not to say so in fear of what the town might think. But if there were a group of people who felt this way, maybe secretly discussing their feelings, they would have organized a town meeting. Saying that if they all felt wrong they would have stopped it already. It was mentioned in the story by Old Man Warner that other villages were practicing the same methods, but that the practice was quickly declining, which he thought absurd. Nevertheless, its has yet to stop and people are still being killed.

In every part of the world, there are different cultures, beliefs, and ways of doing things. Old traditions die hard, especiallyfor a small village of only three hundred people. Who knows why it was invented? Religon and tradition may play a big part of a sadistic ritual performed by the people who die from it. They call it the Lottery.

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