

The Transformation of Tessie Hutchinson:

A Character Analysis

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In Shirley Jackson's 1948 short story "The Lottery," a town of about 300 people gather on the morning of June 27th around ten o'clock in the town square each year for the lottery. Each man draws a slip of paper for their family from the box when their name is called and is instructed by Mr. Summers, the man who conducts the lottery each year. The man who gets the slip of paper with the dot drawn on it, draws again and this time his whole household does as well, children included. Whichever family member pulls the dot, will be stoned to death by the whole village. All the kids gather in the square first to collect rocks, then the men assemble, and the women follow shortly after. Mrs. Hutchinson (Tessie) shows up late to the lottery and with a light heart, makes a joke upon her arrival. When it comes time to pull, she urges her husband to hurry up and pull a slip of paper a bit mockingly. During the story, Tessie does not take the lottery very seriously, as she and everybody else is used to it. Tessie is not as nervous as her fellow neighbors beside her but by the end of the story when her husband pulls the first dot, she is complaining that it is unfair, and her husband did not have enough time to pull the paper he wanted. Ultimately Tessie ends up with the final dot and is stoned to death. Tessie first condones this behavior but protests immediately when it affects her.

In "The Lottery," Tessie arrives late and makes a joke on her arrival. "Mrs. Hutchinson reached her husband, and Mr. Summers, who had been waiting, said cheerfully, 'Thought we were going to have to get on without you, Tessie.' Mrs. Hutchinson said, grinning, 'Wouldn't have me leave m'dishes in the sink, now, would you Joe?'" (The Lottery at FullReads). One

critic, Jack Stark, states that Tessie's inappropriate behavior that she exhibits before the drawing, showing up late and making a remark about not leaving the dishes, shows that she does not take the lottery very seriously.

Mrs. Hutchinson is late arriving at the lottery and when she does arrive, she makes an inappropriate remark that causes nervous laughter. That is, even before she knows she will be the victim she indicates that she is incompletely socialized and thus does not fully accept the lottery ritual's legitimacy (Stark).

Tessie's behavior right before the lottery is a strong indicator of how she feels a sense of immunity to the lottery and does not see it as serious as it really is. Of course, she does not know that in the end, she will be the one pulling the paper with the dot on it resulting in her death.

It is clear that Tessie supports the lottery until she becomes the victim. ". . . Hutchinson. 'Get up there Bill,' Mrs. Hutchinson said, and the other people near her laughed." (The Lottery at FullReads). Tessie urges her husband in a jokingly manner to "get up there" and pull. She says it in such a way that suggests speeding up the process so they can begin the kill. Critic A.R. Coulthard states that "The Lottery" is not so much a representation of the blind obedience of society but one that fills people's need to perform an unpunishable slaughter. "'The lottery' is not the story of a custom that makes no sense, but of one that fulfills a deep and horrifying need." (Coulthard). A.R. Coulthard argues that the people in this village are not blindly following the strange rules of the lottery because of tradition and force, but rather because they truly

enjoy the consequential free slaughter. A.R. Coulthard states, “Her [Jackson’s] simple villagers are not brainwashed victims but bloodthirsty victimizers”

When Tessie finally arrived at the lottery, she is not opposed to the ritual, but when she is chosen to be killed, she is quick to offer her other family members. “‘There’s Don and Eva,’ Mrs. Hutchinson yelled. ‘Make them take their chance!’” . . . ‘It wasn’t fair,’ Tessie said.” (The Lottery at FullReads). According to A.R. Coulthard, Tessie goes so low as to offer up her own flesh and blood in an attempt to lessen her odds of being chosen as the victim.

The soullessness of Tessie Hutchinson even denies the myth of family love. When her family is chosen to supply the victim, Jackson pushes Tessie’s survival instinct to the most shameful level by having her turn on her own flesh and blood. Tessie desperately tries to improve her odds for survival by defying tradition and adding her married daughter to the killing pool. . .” (Coulthard).

A.R. Coulthard’s analysis shows how quickly Tessie’s attitude towards the lottery changed once she was chosen. It also showed that she had no remorse offering up her married daughter into the drawing even though she knows married daughters draw with their husbands. All Tessie cared about at the moment her family was chosen for the lottery, was increasing her own chances of surviving.

Ultimately, Tessie is a hypocrite as she would gladly take part in the ritual stoning to death but will attempt anything to get out of it when she is selected. Critic, Friedman Lenemaja states the following:

Tessie Hutchinson shows both the evils and the weaknesses of mankind faced with immediate death. Her hypocrisy indicates that she would willingly take part in the stoning; but, when she is the chosen sacrifice, she protests the unfairness of the method; she is not willing to be a good sport about giving up her life... Instead Tessie reacts like a frightened animal; but, unlike the animal-mother, the human mother does not always seek protection for her offspring.

Tessie's hypocritical instincts towards the lottery kick in the second her family is chosen. And not for the reasons you would think. She was not worried about her family and children like an animal would be, but rather she was just trying to save herself. Tessie participates in the lottery and seems lighthearted about it as she makes jokes, and when it is her time and she is making a scene, Mrs. Delacroix and Mrs. Graves tell her, "Be a good sport, Tessie." "All of us took the same chance." (The Lottery at FullReads). She was aware of the consequences of the lottery but still did not seem worried and when it came down to it, Tessie resists strongly and she needed to be re-informed by her neighbors of the risk she took.

Although Tessie knew what kind of lottery she was taking part in, she never accepts the results. In the beginning of "The Lottery" Tessie presents no concern at all for the life of her family or herself. As soon as her family becomes the victim, she complains that the process was unfair and tries everything to increase her own odds of survival. She exhibits contradicting and hypocritical behavior throughout the extent of "The Lottery" which was a short-lived realization for her. The importance and harm of the lottery was not fully realized by Tessie until right before she was stoned to death.

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