

The end of the black box

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Davey didn't remember Tessie nor remember the warm nights on the porch sipping lemonade that she made from tart lemons sweetened with sugar before pouring the water into the pitcher. Davey didn't know her loss in a real sense, only through the pain of his sister and brother. He knew the pain of his father who sat in a chair staring out over the fields in silent resentment, cold and stoic as he accepted the fate of his wife, but not his own fate of raising three children on his own.

It was Davey who moved to make their plans a reality. He had seen others who had fallen to the stones, sacrificed for the good of the town. He sat for hours trying to see the connection between the horrific act of stoning the one and the success of the fields. He tracked the harvests year after year, noticing that some years were good and some were bad, never relating to the person who was stoned. He tried to show Mr. Summers that the lottery did the town no good. However, Mr. Summers had an excuse and argument to counter every point that Davey made. When Mr. Summers died, he tried again to speak to his father who surprisingly took over in running the lottery year after year, as if he could reconcile Tessie's sacrifice by deeper participation. This didn't change a thing. Nancy came up with the idea.

The town gathered, the children made the pile of stones, and the tense, polite conversation began to murmur through the growing crowd. Bill Hutchinson raised hands and smiled, quieting the crowd to ready for the lottery to begin. The year before had been brutal as the five-year-old child of the village teacher had been the sacrifice, and mothers were noticeably more protective of their young ones, cradling them in their arms and turning slightly away. Janie held her Bill's child close, her lips kissing repeatedly the

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forehead of her tiny daughter. Bill looked at Davey and nodded. Davey undid the bag he had at his side and pulled the sledgehammer and deftly walked up to the black box. With one angered blow, he struck the old box, shattering it into millions of shards, the papers inside blowing away as the one piece with the black dot meandered up and to the side, making its way into the fields. Shouting loudly he said “ The lottery is over! It is over! If the fields produce well this year, then I will burn this town to the ground if another lottery is held. The paper itself has embraced the field.” The crowd stared in stunned silence, remembering the small child’s cries from the year before. Slowly, Nancy began to hand out shards of the box to each of the families as Davey continued to speak. “ With these pieces of the box, remember that we no longer need to lose our loved ones. Remember how easily the box was sacrificed so that we could live.” And the lottery was held no longer, while the harvests continued to sometimes be good or to sometimes be bad.