

Birthday party



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The title of this short story is very deceiving the tone is different from the tone of the story. The tone changes from happy to sad as soon as the cake is brought out. The women tried to show affection and love towards her husband by the cake but it was basically turned down. The point of view is through a random person who doesn't know the couple at all. The speaker doesn't know how they are as a couple but can see that the woman is upset at her husband's reaction to the cake. " You looked at him and you saw this and you thought, " Oh, now, don't be like that!

" this quote almost lets us know that the speaker wanted to jump in and defend the women but can't because she does not know the couple. Katharine Brush's short story " Birthday Party" reveals how joyless a marriage can be when spouses are too unimaginative to stray from the bourgeois notions of how a man-woman relationship should function. Brush writes of a sweet and sensitive wife who takes her husband out to eat on his birthday. Instead of being pleased when the wife surprises her husband with a cake, the husband is cross and unkind.

Upon noticing her husband's displeasure, the wife sits crying submissively. The husband has asserted his role as head of the household too practical for frivolous romance and the wife sadly obeys his wishes for practicality and convention. The story's opening sentence describes the couple as somewhat bland and certainly normal. The statement that they are in their " late thirties" and appear " unmistakably married" (line one) immediately categorizes them and therefore stereotypes them.

The fact that they sit in a " narrow" (line two) restaurant suggests that with their bland, stable demeanor, perhaps they are narrow-minded. With the

couple's strict regard for the appropriate behavior of a man and wife, as is evident later in the text, they certainly have narrow perceptions of proper marriage etiquette. The man is plain looking, almost non-descript, except for Brush's hint that he has a "self-satisfied face" (line three)---he is confident about himself, but even more importantly with where he stands as man of the house.

His wife, a regular June Cleaver, is "fadingly pretty" (line three), implying perhaps that she still has a degree of youthfulness to her but for the most part is no longer a vivacious belle---and probably never was in the first place because she is too bland and normal ever to have been vivacious or truly beautiful. Brush further emphasizes how bourgeois the couple is with telling diction; the couple was not "conspicuous" or "particularly noticeable" (line four). Brush even mocks the couple's birthday dinner by capitalizing their event---it was an "Occasion" (line five).

She sarcastically reveals that it is the husband's birthday and that the wife has pulled together a "little surprise" (line six) for him, demeaning the wife's plans by calling them little. The description of the next scene unearths the contrast between the wife's behaviors to her husband's. The wife still has a certain amount of youthful spirit to her like a child; she still takes delight in planning a surprise for someone and being privy to the secret. The husband, however, fails to find anything about the "small but glossy birthday cake" (line seven) as cute or amusing.

The single candle on the tiny cake is perhaps representative of the couple's romance. Instead of glowing with passion and intensity, the candle---and the couple's marriage---presents one timid flame. In an attempt to salvage the

marriage's romance, the wife hired a violin-and-piano "orchestra"---sarcastic diction that ironically diminishes the impressiveness of the band, even though these two instruments are typically associated with love---play the "Happy Birthday" song, but, again, her husband fails to enjoy the moment.

He disapproves of his wife's efforts to entertain him. "With shy pride" (line ten), the wife beams upon the cake and orchestra---she does it shyly because she is afraid of expressing her emotions too candidly since it would not be "respectable" according to post World War II society for her to appear excited. People in the restaurant give a polite and almost desperate applause, but the husband is "hotly embarrassed" (line twelve about his wife's "little surprise").

In the final paragraph, Brush clearly reveals her sentiments about the husband's response, coloring him as cruel and "unkind" (line eighteen). The line "You looked at him and you saw this and you thought, 'Oh, now don't be like that!'" and the author's italicization of the word "be" implies a certain amount of disgust for a husband who is trying to crush his wife's jovial spirit. With a spit of contempt, Brush adds that "he was like that" (line fifteen), intensifying her anger and disapprobation of his meanness.

Brush supplies a list of words to describe what the husband muttered to his wife as "some punishing thing, quick and curt and unkind" (line eighteen). The lengthened syntax in this sentence has the feel of the husband's criticism of his wife for essentially being sweet to him. He comes off as a nasty man too concerned with his macho, stoical reputation to take a moment to be nice to his wife and thank her for remembering his birthday. "Birthday Party" is an ironic story with an ironic title.

What this husband and wife experience is certainly no party, but merely another miserable episode in their unenviable marriage. Katherine Brush laments the state of bourgeois relations between men and women, while ultimately commenting on the gradual and inevitable death of romance in American society. As people make more room in their hearts for their love of "respectability", the less room they have left in their hearts for spousal love and simple pleasures.