

THE LOTTERY

By James Hanna

WHY WE LIKE IT: *A futuristic utopia with disturbing dystopian realities. The speaker, Jeremiah, 'an old man of seventeen' lives like the rest of his tribe under the watchful presence of the 'protectors'. He has bought into the brainwashing that characterizes his survival, and distances himself from a radical fringe group called the 'unbelievers.' The benign mood of this story reminds us of Shirley Jackson's masterpiece of the same title, but also, for different reasons, Brave New World. We like the deliberately mechanical prose and child-like voice in 'The Lottery' as much as the story itself. Certain lines resonate like mantras... 'today the sky is the color tea' but we begin to recognize they are disengaged from context and meaning. It points to a life and a mindset structured by programmed language and conditioned responses that equate into a 'soma'-like sense of inner peace—hold the narrative up to a mirror—what you see is the very face of 'benevolent' tyranny. A beautifully controlled story with passages cache-pots of understated beauty: Inside the dome, there are cows and sheep. Inside the dome, there are farmlands and orchards. Outside the dome, there is dust and rocks. The dust is very dry and the rocks are very hot. There is no farmland outside of the dome. There are no animals.'*

The Lottery

A warm wind is blowing from the north, and today the air is clear. The air is the color of tea. The air is usually the color of coffee—not the color of tea.

Today I see trees and grass. The trees are twisted and scaly, the grass is drier than straw. I wish that the air was the color of coffee, not the color of tea. If the air was the color of coffee, I would not see the trees and the grass.

Whatever the color of the air, I can always see into the dome. The dome is huge and bright. The dome has forests and lawns. I see leafy trees and flowers when I look into the dome.

The dome is one mile high, and it must be a hundred miles wide. Birds fly about within the dome—colorful, cheerful birds. There are towering buildings inside the dome, there are roads with buses and cars. There are lakes with fountains and ducks. There is farmland with very tall crops.

I am glad the dome is beautiful, it is where our protectors live. Our protectors are tall with shiny baldheads. Our protectors wear flowing white robes. They do not look like us—we are naked and hairy, not pretty like our protectors.

Our protectors guard our tribe from the trolls that live high up in the hills. If it was not for our protectors, the trolls would come down from the hills. The trolls have razor-sharp claws. Their cocks are harder than stone. They would butcher and rape everyone in our tribe if it was not for our protectors.

Our protectors are kind and intelligent, unlike the horrible trolls. I am very afraid of the trolls—I do not want to feel their claws. Not everybody in our tribe is afraid of the trolls. There are unbelievers in our tribe who are not afraid of them. “Have you ever seen a troll?” they ask us. I have never seen a troll, and that is a very good thing. Our protectors make sure the trolls never come down from the hills.

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Today the air is clear. The air is the color of tea. I can see the shapes of the hills where the deadly trolls have their home. I wish the air was darker—I do not want to look at the hills.

My name is Jeremiah—I'm an old man of seventeen. I belong to a tribe that lives outside the dome, and I have no other names. Jeremiah is a very good name. Everyone in our tribe has that name. Even women and girls are named Jeremiah. Our protectors have given us all this name. They say it's a very fine name. They say there will be great love in our tribe if all of us share the same name.

A great many tribes live outside of the dome, but none of them share our name. Our protectors tell us to stay away from all the other tribes. The tribes are very bad, they say. The tribes have cannibals in them. The unbelievers in our tribe ask, "Have you ever seen a cannibal?" I tell them I once saw a cannibal, and he was from another tribe. The cannibal was eating a girl from our tribe. He was gobbling down her intestines, which drooped from his hands like snakes.

I stay far away from the other tribes. I do not like cannibals. I do not like the unbelievers either, but our protectors say let them be. Our protectors say everyone in our tribe should be able to speak his mind.

Inside the dome, there are cows and sheep. Inside the dome, there are farmlands and orchards. Outside the dome, there is dust and rocks. The dust is very dry and the rocks are very hot. There is no farmland outside of the dome. There are no animals.

Our protectors feed us every day—they do not want us to be hungry. Every day, giant vans leave the dome and distribute food to all the tribes. The food is dumped from the vans, and there is always plenty of food. There are apple cores and peanut shells and chicken bones and bread. There are banana peels and corncobs and watermelon rinds. The food is very tasty. I eat until I am full.

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Today the air is the color of tea. It is not the color of coffee. I can see the lights of other domes that are many miles away. There are domes all over the country. There are domes all over the world. I do not want to look at other domes, so I turn my head away.

When the domes fight with each other, there is a truce among the tribes. Our protectors tell us to band together, and they give us banners and swords. Even women and children are given banners and swords. Our protectors say we must kill the tribesmen fighting for other domes. They say we should eat their livers because the livers will keep us strong. They say if we eat only the livers, we are better than cannibals.

The unbelievers say there is no glory in fighting tribes from other domes. They say the domes fight each other for sport. They say it is bad to eat livers.

I am proud to have carried a sword and a banner. I am proud to have fought for my dome. I have killed those who fight for other domes. I have eaten their livers too.

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Today the air is the color of tea, and protectors walk among us. Whenever the air is the color of tea, our protectors visit us. They come down from the sky in magnificent floats that make a cooling wind.

Our protectors are tall and beautiful. Their eyes are like pools of blue water. They do not stay very long outside of the dome, but it is good that they walk among us.

Our protectors ask us a question when they come to visit us. It is the same question every time. "What will you do for us?" they ask. Their voices are thin and melodious. They sound like wonderful birds.

Once a protector looked at me and touched me on the forehead. I never felt a gentler touch. I never saw bluer eyes. "What will you do for us?" he asked. His voice was musical.

I told him I had killed other tribesmen in battle. I told him I had eaten their livers. The protector looked at me and repeated, "What will you do for us?"

Our protectors kind and comforting. We love them very much. The women in our tribe have orgasms when our protectors walk among us. "What will you do for us?" our protectors ask the woman. Sometimes they gather up women and girls and fly them back to the dome.

The unbelievers among us say our protectors should stay inside the dome. They say our protectors should never ask us what we will do for them. I tell the unbelievers I would do much for our protectors. Our protectors keep us fed. They give us banners and swords. They protect us from the terrible trolls that live up in the hills.

Today a warm wind is blowing, and the air is the color of tea. Today, our protectors have set up the stage where they have the lottery. Whenever the air is the color of tea, the lottery is held.

There are numbers tattooed on our forearms. My number is 6609. Our protectors spin a big lottery wheel that all the tribe can see. They spin the wheel four

times. They call out a number each time. If each of your numbers is called, you will be allowed to live inside the dome.

All our tribe gathers around the stage. It is good to live in the dome. We can better serve our protectors if we are allowed to live in the dome.

The unbelievers say they do not want to live in the dome. The unbelievers have no numbers on their forearms. "We are all of one body," our protectors announce when they have the lottery. But the unbelievers are never selected to live inside the dome.

Today, the wheel spins slowly, and my number does not come up. I have attended the lottery hundreds of times and my number has not been announced. I know it will not be much longer until my number comes up. I know that very soon I will live in the beautiful dome.

Today a woman I do not like wins the lottery. She is standing among unbelievers. She has no battle scars. The woman is very lucky to have won the lottery.

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Today the air is the color of tea. Today there are devils among us. Whenever the air is the color of tea, devils come among us. The devils put bad thoughts into our heads—thoughts that make us angry. Our protectors tell us that it is unwise to listen to the devils.

I have listened to a devil today, and today I am very angry. I am angry because our protectors gave out many beautiful banners. The banners are bright and colorful, and they flutter like flames in the wind. The banners declare we are all of

one body—that is a very good thing. The banners proclaim that our dome will shine brighter than all the domes in the world.

I am angry because our protectors did not give me a beautiful banner. I have killed many tribesmen in battle. I have eaten their livers too. I have split open the wombs of women who have been filled by our enemy’s seed. Our protectors did not give me a banner, but they gave banners to unbelievers. I am very, very angry at our terrible protectors.

The unbelievers tell me that there are no devils among us. They say it is our protectors who put bad thoughts into our heads. They say I should not be angry because I did not get a banner. They say if I keep bad thoughts in my head, I will not win the lottery.

Tomorrow has come. A warm wind is still blowing. The air is not the color of coffee—it is still the color of tea.

There will be a lottery today because the air is the color of tea. A few protectors have set up the stage where the numbers are announced. I am no longer angry at our protectors—my thoughts are good once again. Some unbelievers stand beside me while the lottery wheel revolves.

Today I am very lucky. Today my number comes up. The protector who spun the giant wheel called out, “6-6-0-9.” Today I will get to live in the dome and better serve our protectors.

The protector who spun the lottery wheel is looking directly at me. His face is like the face of a statue. His eyes are as blue as a lake. "What will you do for us?" he says. His voice is as pure as a flute.

I walk behind the protectors, and we get inside the float. My thoughts are good today. I am sad that my thoughts were not always good. I am glad our protectors are kind.

I see the farms and cattle as we land beside the dome. I see the lakes and the butterflies. I see the orchards and birds. My heart is as light as a sparrow. My thoughts are very good.

I leave the float and follow the protectors into the dome.

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I have never felt a softer breeze. I have never seen brighter colors. I have never smelled the sweetness of flowers. I have never heard voices so gentle.

I see many buildings that are tall and straight, and I see giant temples too. Wonderful signs sit on top of the temples. The signs say *WE ARE ALL OF ONE BODY*. I see carts being drawn by magnificent horses as I walk towards one of the temples. The carts are full of bodies. They are rolling towards the farmlands. The bodies look like they came from the tribes that live around the dome. There are many, many bodies inside the rolling carts.

I know I will soon be among the bodies that are rolling towards the farmlands. I am glad that I will lie with the bodies—I should not have had angry thoughts. I am glad I will join the bodies while all of my thoughts are good. I am glad the unbelievers told our protectors about my angry thoughts.

Soon, my body will nourish the crops that grow so very tall. It will nourish the fruits and nuts that touch the lips of our protectors. I am glad I will nourish the fruits and nuts. I am glad we are all of one body.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *While watching a recent Trump Rally on television, I wondered, What are the logical fruits of a canine devotion to dogma? The crowd gazes were so adoring, the chants so heartfelt, that the story I penned did not seem altogether far-fetched. Why not a world in which the elite live in air-conditioned domes while the rest of humanity is relegated to smog-filled deserts? Still, my docile main character, Jeremiah, is not without compensation. Unlike the hapless Winston Smith in Orwell's 1984, he did not have to suffer an array of tortures to arrive at his complacency with Big Brother.*

BIO: *James Hanna is a retired probation officer and a former fiction editor of The Sand Hill Review. He has had over sixty story publications and three Pushcart nominations. His books, three of which have won awards, are available on Amazon.*

