“No One’s a Mystery” by Elizabeth Tallent

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The short story, No One’s a Mystery, by Elizabeth Tallent, is only three pages long and has been narrated in such a beautiful way that you can visualize the whole situation. The story has only three characters: Jack, 18 years old girl, and his wife (Tallent). The girl in her early teens is happy with the love she is getting, but unaware that Jack has used her. The story has portrayed the character of Jack as being powerful over the 18-year-old girl and how they have been in a relationship for the last two years.

Gender, Power, and Competing Perspectives

There is a different perspective to analyze or view the story. In the story, two women are shown to have two different characters and powers. The power Jack has over that unnamed 18-year-old girl and the power his wife has over him. The character of a young girl is described as naïve and innocent, with no realization of what this whole relationship will lead to. On the other hand, the wife is depicted as irritating and unworthy. The author has used metaphoric language and details in such a way that this short story explains the whole situation. For example, the use of the phrase “light as a dime” can be interpreted as the weakness of the relationship between Jack and the little girl. The feminists would view this story as a power relation and dominance of men over women.

Physical, Mental, and Emotional Power

Power relations are a concept that can be seen in this story. Jack has the real power in the story as his character is strongly built, and among all the characters, he is the only one who has been named. It indicates that the character of Jack is so powerful that he is related to two women at the same time. The way Jack pushed the girl down all of a sudden shows the way men treat the other women they want to have fun with, but do not want to title that extra relationship. The power dynamics of this story are so dependent on the elements of gender and age. However, the girl has some emotional power over Jack which somehow might make him powerless at the same time. Another aspect of power is depicted in the way he fears his wife, but the idea is that having fearful power does not make anyone powerful. The lines of power are blurred, and the story is narrated in a way that one moment, one person has power over the other, and the next moment, it is vice versa. Another way to look at power is the type of power characters have over others. For example, the way Jack pushes the girl down indicates physical power, the wife’s arrival results in a fearful vibe around Jack, which signifies mental power, and the way the girl emotionally manipulates Jack can be taken as emotional power.

The Narrator’s Acceptance of Patriarchal Control

However, the way the narrator accepts the reality and does not consider Jack pushing her down or being in a relationship with an old married man as irrational. For the girl, the behavior might be normal and expected. That is the reason she did not try to get back up and instead started observing things closely. Even she was asking questions and replying to Jack when he had pushed him down. This indicates how women have accepted their status as low and consider a man pushing any girl down a normal act. Women, especially young women, have grown up in a patriarchal society where most of the acts by men are rationalized as love, protection, and their masculine nature. The character of the girl is shown as submissive and naïve in the way she tries to rationalize. An example of rationalizing is then got up and says, “butterfly dust print”(Tallent) is how she is positively rationalizing the push and behavior of Jack. Also, she might be aware that if they both got caught by Jack’s wife, it would put them in trouble, so she did not say anything regarding Jack hiding him on the arrival of his wife. This also shows that the girl is obedient and naïve to the concept of the actual situation, and toward the end of the story, it can be seen that she is looking forward to a long-term relationship, but Jack is letting her know that the relationship is temporary and they both will move on with their life. However, the girl, using her emotional power, described the story of their future in a way that the center point remains on their relationship and the activities she will do with Jack. In conclusion, the story is written beautifully with details so that the reader can picture the transparency of a relationship from the perspective of two different people. The way he pushed the girl down and the power he has over her can be seen as an example of a power dynamic in a relationship. But the story also depicts that because the girl is emotionally involved with the old man, she does not view the pushing down as something negative.

Work Cited

Tallent, Elizabeth. *No One’s a Mystery*. https://faculty.weber.edu/jyoung/English%202500/

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