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Effects of Loneliness and Poor Communication

Textual Analysis: *A Small Good Thing*

Communication is vital for the efficient transfer of information from one person to another. The message can take a different shape if two people fail to communicate properly. Loneliness is a complex and usually unpleasant emotional response to isolation and/ or lack of companionship. Something similar occurs in the story *A Small Good Thing*, where ineffective communication lead by isolation caused a lot of chaos. Raymond Carver, in this story, effectively points out the importance of meaningful communication and companionship.

Carver brings out the theme of loneliness with the character of the baker. In doing so, the he points out how isolation can lead to strained communication. The baker is a somber, taciturn man with an abrupt manner. He is probably in his fifties. When Ann orders the birthday cake from him, he does not chat or be friendly with her, and his behavior makes her uncomfortable. When Ann does not collect the birthday cake, the baker makes harassing phone calls to her home. But later he asks for forgiveness, acknowledging that he was wrong. It transpires that he is lonely and childless. In spite of the fact that he is constantly busy as a baker, he feels his life is empty. As described by Carver, "...To repeat the days with the ovens endlessly full and endlessly empty." (Carver, 121). This lead the baker to make the angry and abrupt phone calls.

The baker, however, is a man with a soft heart. He must have lost his benevolence by a long spell of seclusion. Carver demonstrates how the Baker's lack of companionship makes the Baker more sudden in his communication. He wants company to share his ideas, his sorrows, and his view towards his life. People tend to get engrossed in their work. Similarly, the baker is also occupied with his baking. As he mentions in the story, "Lady, I work for sixteen hours a day in this place to earn a living... I work here night and day, trying to make ends meet... Bakers work at night." (Carver, 118-119). With such a packed schedule, no one tends to be polite. If he were to be aware about Scotty's condition, he might have reacted in a different manner but, expecting something that is completely unimaginable, is impossible. His hard work in isolation results in stress, which wholesomely contributed to the Baker's method of communication.

While concluding the story, Carver also points out that companionship can lead to better communication. The Baker comforts Ann and Howard in their times of deep sorrow. He offers them cinnamon rolls and coffee, with some cream and sugar. He also listens to the entire story of how Scotty had suffered. He shares anecdotes from his life, how lonely his life is and how he has been spending so many years alone. The baker is initially very patient, and also tells Howard that there is a cake that has to be collected. As quoted from the text "Then he began to talk... They nodded when the baker began to speak about loneliness... He told them what it was like to be childless all these years." (Carver, 121). The Baker had seen thousands of celebrations. Marriages, Birthdays, etc. But, being lonely, he could not celebrate, or rather, he had no one to celebrate with. Although, initially there is hate in the eyes of the baker, the ending shows his soft-heart, his welcoming character and his understanding towards Ann and Howard. Carver also projects the fact that, when people share their grief and sorrow, people will understand their

difficulties. Here, the Baker and the couple shared their remorse with each other, understood each other and finally tied all the loose ends of their abrupt conversation.

The lack of effective communication causes the mistrust between Ann, Howard and the Baker. The baker had never intended to trouble them at times of profound sorrow. If he had communicated more effectively with Howard, probably the conclusion of the story would be different. We can see the lack of communication between Ann and Howard. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that Ann has not informed Howard about the cake, and Howard does not inform Ann about the phone call. He only tells, "...Just don't put up with this creep who keeps calling. Hang up right away" (Carver, 97). In this way Carver expresses the importance of heeding to someone else's words and proper communication with your partner.

The Author, Raymond Carver also demonstrates the role of the doctor in providing information to the kith and kin of a patient. There is a deficiency in communication between Dr. Francis and the couple. Every time Ann and Howard check on Scotty's condition, Dr. Francis replies, "It is not coma yet, not exactly..." (Carver, 100). Dr. Francis should have been clearer to the parents that the child is in coma or in danger, so the parents would have been mentally ready to face the death of their son. Later, the doctor's called it "a hidden occlusion and said it was a one in a million circumstance" (Carver, 113).

The lack of communication has been kneaded into the story, and it points out Carver's strong message that one mistake in communication can ruin lives. If the Baker had clearly specified that a was to be collected, if Ann had mentioned to Howard that she had ordered a cake, if Howard had mentioned to Ann that a baker had called regarding a cake and if Dr. Francis had substantially broken the truth about Scotty's condition, probably the ending would have been a lot different.

“Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity. We can choose to use this force constructively with words of encouragement, or destructively using words of despair. Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble” (Yehuda Berg).

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