

Seven Hundred and Seventy Seven

The colossal hall was filled with people, all glancing nervously around the room. Forced conversations were made and the smiles, although friendly, were strained and anxious. The atmosphere was tense and as time progressed, the pressure lay over the group like a thick, heavy blanket. Finally, precisely when the large grandfather clock struck twelve, the door opened and a hushed silence fell over the crowd.

A young man made his way to the stage, expressionlessly climbing the few steps. When he reached it, he scanned his onlookers, absorbing each grim face and feeling the level of unease mingled with fear. As he finished his observations, he smiled malevolently, satisfied with the feat he had just accomplished. His teeth seemed to get sharper and the room felt dark and cold.

“My people!” he announced, “Your desires could be granted in this event. You dearest wishes may be fulfilled. But there is also a catch: there can only be one winner.”

The silence felt loud as the speech finished. Those who were bonded through friendship looked at each other with distaste, their relationship turning bitter, into enmity. There could only be one winner. Everybody wanted to win.

Satisfied with his declaration, the man reached his hand to a box. It was had intricate designs, with a narrow slot. It contained yellowed pieces of paper, and for some people, was a matter of life and death. He sneered at the wizened faces before him, each filled with wisdom, and gave them a stony scowl. He inserted his hand into the box and a brittle

paper was brought out. The crowd watched fretfully, almost hungrily, at the stage. Looking at the paper, he began to grin maliciously, and cast an eye over the fate of one of the many elderly citizens.

Giving the audience one last frown, he announced in a chilling tone, “seven hundred and seventy seven.”

An ancient woman with wrinkled skin and round glasses stood up. She let out a high pitched scream, looking as if she would faint. Tears flowed out of her eyes and her head was in her hands. Her body shook, before she crumpled to the ground. She gazed at the crowd once again and then at the piece of paper already in her hand. Gulping, she regained her composure, before throwing her arms in the air.

“Bingo!” she cried, “I win! I win!”

She ran forward to receive her price, while the others watched with envy, though they knew that they could try again next week. They all filed out, with the winner proudly clutching a plastic trophy and a new knitting kit.