

the giver (excerpt)

SOUND – AUDIENCE MURMURING

- ELDER: Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome back from your break. So far, we have recognized the stages of life of all of the other young members of our community, celebrating their accomplishments and their new responsibilities, but now we come to the most important part of our annual celebration – the Ceremony of the Twelves
- W3: The Twelves were seated according to the numbers they'd been assigned when *they* were newchildren.
- ELDER: We've known these young people all of their lives, from the time they were newchildren in our Nurturing Center, ready to be delivered to those couples that had requested children, to their first days in school, when they learned about our lives here in the community, and the principles of Sameness that have made us safe.
- M2: Number Nineteen, Jonas looked down the row and saw all of his friends he'd grown up with here in the community.
- W1: There was his best friend, Asher, Number Four.
- M1: And his special friend, Fiona, Number Eighteen.
- ELDER: Under your tutelage they have learned how to tell of their dreams, and how to share - and control their feelings.
- M2: Every night the families in the community would gather around their dinner table to talk about their day....

SOUND – WHOOSH

(the four family members move to a table and four chairs located extreme downstage right)

- M1: (Father) Alright, who wants to be the first tonight for feelings? Jonas?*(looks at Jonas, who appears to be uncomfortable, then turns to Lily)* Alright Lily, you're first.
- W2: I felt very angry this afternoon. My group was at the play area and we had a visiting group of Sevens, and one of them- I don't know his name, he was a male - kept going right to the front of the line. I felt so angry I made my hand into a fist, like this.

W1: Why do you think he did that?

W2: Because he was rude.

M1: *(thinks, then)* Have you ever visited a strange playground with your group, Lily?

W2: ...yes. Last year we went visited a group of sixes in another community.

W1: And how did that make you feel?

W2; *(thinking)* Strange.... because they did some things differently than us, so I felt a little stupid.

W1: Lily, we don't use that word.

M1: Do you think it's possible that the boy from the group today simply felt the same way? Maybe he simply didn't know how you did things?

Jonas: I feel sorry for him. I feel sorry for anyone who's a stranger and doesn't know what to do.

M1: What do you think now, Lily? Do you still feel angry?

W2: I guess not. I guess I feel sorry for him too. And sorry I made a fist.

W1: Thank you for sharing your feelings, Lily.

M1: I'll go next. Today I was feeling worried. We have a newchild who isn't doing well.

W2: What gender is it?

M1: Male. He's a sweet little guy, but he isn't growing as fast as he should. The committee is beginning to think about releasing him.

W1: *(pained, but controlled)* Oh no, that's awful. It's always such a shame when a newchild has to be released...

M1: Well, I'm going to keep trying. I may ask the committee for permission to bring him here at night, to see if we can get him to sleep better.

W1: Of course.

W2: Father, if you bring the newchild home, maybe we could keep him!

W1: Lily, you know the rules.

W2: Yes. Two children, one male, and one female. But still...it would be fun to have a little brother for a change.

M1: Alright Mother, your turn.

W1: Today, they brought a repeat offender in front of me. I sentenced him last year, and thought he would learn from his sentence, but when he was brought back today, I almost felt a little guilty.

Jonas: Why guilty?

W1: Because my first sentence clearly wasn't enough to teach him, and if he commits a third infraction, he'll have to be released. I'd hate to have to carry out that sentence.

M1: *(reaches over and takes her hand)* Now now, let go of that feeling. Alright, Jonas, you're next.

Jonas: I'm feeling...apprehensive.

M1: Why is that?

Jonas: Because the Ceremony is worrying me.

W2: Ooooh, the Ceremony of the Twelves!

M1: I'm glad you told us of your feelings, Jonas. Don't worry – you'll do fine at the ceremony.

Jonas: But I can't help worrying about what assignment the Committee will give me.

W1: Oh, it's nothing to worry about. Lily, I think your father and I need to have a discussion with Jonas.

W2: A private discussion?

W1: Yes dear, a private discussion.

W2: Fine *(she gets up and leaves, quietly)*.

M1: That's a good girl. We'll be in to say good night. *(she's gone)* You know, every December was exciting to me when I was younger. I always looked forward to the Ceremony of the Ages.

Jonas: I enjoy the Naming of the newchildren

W1: Oh me too! I love the surprise. The year we got Lily, we knew we'd be getting a female, but we had no idea what her name would be.

M1: And when we got onstage, and they handed us newchild 23, I was so happy, because she'd always been my favorite in the nursery.

W1: And I loved the name they gave her.

M1: *(pause)* You know it's nothing to be afraid of, the Ceremony of the Twelves. The Committee will find the right assignment for you.

Jonas: Were you nervous when it was your turn?

M1: Nervous? No. Because I was fairly certain what my assignment would be.

W1: *(surprised)* How could you know?

M1: Well, I knew what my aptitude was. When my friends were out playing, I'd sneak away and head to the nurturing center and help with the newchildren. And of course, the Elders knew that, so I expected my assignment to be a nurterer.

Jonas: Were any of your Twelve friends disappointed with their assignments?

M1: Disappointed? No, I don't think so. Surprised, maybe, but nicely surprised.

Jonas: Mother, how about you? Were any of your friends disappointed?

W1: *(thinks)* There was one girl I remember who was unhappy to be assigned to be a Birth Mother, but she wasn't really ready to do anything else. She was very healthy and athletic, but not much of a student, so they gave her the assignment that made sense for her.

M1: Jonas, there's something we should talk about. You know that this will be the last of the ceremonies for you?

Jonas: Yes.

M1: And it means that you'll be moving into a new group. And each of your friends will too. So your friends will no longer be as close.

Jonas: Well, I think Asher and I will always be friends. And there'll still be school.

W1: Yes, but there will still be changes. You'll find a new set of friends, who share your new interests, and your old friends will stop being as important.

Jonas: I see. Do you still get to play after Twelve?

W1: Sometimes, but it won't seem as important anymore.

M1: Well not me. Every day at the nurturing center I play peek-a-boo! Fun doesn't end when you turn twelve, Jonas. It just becomes different. *(smiles)* Don't worry, Jonas. Everything will be just fine.

W2: *(enters, carrying a stuffed animal and wearing a robe)* Is the private conversation done yet?

W1: Lily!...Yes, I think we're done *(smiles at Jonas)*. Now Lily, you're almost a Nine, and you know your comfort object will have to be taken away. You should start learning how to sleep without it.

M1: C'mon there, Lily Billy Goat – I'll remove the ribbons from your hair.

W2: So will you be bringing the newchild home with you tomorrow?

M1: Yes Lily, I think I will. We'll see if we can help him learn, so he can be given to a nice family.

W1: Jonas, time for you to go to bed too. I've got a lot of work to get caught up on before tomorrow's day at Justice.

Jonas: Alright Mother. Good night

(he gets up and goes to her, half-expectedly thinking that maybe he'll kiss her good night – he's getting closer to her, and just as he's ready to make his move, she looks up from her briefcase, and a flash of fear shows in her eyes – then she realizes what he's doing, and firmly, but nicely cuts him off with...)

W1: Good night, Jonas.

(and she watches him walk away, back toward the area of the ceremony).