

button button by richard matheson summary

button button by richard matheson summary offers a compelling exploration of human nature, morality, and the consequences of seemingly simple choices. This short story by Richard Matheson delves into the psychological and ethical dilemmas faced by the protagonist when presented with a mysterious box and a tempting proposition. The narrative challenges readers to consider the weight of their decisions and the unforeseen ripple effects that follow. In this detailed article, the plot, characters, themes, and moral questions embedded in "Button Button" are thoroughly examined. Additionally, the story's impact and adaptations are discussed to provide a comprehensive understanding of its significance in the realm of speculative fiction. The following sections will guide readers through a full button button by richard matheson summary, ensuring clarity and depth.

- Plot Overview of Button Button
- Main Characters and Their Roles
- Themes and Symbolism
- Moral and Ethical Questions
- Legacy and Adaptations

Plot Overview of Button Button

The plot of "Button Button" centers around a couple, Norma and Arthur Lewis, who receive an unusual package containing a button and a note. The note explains that if they press the button, someone they do not know will die, and in return, they will receive a large sum of money. The story unfolds as

Norma grapples with the temptation and moral implications of pressing the button.

Richard Matheson carefully constructs the plot to build suspense and explore human curiosity and greed. The mysterious nature of the offer and the couple's reactions drive the narrative, culminating in a shocking and thought-provoking conclusion. The story's brevity intensifies its impact, making every decision and consequence significant.

Initial Encounter with the Box

Norma and Arthur are initially skeptical when they receive the box with the button. The note accompanying it presents a clear proposition: press the button, receive \$50,000, and cause the death of an unknown person. This setup immediately introduces the central conflict—whether to act on temptation or uphold moral integrity.

Norma's Decision and Its Consequences

Norma's curiosity and desire lead her to press the button despite Arthur's objections. The suspense heightens as they wait for the promised reward and the consequences of their choice. The story concludes with a twist that reveals the true cost of their decision, emphasizing the unpredictable and often tragic outcomes of moral compromises.

Main Characters and Their Roles

The characters in "Button Button" are essential in conveying the story's themes and moral questions. Their personalities, motivations, and interactions provide insight into the human psyche when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Norma Lewis

Norma is the protagonist whose curiosity and desire for financial gain drive the plot. She represents the human inclination to weigh personal benefit against ethical considerations. Her complex emotions—ranging from excitement to guilt—highlight the internal conflict experienced when confronting difficult choices.

Arthur Lewis

Arthur, Norma's husband, serves as a foil to Norma's impulsiveness. He is cautious, skeptical, and morally grounded, expressing concern about the implications of pressing the button. Arthur's resistance underscores the story's exploration of conscience versus temptation and adds tension to the narrative.

The Mysterious Offeror

Though never directly seen, the person or entity behind the offer represents an external force testing human morality. This character's role is symbolic, posing the ethical challenge and serving as a catalyst for the story's events.

Themes and Symbolism

"Button Button" is rich with themes and symbols that deepen its narrative impact and provoke reflection on human nature and ethics.

The Temptation of Easy Wealth

The story highlights how the allure of quick financial gain can cloud judgment and lead individuals to make morally questionable decisions. The button is a metaphor for temptation—simple to press but

with devastating consequences.

The Consequences of Choices

Matheson emphasizes that actions have consequences, often unforeseen and irreversible. The story's climax reveals the heavy price of the characters' decision, illustrating the theme that moral compromises can lead to personal tragedy.

Death and Morality

The inevitability of death and its ethical implications are central to the story. The anonymous death caused by pressing the button forces readers to confront questions about the value of life and accountability.

- Temptation and greed as human weaknesses
- The unpredictability of consequences
- The ethical dilemma of sacrificing others for personal gain
- The symbolic meaning of the button as a test of character

Moral and Ethical Questions

The core of "Button Button" lies in its provocative ethical questions that challenge readers to consider their values and decision-making processes.

Is It Justifiable to Harm Others for Personal Benefit?

The story asks whether the promise of wealth can ever justify causing harm to an unknown individual. It challenges the reader to evaluate the boundaries of moral behavior when faced with temptation.

The Role of Responsibility and Accountability

Norma and Arthur's dilemma raises issues of responsibility—not only for their actions but also for the indirect harm caused. The narrative questions how much accountability one bears for consequences that are not immediate or visible.

The Impact of Anonymity on Moral Decisions

The unknown identity of the victim in "Button Button" reflects how anonymity can desensitize people to the consequences of their actions, making unethical choices easier to justify.

Legacy and Adaptations

"Button Button" has left a lasting impact on speculative fiction and popular culture. Its compelling premise and profound moral questions have inspired various adaptations and discussions.

Television and Film Adaptations

The story was notably adapted for television, including an episode of the anthology series "The Twilight Zone." These adaptations often preserve the original's tension and ethical dilemma, bringing the narrative to a broader audience.

Influence on Contemporary Media

The concept of a device or mechanism that offers a tempting but morally fraught choice has influenced numerous stories in literature, television, and film. "Button Button" remains a reference point for exploring the consequences of human decisions.

Enduring Relevance

Despite being written decades ago, the story's themes of temptation, morality, and consequence continue to resonate. Its concise yet powerful narrative serves as a cautionary tale about the costs of ethical compromise.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main plot of 'Button Button' by Richard Matheson?

The story revolves around a mysterious box with a button that, if pressed, will give the presser a large sum of money but cause the death of someone they don't know. The ethical dilemma and consequences form the core of the plot.

Who are the main characters in 'Button Button' by Richard Matheson?

The main characters are Norma and Arthur Lewis, a married couple who receive the box and must decide whether to press the button.

What themes are explored in 'Button Button' by Richard Matheson?

The story explores themes such as morality, greed, the value of human life, and the consequences of one's choices.

How does 'Button Button' by Richard Matheson end?

In the twist ending, after Norma presses the button, she later discovers that the person who died was her own husband, Arthur, revealing the true cost of her decision.

What is the moral lesson of 'Button Button' by Richard Matheson?

The story teaches that actions driven by greed or selfish desires can lead to unintended and tragic consequences, emphasizing the importance of ethical decision-making.

Has 'Button Button' by Richard Matheson been adapted into other media?

Yes, 'Button Button' was adapted into an episode of the television series 'The Twilight Zone,' which helped popularize the story and its moral dilemma.

Additional Resources

1. *Button, Button* by Richard Matheson

This is the original short story that explores the moral dilemma faced by a couple who receive a mysterious box with a button. Pressing the button promises a large sum of money but at a terrible cost—someone they don't know will die. The story challenges readers to consider the consequences of their choices and the value of human life.

2. *The Monkey's Paw*