

DRAMA

THE DEAR DEPARTED

By - **Stanley Houghton**

SUMMARY

Mrs. Slater scolds her daughter Victoria for loitering around in a fancy-colourful dress when her grandfather is lying dead upstairs.

She asks Victoria to wear a white frock with a black sash.

Her Aunt Elizabeth and Ben are coming and they will not like her in such a dress.

Mrs. Slater wants to grab/steal the things that belonged to grandfather before the Jordans come.

She asks her husband Henry to use new slippers of grandfather.

She has eye on the old man's bureau and wants to bring downstairs in her room.

Mrs. Slater knows that her sister Elizabeth is very sharp and clever and will drive a hard bargain over things left by grandfather.

Henry doesn't seem much interested but gives in soon.

When Henry and his wife are bringing the bureau down, Victoria asks if they were stealing it.

Mrs. Slater tells a lie that the bureau was given by Grandfather before he died.

Then Mrs. Slater brings the man's beautiful clock downstairs.

The Jordans come and they ask how the old man died.

They are annoyed that Mrs. Slater didn't call any other doctor when Dr.Pringle,the family doctor was not available.

Mrs. Slater tells that he was well in the morning, had his breakfast and then left for the insurance office to pay his premium.

Mr. Jordan shows no emotion and says everybody has to die sooner or later.

They talk about giving announcement in the paper.

Mr. and Mrs. Jordan are more interested in having tea than going up and seeing the dead man.

Mrs. Jordan wants that a list must be made of the things left by the old man.

Henry tells them that the old has not left any jewelry or valuables

Mrs. Jordan reminds that he must have left a gold watch for Jimmy because he was very fond of him.

Mrs. Slater is not pleased .Ben asks for receipt for the premium paid that morning.

He calls grandfather "the drunken old beggar" when he realizes that premium has not been paid.

Victoria goes upstairs to fetch the bunch of keys when she finds her grandfather moving.

She starts shouting "Mother! Mother! Grandpa's getting up".

Soon Mr. Abel Merryweather comes down and they are transfixed with amazement.

He is surprised to find Henry wearing his new slippers.

He finds Elizabeth, Amelia, Henry and little Victoria wearing dresses for mourning.

Abel Merryweather is again surprised to see his bureau and clock downstairs.

Mrs. Jordan tells grandfather that Mrs. Slater and Henry have stolen his bureau and clock.

Mrs. Slater tries to silence her but Mrs. Jordan is relentless.

She tells her father what was going on in the house when he was dead.

Mr. Abel Merryweather understands why all of them were in black.

Grandfather declares that he is going to make a new will.

He will leave his belongings to the person with whom he will be living at time of his death.

The selfish and greedy daughters compete with each other to keep the old man with them.

Abel Merryweather comes to know what his greedy daughters think of him.

Grandfather declares that on Monday he is going to do three things.

First he will go to his lawyer to change his will.

Then he will go to the insurance office to pay the premium.

In the end he will go to St. Phillip's Church and get married.

Everyone is shocked and surprised and Mrs. Slater that the old man has gone out of senses.

Mr. Abel Merryweather declares that he is going to marry Mrs. John Shorrocks, who keeps the 'Ring- 'o'-Bells.

He invites all of them at the wedding at twelve o'clock at St. Phillip's Church.

PLOT OF THE PLAY

Mrs. Slater discovers that grandfather is dead.

Mrs. Slater instructs her daughter to put her white frock on a black sash.

Mr. Slater fetches the bureau and the clock from the upstairs.

The Jordans arrive and know in detail about grandfather's demise from the slaters.

The family sits down to have a tea.

They discuss about obituary announcement in the papers and the insurance premium payment.

Victoria is asked to fetch the bunch of keys to the bureau to look for the insurance receipt.

Grandfather comes down and is surprised to see the Jordans.

Grandfather comes to know how his daughters were in hurry to divide his belongings between them.

Grandfather announces his intention to change the will and to marry Mrs. Shorrocks.

DIFFICULT WORDS AND THEIR MEANINGS

- PEARSON'S WEEKLY - A British weekly magazine founded by Sir Cyril Pearson

(1866-1921) in 1890.

- Precocious - a person whose mental attitude is developed beyond his/ her age.
- Gallivanting - go about seeking pleasure.
- Colours - wearing gay dress
- Drive a hard bargain - to argue in an aggressive manner and force somebody to agree on the best possible arrangement.
- Money-grubbing - seeking greedily to obtain money at every opportunity.
- Ostentatiously – showily
- Piqued - experienced indignation
- As merry as a sandboy - extremely happy and care free.
- Poetic license - freedom to change facts or normal rules of language.
- 'Ring-O-Bells' - the name of a restaurant.
- Tomfoolery - foolish behavior
- Dickens - informal way of saying that you are annoyed or surprised.

MAJOR CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

MR.ABEL MERRYWEATHER

Victoria's grandfather, an old widower.
Enjoys life,used to drinking.
Knows people have many faces.
Has an affair with Mrs. John Shorrock
Destroys his will and gets married again, leaving nothing for his daughters.

AMELIA SLATER/MRS. SLATER

Abel's daughter.
Looks after her father only for his possessions.
Is more interested in what mourning dress she should wear to out-stage her sister than having genuine feelings for her father.
Detests her sister and doesn't want her to gain anything for their father's will.
Steals her father's belongings so that her sister can't have them after his supposed death.

HENRY SLATER

Henry Slater, the husband of Amelia.
He is a stooping, heavy man with a drooping moustache.
He is not mean like his wife but he has no strength to contradict what his wife says.
When Amelia asks him to put on the slipper of grandfather, he is reluctant to do it.
He is a selfish and cunning, but not to the extent his wife is.

VICTORIA SLATER

Ten-year-old daughter of the Slaters.
Different from her parents and aunt.
Ignorant to the intentions of her mother.

Shows a streak of goodness despite being young.
Is fond of her grandfather

BEN JORDAN

Ben Jordan is the husband of Elizabeth.
He is a jolly little man accustomed to be humorous.
He has bright chirpy little voice. Chirpily he remarks, 'We have all got to die sometime or other'.
Even on a grave occasion, He humorously remark about the grandfather, " If there was one thing he couldn't bear, it was water."
Internally he is very timid.
More money minded than Henry-throughout the play what keeps him worried is to find the receipt of the premium that the grandfather had paid at the insurance office.

ELIZABETH JORDAN

She is Ben's wife, Amelia's sister and Abel's daughter.
Equally insensitive, impolite and money minded like her sister.
She is real hypocrite.
She has a habit to drive a hard bargain over whatever she likes
Has a habit of grabbing all good things in the world-eyed on her father's valuable gold watch.
She does not leave any chance to disgrace her sister to get his father's property.

EXTRACT BASED QUESTIONS

1. I am amazed at you, Victoria; I really am. How you can gallivanting about in the street when your grandfather is lying dead and cold upstairs, I don't know. Be off now, and change your dress before your Aunt Elizabeth and your uncle Ben come. It would never do for them to find you in colours.
- a) Who is the speaker of these lines?
 - b) Why does the speaker ask Victoria to change her dress?
 - c) What does the word 'amazed' mean?

Ans. a) The speaker is Mrs. Slater.
b) The speaker asks Victoria to change her dress because Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Ben would be upset to see her in coloured dress as her grandfather is lying dead upstairs.
c) Surprised.

2. 'Elizabeth's that sharp she'll see I'm after it, and she'll drive a hard bargain over it. Eh, what it is to have a low money grubbing spirit!'

- a) Who is the speaker of these lines?
- b) Who will drive a hard bargain and why?
- c) Who has a low money grubbing spirit?

Ans. a) Mrs. Slater is the speaker here.
b) Aunt Elizabeth will bargain hard over things which her sister is trying to get.
c) Elizabeth has low money grubbing spirit

3. 'No, for myself it's such a relief to get into the black. And now perhaps you'll tell us all about it. What did the doctor say?'

a) What is a great relief for the speaker?

b) What does the speaker mean by telling "us all about it"?

Ans. a) To get into the black dress for mourning is a great relief for the speaker.

b) It means that they want to know how grandfather died.

c) Mrs. Jordan is the speaker of these lines.

4. 'Well he must have gone round to the 'Ring-O-Bells' afterwards, for he came in as merry as a sand-boy. I say, 'We are only waiting for Henry to start dinner'. 'Dinner', he says 'I don't want no dinner. Am going to bed!'

a) Who must have gone to the Ring-O-Bells'?

b) What is the Ring-O-Bells'?

c) What does the word 'Sand-boy' mean?

Ans. a) Abel Merryweather must have gone to the Ring-O-Bells.

b) It is a restaurant owned by Mrs. Shorrock.

c) Happy and jolly.

5. 'Amelia and Henry. They have stolen your clock and bureau. (Working herself up.) They sneaked into your room like a thief in night and stole them after you were dead.'

a) Who is Amelia?

b) How did they steal the clock and the bureau?

c) Give the meaning of the word 'sneak'?

Ans. a) She is Mrs. Slater.

b) They entered like thieves into grandfather's room after he was dead and stole the clock and the bureau.

c) Without being seen or heard.

ADDITIONAL EXTRACT BASED QUESTIONS

1. 'I don't want to be hard on anyone. I will tell you what I am going to do. Since your mother died, I've lived part of the time with you, 'Melia', and part with you, Lizzie. Well, I shall make a new will, leaving all my bits of things to whomever I'm living you with when I die. How does that strike you?'

a) How had the speaker been living since their mother died?

b) Who is the speaker?

c) What is the meaning of the word 'will'?

2. 'To Mrs. John Shorrocks who keeps the Ring-O-Bells. We've had it fixed up a good while now, but I was keeping it for a pleasant surprise. (He rises). I felt I was a bit of burden to you, so I found someone who'd think it a pleasure to look after me. We shall be very glad to see you at the ceremony.'

a) Who is the owner of Ring-O-Bells?

b) What have they 'fixed up a good while now'?

c) Give the meaning of the word 'ceremony'?

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS (30-40 WORDS EACH)

1. Why does Mrs. Slater scold Victoria?

Ans. Elizabeth and Ben have been informed of grandfather's death by Amelia and will be there soon. Victoria is gallivanting about in the street. Mrs. Slater wants Victoria to go

away and change her dress before her Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Ben arrive as they would not like her to see in colourful dress on the day of mourning.

2. Why does Mrs. Slater decide to shift the bureau from grandfather's room before the arrival of the Jordans? How does Henry react to the suggestion?

Ans. Mrs. Slater decides to shift the bureau from grandfather's room because she knows that Elizabeth is a hard bargainer. She must have the bureau before Elizabeth arrives. Moreover, she 'always wanted to have it after he died.' Henry asks her that she must arrange with Elizabeth when they are dividing the articles of grandfather.

3. Why does grandfather think of destroying the old will and making another will? What does he intend to do?

Ans. When Henry asks grandpa if he made a will Abel replies that it was locked up in the bureau. He is thinking of destroying it and making another. He doesn't want to be hard on any one. He will leave all his belongings to whomever he is living with when he dies. He will not live alternatively with one of his daughters as he has been doing since his wife died.

4. What three things grandfather is going to do on next Monday?

Ans. Abel Merryweather declares what he is going to do on next Monday. First of all he will go to his lawyer and alter his will. Then he will go to insurance office and pay his premium. In the end he will go to St. Phillip's Church to get married. He is going to marry Mrs. John Shamrocks who keeps the Ring-O-Bells.

5. What do the Slaters and Jordans talk about the old man's insurance?

Ans. Mrs Slater informs the Jordans that grandfather went to pay his insurance after the breakfast. Ben supports his act as a 'good thing'. Mrs. Jordan considers her father "too honourable to have gone" without paying the premium. But later on they doubt that "he's not paid it. Ben calls him "the drunken old beggar". Mrs. Slater calls it "nothing sort of swindling."

ADDITIONAL SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Why does Victoria come down shouting "Mother! Mother!"?
2. How do his daughters and their husbands react after seeing Abel alive?
3. Who is Victoria? What is her role in the play?
4. How do Amelia and Elizabeth compete with each other to keep grandfather with them after they come to know of the terms of the new will?
- 5.4. Why didn't the Slaters call the doctor? What three things grandfather is going to do on next Monday?

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS/VALUE BASED QUESTIONS (80-100 WORDS EACH)

1. Give a character sketch of Mrs. Slater comparing her with her sister Elizabeth.

VALUE POINTS:

1. Both the sisters-many traits common-insensitive, inhuman-greedy and money minded. Amelia is vigorous, plump red-faced and self-centered woman--Elizabeth is a

stout -- complacent woman--. Both understand each other very well-- Amelia grabs grandpa's new pair of slippers-- bureau and clock before Elizabeth arrives -- she knows Elizabeth is very sharp -- will drive a hard bargain. Elizabeth -- insensitive-- prefers to have tea first than going upstairs to see her father-- accuses grandfather of not paying the insurance premium. -- considers him a burden-- leaves no chance of humiliating Slaters-- exposes Amelia and Henry-- a real hypocrite.

2. Write the theme of the play 'The Dear Departed'.

VALUE POINTS

Social drama-depicts the social message-advocates of giving due respect and love to old/elderly people - suffer loneliness and emptiness in their lives. The playwright aptly satirizes -the degradation of moral values in families - people give more importance to money and materialism --destroying the old culture of family ties-- running after money-- insensitivity defeating family bonds-disregarding decency and modesty to compete in this world--inhuman attitude--leaving their duties and responsibilities towards old people-humiliating humanity for the sake of money.

3 .Elderly/old people need to be treated with great care and love. How can we take care of elderly people?

VALUE POINTS:

1. Elderly people --must be treated with great care and love-materialistic people-no thought for modesty, decency and filial obligations-desire to move with time makes insensitive-forgetting our responsibility towards old people-think them burden--old people feel neglected and dull without a smile on their faces-suffer from loneliness- we need to take proper care--understand their needs--we should try to be a good caretaker--provide them better food and medicine --give emotional support and love.

ADDITIONAL LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS/VALUE BASED QUESTIONS

1. Write a character sketch of Henry comparing with Ben Jordan.
2. The play The Dear Departed shows inhuman attitude of Amelia and Elizabeth towards their father. Explain.
3. Mr. Abel Merryweather decides to change the will and get married with Mrs. Shorrock at the end of the play. Do you think his act is justified?
4. Your parents misbehave with your grandparents and never look after them properly.

How you are going to change the behavior of your parents?