

THE BOOR

Anton Chekhov

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

HELENA IVANOVNA POPOV, a young widow, mistress of a country estate

GRIGORI STEPANOVITCH SMIRNOV, proprietor of a country estate

LUKA, servant of MRS. POPOV

A gardener. A Coachman. Several workmen

TIME: *The present.*

SCENE: *A well-furnished reception-room in MRS. POPOV'S home. MRS. POPOV is discovered in deep mourning, sitting upon a sofa, gazing steadfastly at a photograph. LUKA is also present.*

LUKA: It isn't right, ma'am. You're wearing yourself out! The maid and the cook have gone looking for berries; everything that breathes is enjoying life; even the cat knows how to be happy — slips about the courtyard and catches birds — but you hide yourself here in the house as though you were in a cloister. Yes, truly, by actual reckoning you haven't left this house for a whole year.

MRS. POPOV: And I shall never leave it — why should I? My life is over. He lies in his grave, and I have buried myself within these four walls. We are both dead.

LUKA: There you are again! It's too awful to listen to, so it is! Nikolai Michailovitch is dead; it was the will of the Lord, and the Lord has given him eternal peace. You have grieved over it and that ought to be enough. Now it's time to stop. One can't weep and wear mourning forever! My wife died a few years ago. I grieved for her. I wept a whole month — and then it was over. Must one be forever singing lamentations? That would be more than your husband was worth! *[He sighs.]* You have forgotten all your neighbors. You don't go out and you receive no one. We live — you'll pardon me — like the spiders, and the good light of day we never see. All the livery is eaten by mice — as though there weren't any more nice people in the world! But the whole neighborhood is full of gentlefolk. The regiment is stationed in Riblov — officers — simply beautiful! One can't see enough of them! Every Friday a ball, and military music every day. Oh, my dear, dear ma'am, young and pretty as you are, if you'd only let your spirits live —! Beauty can't last forever. When ten short years are over, you'll be glad enough to go out a bit and meet the officers — and then it'll be too late.

MRS. POPOV: *[Resolutely.]* Please don't speak of these things again. You know very well that since the death of Nikolai Michailovitch my life is absolutely nothing to me. You think I live, but it only seems so. Do you understand? Oh, that his departed soul may see how I love him! I know, it's no secret to you; he was often unjust to me, cruel, and — he wasn't faithful, but I shall be faithful to the grave and prove to him how I can love. There, in the Beyond, he'll find me the same as I was until his death.

LUKA: What is the use of all these words, when you'd so much rather go walking in the garden or order Toby or Welikan harnessed to the trap, and visit the neighbors?

MRS. POPOV: *[Weeping.]* Oh!

LUKA: Madam, dear madam, what is it? In Heaven's name!

MRS. POPOV: He loved Toby so! He always drove him to the Kortschagins or the Vlassovs. What a wonderful horseman he was! How fine he looked when he pulled at the reigns with all his might! Toby, Toby — give him an extra measure of oats to-day!

LUKA: Yes, ma'am.

[A bell rings loudly.]

MRS. POPOV: *[Shudders.]* What's that? I am at home to no one.

LUKA: Yes, ma'am.

[He goes out, centre.]

MRS. POPOV: [Gazing at the photograph.] You shall see, Nikolai, how I can love and forgive! My love will die only with me — when my poor heart stops beating. [She smiles through her tears.] And aren't you ashamed? I have been a good, true wife; I have imprisoned myself and I shall remain true until death, and you — you — you're not ashamed of yourself, my dear monster! You quarrelled with me, left me alone for weeks —

[LUKA enters in great excitement.]

LUKA: Oh, ma'am, someone is asking for you, insists on seeing you —

MRS. POPOV: You told him that since my husband's death I receive no one?

LUKA: I said so, but he won't listen; he says it is a pressing matter.

MRS. POPOV: I receive no one!

LUKA: I told him that, but he's a wild man; he swore and pushed himself into the room; he's in the dining-room now.

MRS. POPOV: [Excitedly.] Good. Show him in. The impudent —!

[LUKA goes out, centre.]

MRS. POPOV: What a bore people are! What can they want with me? Why do they disturb my peace? [She sighs.] Yes, it is clear I must enter a convent. [Meditatively.] Yes, a convent.

[SMIRNOV enters, followed by LUKA.]

SMIRNOV: [To LUKA.] Fool, you make too much noise! You're an ass! [Discovering MRS. POPOV—politely.] Madam, I have the honor to introduce myself: Lieutenant in the Artillery, retired, country gentleman, Grigori Stapanovitch Smirnov! I'm compelled to bother you about an exceedingly important matter.

MRS. POPOV: [Without offering her hand.] What is it you wish?

SMIRNOV: Your deceased husband, with whom I had the honor to be acquainted, left me two notes amounting to about twelve hundred roubles. Inasmuch as I have to pay the interest to-morrow on a loan from the Agrarian Bank, I should like to request, madam, that you pay me the money to-day.

MRS. POPOV: Twelve-hundred — and for what was my husband indebted to you?

SMIRNOV: He bought oats from me.

MRS. POPOV: [With a sigh, to LUKA.] Don't forget to give Toby an extra measure of oats.

[LUKA goes out.]

MRS. POPOV: [To SMIRNOV.] If Nikolai Michailovitch is indebted to you, I shall, of course, pay you, but I am sorry, I haven't the money to-day. To-morrow my manager will return from the city and I shall notify him to pay you what is due you, but until then I cannot satisfy your request. Furthermore, today is just seven months since the death of my husband, and I am not in the mood to discuss money matters.

SMIRNOV: And I am in the mood to fly up the chimney with my feet in the air if I can't lay hands on that interest to-morrow. They'll seize my estate!

MRS. POPOV: Day after to-morrow you will receive the money.

SMIRNOV: I don't need the money day after to-morrow; I need it to-day.

MRS. POPOV: I'm sorry I can't pay you today.

SMIRNOV: And I can't wait until day after to-morrow.

MRS. POPOV: But what can I do if I haven't it?

SMIRNOV: So you can't pay?

MRS. POPOV: I cannot.

SMIRNOV: Hm! Is that your last word?

MRS. POPOV: My last.

SMIRNOV: Absolutely?

MRS. POPOV: Absolutely.

SMIRNOV: Thank you. [*He shrugs his shoulders.*] And they expect me to stand for all that. The toll-gatherer just now met me in the road and asked why I was always worrying. Why, in Heaven's name, shouldn't I worry? I need money, I feel the knife at my throat. Yesterday morning I left my house in the early dawn and called on all my debtors. If even one of them had paid his debt! I worked the skin off my fingers! The devil knows in what sort of Jew-inn I slept; in a room with a barrel of brandy! And now at last I come here, seventy versts from home, hope for a little money, and all you give me is moods! Why shouldn't I worry?

MRS. POPOV: I thought I made it plain to you that my manager will return from town, and then you will get your money.

SMIRNOV: I did not come to see the manager; I came to see you. What the devil—pardon the language—do I care for your manager?

MRS. POPOV: Really, sir, I am not used to such language or such manners. I shan't listen to you any further.

[*She goes out, left.*]

SMIRNOV: What can one say to that? Moods! Seven months since her husband died! Do I have to pay the interest or not? I repeat the question, have I to pay the interest or not? The husband is dead and all that; the manager is—the devil with him!—travelling somewhere. Now, tell me, what am I to do? Shall I run away from my creditors in a balloon? Or knock my head against a stone wall? If I call on Grushev he chooses to be “not at home,” Iroschevitch has simply hidden himself, I have quarrelled with Kurzin and came near throwing him out of the window, Masutov is ill and this woman has—moods! Not one of them will pay up! And all because I've spoiled them, because I'm an old whiner, dish-rag! I'm too tender-hearted with them. But wait! I allow nobody to play tricks with me, the devil with 'em all! I'll stay here and not budge until she pays! Brr! How angry I am, how terribly angry I am! Every tendon is trembling with anger, and I can hardly breathe! I'm even growing ill! [*He calls out.*] Servant!

[*LUKA enters.*]

LUKA: What is it you wish?

SMIRNOV: Bring me Kvass or water! [*LUKA goes out.*] Well, what can we do? She hasn't it on hand? What sort of logic is that? A fellow stands with the knife at his throat, he needs money, he is on the point of hanging himself, and she won't pay because she isn't in the mood to discuss money matters. Women's logic! That's why I never liked to talk to women, and why I dislike doing it now. I would rather sit on a powder barrel than talk with a woman. Brr!—I'm getting cold as ice; this affair has made me so angry. I need only to see such a romantic creature from a distance to get so angry that I have cramps in my calves! It's enough to make one yell for help!

[*Enter LUKA.*]

LUKA: [*Hands him water.*] Madam is ill and is not receiving.

SMIRNOV: March! [*LUKA goes out.*] Ill and isn't receiving! All right, it isn't necessary. I won't receive, either! I'll sit here and stay until you bring that money. If you're ill a week, I'll sit here a week. If you're ill a year, I'll sit here a year. As Heaven is my witness, I'll get the money. You don't disturb me with your mourning—or with your dimples. We know these dimples! [*He calls out the window.*] Simon, unharness! We aren't going to leave right away. I am going to stay here. Tell them in the stable to give the horses some oats. The left horse has twisted the bridle again. [*Imitating him.*] Stop! I'll show you how. Stop! [*Leaves window.*] It's awful. Unbearable heat, no money, didn't sleep last night and now—mourning-dresses with moods. My headaches; perhaps I ought to have a drink. Ye-s, I must have a drink. [*Calling.*] Servant!

LUKA: What do you wish?

SMIRNOV: Something to drink! [*LUKA goes out. SMIRNOV sits down and looks at his clothes.*] Ugh, a fine figure! No use denying that. Dust, dirty boots, unwashed, uncombed, straw on my vest — the lady probably took me for a highwayman. [*He yawns.*] It was a little impolite to come into a reception-room with such clothes. Oh, well, no harm done. I'm not here as a guest. I'm a creditor. And there is no special costume for creditors.

LUKA: [*Entering with glass.*] You take great liberty, sir.

SMIRNOV: [*Angrily.*] What?

LUKA: I—I—I just — —

SMIRNOV: Whom are you talking to? Keep quiet.

LUKA: [*Angrily.*] Nice mess! This fellow won't leave!

[*He goes out.*]

SMIRNOV: Lord, how angry I am! Angry enough to throw mud at the whole world! I even feel ill! Servant!

[*MRS. POPOV comes in with downcast eyes.*]

MRS. POPOV: Sir, in my solitude I have become unaccustomed to the human voice and I cannot stand the sound of loud talking. I beg you, please to cease disturbing my rest.

SMIRNOV: Pay me my money and I'll leave.

MRS. POPOV: I told you once, plainly, in your native tongue, that I haven't the money at hand; wait until day after to-morrow.

SMIRNOV: And I also had the honor of informing you in your native tongue that I need the money, not day after to-morrow, but to-day. If you don't pay me to-day I shall have to hang myself to-morrow.

MRS. POPOV: But what can I do if I haven't the money?

SMIRNOV: So you are not going to pay immediately? You're not?

MRS. POPOV: I cannot.

SMIRNOV: Then I'll sit here until I get the money. [*He sits down.*] You will pay day after to-morrow? Excellent! Here I stay until day after to-morrow. [*Jumps up.*] I ask you, do I have to pay that interest to-morrow or not? Or do you think I'm joking?

MRS. POPOV: Sir, I beg of you, don't scream! This is not a stable.

SMIRNOV: I'm not talking about stables, I'm asking you whether I have to pay that interest to-morrow or not?

MRS. POPOV: You have no idea how to treat a lady.

SMIRNOV: Oh, yes, I have.

MRS. POPOV: No, you have not. You are an ill-bred, vulgar person! Respectable people don't speak so to ladies.

SMIRNOV: How remarkable! How do you want one to speak to you? In French, perhaps! Madame, je vous prie! Pardon me for having disturbed you. What beautiful weather we are having to-day! And how this mourning becomes you!

[*He makes a low bow with mock ceremony.*]

MRS. POPOV: Not at all funny! I think it vulgar!

SMIRNOV: [*Imitating her.*] Not at all funny — vulgar! I don't understand how to behave in the company of ladies. Madam, in the course of my life I have seen more women than you have sparrows. Three times have I fought duels for women, twelve I jilted and nine jilted me. There was a time when I

played the fool, used honeyed language, bowed and scraped. I loved, suffered, sighed to the moon, melted in love's torments. I loved passionately, I loved to madness, loved in every key, chattered like a magpie on emancipation, sacrificed half my fortune in the tender passion, until now the devil knows I've had enough of it. Your obedient servant will let you lead him around by the nose no more. Enough! Black eyes, passionate eyes, coral lips, dimples in cheeks, moonlight whispers, soft, modest sights—for all that, madam, I wouldn't pay a kopeck! I am not speaking of present company, but of women in general; from the tiniest to the greatest, they are conceited, hypocritical, chattering, odious, deceitful from top to toe; vain, petty, cruel with a maddening logic and [*he strikes his forehead*] in this respect, please excuse my frankness, but one sparrow is worth ten of the aforementioned petticoat-philosophers. When one sees one of the romantic creatures before him he imagines he is looking at some holy being, so wonderful that its one breath could dissolve him in a sea of a thousand charms and delights; but if one looks into the soul—it's nothing but a common crocodile. [*He seizes the arm-chair and breaks it in two.*] But the worst of all is that this crocodile imagines it is a masterpiece of creation, and that it has a monopoly on all the tender passions. May the devil hang me upside down if there is anything to love about a woman! When she is in love, all she knows is how to complain and shed tears. If the man suffers and makes sacrifices she swings her train about and tries to lead him by the nose. You have the misfortune to be a woman, and naturally you know woman's nature; tell me on your honor, have you ever in your life seen a woman who was really true and faithful? Never! Only the old and the deformed are true and faithful. It's easier to find a cat with horns or a white woodcock, than a faithful woman.

MRS. POPOV: But allow me to ask, who is true and faithful in love? The man, perhaps?

SMIRNOV: Yes, indeed! The man!

MRS. POPOV: The man! [*She laughs sarcastically.*] The man true and faithful in love! Well, that is something *new!* [*Bitterly.*] How can you make such a statement? Men true and faithful! So long as we have gone thus far, I may as well say that of all the men I have known, my husband was the best; I loved him passionately with all my soul, as only a young, sensible woman may love; I gave him my youth, my happiness, my fortune, my life. I worshipped him like a heathen. And what happened? This best of men betrayed me in every possible way. After his death I found his desk filled with love-letters. While he was alive he left me alone for months—it is horrible even to think about it—he made love to other women in my very presence, he wasted my money and made fun of my feelings—and in spite of everything I trusted him and was true to him. And more than that: he is dead and I am still true to him. I have buried myself within these four walls and I shall wear this mourning to my grave.

SMIRNOV: [*Laughing disrespectfully.*] Mourning! What on earth do you take me for? As if I didn't know why you wore this black domino and why you buried yourself within these four walls. Such a secret! So romantic! Some knight will pass the castle, gaze up at the windows, and think to himself: "Here dwells the mysterious Tamara who, for love of her husband, has buried herself within four walls." Oh, I understand the art!

MRS. POPOV: [*Springing up.*] What? What do you mean by saying such things to me?

SMIRNOV: You have buried yourself alive, but meanwhile you have not forgotten to powder your nose!

MRS. POPOV: How dare you speak so?

SMIRNOV: Don't scream at me, please; I'm not the manager. Allow me to call things by their right names. I am not a woman, and I am accustomed to speak out what I think. So please don't scream.

MRS. POPOV: I'm not screaming. It is you who are screaming. Please leave me, I beg you.

SMIRNOV: Pay me my money, and I'll leave.

MRS. POPOV: I won't give you the money.

SMIRNOV: You won't? You won't give me my money?

MRS. POPOV: I don't care what you do. You won't get a kopeck! Leave me!

SMIRNOV: As I haven't had the pleasure of being either your husband or your fiancé, please don't make a scene. *[He sits down.]* I can't stand it.

MRS. POPOV: *[Breathing hard.]* You are going to sit down?

SMIRNOV: I already have.

MRS. POPOV: Kindly leave the house!

SMIRNOV: Give me the money.

MRS. POPOV: I don't care to speak with impudent men. Leave! *[Pause.]* You aren't going?

SMIRNOV: No.

MRS. POPOV: No?

SMIRNOV: No.

MRS. POPOV: Very well.

[She rings the bell. Enter LUKA.]

MRS. POPOV: Luka, show the gentleman out.

LUKA: *[Going to SMIRNOV.]* Sir, why don't you leave when you are ordered? What do you want?

SMIRNOV: *[Jumping up.]* Whom do you think you are talking to? I'll grind you to powder.

LUKA: *[Puts his hand to his heart.]* Good Lord! *[He drops into a chair.]* Oh, I'm ill; I can't breathe!

MRS. POPOV: Where is Dascha? *[Calling.]* Dascha! Pelageja! Dascha!

[She rings.]

LUKA: They're all gone! I'm ill! Water!

MRS. POPOV: *[To SMIRNOV.]* Leave! Get out!

SMIRNOV: Kindly be a little more polite!

MRS. POPOV: *[Striking her fists and stamping her feet.]* You are vulgar! You're a boor! A monster!

SMIRNOV: What did you say?

MRS. POPOV: I said you were a boor, a monster!

SMIRNOV: *[Steps toward her quickly.]* Permit me to ask what right you have to insult me?

MRS. POPOV: What of it? Do you think I am afraid of you?

SMIRNOV: And you think that because you are a romantic creature you can insult me without being punished? I challenge you!

LUKA: Merciful Heaven! Water!

SMIRNOV: We'll have a duel!

MRS. POPOV: Do you think because you have big fists and a steer's neck I am afraid of you?

SMIRNOV: I allow no one to insult me, and I make no exception because you are a woman, one of the "weaker sex!"

MRS. POPOV: *[Trying to cry him down.]* Boor, boor, boor!

SMIRNOV: It is high time to do away with the old superstition that it is only the man who is forced to give satisfaction. If there is equity at all let there be equity in all things. There's a limit!

MRS. POPOV: You wish to fight a duel? Very well.

SMIRNOV: Immediately.

MRS. POPOV: Immediately. My husband had pistols. I'll bring them. *[She hurries away, then turns.]* Oh, what a pleasure it will be to put a bullet in your impudent head. The devil take you!

[She goes out.]

SMIRNOV: I'll shoot her down! I'm no fledgling, no sentimental young puppy. For me there is no weaker sex!

LUKA: Oh, sir. *[Falls to his knees.]* Have mercy on me, an old man, and go away. You have frightened me to death already, and now you want to fight a duel.

SMIRNOV: *[Paying no attention.]* A duel. That's equity, emancipation. That way the sexes are made equal. I'll shoot her down as a matter of principle. What can a person say to such a woman? *[Imitating her.]* "The devil take you. I'll put a bullet in your impudent head." What can one say to that? She was angry, her eyes blazed, she accepted the challenge. On my honor, it's the first time in my life that I ever saw such a woman.

LUKA: Oh, sir. Go away. Go away!

SMIRNOV: That is a woman. I can understand her. A real woman. No shilly-shallying, but fire, powder, and noise! It would be a pity to shoot a woman like that.

LUKA: *[Weeping.]* Oh, sir, go away.

[Enter MRS. POPOV.]

MRS. POPOV: Here are the pistols. But before we have our duel, please show me how to shoot. I have never had a pistol in my hand before!

LUKA: God be merciful and have pity upon us! I'll go and get the gardener and the coachman. Why has this horror come to us?

[He goes out.]

SMIRNOV: *[Looking at the pistols.]* You see, there are different kinds. There are special duelling pistols, with cap and ball. But these are revolvers, Smith & Wesson, with ejectors; fine pistols! A pair like that cost at least ninety roubles. This is the way to hold a revolver. *[Aside.]* Those eyes, those eyes! A real woman!

MRS. POPOV: Like this?

SMIRNOV: Yes, that way. Then you pull the hammer back — so — then you aim — put your head back a little. Just stretch your arm out, please. So — then press your finger on the thing like that, and that is all. The chief thing is this: don't get excited, don't hurry your aim, and take care that your hand doesn't tremble.

MRS. POPOV: It isn't well to shoot inside; let's go into the garden.

SMIRNOV: Yes. I'll tell you now, I am going to shoot into the air.

MRS. POPOV: That is too much! Why?

SMIRNOV: Because — because. That's my business.

MRS. POPOV: You are afraid. Yes. A-h-h-h. No, no, my dear sir, no flinching! Please follow me. I won't rest until I've made a hole in that head I hate so much. Are you afraid?

SMIRNOV: Yes, I'm afraid.

MRS. POPOV: You are lying. Why won't you fight?

SMIRNOV: Because — because — I — like you.

MRS. POPOV: *[With an angry laugh.]* You like me! He dares to say he likes me! *[She points to the door.]* Go.

SMIRNOV: *[Laying the revolver silently on the table, takes his hat and starts. At the door he stops a moment, gazing at her silently, then he approaches her, hesitating.]* Listen! Are you still angry? I was mad as the devil, but please understand me — how can I express myself? The thing is like this — such things are — *[He raises his voice.]* Now, is it my fault that you owe me money? *[Grasps the back of the chair, which breaks.]* The devil know what breakable furniture you have! I like you! Do you understand? I — I'm almost in love!

MRS. POPOV: Leave! I hate you.

SMIRNOV: Lord! What a woman! I never in my life met one like her. I'm lost, ruined! I've been caught like a mouse in a trap.

MRS. POPOV: Go, or I'll shoot.

SMIRNOV: Shoot! You have no idea what happiness it would be to die in sight of those beautiful eyes, to die from the revolver in this little velvet hand! I'm mad! Consider it and decide immediately, for if I go now, we shall never see each other again. Decide—speak—I am a noble, a respectable man, have an income of ten thousand, can shoot a coin thrown into the air. I own some fine horses. Will you be my wife?

MRS. POPOV: [*Swings the revolver angrily.*] I'll shoot!

SMIRNOV: My mind is not clear—I can't understand. Servant—water! I have fallen in love like any young man. [*He takes her hand and she cries with pain.*] I love you! [*He kneels.*] I love you as I have never loved before. Twelve women I jilted, nine jilted me, but not one of them all have I loved as I love you. I am conquered, lost; I lie at your feet like a fool and beg for your hand. Shame and disgrace! For five years I haven't been in love; I thanked the Lord for it, and now I am caught, like a carriage tongue in another carriage. I beg for your hand! Yes or no? Will you?—Good!

[*He gets up and goes quickly to the door.*]

MRS. POPOV: Wait a minute!

SMIRNOV: [*Stopping.*] Well?

MRS. POPOV: Nothing. You may go. But—wait a moment. No, go on, go on. I hate you. Or—no; don't go. Oh, if you knew how angry I was, how angry! [*She throws the revolver on to the chair.*] My finger is swollen from this thing. [*She angrily tears her handkerchief.*] What are you standing there for? Get out!

SMIRNOV: Farewell!

MRS. POPOV: Yes, go. [*Cries out.*] Why are you going? Wait—no, go!! Oh, how angry I am! Don't come too near, don't come too near—er—come—no nearer.

SMIRNOV: [*Approaching her.*] How angry I am with myself! Fall in love like a schoolboy, throw myself on my knees. I've got a chill! [*Strongly.*] I love you. This is fine—all I needed was to fall in love. Tomorrow I have to pay my interest, the hay harvest has begun, and then you appear! [*He takes her in his arms.*] I can never forgive myself.

MRS. POPOV: Go away! Take your hands off me! I hate you—you—this is—

[*A long kiss. Enter LUKA with an axe, the gardener with a rake, the coachman with a pitchfork, and workmen with poles.*]

LUKA: [*Staring at the pair.*] Merciful heavens!

[*A long pause.*]

MRS. POPOV: [*Dropping her eyes.*] Tell them in the stable that Toby isn't to have any oats.

CURTAIN

The Boor

The playwright

Anton Chekov (1860 – 1904) is famous, even a hundred years after his death, for his impressive short stories and one-act plays. *The Cherry Orchard*, *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya* and *The Seagull* are plays that have been studied and performed innumerable times. Many of Chekov's plays were produced by the Moscow Art Theatre. They have been translated into many languages. They continue to have a wide appeal because there is sympathy as well as a realistic portrayal of the troubles in life in his plays. There is also an element of humour, which often turns into rollicking comedy.

Chekov is a representative of pre-revolutionary Russia, well aware of its glaring disparities in the lives of the rich and the poor. In his plays, he often ridicules the sentiments and customs of the bored rich and sympathises with the lot of the poor. His training as a doctor probably gave him an insight into the harsh realities of life. He helped to put down an epidemic of cholera but succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of forty-four.

The play

The Boor, like *The Proposal*, is a comedy. It progresses by a series of contrasts. When the play opens, we find Luka the servant trying to persuade Mrs. Popov to give up mourning for her husband. She is determined to bury herself within the four walls of her house, to show her dead husband how devoted she is to his memory, even though he had tormented her and had been unfaithful to her. Smirnov marches into her house unceremoniously, demanding the money that her husband had borrowed from him. She tells him that she does not have the money at the moment but that she will see that it is returned to him in a day or two. He refuses to leave without the money and decides to stay as long as it takes her to find the amount. He rants and rages at the situation of having to go from debtor to debtor to find his money and also at the fickle nature of women, who have given him a great deal of trouble. Mrs. Popov argues that it is the man and not the woman who is fickle and their argument goes so far as to call for a duel. Mrs. Popov bravely brings her husband's pistols, although she does not know how to use them. While trying to instruct her on how to shoot, Smirnov falls hopelessly in love with her and proposes to her. Mrs. Popov is at first scandalised but soon reciprocates his ardour and at the fall of the curtain, when her servants rush in armed with sticks and staves, they are found in an embrace.

The opening of the play resembles the first scene of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, with Mrs. Popov being sentimental about love. Towards the end it is more like *The Taming of the Shrew*, for Mrs. Popov has outgrown her sentiments and the rough soldier Smirnov has been tamed into expressing his love for her.

After Mrs. Popov leaves the room, Smirnov explodes into a violent soliloquy, listing all his troubles. The language he uses and the circumstances he describes make the audience sympathetic to him, even though he is behaving like a boor. When Mrs. Popov returns, she requests him to stop shouting and leave her house. He refuses and they enter into an argument about who is faithful in love.

The argument soon takes a violent turn. Mrs. Popov calls him a boor and he challenges her to a duel for insulting him, saying that he does not consider women the weaker sex. While in the process of teaching her to fire the pistols, Smirnov falls in love with her and is appalled at himself for falling in love like a young man. This is the climax of the play. Mrs. Popov too is shocked at her response; she asks him to go but also asks him to stay. Their confusion and dismay make the scene hilarious. The rough and boorish creditor and the delicate, sentimental young widow find themselves falling unwillingly in love.

The last line, "Tobby isn't to have any oats" sums up the transformation in Mrs. Popov. It also marks the denouement or resolution of the conflict. She is no longer inclined to feed extra oats to Tobby just because her dead husband was fond of the horse and looked very handsome when he rode, as she had been saying at the beginning of the play. Now she is ready to forget him and give up mourning for him because she has fallen in love again.

Notes

wearing yourself out	: tiring yourself
cloister	: convent, building in which nuns live
lamentations	: expressions of sorrow
livery	: uniform of the servants, worn on formal occasions
Tobby, Welikan	: names of horses owned by Mrs. Popov
verst	: Russian measure of distance, equal to 3500 feet

Exercises

I. Answer the following questions

1. For how long has Mrs. Popov been in mourning?
2. Why is Mrs. Popov mourning?
3. What kind of a person was her husband?
4. Who insists on seeing Mrs. Popov?
5. What does the visitor want?
6. Why is Mrs. Popov unable to oblige her unwelcome guest?
7. What does the guest do when he sees that he cannot get what he wants?
8. Why is the guest angry?
9. What is the argument that develops between the two of them?
10. What does the guest challenge Mrs. Popov to do?

11. Why does he give up his challenge?
12. How does Mrs. Popov react to the guest's declaration?

II. Complete the following sentences

1. Mrs. Popov is in mourning because ...
2. Luka wants Mrs. Popov to give up mourning as it is ...
3. Mrs. Popov wants to be faithful to ...
4. The guest who forces his way into Mrs. Popov's house is ...
5. Smirnov wants Mrs. Popov to ...
6. Mrs. Popov is unable to oblige Smirnov because ...
7. Smirnov thinks that women ...
8. Mrs. Popov believes that men ...
9. Smirnov challenges Mrs. Popov to a duel because ...
10. The play ends with ...

III. Explain with reference to the context

1. ... everything that breathes is enjoying life ...
2. Toby, Toby ... give him an extra measure of oats today!
3. And I am in the mood to fly up the chimney with my feet in the air ...
4. I would rather sit on a powder barrel than talk with a woman.
5. I am not a woman and I am accustomed to speak out what I think.
6. I'm lost, ruined! I've been caught like a mouse in a trap.

IV. Write a short paragraph on each of the following

1. The opening scene of the play
2. The climax of the play
3. The character of Mrs. Popov
4. The contrast between the two main characters in the play

V. Attempt a short essay on

The dramatic element in the play, "The Boor".

THE DEAR DEPARTED

— Stanley Houghton

Characters

Mrs. SLATER, Mrs. JORDAN-sisters

HENRY SLATER, BEN JORDAN- their husbands

VICTORIA SLATER-a girl of ten

ABEL MERRYWEATHER

(The scene is the sitting-room of a small house in a lowermiddle-class district of a provincial town.

On the spectator's left is the window, with the blinds down. A sofa is in front of it. On his right is a fireplace with an armchair by it. In the middle of the wall facing the spectator is the door into the passage. To the left of the door a cheap, shabby chest of drawers, to the right a sideboard. In the middle of the room is the table, with chairs round it. Ornaments and a cheap American clock are on the mantelpiece. In the hearth a kettle. By the sideboard a pair of gaudy new carpet slippers. The table is partly laid for tea, and the necessaries for the meal are on the sideboard, as also are copies of an evening paper and of Tit-Bits and Pearson's Weekly. Turning to the left through the door takes you to the front door, to the right, upstairs. In the passage a hat-stand is visible.

When the curtain rises Mrs. SLATER is seen laying the table. She is a vigorous, plump, red-faced, vulgar woman, prepared to do any amount of straight talking to get her own way. She is in black, but not in complete mourning. She listens a moment and then goes to the window, opens it and calls into the street.)

Mrs. SLATER [sharply]: Victoria! D'ye hear? Come in, will you?

[Mrs. SLATER closes the window and puts the blind straight and then returns to her work at the table. VICTORIA, a precocious girl of ten, dressed in colours, enters.]

Mrs. SLATER: I'm amazed at you, Victoria; I really am. How you can be gallivanting about in the street with your grandfather 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.

VICTORIA: What are they coming for? They haven't been here for ages.

Mrs. SLATER: They're coming to talk over poor grandpa's affairs. Your father sent them a telegram as soon as we found he was dead. [A noise is heard.] Good gracious, that's never them. [Mrs. SLATER hurries to the door and opens it.] No, thank goodness! it's only your father.

[HENRY SLATER, a stooping, heavy man with a drooping moustache, enters. He is wearing a black tail coat, grey trousers, a black tie and a bowler hat. He carries a little paper parcel.]

HENRY: Not come yet, eh?

Mrs. SLATER: You can see they haven't, can't you? Now, Victoria, be off upstairs and that quick. Put your white frock on with a black sash. [VICTORIA goes out.]

Mrs. SLATER [to HENRY]: I'm not satisfied, but it's the best we can do till our new black's ready, and Ben and Elizabeth will never have thought about mourning yet, so we'll outshine them there. [HENRY sits in the armchair by the fire.] Get your boots off, Henry, Elizabeth's that prying she notices the least speck of dirt.

HENRY: I'm wondering if they'll come at all. When you and Elizabeth quarrelled she said she'd never set foot in your house again.

Mrs. SLATER: She'll come fast enough after her share of what grandfather's left. You know how hard she can be when she likes. Where she gets it from, I can't tell.

[Mrs. SLATER unwraps the parcel HENRY has brought. It contains sliced tongue, which she puts on a dish on the table.]

HENRY: I suppose it's in the family.

Mrs. SLATER: What do you mean by that, Henry Slater?

HENRY: I was referring to your father, not to you. Where are my slippers?

Mrs. SLATER: In the kitchen; but you want a new pair, those old ones are nearly worn out. [*nearly breaking down*] You don't seem to realize what it's costing me to bear up like I am doing. My heart's fit to break when I see the little trifles that belonged to grandfather lying around, and think he'll never use them again. [*briskly*] Here! you'd better wear these slippers of grandfather's now. It's lucky he'd just got a new pair.

HENRY: They'll be very small for me, my dear.

Mrs. SLATER: They'll stretch, won't they? I'm not going to have them wasted. [*She has finished laying the table*] Henry, I've been thinking that bureau of grandfather's that's in his bedroom. You know I always wanted to have it after he died.

HENRY: You must arrange with Elizabeth when you're dividing things up.

Mrs. SLATER: 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!

HENRY: Perhaps she's got her eye on the bureau as well.

Mrs. SLATER: She's never been here since grandfather bought it. If it was only down here instead of in his room, she'd never guess it wasn't our own.

HENRY [*started*]: Amelia! [*He rises*]

Mrs. SLATER: Henry, why shouldn't we bring that bureau down here now. We could do it before they come.

HENRY [*stupefied*]: I wouldn't care to.

Mrs. SLATER: Don't look so daft. Why not?

HENRY: It doesn't seem delicate, somehow.

Mrs. SLATER: We could put that shabby old chest of drawers upstairs where the bureau is now. Elizabeth could have that and welcome. I've always wanted to get rid of it.

[*She points to the drawers*]

HENRY: Suppose they come when we're doing it.

Mrs. SLATER: I'll fasten the front door. Get your coat off, Henry; we'll change it.

[*Mrs. SLATER goes to fasten front door. HENRY takes his coat off. Mrs. SLATER reappears.*]

Mrs. SLATER: I'll run up and move the chairs out of the way.

[*VICTORIA appears, dressed according to her mother's instructions.*]

VICTORIA: Will you fasten my frock up the back, mother?

Mrs. SLATER: I'm busy: get your father to do it.

[*Mrs. SLATER hurries upstairs, and HENRY fastens the frock.*]

VICTORIA: What have you got your coat off for, father?

HENRY: Mother and me are going to bring grandfather's bureau down here.

VICTORIA [*after a moment's thought*]: Are we pinching it before Aunt Elizabeth comes?

HENRY [*Shocked*]: No, my child. Grandpa gave it to your mother before he died.

VICTORIA: This morning?

HENRY: Yes.

VICTORIA: Ah! He was drunk this morning.

HENRY: Hush: you mustn't ever say he was drunk now.

[*HENRY has fastened the frock, and Mrs. SLATER appears carrying a handsome clock under her arm.*]

Mrs. SLATER: I thought I'd fetch this down as well. [*She puts it on the mantelpiece.*] Our clock's worth nothing and this always appealed to me.

VICTORIA: That's grandpa's clock.

Mrs. SLATER: Chut! Be quiet! It's ours now. Come, Henry, lift your end. Victoria, don't breathe a word to your aunt about the clock and the bureau.

[*They carry the chest of drawers through the doorway.*]

VICTORIA [*to herself*]: I thought we'd pinched them.

[*After a short pause there is a sharp knock at the front door.*]

Mrs. SLATER [*from upstairs*]: Victoria, if that's your aunt and uncle you're not to open the door.

[*VICTORIA peeps through the window.*]

VICTORIA: Mother, it's them!

Mrs. SLATER: You're not to open the door till I come down. [*Knocking repeated.*] Let them knock away. [*There is a heavy bumping noise*] Mind the wall, Henry.

[*HENRY and Mr. SLATER, very hot and flushed, stagger in with a pretty old-fashioned bureau containing a locked desk. They put it where the chest of drawers was, and straighten the ornaments, etc. The knocking is repeated.*]

Mrs. SLATER: That was a near thing. Open the door, Victoria. Now, Henry, get your coat on. [*She helps him.*]

HENRY: Did we knock much plaster off the wall?

Mrs. SLATER: Never mind the plaster. Do I look all right? [*Straightening her hair at the glass.*] Just watch Elizabeth's face when she sees we're all in half-mourning. [*throwing him Tit-Bits*] Take this and sit down. Try and look as if we'd been waiting for them.

[*HENRY sits in the armchair and Mrs. SLATER left of table.*]

[*They read ostentatiously. VICTORIA ushers in BEN and Mrs. JORDAN. The latter is a stout, complacent woman with an impassive face and an irritating air of being always right. She is wearing a complete and deadly outfit of new mourning crowned by a great black hat with plumes. BEN is also in complete new mourning with black gloves and a band round his hat. He is rather a jolly little man, accustomed to be humorous, but at present trying to adopt himself to the regrettable occasion. He has a bright, chirpy little voice. Mrs. JORDAN sails into the room and solemnly goes straight to Mrs. SLATER and kisses her. The men shake hands. Mrs. JORDAN kisses HENRY. BEN kisses Mrs. SLATER. Not a word is spoken. Mrs. SLATER furtively inspects the new mourning.*]

Mrs. JORDAN: Well, Amelia, and so he's gone at last.

Mrs. SLATER: Yes, He's gone. He was seventy-two a fortnight last Sunday.

[*She sniffs back a tear. Mrs. JORDAN sits on the left of the table. Mrs. SLATER on the right. HENRY in the armchair. BEN on the sofa with VICTORIA near him.*]

BEN [*chirpily*]: Now, Amelia, you mustn't give way. We've all got to die some time or other. It might have been worse.

Mrs. SLATER: I don't see how.

BEN: It might have been one of us.

HENRY: It's taken you a long time to get here Elizabeth.

Mrs. JORDAN: Oh, I couldn't do it. I really couldn't do it.

Mrs. SLATER [*suspiciously*]: Couldn't do what?

Mrs. JORDAN: I couldn't start without getting the mourning.

[*glancing at her sister*]

Mrs. SLATER: We've ordered ours, you may be sure. [*Acidly*]

I never could fancy buying ready-made things.

Mrs. JORDAN: 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?

Mrs. SLATER: Oh, he's not been near yet.

Mrs. JORDAN: Not been near?

BEN [*in the same breath*] : Didn't you send for him at once?

Mrs. SLATER: Of course I did. Do you take me for a fool? I sent Henry at once for Dr. Pringle but he was out.

BEN: You should have gone for another. Eh, Eliza?

Mrs. JORDAN: Oh, yes. It's a fatal mistake.

Mrs. SLATER: Pringle attended him when he was alive and Pringle shall attend him when he's dead. That's professional etiquette.

BEN: Well, you know your own business best, but-

Mr. JORDAN: Yes-it's a fatal mistake.

Mrs. SLATER: Don't talk so silly, Elizabeth. What good could a doctor have done?

Mrs. JORDAN: Look at the many cases of persons being restored to life hours after they were thought to be 'gone'.

HENRY: That's when they've been drowned. Your father wasn't drowned, Elizabeth.

BEN: [*humorously*]: There wasn't much fear of that. If there was one thing he couldn't bear it was water.

[*He laughs, but no one else does*]

Mrs. JORDAN [*pained*]: Ben! [BEN is crushed at once]

Mrs. SLATER: [*piqued*] : I'm sure he washed regular enough.

Mrs. JORDAN: If he did take a drop too much at times, we'll not dwell on that, now.

Mrs. SLATER: Father had been 'merry' this morning. He went out soon after breakfast to pay his insurance.

BEN: My word, it's a good thing he did.

Mrs. JORDAN: He always was thoughtful in that way. He was too honourable to have 'gone' without paying his premium.

Mrs. SLATER: Well, he must have gone round to the 'Ring-o'-Bells' afterwards, for he came in as merry as a sandboy. I says, 'We're only waiting Henry to start dinner. 'Dinner', he says, 'I don't want no dinner. I'm going to bed!'

BEN [*Shaking his head*] : Ah! Dear, dear.

HENRY: And when I came in I found him undressed sure enough and snug in bed.

[*He rises and stands on the hearthrug.*]

Mrs. JORDAN [*definitely*]: Yes, he'd had a 'warning'. I'm sure of that. Did he know you?

HENRY: Yes. He spoke to me.

Mrs. JORDAN: Did he say he'd had a 'warning'?

HENRY: No. He said, 'Henry, would you mind taking my boots off; I forgot before I got into bed.'

Mrs. JORDAN: He must have been wandering.

HENRY: No, he'd got 'cm on all right.

Mrs. SLATER: And when we'd finished dinner I thought I'd take up a bit of something on a tray. He was lying there for all the world as if he was asleep, so I put the tray down on the bureau-[*correcting*

herself] on the chest of drawers-and went to waken him. (A pause) He was quite cold.

HENRY: Then I heard Amelia calling for me, and I ran upstairs.

Mrs. SLATER: Of course we could do nothing.

Mrs. JORDAN: He was 'gone'?

Mrs. SLATER: There wasn't any doubt.

Mrs. JORDAN: I always knew he'd go sudden in the end.

[A pause, they wipe their eyes and sniff back tears.]

Mrs. SLATER [rising briskly at length; in a businesslike tone]: Well, will you go up and look at him now, or shall we have tea?

Mrs. JORDAN: What do you say, Ben?

BEN: I'm not particular.

Mrs. JORDAN [surveying the table]: Well, then, if the kettle's nearly ready we may as well have tea first.

[Mr. SLATER puts the kettle on the fire and gets tea ready.]

HENRY: One thing we may as well decide now, the announcement in the papers.

Mrs. JORDAN: I was thinking of that. What would you put?

Mrs. SLATER: At the residence of his daughter, 235 Upper Cornbank Street, etc.

HENRY: You wouldn't care for a bit of poetry?

Mrs. JORDAN: I like 'Never Forgotten'. It's refined.

HENRY: Yes, but it's rather soon for that.

BEN: You couldn't very well have forgotten him the day after.

Mrs. SLATER: I always fancy, "A loving husband, a kind father, and a faithful friend".

BEN [doubtfully]: Do you think that's right?

HENRY: I don't think it matters whether it's right or not.

Mrs. JORDAN: No, it's more for the look of the thing.

HENRY: I saw a verse in the Evening News yesterday. Proper poetry it was. It rhymed.

[He gets the paper and reads.]

'Despised and forgotten by some you may be

But the spot that contains you is sacred to we'

Mrs. JORDAN: That'll never do. You don't say 'Sacred to we'.

HENRY: It's in the paper.

Mrs. SLATER: You wouldn't say it if you were speaking properly, but it's different in poetry.

HENRY: Poetic licence, you know.

Mrs. JORDAN: No, that'll never do. We want a verse that says how much we loved him and refers to all his good qualities and says what a heavy loss we've had.

Mrs. SLATER: You want a whole poem. That'll cost a good lot.

Mrs. JORDAN: Well, we'll think about it after tea, and then we'll look through his bits of things and make a list of them. There's all the furniture in his room.

HENRY: There's no jewellery or valuables of that sort.

Mrs. JORDAN: Except his gold watch. He promised that to our Jimmy.

Mrs. SLATER: Promised your Jimmy! I never heard of that.

Mrs. JORDAN: Oh, but he did, Amelia, when he was living with us. He was very fond of Jimmy.

Mrs. SLATER: Well. [*amazed*] I don't know!

BEN: Anyhow, there's his insurance money. Have you got the receipt for the premium he paid this morning?

Mrs. SLATER: I've not seen it.

[VICTORIA *jumps up from the sofa and comes behind the table.*]

VICTORIA: Mother, I don't think Grandpa went to pay his insurance this morning.

Mrs. SLATER: He went out.

VICTORIA: Yes, but he didn't go into the town. He met old Mr. Tattersall down the street, and they went off past St. Phillip's Church.

Mrs. SLATER: To the 'Ring-o'-Bells'. I'll be bound.

BEN: The 'Ring-o'-Bells'?

Mrs. Slater: That public-house that John Shorrocks' widow keeps. He is always hanging about there. Oh, if he hasn't paid it-

BEN: Do you think he hasn't paid it? Was it overdue?

Mrs. SLATER: I should think it was overdue.

Mrs. JORDAN: Something tells me he's not paid it. I've a 'warning', I know it; he's not paid it.

BEN: The drunken old beggar.

Mrs. JORDAN: He's done it on purpose, just to annoy us.

Mrs. SLATER: After all I've done for him, having to put up with him in the house these three years. It's nothing short of swindling.

Mrs. JORDAN: I had to put up with him for five years.

Mrs. SLATER: And you were trying to turn him over to us all the time.

HENRY: But we don't know for certain that he's not paid the premium.

Mrs. JORDAN: I do. It's come over me all at once that he hasn't.

Mrs. SLATER: Victoria, run upstairs and fetch that bunch of keys that's on your Grandpa's dressing-table.

VICTORIA [*timidly*]: In Grandpa's room?

Mrs. SLATER: Yes.

VICTORIA: I-I don't like to.

Mrs. SLATER: Don't talk so silly. There's no one can hurt you. [VICTORIA *goes out reluctantly*]. We'll see if he's locked the receipt up in the bureau.

BEN: In where? In this thing? [*He rises and examines it.*]

Mrs. JORDAN [*also rising*]: Where did out pick that up, Amelia? It's new since last I was there. [*They examine it closely.*]

Mrs. SLATER: Oh-Henry picked it up one day.

Mrs. JORDAN: I like it. It's artistic. Did you buy it at an auction?

HENRY: Eh! Where did I buy it, Amelia?

Mrs. SLATER: Yes, at an auction.

BEN [*disparagingly*]: Oh, second-hand.

Mrs. JORDAN: Don't show your ignorance, Ben. All artistic things are second-hand. Look at those old masters.

[VICTORIA *returns, very sacred. She closes the door after her.*]

VICTORIA: Mother! Mother!

Mrs. SLATER: What is it, child?

VICTORIA: Grandpa's getting up.

Mrs. JORDAN: The child's crazy.

BEN: What?

Mrs. SLATER: What do you say?

VICTORIA: Grandpa's Mrs. SLATER: getting up.

Mrs. SLATER: Don't talk so silly. Don't you know your Grandpa's dead?

VICTORIA: No, no; he's getting up. I saw him.

[*They are transfixed with amazement; BEN and Mrs. JORDAN left of table; VICTORIA clings to Mrs. SLATER, right of table; HENRY near fireplace.*]

Mrs. JORDAN: You'd better go up and see for yourself, Amelia.

Mrs. SLATER: Here-come with me, Henry

[HENRY draws back terrified]

BEN [*suddenly*]: Hist! Listen.

[*hey look at the door. A slight chuckling is heard outside. The door opens, revealing an old man clad in a faded but gay dressing-gown. He is in his stockinged feet. Although over seventy he is vigorous and well coloured; his bright, malicious eyes twinkle under his heavy, reddish-grey eyebrows. He is obviously either Grandfather ABEL MERRYWEATHER or else his ghost.*]

ABEL: What's the matter with little Vicky? (*He sees BEN and Mrs. JORDAN.*) Hallow! What brings you here? How's yourself, Ben?

[*ABEL thrusts his hand at BEN, who skips back smartly and retreats with Mrs. JORDAN to safe distance below the sofa.*]

Mrs. SLATER: [*approaching ABEL gingerly*]. Grandfather, is that you?

[*She pokes him with her hand to see if he is solid.*]

ABEL: Of course it's me. Don't do that. 'Melia. What the devil do you mean by this tomfoolery?

Mrs. SLATER: [*to the others*]: He's not dead.

BEN: Doesn't seem like it.

ABEL [*irritated by the whispering*]: You've kept away long enough, Lizzie; and now you've come you don't seem over pleased to see me.

Mrs. JORDAN: You took us by surprise, father. Are you keeping quite well?

ABEL [*Trying to catch the words*]: Eh? What?

Mrs. JORDAN: Are you quite well?

ABEL: Aye, I'm right enough but for a bit of a headache. I wouldn't mind betting that I'm not the first in this house to be carried to the cemetery. I always think Henry there looks none too healthy.

Mrs. JORDAN: Well, I never!

[*ABEL crosses to the armchair and HENRY gets out of his way to the front of the table*]

ABEL: "Melia, what the dickens did I do with my new slippers?

Mrs. SLATER: [*confused*]: Aren't they by the hearth, grandfather?

ABEL: I don't see them. [*Observing HENRY trying to remove the slippers*] Why, you've got 'em on, Henry.

Mrs. SLATER: [*promptly*]: I told him to put them on to stretch them, they were that new and hard. Now, Henry.

[*Mrs. SLATER snatches the slippers from HENRY and gives them to ABEL, who puts them on and sits in arm chair.*]

Mrs. JORDAN: [to BEN] : Well, I don't call that delicate, stepping into a dead man's shoes in such haste.

[HENRY goes up to the window and pulls up the blind. VICTORIA runs across to ABEL and sits on the floor at his feet.]

VICTORIA : Oh, Grandpa I'm so glad you're not dead.

Mrs. SLATER:[in a vindictive whisper] : Hold your tongue, Victoria.

ABEL : Eh? What's that? Who's gone dead?

Mrs. SLATER: [loudly] : Victoria says she's sorry about your head.

ABEL: Ah, thank you, Vicky, but I'm feeling better.

Mrs. SLATER: [to Mrs. JORDAN] : He's so fond of Victoria.

Mrs. JORDAN: [to Mrs. SLATER] : Yes; he's fond of our Jimmy, too.

Mrs. SLATER: You'd better ask him if he promised your Jimmy his gold watch.

Mrs. JORDAN: [disconcerted]: I couldn't just now. I don't feel equal to it.

ABEL: Why, Ben, you're in mourning! And Lizzie too. And "Melia, and Henry and little Vicky! Who's gone dead? It's someone in the family. [He chuckles.]

Mrs. SLATER: No one you know, father. A relation of Ben's.

ABEL: And what relation of Ben's?

Mrs. SLATER: His brother.

BEN [to Mrs. SLATER] : Dang it, I never had one.

ABEL: Dear, dear. And what was his name, Ben?

BEN [at a loss] : Er.-er. [He crosses to front of table.]

Mrs. SLATER: [R. of table, prompting.] Frederick.

Mrs. JORDAN: [L. of table, prompting.] Albert.

BEN: Er-Fred-Alb-Isaac.

ABEL : Isaac? And where did your brother Isaac die?

BEN: In-er-in Australia.

ABEL : Dear, dear. He'd be older than you, eh?

BEN: Yes, five years.

ABEL : Aye, aye. Are you going to the funeral?

BEN: Oh, yes.

Mrs. SLATER and Mrs. JORDAN: No, no.

BEN: No, of course not. [He retires to L.]

ABEL [rising] : Well, I suppose you've only been waiting for me to begin tea. I'm feeling hungry.

Mrs. SLATER: [taking up the kettle] : I'll make tea.

ABEL : Come along, now; sit you down and let's be jolly.

[ABEL sits at the head of the table, facing spectators. BEN and Mrs. JORDAN on the left. VICTORIA brings a chair and sits by ABEL. Mrs. SLATER and HENRY sit on the right. Both the women are next to ABEL.]

Mrs. SLATER: Henry, give Grandpa some tongue.

ABEL : Thank you, I'll make a start.

[He helps himself to bread and butter. HENRY serves the tongue and Mrs. SLATER pours out tea. Only ABEL eats with any heartiness.]

BEN: Glad to see you've got an appetite, Mr. Merryweather, although you've not been so well.

ABEL : Nothing serious. I've been lying down for a bit.

Mrs. SLATER: Been to sleep, Grandfather?

ABEL : No, I've not been to sleep.

Mrs. SLATER and HENRY: Oh!

ABEL [*eating and drinking*]: I can't exactly call everything to mind, but I remember I was a bit dazed like. I couldn't move an inch, hand or foot.

BEN: And could you see and hear, Mr. Merryweather?

ABEL : Yes, but I don't remember seeing anything particular.

Mustard, Ben. [*BEN passes the mustard.*]

Mrs. SLATER: Of course not, Grandfather. It was all your fancy. You must have been asleep.

ABEL [*snappishly*]: I tell you I wasn't asleep, "Melia. Damn it, I ought to know.

Mrs. JORDAN: Didn't you see Henry or Amelia come into the room?

ABEL [*scratching his head*]: Now let me think-

Mrs. SLATER: I wouldn't press him, Elizabeth. Don't press him.

HENRY: No. I wouldn't worry him.

ABEL [*suddenly recollecting*]: Ay, begad! Melia and Henry, what the devil did you mean by shifting my bureau out of my bedroom? [*HENRY and Mrs. SLATER are speechless.*] D'you hear me? Henry! Melia!

Mrs. JORDAN: What bureau was that, father?

ABEL: Why? My bureau, the one I bought-

Mrs. JORDAN: [*pointing to the bureau*]: Was it that one, father?

ABEL : Ah, that's it. What's it doing here? Eh?

[*A pause. The clock on the mantelpiece strikes six. Everyone looks at it.*]

Drat me if that isn't my clock, too. What the devil's been going on in this house?

[*A slight pause.*]

BEN: Well, I'll be hanged.

Mrs. JORDAN [*rising*]: I'll tell you what's been going on in this house, father. Nothing short of robbery.

Mrs. SLATER: Be quiet, Elizabeth.

Mrs. JORDAN: I'll not be quiet. Oh, I call it double-faced.

HENRY: Now, now, Elizabeth.

Mrs. JORDAN: And you, too. Are you such a poor creature that you must do every dirty thing she tells you?

Mrs. SLATER: [*rising*]: Remember where you are, Elizabeth.

HENRY [*rising*]: Come, come. No quarrelling.

BEN [*rising*]: My wife's every right to speak her own mind.

Mrs. SLATER: Then she can speak it outside, not here.

ABEL [*rising; thumping the table*]: damn it all, will someone tell me what's been going on?

Mrs. JORDAN: Yes, I will, I'll not see you robbed.

ABEL : Who's been robbing me?

Mrs. JORDAN: Amelia and Henry. They've stolen your clock and bureau. [*Working herself up*] They sneaked into your room like a thief in the night and stole them after you were dead.

HENRY and Mrs. SLATER: Hush! Quiet, Elizabeth!

Mrs. JORDAN: I'll not be stopped. After you were dead, I say.

ABEL: After who was dead?

Mrs. JORDAN: You.

ABEL: But I'm not dead.

Mrs. JORDAN: No, but they thought you were.

[A pause. ABEL gazes round at them.]

ABEL: Oho! So that's why you're all in black today. You thought I was dead. [He chuckles.] That was a big mistake.

[He sits and resumes his tea.]

Mrs. SLATER: [sobbing]: Grandfather.

ABEL: It didn't take you long to start dividing my things between you.

Mrs. JORDAN: No, father: you mustn't think that. Amelia was simply getting hold of them on her own account.

ABEL: You always were a keen one, Amelia. I suppose you thought the will wasn't fair.

HENRY: Did you make a will?

ABEL: Yes, it was locked up in the bureau.

Mrs. JORDAN: And what was in it, father?

ABEL: That doesn't matter now. I'm thinking of destroying it and making another.

Mrs. SLATER [sobbing]: Grandfather, you'll not be hard on me.

ABEL: I'll trouble you for another cup of tea, Melia; two lumps and plenty of milk.

Mrs. SLATER: With pleasure, Grandfather.

[She pours out the tea]

ABEL: I don't want to be hard on anyone. I'll tell you what I'm 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 whoever I'm living with when I die. How does that strike you?

HENRY: It's a bit of a lottery, like.

Mrs. JORDAN: And who do you intend to live with from now?

ABEL [drinking his tea]: I'm just coming to that.

Mrs. JORDAN: You know, father, it's quite time you came to live with us again. We'd make you very comfortable.

Mrs. SLATER: No, he's not been with us as long as he was with you.

Mrs. JORDAN: I may be wrong, but I don't think father will fancy living on with you after what's happened today.

ABEL: So you'd like to have me again, Lizzie?

Mrs. JORDAN: You know we're ready for you to make your home with us for as long as you please.

ABEL: What do you say to that, Melia?

Mrs. SLATER: All I can say is that Elizabeth's changed her mind in the last two years. [Rising] Grandfather, do you know what the quarrel between us was about?

Mrs. JORDAN: Amelia, don't be a fool; sit down.

Mrs. SLATER: No, if I'm not to have him, you shan't either. We quarrelled because Elizabeth said she wouldn't take you off our hands at any price. She said she'd had enough of you to last a lifetime, and we'd got to keep you.

ABEL : It seems to me that neither of you has any cause to feel proud about the way you've treated me.

Mrs. SLATER: If I've done anything wrong, I'm sure I'm sorry for it.

Mrs. JORDAN: And I can't say more than that, too.

ABEL : It's a bit late to say it, now. You neither of you cared to put up with me.

Mrs. SLATER and Mrs. JORDAN: No, no, Grandfather.

ABEL : Aye, you both say that because of what I've told you about leaving my money. Well, since you don't want me I'll go to someone that does.

BEN: Come, Mr. Merryweather you've got to live with one of your daughters.

ABEL : I'll tell you what I've got to do. On Monday next I've got to go to three things. I've got to go to the lawyers' and alter my will; and I've got to go to the insurance office and pay my premium; and I've got to go to the St. Philip's Church and get married.

BEN and HENRY: What!

Mrs. JORDAN: Get married!

Mrs. SLATER: He's out of his sense. [*General consternation.*]

ABEL : I say I'm going to get married.

Mrs. SLATER: Who to?

ABEL : 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 a 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. [*He gets to the door.*] Till Monday, then. Twelve o'clock at St. Philip's Church. [*Opening the door.*] It's a good thing you brought that bureau downstairs, Melia. It'll be handier to carry across to the Ring-o'-Bells' on Monday.

[*He goes out*]

Curtain

Dear Departed

The playwright

William Stanley Houghton (1881 – 1913) belonged to Manchester, in Britain. Although he was in the cotton trade, he was greatly interested in the theatre. He reviewed plays for the *Manchester Guardian*. In time, he began to write plays for the Manchester School of drama, along with well-known playwrights such as Harold Brighouse and Alan Monkhouse, which were performed at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester.

The Dear Departed was his first play and was performed in 1908. Other plays followed in quick succession: *Independent Means* (1909), *The Younger Generation* (1910), *Master of the House* (also in 1910), *Fancy-free* (1911) and *Hindle Wakes* (1912), the last and best of his plays.

Houghton's plays are strongly based on the simple, day-to-day lives of ordinary people. The action consists of the little deeds of ambition, greed, pride and jealousy. The characters are usually middle-class people, trying to reach above their limitations. The dramatic effect is often provided by an unexpected turn of events. The dialogue is colloquial and in keeping with the social levels of the characters.

The play

The play "The Dear Departed" is a sardonic comment on the greed and insensitive behaviour of Abel's two daughters. In contrast to the daughters, the sons-in-law and the grand-daughter appear more affectionate towards Abel. The playwright Stanley Houghton, has succeeded in presenting a study of contrasts, in tone and action, as well as in character.

The play opens on an animated note, with Mrs. Slater issuing instructions to her daughter and husband. It soon becomes clear that her father has died and that she is trying to take his valuables before her sister arrives to stake her claim. When Mrs. Jordan arrives with her husband, it is obvious that she is as calculating and selfish as her sister. When the sisters have exchanged veiled accusations and insinuations, and are ready to get down to the business of sharing their father's property, the unexpected happens and the play ends with the speechless discomfiture of the vitriolic women. Although Abel Merryweather appears only in the latter part of the play, he is undoubtedly the protagonist and steals the show very effectively. The characters are drawn as individuals, with ideas and habits that set them apart. Mrs. Slater and Mrs. Jordan, both acquisitive and selfish, are still identifiably different, as are their husbands, both meek and obedient to their wives, but with sentiments and humour of their own.

Meanings

provincial town	: small town
blinds	: shade or covering for a window
fireplace	: place in a room to light a fire in cold weather
sideboard	: a side table, usually with shelves and drawers
mantelpiece	: shelf surrounding a fireplace
hearth	: part of the fireplace where the fire is lit
Tit-Bits,	
Pearson's Weekly	: names of magazines

in black	: in black clothes, as a sign of mourning
straight talking	: frank talk
precocious	: child who knows more than is normal at that age
gallivanting about	: enjoying oneself
in colours	: in brightly coloured clothes and not in black (mourning)
tail coat	: a coat which is long at the back, with divided ends, resembling the tail of a swallow (so often called "swallow")
bowler hat	: hard, round, black hat with a curved rim
sash	: broad cloth belt
new black	: new set of black clothes for the period of mourning
You know ... tell	: Mrs. Slater accuses her sister of being greedy and driving a hard bargain; she also comments that she does not know from where she gets this trait. This is ironical, for she herself has the same qualities. Her husband remarks: "I suppose it's in the family" and quickly retract when she is annoyed.
sliced tongue	: tongue of an ox or sheep, cut into pieces and cooked and cooked and eaten cold
nearly breaking down	: almost weeping
You don't seem again	: pretends to be overwhelmed by her father's death
sharp	: quick to notice something
after it	: want it badly
drive a hard bargain	: ask for something valuable instead of it
have a low money-grubbing spirit	: be greedy
got her eye on	: wants
stupefied	: shocked
daft	: foolish
delicate	: decent
fasten the front door	: bolt the front door
fasten my frock	: hook or zip the frock at the back
pinching	: stealing
near thing	: managed just in time
ostentatiously	: making a show of doing something
ushers in	: brings them in
complacent	: satisfied with oneself
impassive	: without any expression
deadly: terrible	
accustomed to	: used to
regrettable occasion	: sad event of Grandfather's death
chirpy: happy, cheerful	
sails into the room	: walks majestically, with great dignity
furtively	: secretly
give way	: give in to grief; cry
acidly	: sarcastically
fatal mistake	: serious mistake
professional etiquette	: following the conventions of a profession
restored to life	: brought back to life

be 'gone'	: have died
crushed	: subdued
piqued	: irritated
take a drop too much	: get drunk
merry	: drunk
'Ring-o-Bells'	: name of a pub, where drinks are available
merry as a sand boy	: completely drunk
dinner	: main meal of the day
'waming'	: feeling that he was going to die
wandering	: not clear in his thinking
was quite cold	: felt cold to the touch, as if he were dead
Evening News	: name of a newspaper
despised	: not thought well of
poetic licence	: freedom to change the rules of the language while writing poetry
You ... poem	: said sarcastically
That'll ... lot	: thinks that it would be a waste of money to have a long obituary
swindling	: cheating
reluctantly	: unwillingly
disparagingly	: expressing a low opinion of something
transfixed with wonder	: paralysed with shock
chuckling	: laughing
clad	: dressed
<i>gay</i>	: <i>brightly coloured</i>
stocking feet	: wearing stockings but not shoes
vigorous and well-coloured	: active and healthy
malicious eyes	: sarcastic look
skips back smartly	: moves away quickly
tomfoolery	: nonsense
delicate	: in good taste
stepping into a dead man's shoes	: idiom meaning taking a dead man's place; here, also literally wearing a dead man's slippers
vindictive	: harsh
about your head	: about your headache
Dang it	: an expression of swearing, like damn it
Er ... er	: uncertain, because he has no brother. The conversation that follows is hilarious, because they are all saying different things in reply to Abel's questions, because they are not prepared to answer them and are trying to cover up their confusion.
begad	: by God Drat me, what the devil,
I'll be hanged	: expressions of surprise
double-faced	: cheating
working herself up	: becoming angry
bit of a lottery	: depending on luck, as in the case of a lottery
fancy	: like
handier	: easier

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. Why does Mrs. Slater say, "I am amazed at you Victoria"?
2. Why would it never do for Victoria to be found "in colours"?
3. Why are Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Ben coming?
4. How does Mrs. Slater hope to "outshine" the others?
5. What does Mrs. Slater want to do with her father's slippers?
6. What are the two objects of her father's that Mrs. Slater has always wanted?
7. What does Mrs. Slater do with the two objects that she covets?
8. What does Victoria feel about her mother's actions?
9. What impression do you get of Mr. and Mrs. Jordan?
10. Why has a doctor not seen Mr. Merryweather?
11. Why did the Slaters come to the conclusion that Mr. Merryweather was dead?
12. How was the announcement to be worded?
13. What was the discussion about the insurance premium?
14. What other assets were the sisters planning to share between them?
15. Why are all of them "transfixed with amazement"?
16. How do the family explain being in black ?
17. Why do the sisters quarrel?
18. To whom does Mr. Merryweather propose to leave his things?
19. What are the three things that Mr. Merryweather plans to do on Monday?
20. Whom was Mr. Merryweather going to marry?

II. Complete the following sentences

1. When you and Elizabeth quarrelled she said
2. Elizabeth's that sharp she'll
3. If there was one thing he couldn't bear
4. He was too honourable to have gone
5. Oh, Grandpa, I'm so glad
6. Well, I shall make a new will, leaving

III. Explain with reference to the context

1. It doesn't seem delicate, somehow.
2. Are we pinching it before Aunt Elizabeth comes?
3. I never could fancy ready-made things.
4. It's come over me all at once that he hasn't.
5. I wouldn't mind that I'm not the first in this house to be carried to the cemetery.
6. Till Monday, then.

Sample

"We've had it fixed up a good while now, but I was keeping it for a pleasant surprise."

These words are spoken by Abel Merryweather, the father of Mrs. Slater and Mrs. Jordan. After having had some drinks in the morning, Abel remained sleeping. His daughter Amelia and son-in-law Henry Slater think that he is dead. They inform his other daughter Elizabeth, who comes over with her husband, Ben Jordan.

While Amelia and Elizabeth are busy dividing their father's property among them, Abel comes down. They are all shocked to see him alive and well. He informs them that he would be re-writing his will, leaving all his property to the person with whom he is living at the time of his death. The daughters think it would have to be one of them, but he says he is going to marry Mrs. John Shorrocks, who keeps the Ring-o'-Bells, where he goes to drink very often.

It is at this point that Abel says he had planned it long ago, but wanted to give his family "a pleasant surprise". His words are ironical, because it is actually an unpleasant shock to them.

IV. Write an essay on each one of the following

1. The plot of the play
2. The characters in the play
3. Humour in the play
4. The climax of the play

THE BISHOP'S CANDLE STICKS

Norman McKinnel

SCENE: *The kitchen of the Bishop's cottage. It is plainly but substantially furnished. Doors R. and L. and L.C. Window R.C. Fireplace with heavy mantelpiece down R. Oak settle with cushions behind door L.C. Table in window R.C. with writing materials and crucifix (wood). Eight-day clock R. of window. Kitchen dresser with cupboard to lock down L. Oak dining table R.C. Chairs, books, etc. Winter wood scene without. On the mantelpiece are two very handsome candlesticks which look stangely out of place with their surroundings.*

Marie and Persome discovered. Marie stirring some soup on the fire. Persome laying the cloth, etc.

PERSOME: Marie, isn't the soup boiling yet?!

MARIE: Not yet, madam.

PERSOME: Well it ought to be. You haven't tended the fire properly, child.

MARIE: But, madam, you yourself made the fire up.

PERSOME: Don't answer me back like that. It is rude.

MARIE: Yes, madam.

PERSOME: Then don't let me have to rebuke you again.

MARIE: No, madam,

PERSOME: I wonder where my brother can be. It is after eleven o'clock (*looking at the clock*) and no sign of him. Marie!

MARIE: Yes, Madam.

PERSOME: Did Monseigneur the Bishop leave any message for me?

MARIE: No, madam.

PERSOME: Did he tell you where he was going?

MARIE: Yes, madam.

PERSOME: 'Yes, madam' (*imitating*). Then why haven't you told me, stupid!

MARIE: Madam didn't ask me.

PERSOME: But that is no reason for your not telling me, is it?

MARIE: Madam said only this morning I was not to chatter, so I thought-

PERSOME: Ah, mon Dieu, you thought! Ah! It is hopeless.

MARIE: Yes, madam.

PERSOME: Don't keep saying, 'yes, madam', like a parrot, nincompoop.

MARIE: No, madam.

PERSOME: Well. Where did monseigneur say he was going?

MARIE: To my mother's madam.

PERSOME: To your mother's indeed! And why, pray?

MARIE: Monseigneur asked me how she was, and I told him she was feeling poorly.

PERSOME: You told him she was feeling poorly, did you? And so my brother is to be kept out of his bed, and go without his supper because you told him she was feeling poorly. There's gratitude for you!

MARIE: Madam, the soup is boiling!

PERSOME: Then pour it out, fool, and don't chatter. (Marie *about to do so*) No, no. Not like that, here let me do it, and do you put the salt-cellars on the table- the silver ones.

MARIE: The silver ones, madam?

PERSOME: Yes, the silver ones. Are you deaf as well as stupid?

MARIE: They are sold, madam.

PERSOME: Sold! (*with horror*) sold! Are you mad? Who sold them? Why were they sold?

MARIE: Monseigneur the Bishop told me this afternoon while you were out to take them to Monsieur Gervals who has often admired them, and sell them for as much as I could.

PERSOME: But you had no right to do so without asking me.

MARIE: But, madam, Monseigneur the Bishop told me (*with awe*).

PERSOME: Monseigneur the Bishop is a-ahem! But, but what can he have wanted with the money?

MARIE: Pardon, madam but I think it was for Mere Gringoire.

PERSOME: Mere Gringoire indeed! Mere Gringoire! What, the old witch who lives at the top of the hill, and who says she is bedridden because she is too lazy to do any work? And what did Mere Gringoire want with the money pray?

MARIE: Madam, it was for the rent. The bailiff would not wait any longer and threatened to turn her out today if it were not paid, so she sent little Jean to monseigneur to ask for help and-

PERSOME: Oh mon Dieu! It is hopeless, hopeless. We shall have nothing left. His estate is sold, his savings have gone. His furniture, everything. Were it not for my little *dot* we should starve, and now my beautiful- beautiful (*sob*) salt-cellars. Ah, it is too much, too much (*She breaks down crying.*)

MARIE: Madam, I am sorry, if I had known-

PERSOME: Sorry and why pray? If Monseigneur the Bishop chooses to sell his salt-cellars he may do so, I suppose. Go and wash your hands, they are disgracefully dirty.

MARIE: Yes, madam (*going towards R.*)

(*Enter the Bishop, C*)

Bishop: Ah, how nice and warm it is in here! It is worth going out in the cold for the sake of the comfort of coming in. (*Persome has hastened to help him off with his coat, etc. Marie has dropped a deep curtsy.*) Thank you, dear (*looking at her*). Why, what is the matter? You have been crying. Has Marie been troublesome, eh? (*Shaking his finger at her*) Ah!

PERSOME: No, it wasn't Marie-but, but-

BISHOP: Well, well, you shall tell me presently. Marie, my child, run home now, your mother is better, I have prayed with her, and the doctor has been. Run home! (*Marie putting on cloak and going*) And, Marie, let yourself in quietly in case your mother is asleep.

MARIE: Oh, thanks, thanks, monseigneur. (*She goes to door C. As it opens the snow drives in.*)

BISHOP: Here, Marie, take my comforter, it will keep you warm, It is very cold tonight.

MARIE: Oh, no, monseigneur (*Shamefacedly*)!

PERSOME: What nonsense, brother, she is young, she won't hurt.

BISHOP: Ah, Persome, you have not been out, you don't know how cold it has become. Here, Marie, let me put it on for you. (*Does so.*) There! Run along, little one.

[*Exit Marie C.*]

PERSOME: Brother, I have no patience with you. There, sit down and take your soup, it has been waiting ever so long. And if it is spoilt it serves you right.

BISHOP: It smell delicious.

PERSOME: I'm sure Marie's mother is not so ill that you need have stayed out on such a night as this. I believe those people *pretend* to be ill just to have the Bishop call on them. They have no thought of the Bishop!

BISHOP: It is kind of them to want to see me.

PERSOME: Well for my part I believe that charity begins at home.

BISHOP: And so you make me this delicious soup. You are very good to me, sister.

PERSOME: Good to you, yes! I should think so. I should like to know where you would be without me to look after you. The dupe of every idle scamp or lying old woman in the parish.

BISHOP: If people lie to me they are poorer, not I.

PERSOME: But it is ridiculous, you will soon have nothing left. You give away everything, everything!!!

BISHOP: My dear, there is so much suffering in the world, and I can do so little (*sighs*), so very little.

PERSOME: Suffering, yes, but you never think of the suffering you cause to those who love you best, the suffering you cause to me.

BISHOP (*rising*): You, sister dear? Have I hurt you? Ah. I remember you had been crying. Was it my fault? I didn't mean to hurt you. I am sorry.

PERSOME: Sorry. Yes, Sorry won't mend it. Humoh! Oh, do go on eating your soup before it gets cold.

BISHOP: Very well, dear, (*Sits*) But tell me-

PERSOME: You are like a child, I can't trust you out of my sight. No sooner is my back turned than you get that little minx Marie to sell the silver salt cellars.

BISHOP: Ah, yes, the salt-cellars. It is a pity. You, you were proud of them?

PERSOME: Proud of them, why they have been in our family for years.

BISHOP: Yes, it is a pity, they were beautiful, but still, dear, one can eat salt out of china just as well.

PERSOME: Yes, or meat off the floor, I suppose. Oh, it's coming to that. And as for that old wretch Mere Gringoire, I wonder she had the audacity to send here again. The last time I saw her I gave her such a talking to that it ought to have had some effect.

BISHOP: Yes! I offered to take her in here for a day or two, but she seemed to think it might distress you.

PERSOME: Distres me!!!

BISHOP: And the bailiff, who is a very just man, would not wait longer for the rent, so-so-you see I *had* to pay it.

PERSOME: *You had* to pay it. [*Gesture of comic despair.*]

BISHOP: Yes, and you see I had no money so I had to dispose of the salt-cellar. It was fortunate I had them, wasn't it? (*Smiling*) But I'm sorry I have grieved you.

PERSOME: Oh, go on! go on! you are incorrigible. You'll sell your candlesticks next.

BISHOP (*with real concern*): No, no, sister, not my candlesticks.

PERSOME: Oh! Why not? They would pay somebody's rent, I suppose.

BISHOP: Ah, you are good, sister, to think of that, but, but I don't want to sell them. You see, dear, my mother gave them to me on-on her deathbed just after you were born, and-and she asked me to keep them in remembrance of her, so I would like to keep them, but perhaps it is a sin to set such store by them?

PERSOME: Brother, brother, you will break my heart (*with tears in her voice*). There! don't say anything more, Kiss me and give me your blessing. I'm going to bed. [*They kiss.*]

(*Bishop making sign of the Cross and murmuring blessing.*)

(*Persome locks cupboard door and turns to go*)

PERSOME: Don't sit up too long and tire your eyes.

BISHOP: No, dear! Good night! [*Persome exits R.*]

BISHOP: (comes to table and opens a book, then looks up at the candlesticks): They would pay somebody's rent. It was kind of her to think of that.

[He stirs the fire, trims the lamp, arranges some books and papers, sits down, is restless, shivers slightly, clock outside strikes twelve, and he settles to read. Music during this. Enter the Convict stealthily, he has a long knife and seizes the Bishop from behind.

CONVICT: If you call out you are a dead man!

BISHOP: But, my friend, as you see, I am reading. Why should I call out? Can I help you in any way?

CONVICT (*hoarsely*): I want food. I'm starving. I haven't eaten anything for three days. Give me food quickly, quickly, curse you.

BISHOP (*eagerly*): But certainly, my son, you shall have food. I will ask my sister for the keys of the cupboard. [*Rising.*]

CONVICT: Sit down!!! (*The Bishop sits, smiling*). None of that, my friend! I'm too old a bird to be caught with chaff. You would ask your sister for the keys, would you? A likely story! You would rouse the house too. Eh? Ha! ha! A good joke truly. Come, where is the food. I want no keys. I have a wolf inside me tearing at my entrails, tearing me; quick, tell me where the food is.

BISHOP (*aside*): I wish Persome would not lock the cupboard. (*Aloud*) Come, my friend, you have nothing to fear. My sister and I are alone here.

CONVICT: How do I know that?

BISHOP: Why, I have just told you. [*Convict looks long at the Bishop.*]

CONVICT: Hump! I'll risk it. [*Bishop, going to door R.*]

But mind! Play me false and as sure as there are devils in hell I'll drive my knife through your heart. I have nothing to lose.

BISHOP: You have your soul to lose, my son, it is of more value than my heart. *(At door R. calling)* Persome! Persome!

[The Convict stands behind him with his knife ready.]

PERSOME *(within)*: Yes, brother.

BISHOP: Here is a poor traveller who is hungry. If you are not undressed will you come and open the cupboard and I will give him some supper.

PERSOME *(within)*: What, at this time of night? A pretty business truly. Are we to have no sleep now, but to be at the beck and call of every ne'er-do-well who happens to pass?

BISHOP: But, Persome, the traveller is hungry.

PERSOME: Oh, very well, I am coming. *(Persome enters R. Sees the knife in the Convict's hand.) (Frightened)* Brother, what is he doing with that knife?

BISHOP: The knife, oh, well, you see, dear, perhaps he may have thought that I had sold ours. *(Laughs gently.)*

PERSOME: Brother, I am frightened. He glares at us like a wild beast *(aside to him)*.

CONVICT: Hurry, I tell you. Give me food or I'll stick my knife in you both and help myself.

BISHOP: Give me the keys, Persome, *(she gives them to him)* and now, dear, you may go to bed.

(Persome going. The Convict springs in front of her.)

CONVICT: Stop! Neither of you leave this room till I do.

[She looks at the Bishop.]

BISHOP: Persome, will you favour this gentleman with your company at supper? He evidently desires it.

PERSOME: Very well, brother.

[She sits down at table staring at the two.]

BISHOP: Here is some cold pie and a bottle of wine and some bread.

CONVICT: Put them on the table, and stand below it so that I can see you.

(Bishop does so and opens drawer in table, taking out knife and fork, looking at the knife in Convict's hand.)

CONVICT: My knife is sharp. *(He runs his finger along the edge and looks at them meaningly.)* And as for forks *(taking it up)* laugh! steel. *(He throws it away.)* We don't use forks in prison.

PERSOME: Prison?

CONVICT *(cutting off an enormous slice, which he tears with his fingers like an animal, then starts)*. What was that? *(he looks at the door.)* Why the devil do you leave the window unshuttered and the door unbarred so that anyone can come in *(shutting them)*?

BISHOP: That is why they are left open.

CONVICT: Well, they are shut now!

BISHOP *(sighs)*: For the first time in thirty years.

(Convict eats voraciously and throws a bone on the floor.

PERSOME: Oh, my nice clean floor!

(Bishop picks up the bone and puts it on plate.

CONVICT: You're not afraid of thieves?

BISHOP: I am sorry for them.

CONVICT: Sorry for them. Ha! ha! ha! (*Drinks from bottle.*) That's a good one. Sorry for them. Ha! ha! ha! (*Drinks.*) (*Suddenly*) What the devil are you?

BISHOP: I am a bishop.

CONVICT: Ha! ha! ha! A bishop. Holy Virgin, a bishop. Well I'm damned!

BISHOP: I hope you may escape that, my son. Persome, you may leave us, this gentleman will excuse you.

PERSOME: Leave you with—

BISHOP: Please! My friend and I can talk more-freely then.

(By this time, owing to his starving condition, the wine has affected the Convict)

CONVICT: What's that? Leave us. Yes, yes, leave us. Good night. I want to talk to the Bishop. The Bishop. Ha! ha!

[*Laughs as he drinks and cough*

BISHOP: Good night, Persome.

(*He holds the door open and she goes out R., holding in her skirts as she passes the Convict.*

CONVICT: (*chuckling to himself*): The Bishop. Ha. ha!

Well I'm- (*suddenly very loudly*) D' you know what I am?

BISHOP: I think one who has suffered much

CONVICT: Suffered (*puzzled*), suffered? My God, yes (*Drinks*) But that's a long time ago. Ha! ha! That was when I was a man, now I'm not a man, now I'm a number, number 15729, and I've lived in hell for ten years.

BISHOP: Tell me about it-about hell.

CONVICT: Why? (*Suspiciously*) Do you want to tell the police-to set them on my track.

BISHOP: No! I will not tell the police.

CONVICT (*looks at him earnestly*): I believe you (*scratching his head*), but damn me if I know why.

BISHOP (*laying his hand on the Convict's arm*): Tell me about the time- the time before you went to-hell.

CONVICT: It's so long ago I forget, but I had a little cottage, there were vines growing on it. (*dreamily*), they looked pretty with the evening sun on them and, and-there was a woman-she was (*thinking hard*)- she must have been my wife-yes. (*Suddenly and very rapidly*) Yes, I remember! she was ill, we had no food, I could get no work, it was a bad year, and my wife, my Jeanettee, was ill, dying, (*pause*) so I stole to buy her food. (*Long pause. The Bishop gently pats his hand.*) They caught me. I pleaded to them, I told them why I stole, but they laughed at me, and I was sentenced to ten years in the prison hulks, (*pause*) ten years in hell. The night I was sentenced the gaoler told me-told me Jeanettee was dead. (*Sobs, with fury*) Ah, damn them, damn them. God curse them all. (*He sinks on the table sobbing*)

BISHOP: Now tell me about the prison-ship, about hell.

CONVICT: Tell you about it? Look here, I was a man once. I'm a beast now, and they made me what I am. They chained me up like a wild animal, they lashed me like a hound. I fed on filth, I was covered with vermin, I slept on boards and I complained. They lashed me again. For ten years, ten years. Oh God! They took away my name, they took away my soul, and they gave me a devil in its place. But one day they were careless, one day they forgot to chain up their wild beast, and he escaped. He was free. That was six weeks ago. I was free, free to starve.

BISHOP: To starve?

CONVICT: Yes, to starve. They feed you in hell, but when you escape from it you starve. They were hunting me everywhere and I had no passport, no name. So I stole again, I stole these rags, I stole my food daily, I slept in the woods, in barns, anywhere, I dare not ask for work, I dare not go into a town to beg, so I stole, and they have made me what I am, they have made me a thief. God curse them all.

(Empties the bottle and throws it into the fire place R., smashing it.)

BISHOP: My son, you have suffered much, but there is hope for all.

CONVICT: Hope! Hope! Ha! ha! ha! *[Laughs wildly.]*

BISHOP: You have walked far, you are tired. Lie down and sleep on the couch there, and I will get you some coverings.

CONVICT: And if anyone comes?

BISHOP: No one will come, but if they do, are you not my friend?

CONVICT: You friend *(puzzled)*?

BISHOP: They will not molest the Bishop's friend

CONVICT: The Bishop's friend.

(Scratching his head, utterly puzzled)

BISHOP: I will get the coverings.

CONVICT: *(looks after him, scratches his head):* The Bishop's friend! *(He goes to fire to warm himself and notices the candlesticks. He looks round to see if he is alone, and takes them down, weighing them.)* Silver, by God, and heavy. What a prize!

(He hears the Bishop coming, and in his haste drops one candlestick on the table.)

[Enter the Bishop.]

BISHOP: *(sees what is going on, but goes to the settle up L. with coverings):* Ah, you are admiring my candlesticks. I am proud of them. They were a gift from my mother. A little too handsome for this poor cottage perhaps, but all I have to remind me of her. Your bed is ready. Will you lie down now?

CONVICT: Yes, yes, I'll lie down now. *(Puzzled)* Look here, why the devil are you-ki-kind to me. *(suspiciously)* What do you want? Eh?

BISHOP: I want you to have a good sleep, my friend.

CONVICT: I believe you want to convert me; save my soul, don't you call it? Well it's no good, see? I don't want any damned religion, and as for the Church, bah! I hate the Church.

BISHOP: That is a pity, my son, as the Church does not hate you.

CONVICT: You are going to try to convert me. Oh, ha! ha! that's a good idea. Ha! ha! ha! No, no, Monseigneur the Bishop. I don't want any of your Faith. Hope, and Charity, see? So anything you do for me you're doing to the devil, understand? (*defiantly*)

BISHOP: One must do a great deal for the devil, in order to do a little for God.

CONVICT: (*angrily*): I don't want any damned religion. I tell you.

BISHOP: Won't you lie down now, it is late?

CONVICT: (*grumbling*): Well all right, but I won't be preached at, I-I- (*on couch*) You're sure no one will come?

BISHOP: I don't think they will, but if they do-you yourself have locked the door.

CONVICT: Humph! I wonder if it's safe. (*He goes to the door and tries it, then turns and sees the Bishop holding the covering, annoyed.*) Here! you go to bed. I'll cover myself. (*The Bishop hesitates*) Go on, I tell you.

BISHOP: Good night my son. (*Exit L.*)

(*Convict waits till he is off, then tries the Bishop's door.*)

CONVICT: No lock of course. Curse it. (*Looks round and sees the candlesticks again.*) Humph! I'll have another look at them. (*He takes them up and toys with them.*) Worth hundreds I'll warrant. If I had these turned into money they'd start me fair, Humph! The old boy's fond of them too, said his mother gave him them. His mother, yes, They didn't think of *my* mother when they sent me to hell. He was kind to me too-but what's a bishop for except to be kind to you? Here, cheer up, my hearty, you're getting soft. God! wouldn't my chain-mates laugh to see 15729 hesitating about collaring the plunder because he felt good. Good! Ha! ha! oh my God! Good! Ha! ha! 15729 getting soft. That's a good on. Ha! ha! No, I'll take these candlesticks and go. If I stay here he'll preach at me in the morning and I'll get soft. Damn him and his preaching too. Here goes!

(*He takes the candlesticks, stows them in his coat, and cautiously exits L.C. As he does so the door slams.*)

PERSOME (*without*): Who's there? Who's there, I say. Am I to get no sleep tonight? Who's there, I say (*Enter R. Persome*) I am sure I heard the door shut. (*Looking round*) No one here? (*Knocks at the Bishop's door L. Sees the candlesticks have gone.*) The candlesticks, the candlesticks. They are gone. Brother, brother, come out. Fire, murder, thieves.

[*Enter Bishop L.*]

BISHOP: What is it, dear, what is it? What is the matter?

PERSOME: He has gone. The man with the hungry eyes has gone, and he has taken your candlesticks.

BISHOP: Not my candlesticks, sister, surely not those. (*He looks and sighs*) Ah, that is hard, very hard, I, I-He might have left me those. They were all I had.

[*Almost breaking down.*]

PERSOME: Well, but go and inform the police, He can't have gone far. They will soon catch him, and you'll get the candlesticks back again. You don't deserve them, though, leaving them about with a man like that in the house.

BISHOP: You are right, Persome. It was my fault. I led him into temptation.

PERSOME: Oh, nonsense! Led him into temptation indeed! The man is a thief, a common scoundrelly thief. I knew it the moment I saw him. Go and inform the police or I will.

[*Going but he stops her.*]

BISHOP: And have him sent back to prison (*very softly*), sent back to hell! No, Persome. It is a just punishment for me; I set too great store by them. It was a sin. My punishment is just, but oh God, it is hard, it is very hard.

[*He buries his head in his hands.*]

PERSOME: No, brother, you are wrong. If you won't tell the police I will. I will not stand by and see you robbed. I know you are my brother and my bishop and the best man in all France, but you are a fool, I tell you, a child, and I will not have your goodness abused. I shall go and inform the police (*going*).

BISHOP: Stop, Persome. The candlesticks were mine, they are *his* now. It is better so. He has more need of them than I. My mother would have wished it so had she been here.

PERSOME: But- [*Great knocking without.*]

SERGEANT (*Without*): Monseigneur, monseigneur, we have something for you, may we enter?

BISHOP: Enter, my son.

[*Enter Sergeant and three Gendarmes with the Convict bound.*]

PERSOME: Ah, so they have caught you, villain, have they?

SERGEANT: Yes, madam, we found this scoundrel slinking along the road, and as he wouldn't give any account of himself we arrested him on suspicion. Holy Virgin, isn't he strong and didn't he struggle? While we were securing him these candlesticks fell out of his pockets. (*Persome seizes lovingly*) I remembered the candlesticks of Monseigneur the Bishop, so we brought him here that you might identify them and then we'll lock him up. [*The Bishop and the Convict have been looking at each other. The Convict with dogged defiance.*]

BISHOP: But, but I don't understand, this gentleman is my very good friend.

SERGEANT: Your *friend*, monsignor!! Holy Virgin! Well!!!

BISHOP: Yes, my friend, he did me the honour to sup with me tonight and I-I have given him the candlesticks.

SERGEANT: (*incredulously*): You gave *him*, *him* your candlesticks? Holy Virgin!

BISHOP: (*severely*): Remember, my son, that she is holy,

SERGEANT (*saluting*): Pardon, monsignor.

BISHOP: And now I think you may let your prisoner go.

SERGEANT: But he won't show me his papers, he won't tell me who he is.

BISHOP: I have told you he is my friend.

SERGEANT: Yes, that's all very well, but -

Bishop: He is your Bishop's friend, surely that is enough.

SERGEANT: Well, but-

BISHOP: Surely?

[*A pause, The Sergeant and the Bishop look at each other.*]

SERGEANT: I-I- Humph! (*To his men*) Loose the prisoner. (*They do so*) Right about turn, quick march!

[*Exit Sergeant and Gendarmes. A long pause.*]

CONVICT: (*veryslowly, as if in a dream*): You told them you had given me the candlesticks, given me them. By God!

PERSOME: (*Shaking her fist at him and hugging the candlesticks to her breast*): Oh, you scoundrel, you pitiful scoundrel, you come here and are fed, and warmed, and- and you thieve, steal from your benefactor. Oh, you blackguard.

BISHOP: Persome, you are overwrought. Go to your room.

PERSOME: What, and leave you with him to be cheated again, perhaps murdered. No, I will not.

BISHOP (*with slight severity*): Persome, leave us, I wish it.

[She looks hard at him, then turns towards her door.

PERSOME: Well, if I must go at least I'll take the candlesticks with me.

BISHOP (*more severely*): Persome, place the candlesticks on that table and leave us.

PERSOME: (*defiantly*): I will not!

BISHOP: (*Loudly and with great severity*): I, your bishop, command it.

[*Persome does so with great reluctance and exits R.*

CONVICT: (*Shamefacedly*): Monseigneur, I'm glad I didn't get away with them, curse me, I am. I'm glad.

BISHOP: Now won't you sleep here? See, your bed is ready.

CONVICT: No! (*Looking at the candlesticks*) No! no! I daren't, I daren't-besides I must go on, I must get to Paris, it is big, and I-I can be lost there, they won't find me there and I must travel at night, do you understand?

BISHOP: I see-you must travel by night.

CONVICT: I -I didn't believe there was any good in the world-one doesn't when one has been in hell, but somehow I-I-know you're good and, and it's a queer thing to ask but-but could you, would you bless me before I go-I-I think it would help me. I-

[*Hangs his head very shamefacedly.*

[*Bishop makes sign of the Cross and murmurs blessing.*

CONVICT (*tries to speak, but a sob almost chokes him*): Good night.

[*He hurries towards the door.*

BISHOP: Stay, my son, you have forgotten your property (*giving him the candlesticks*).

CONVICT: You mean me-you want me to take them?

BISHOP: Please, they may help you. (*The Convict takes the candlesticks in absolute amazement*) And, my son, there is a path through the woods at the back of this cottage which leads to Paris, it is a very lonely path, and I have noticed that my good friends the gendarmes do not like lonely paths at night. It is curious.

CONVICT: Ah, thanks, thanks, monseigneur, I-I- (*He sobs.*) Ah! I'm a fool, child to cry but somehow you have made me feel that-it is just as if something had come into me-as if I were a man again and not a wild beast.

[*The door at back is open and the Convict is standing in it.*

BISHOP: (*putting his hand on his shoulder*): Always remember, my son, that this poor body is the Temple of the Living God.

CONVICT: (*With great awe*): The Temple of the Living God. I'll remember. (*Exit L.C.*)

[*The Bishop closes the door and goes quietly to the prie-dieu in the window R., he sinks on his knees, and bows his head in prayer.*

Slow curtain

The Bishop's Candlesticks

The playwright

Norman McKinnel was an actor and playwright. In this play, which is an adaptation of the first few chapters of Victor Hugo's famous novel, *Les Miserables*, he depicts the social ills and disparities in nineteenth century France.

Without preaching or moralising, he introduces the idea that good can prevail over evil and that the most hardened criminal can be won over by love.

The play

The play produces its effect by contrast. It opens with the bustling figure of the Bishop's sister, Persome, who is scandalised that the people in her brother's parish take advantage of his kindness. She is very upset that he has sold all his property, even the salt cellars, to help the poor. In contrast, the Bishop, when he comes in, is subdued, humble and grateful for the opportunity to save the poor. Even his indignant sister cannot hold out against him for long.

When the convict enters, he proves to be another contrast to the Bishop. As the two men talk, the Bishop continues to be gentle, kind and considerate while the convict is rude, harsh, almost brutal.

The dramatist succeeds in portraying the Bishop as a noble, pious and yet loveable character. He is the central figure in the play. His acts of charity, only recounted by his sister earlier, culminate in his giving away the candlesticks, which he has treasured for all these years as a blessing from his mother.

The language is simple and unpretentious and helps the play proceed without distraction to the climax.

Notes

rebuke	: scold
Monseigneur	: title given to people in high positions in France
mon Dieu	: my God
feeling poorly	: feeling ill
Monsieur	: Mister (in French)
mere	: mother (in French); here meaning "old woman"
bailliff	: manager of an estate or a farm, who also collects the rent
dot	: dowry (French)
comforter	: muffler
scamp	: good-for-nothing
incorrigible	: cannot be changed

When Persome says he will sell the candlesticks, she is actually speaking in anger but the Bishop takes her words literally and feels she is being kind and thoughtful. He does not want to sell them because they mean too much to him, not so much in terms of money, but in sentiment. He agonises that may be he is being too selfish and possessive in wanting to keep the candlesticks, and thinks that he should be more charitable. Although his sister is angry with him, she is also touched by his goodness and cannot be angry with him for long.

Why the devil ... can come in?: The convict asks this question without realising that he has been able to enter only because the door and window have not been barred. The Bishop gently points it out to him, but he is too hungry to understand the irony of his question.

I hope you may escape that, my son : The Bishop says this when the convict says "Well, I'll be damned." He has taken the literal meaning of being damned and going to hell.

Exercises

I. Answer the following questions

1. Why was the Bishop late in returning?
2. What had happened to the silver salt-cellars?
3. What does the Bishop give Marie to keep her warm?
4. Why does the convict ask Persome to stay while he eats?
5. Why does the convict say, "I'm a number"?
6. Why is the Bishop upset when he finds that the candlesticks are gone?
7. How does the convict come back to the Bishop's house?
8. Why do the officers leave without the convict?
9. What gift does the Bishop give the convict?
10. What advice does the Bishop give the convict?

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. Ah, it is too much, too much.
2. And if it is spoilt, it serves you right.
3. Brother, brother, you will break my heart.
4. You have your soul to lose, my son, it is of more value than my heart.
5. They took away my name, they took away my soul, and they gave me a devil in its place.
6. Yes, my friend, he did me the honour to sup with me tonight and I — I have given him the candlesticks.
7. You mean me — you want me to take them?
8. ... you have made me feel ... as if I were a man again and not a wild beast.

III. Language work

A. Give the meanings of the following idioms and make sentences using them:

- to set store by; break my heart; too old a bird to catch with chaff;
have a wolf inside one; play false; to be at the beck and call of

B. Fill in the blanks with appropriate prepositions:

1. I offered ... take her ... here ... a day or two.
2. Don't sit ... too long.
3. I will drive my knife ... your heart.
4. Will you favour this gentleman ... your company ... dinner?
5. Tell me ... the time ... the time ... you went ... hell.

C. Give the antonyms of the following words:

proud; beautiful; ill; kind; alone; hope; remember; punishment; friend; help.

IV. Answer in a short paragraph

1. Why is Persome irritated with Marie?
2. What is Persome's reaction to the sale of the salt-cellars?
3. How is the sale of the salt-cellars significant in the play?
4. What impression do you get of the Bishop, from the conversation between Persome and Marie?
5. How does the convict change by the end of the play?

V. Write an essay on

Characterisation in the play

THE LITTLE MAN

- John Galsworthy

A farcical morality in three scenes Characters

The little man.	The American.
The Englishman.	The Englishwoman.
The German.	The Dutch boy.
The mother.	The baby.
The waiter.	The station official.
The policeman.	The porter.

Scene I

Afternoon, on the departure platform of an Austrian railway station. At several little tables outside the buffet persons are taking refreshment, served by a pale young waiter. On a seat against the wall of the buffet a woman of lowly station is sitting beside two large bundles, on one of which she has placed her baby, swathed in a black shawl.

Waiter: [Approaching a table whereat sit an English traveller and his wife]

Two coffee?

Englishman: [Paying] Thanks. [To his wife, in an Oxford voice] Sugar?

Englishwoman: [In a Cambridge voice] One.

American traveler: [With field-glasses and a pocket camera from another table]

Waiter, I'd like to have you get my eggs. I've been sitting here quite a while.

Waiter: Yes, sare.

German traveler: 'Kellner, bezahlen'! [His voice is, like his moustache, stiff and brushed up at the ends. His figure also is stiff and his hair a little grey, clearly once, if not now, a colonel.]

Waiter: 'Komm' gleich'!

[The baby on the bundle wails. The mother takes it up to soothe it. A young, red-cheeked Dutchman at the fourth table stops eating and laughs.]

American: My eggs! Get a wiggle on you!

Waiter: Yes, sare. [He rapidly recedes.]

[A LITTLE MAN in a soft hat is seen to the right of tables. He stands a moment looking after the hurrying waiter, then seats himself at the fifth table.]

Englishman: [Looking at his watch] Ten minutes more.

Englishwoman: Bother!

American: [Addressing them] 'Pears as if they'd a prejudice against eggs here, anyway.

[The English look at him, but do not speak.]

German.: [In creditable English] In these places man can get nothing.

[The waiter comes flying back with a compote for the Dutch youth, who pays.]

German: 'Kellner, bezahlen'!

Waiter: 'Eine Krone sechzig'.

[The german pays.]

American: [Rising, and taking out his watch—blandly] See here. If I don't get my eggs before this watch ticks twenty, there'll be another waiter in heaven.

Waiter: [Flying] 'Komm' gleich'!

American: [Seeking sympathy] I'm gettin' kind of mad!

[The **englishman** halves his newspaper and hands the advertisement half to his wife. The **baby** wails. The **mother** rocks it.]

[The **dutch youth** stops eating and laughs. The **german** lights a cigarette. The **LITTLE MAN** sits motionless, nursing his hat. The **waiter** comes flying back with the eggs and places them before the **American**.]

American: [Putting away his watch] Good! I don't like trouble. How much?

[He pays and eats. The **waiter** stands a moment at the edge of the platform and passes his hand across his brow. The **LITTLE MAN** eyes him and speaks gently.]

LITTLE MAN: Herr Ober!

[The WAITER turns.] Might I have a glass of beer?

Waiter: Yes, sare.

LITTLE MAN: Thank you very much.

[The **waiter** goes.]

American. [Pausing in the deglutition of his eggs—affably] Pardon me, sir, I'd like to have you tell me why you called that little bit of a feller "Herr Ober." Reckon you would know what that means? Mr. Head Waiter.

LITTLE MAN: Yes, yes.

American: I smile.

LITTLE MAN. Oughtn't I to call him that?

GERMAN. [Abruptly] 'Nein—Kellner'.

AMERICAN. Why, yes! Just "waiter."

[The ENGLISHWOMAN looks round her paper for a second. The DUTCH YOUTH stops eating and laughs. The LITTLE MAN gazes from face to face and nurses his hat.]

LITTLE MAN. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

GERMAN. Gott!

AMERICAN. In my country we're very democratic—but that's quite a proposition.

ENGLISHMAN. [Handling coffee-pot, to his wife] More?

ENGLISHWOMAN. No, thanks.

GERMAN. [Abruptly] These fellows—if you treat them in this manner, at once they take liberties. You see, you will not get your beer.

[As he speaks the WAITER returns, bringing the LITTLE MAN'S beer, then retires.]

AMERICAN. That 'pears to be one up to democracy. [To the LITTLE MAN] I judge you go in for brotherhood?

LITTLE MAN. [Startled] Oh, no!

AMERICAN. I take considerable stock in Leo Tolstoi myself. Grand man—grand-souled apparatus. But I guess you've got to pinch those waiters some to make 'em skip. [To the ENGLISH, who have carelessly looked his way for a moment] You'll appreciate that, the way he acted about my eggs.

[The ENGLISH make faint motions with their chins and avert their eyes.]

[To the WAITER, who is standing at the door of the buffet]

Waiter! Flash of beer—jump, now!

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

GERMAN. 'Cigarren'!

WAITER. 'Schon'!

[He disappears.]

AMERICAN. [Affably—to the LITTLE MAN] Now, if I don't get that flash of beer quicker'n you got yours, I shall admire.

GERMAN. [Abruptly] Tolstoi is nothing 'nichts'! No good! Ha?

AMERICAN. [Relishing the approach of argument] Well, that is a matter of temperament. Now, I'm all for equality. See that poor woman there—very humble woman—there she sits among us with her baby. Perhaps you'd like to locate her somewhere else?

GERMAN. [Shrugging]. Tolstoi is 'sentimentalisch'. Nietzsche is the true philosopher, the only one.

AMERICAN. Well, that's quite in the prospectus—very stimulating party—old Nietch—virgin mind. But give me Leo! [He turns to the red-cheeked YOUTH] What do you opine, sir? I guess by your labels you'll be Dutch. Do they read Tolstoi in your country?

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

AMERICAN. That is a very luminous answer.

GERMAN. Tolstoi is nothing. Man should himself express. He must push—he must be strong.

AMERICAN. That is so. In America we believe in virility; we like a man to expand. But we believe in brotherhood too. We draw the line at niggers; but we aspire. Social barriers and distinctions we've not much use for.

ENGLISHMAN. Do you feel a draught?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [With a shiver of her shoulder toward the AMERICAN] I do—rather.

GERMAN. Wait! You are a young people.

AMERICAN. That is so; there are no flies on us. [To the LITTLE MAN, who has been gazing eagerly from face to face] Say! I'd like to have you give us your sentiments in relation to the duty of man.

[The LITTLE MAN, fidgets, and is about to open his mouth.]

AMERICAN. For example—is it your opinion that we should kill off the weak and diseased, and all that can't jump around?

GERMAN. [Nodding] 'Ja, ja'! That is coming.

LITTLE MAN. [Looking from face to face] They might be me.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

AMERICAN. [Reproving him with a look] That's true humility.

'Tisn't grammar. Now, here's a proposition that brings it nearer the bone: Would you step out of your way to help them when it was liable to bring you trouble?

GERMAN. 'Nein, nein'! That is stupid.

LITTLE MAN. [Eager but wistful] I'm afraid not. Of course one wants to—There was St Francis d'Assisi and St Julien L'Hospitalier, and——

AMERICAN. Very lofty dispositions. Guess they died of them. [He rises] Shake hands, sir—my name is—[He hands a card] I am an ice-machine maker. [He shakes the LITTLE MAN's hand] I like your sentiments—I feel

kind of brotherly. [Catching sight of the WAITER appearing in the doorway] Waiter, where to hell is that glass of beer?

GERMAN. Cigarren!

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

ENGLISHMAN. [Consulting watch] Train's late.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Really! Nuisance!

[A station POLICEMAN, very square and uniformed, passes and repasses.]

AMERICAN. [Resuming his seat—to the GERMAN] Now, we don't have so much of that in America. Guess we feel more to trust in human nature.

GERMAN. Ah! ha! you will presently find there is nothing in him but self.

LITTLE MAN. [Wistfully] Don't you believe in human nature?

AMERICAN. Very stimulating question.

[He looks round for opinions. The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

ENGLISHMAN. [Holding out his half of the paper to his wife] Swap!

[His wife swaps.]

GERMAN. In human nature I believe so far as I can see him—no more.

AMERICAN. Now that 'pears to me kind o' blasphemy. I believe in heroism. I opine there's not one of us settin' around here that's not a hero—give him the occasion.

LITTLE MAN. Oh! Do you believe that?

AMERICAN. Well! I judge a hero is just a person that'll help another at the expense of himself. Take that poor woman there. Well, now, she's a heroine, I guess. She would die for her baby any old time.

GERMAN. Animals will die for their babies. That is nothing.

AMERICAN. I carry it further. I postulate we would all die for that baby if a locomotive was to trundle up right here and try to handle it. [To the GERMAN] I guess you don't know how good you are. [As the GERMAN is twisting up the ends of his moustache—to the

ENGLISHWOMAN] I should like to have you express an opinion, ma'am.

ENGLISHWOMAN. I beg your pardon.

AMERICAN. The English are very humanitarian; they have a very high sense of duty. So have the Germans, so have the Americans. [To the DUTCH YOUTH] I judge even in your little country they have that. This is an epoch of equality and high-toned ideals. [To the LITTLE MAN] What is your nationality, sir?

LITTLE MAN. I'm afraid I'm nothing particular. My father was half-English and half-American, and my mother half-German and half-Dutch.

AMERICAN. My! That's a bit streaky, any old way. [The POLICEMAN passes again] Now, I don't believe we've much use any more for those gentlemen in buttons. We've grown kind of mild—we don't think of self as we used to do.

[The WAITER has appeared in the doorway.]

GERMAN. [In a voice of thunder] 'Cigarren! Donnerwetter'!

AMERICAN. [Shaking his fist at the vanishing WAITER.] That flash of beer!

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

AMERICAN. A little more, and he will join George Washington! I was about to remark when he intruded: In this year of grace 1913 the kingdom of Christ is quite a going concern. We are mighty near universal brotherhood. The colonel here [He indicates the GERMAN] is a man of blood and iron, but give him an opportunity to be magnanimous, and he'll be right there. Oh, sir! yep!

[The GERMAN, with a profound mixture of pleasure and cynicism, brushes up the ends of his moustache.]

LITTLE MAN. I wonder. One wants to, but somehow—[He shakes his head.]

AMERICAN. You seem kind of skeery about that. You've had experience, maybe. I'm an optimist—I think we're bound to make the devil hum in the near future. I opine we shall occasion a good deal of trouble to that old party. There's about to be a holocaust of selfish interests. The colonel there with old-man Nietch he won't know himself. There's going to be a very sacred opportunity.

[As he speaks, the voice of a RAILWAY OFFICIAL is heard at the distance calling out in German. It approaches, and the words become audible.]

GERMAN. [Startled] 'Der Teufel'! [He gets up, and seizes the bag beside him.]

[The STATION OFFICIAL has appeared; he stands for a moment casting his commands at the seated group. The DUTCH YOUTH also rises, and takes his coat and hat. The OFFICIAL turns on his heel and retires still issuing directions.]

ENGLISHMAN. What does he say?

GERMAN. Our train has come in, de oder platform; only one minute we haf.

[All, have risen in a fluster.]

AMERICAN. Now, that's very provoking. I won't get that flash of beer.

[There is a general scurry to gather coats and hats and wraps, during which the lowly WOMAN is seen making desperate attempts to deal with her baby and the two large bundles. Quite defeated, she suddenly puts all down, wrings her hands, and cries out: "Herr Jesu! Hilfe!" The flying procession turn their heads at that strange cry.]

AMERICAN. What's that? Help?

[He continues to run. The LITTLE MAN spins round, rushes back, picks up baby and bundle on which it was seated.]

LITTLE MAN. Come along, good woman, come along!

[The WOMAN picks up the other bundle and they run.]

[The WAITER, appearing in the doorway with the bottle of beer, watches with his tired smile.]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A second-class compartment of a corridor carriage, in motion. In it are seated the ENGLISHMAN and his WIFE, opposite each other at the corridor end, she with her face to the engine, he with his back. Both are somewhat protected from the rest of the travellers by newspapers. Next to her sits the GERMAN, and opposite him sits the AMERICAN; next the AMERICAN in one window corner is seated the DUTCH YOUTH; the other window corner is taken by the GERMAN'S bag. The silence is only broken by the slight rushing noise of the train's progression and the crackling of the English newspapers.

AMERICAN. [Turning to the DUTCH YOUTH] Guess I'd like that window raised; it's kind of chilly after that old run they gave us.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs, and goes through the motions of raising the window. The ENGLISH regard the operation with uneasy irritation. The GERMAN opens his bag, which reposes on the corner seat next him, and takes out a book.]

AMERICAN. The Germans are great readers. Very stimulating practice. I read most anything myself!

[The GERMAN holds up the book so that the title may be read.]

“Don Quixote”—fine book. We Americans take considerable stock in old man Quixote. Bit of a wild-cat—but we don’t laugh at him.

GERMAN. He is dead. Dead as a sheep. A good thing, too.

AMERICAN. In America we have still quite an amount of chivalry.

GERMAN. Chivalry is nothing ‘sentimentalisch’. In modern days—no good. A man must push, he must pull.

AMERICAN. So you say. But I judge your form of chivalry is sacrifice to the state. We allow more freedom to the individual soul. Where there’s something little and weak, we feel it kind of noble to give up to it. That way we feel elevated.

[As he speaks there is seen in the corridor doorway the LITTLE MAN, with the WOMAN’S BABY still on his arm and the bundle held in the other hand. He peers in anxiously. The ENGLISH, acutely conscious, try to dissociate themselves from his presence with their papers. The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

GERMAN. ‘Ach’! So!

AMERICAN. Dear me!

LITTLE MAN. Is there room? I can’t find a seat.

AMERICAN. Why, yes! There’s a seat for one.

LITTLE MAN. [Depositing bundle outside, and heaving BABY] May I?

AMERICAN. Come right in!

[The GERMAN sulkily moves his bag. The LITTLE MAN comes in and seats himself gingerly.]

AMERICAN. Where’s the mother?

LITTLE MAN. [Ruefully] Afraid she got left behind.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The ENGLISH unconsciously emerge from their newspapers.]

AMERICAN. My! That would appear to be quite a domestic incident.

[The ENGLISHMAN suddenly utters a profound “Ha, Ha!” and disappears behind his paper. And that paper and the one opposite are seen to shake, and little squirls and squeaks emerge.]

GERMAN. And you haf got her bundle, and her baby. Ha! [He cackles drily.]

AMERICAN. [Gravely] I smile. I guess Providence has played it pretty low down on you. It’s sure acted real mean.

[The BABY wails, and the LITTLE MAN jigs it with a sort of gentle desperation, looking apologetically from face to face. His wistful glance renews the fore of merriment wherever it alights. The AMERICAN alone preserves a gravity which seems incapable of being broken.]

AMERICAN. Maybe you’d better get off right smart and restore that baby. There’s nothing can act madder than a mother.

LITTLE MAN. Poor thing, yes! What she must be suffering!

[A gale of laughter shakes the carriage. The ENGLISH for a moment drop their papers, the better to indulge. The LITTLE MAN smiles a wintry smile.]

AMERICAN. [In a lull] How did it eventuate?

LITTLE MAN. We got there just as the train was going to start, and I jumped, thinking I could help her up. But it moved too quickly, and—and left her.

[The gale of laughter blows up again.]

AMERICAN. Guess I'd have thrown the baby out to her.

LITTLE MAN. I was afraid the poor little thing might break.

[The Baby wails; the LITTLE MAN heaves it; the gale of laughter blows.]

AMERICAN. [Gravely] It's highly entertaining—not for the baby. What kind of an old baby is it, anyway? [He sniff's] I judge it's a bit—niffy.

LITTLE MAN. Afraid I've hardly looked at it yet.

AMERICAN. Which end up is it?

LITTLE MAN. Oh! I think the right end. Yes, yes, it is.

AMERICAN. Well, that's something. Maybe you should hold it out of window a bit. Very excitable things, babies!

ENGLISHWOMAN. [Galvanized] No, no!

ENGLISHMAN. [Touching her knee] My dear!

AMERICAN. You are right, ma'am. I opine there's a draught out there. This baby is precious. We've all of us got stock in this baby in a manner of speaking. This is a little bit of universal brotherhood. Is it a woman baby?

LITTLE MAN. I—I can only see the top of its head.

AMERICAN. You can't always tell from that. It looks kind of over-wrapped up. Maybe it had better be unbound.

GERMAN. 'Nein, nein, nein'!

AMERICAN. I think you are very likely right, colonel. It might be a pity to unbind that baby. I guess the lady should be consulted in this matter.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Yes, yes, of course——!

ENGLISHMAN. [Touching her] Let it be! Little beggar seems all right.

AMERICAN. That would seem only known to Providence at this moment. I judge it might be due to humanity to look at its face.

LITTLE MAN. [Gladly] It's sucking my' finger. There, there—nice little thing—there!

AMERICAN. I would surmise in your leisure moments you have created babies, sir?

LITTLE MAN. Oh! no—indeed, no.

AMERICAN. Dear me!—That is a loss. [Addressing himself to the carriage at large] I think we may esteem ourselves fortunate to have this little stranger right here with us. Demonstrates what a hold the little and weak have upon us nowadays. The colonel here—a man of blood and iron—there he sits quite calm next door to it. [He sniffs] Now, this baby is rather chastening—that is a sign of grace, in the colonel—that is true heroism.

LITTLE MAN. [Faintly] I—I can see its face a little now.

[All bend forward.]

AMERICAN. What sort of a physiognomy has it, anyway?

LITTLE MAN. [Still faintly] I don't see anything but—but spots.

GERMAN. Oh! Ha! Pfu!

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

AMERICAN. I am told that is not uncommon amongst babies. Perhaps we could have you inform us, ma'am.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Yes, of course—only what sort of——LITTLE MAN. They seem all over its——[At the slight recoil of everyone] I feel sure it's—it's quite a good baby underneath.

AMERICAN. That will be rather difficult to come at. I'm just a bit sensitive. I've very little use for affections of the epidermis.

GERMAN. Pfu! [He has edged away as far as he can get, and is lighting a big cigar]

[The DUTCH YOUTH draws his legs back.]

AMERICAN. [Also taking out a cigar] I guess it would be well to fumigate this carriage. Does it suffer, do you think? LITTLE MAN. [Peering] Really, I don't—I'm not sure—I know so little about babies. I think it would have a nice expression—if—if it showed.

AMERICAN. Is it kind of boiled looking?

LITTLE MAN. Yes—yes, it is.

AMERICAN. [Looking gravely round] I judge this baby has the measles.

[The GERMAN screws himself spasmodically against the arm of the ENGLISHWOMAN'S seat.]

ENGLISHWOMAN. Poor little thing! Shall I——?

[She half rises.]

ENGLISHMAN. [Touching her] No, no——Dash it!

AMERICAN. I honour your emotion, ma'am. It does credit to us all. But I sympathize with your husband too. The measles is a very important pestilence in connection with a grown woman.

LITTLE MAN. It likes my finger awfully. Really, it's rather a sweet baby.

AMERICAN. [Sniffing] Well, that would appear to be quite a question. About them spots, now? Are they rosy?

LITTLE MAN. No-o; they're dark, almost black.

GERMAN. Gott! Typhus! [He bounds up on to the arm of the

ENGLISHWOMAN'S Seat.]

AMERICAN. Typhus! That's quite an indisposition!

[The DUTCH YOUTH rises suddenly, and bolts out into the corridor. He is followed by the GERMAN, puffing clouds of smoke. The ENGLISH and AMERICAN sit a moment longer without speaking. The ENGLISHWOMAN'S face is turned with a curious expression—half pity, half fear—towards the LITTLE MAN. Then the ENGLISHMAN gets up.]

ENGLISHMAN. Bit stuffy for you here, dear, isn't it?

[He puts his arm through hers, raises her, and almost pushes her through the doorway. She goes, still looking back.]

AMERICAN. [Gravely] There's nothing I admire more'n courage. Guess I'll go and smoke in the corridor.

[As he goes out the LITTLE MAN looks very wistfully after him. Screwing up his mouth and nose, he holds the BABY away from him and wavers; then rising, he puts it on the seat opposite and goes through the motions of letting down the window. Having done so he looks at the BABY, who has begun to wail. Suddenly he raises his hands and clasps them, like a child praying. Since, however, the BABY does not stop wailing, he hovers over it in indecision; then, picking it up, sits down again to dandle it, with his face turned toward the open window. Finding that it still wails, he begins to sing to it in a cracked little voice. It is charmed at once. While he is singing, the AMERICAN

appears in the corridor. Letting down the passage window, he stands there in the doorway with the draught blowing his hair and the smoke of his cigar all about him. The LITTLE MAN stops singing and shifts the shawl higher to protect the BABY'S head from the draught.]

AMERICAN. [Gravely] This is the most sublime spectacle I have ever envisaged. There ought to be a record of this.

[The LITTLE MAN looks at him, wondering. You are typical, sir, of the sentiments of modern Christianity. You illustrate the deepest feelings in the heart of every man.]

[The LITTLE MAN rises with the BABY and a movement of approach.] Guess I'm wanted in the dining-car.

[He vanishes. The LITTLE MAN sits down again, but back to the engine, away from the draught, and looks out of the window, patiently jogging the BABY On his knee.]

CURTAIN

SCENE III

An arrival platform. The LITTLE MAN, with the BABY and the bundle, is standing disconsolate, while travellers pass and luggage is being carried by. A STATION OFFICIAL, accompanied by a POLICEMAN, appears from a doorway, behind him. OFFICIAL. [Consulting telegram in his hand] 'Das ist der Herr'. [They advance to the LITTLE MAN.]

OFFICIAL. 'Sie haben einen Buben gestohlen'?

LITTLE MAN. I only speak English and American.

OFFICIAL. 'Dies ist nicht Ihr Bube'?

[He touches the Baby.]

LITTLE MAN. [Shaking his head] Take care—it's ill.

[The man does not understand.] Ill—the baby——

OFFICIAL. [Shaking his head] 'Verstehe nicht'. Dis is nod your baby? No?

LITTLE MAN. [Shaking his head violently] No, it is not. No.

OFFICIAL. [Tapping the telegram] Gut! You are 'rested. [He signs to the POLICEMAN, who takes the LITTLE MAN'S arm.]

LITTLE MAN. Why? I don't want the poor baby.

OFFICIAL. [Lifting the bundle] 'Dies ist nicht Ihr Gepack'—pag?

LITTLE MAN. No.

OFFICIAL. Gut! You are 'rested.

LITTLE MAN. I only took it for the poor woman. I'm not a thief—I'm—I'm——

OFFICIAL. [Shaking head] Verstehe nicht.

[The LITTLE MAN tries to tear his hair. The disturbed BABY wails.]

LITTLE MAN. [Dandling it as best he can] There, there—poor, poor!

OFFICIAL. Halt still! You are 'rested. It is all right.

LITTLE MAN. Where is the mother?

OFFICIAL. She comet by next drain. Das telegram say: 'Halt einen Herren mit schwarzem Buben and schwarzem Gepack'. 'Rest gentleman mit black baby and black—pag
[The LITTLE MAN turns up his eyes to heaven.]

OFFICIAL. 'Komm mit us'.

[They take the LITTLE MAN toward the door from which they have come. A voice stops them.]

AMERICAN. [Speaking from as far away as may be] Just a moment!

[The OFFICIAL stops; the LITTLE MAN also stops and sits down on a bench against the wall. The POLICEMAN stands stolidly beside him. The AMERICAN approaches a step or two, beckoning; the OFFICIAL goes up to him.]

AMERICAN. Guess you've got an angel from heaven there! What's the gentleman in buttons for?

OFFICIAL. 'Was ist das'?

AMERICAN. Is there anybody here that can understand American?

OFFICIAL. 'Verstehe nicht'.

AMERICAN. Well, just watch my gestures. I was saying [He points to the LITTLE MAN, then makes gestures of flying] you have an angel from heaven there. You have there a man in whom Gawd [He points upward] takes quite an amount of stock. You have no call to arrest him. [He makes the gesture of arrest] No, Sir. Providence has acted pretty mean, loading off that baby on him. [He makes the motion of dandling] The little man has a heart of gold. [He points to his heart, and takes out a gold coin.]

OFFICIAL. [Thinking he is about to be bribed] 'Aber, das ist zu viel'!

AMERICAN. Now, don't rattle me! [Pointing to the LITTLE MAN] Man [Pointing to his heart] 'Herz' [Pointing to the coin] 'von' Gold. This is a flower of the field—he don't want no gentleman in buttons to pluck him up.

[A little crowd is gathering, including the Two ENGLISH, the GERMAN, and the DUTCH YOUTH.]

OFFICIAL. 'Verstehe absolut nichts'. [He taps the telegram] 'Ich muss mein' duty do.

AMERICAN. But I'm telling you. This is a white man. This is probably the whitest man on Gawd's earth.

OFFICIAL. 'Das macht nichts'—gut or no gut, I muss mein duty do.

[He turns to go toward the LITTLE MAN.]

AMERICAN. Oh! Very well, arrest him; do your duty. This baby has typhus.

[At the word "typhus" the OFFICIAL stops.]

AMERICAN. [Making gestures] First-class typhus, black typhus, schwarzen typhus. Now you have it. I'm kind o' sorry for you and the gentleman in buttons. Do your duty!

OFFICIAL. Typhus? Der Bub—die baby hat typhus?

AMERICAN. I'm telling you.

OFFICIAL. Gott im Himmel!

AMERICAN. [Spotting the GERMAN in the little throng] here's a gentleman will corroborate me.

OFFICIAL. [Much disturbed, and signing to the POLICEMAN to stand clear] Typhus! 'Aber das ist grasslich'!

AMERICAN. I kind o' thought you'd feel like that.

OFFICIAL. 'Die Sanitatsmaschine! Gleich'!

[A PORTER goes to get it. From either side the broken half-moon of persons stand gazing at the LITTLE MAN, who sits unhappily dandling the BABY in the centre.]

OFFICIAL. [Raising his hands] 'Was zu thun'?

AMERICAN. Guess you'd better isolate the baby.

[A silence, during which the LITTLE MAN is heard faintly whistling and clucking to the BABY.]

OFFICIAL. [Referring once more to his telegram]

"Rest gentleman mit black baby." [Shaking his head] Wir must den gentleman hold. [To the GERMAN] 'Bitte, mein Herr, sagen Sie ihm, den Buben zu niedersetzen'. [He makes the gesture of deposit.]

GERMAN. [To the LITTLE MAN] He say: Put down the baby.

[The LITTLE MAN shakes his head, and continues to dandle the BABY.] OFFICIAL. You must.

[The LITTLE MAN glowers, in silence.]

ENGLISHMAN. [In background—muttering] Good man!

GERMAN. His spirit ever denies.

OFFICIAL. [Again making his gesture] 'Aber er muss'!

[The LITTLE MAN makes a face at him.] 'Sag' Ihm'. Instantly put down baby and komm' mit us.

[The BABY wails.]

LITTLE MAN. Leave the poor ill baby here alone? Be—be—be d—d to you!

AMERICAN. [Jumping on to a trunk—with enthusiasm] Bully!

[The ENGLISH clap their hands; the DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The OFFICIAL is muttering, greatly incensed.]

AMERICAN. What does that body-snatcher say?

GERMAN. He say this man use the baby to save himself from arrest. Very smart he say.

AMERICAN. I judge you do him an injustice. [Showing off the LITTLE MAN with a sweep of his arm.] This is a white man. He's got a black baby, and he won't leave it in the lurch. Guess we would all act noble that way, give us the chance.

[The LITTLE MAN rises, holding out the BABY, and advances a step or two. The half-moon at once gives, increasing its size; the AMERICAN climbs on to a higher trunk. The LITTLE MAN retires and again sits down.]

AMERICAN. [Addressing the OFFICIAL] Guess you'd better go out of business and wait for the mother.

OFFICIAL. [Stamping his foot] Die Mutter soll 'rested be for taking out baby mit typhus. Ha! [To the LITTLE MAN] Put ze baby down!

[The LITTLE MAN smiles.] Do you 'ear?

AMERICAN. [Addressing the OFFICIAL] Now, see here. 'Pears to me you don't suspicion just how beautiful this is. Here we have a man giving his life for that old baby that's got no claim on him. This is not a baby of his own making. No, sir, this is a very Christ-like proposition in the gentleman.

OFFICIAL. Put ze baby down, or ich will gommand someone it to do.

AMERICAN. That will be very interesting to watch.

OFFICIAL. [To POLICEMAN] Dake it vrom him.

[The POLICEMAN mutters, but does not.]

AMERICAN. [To the German] Guess I lost that.

GERMAN. He say he is not his officier.

AMERICAN. That just tickles me to death.

OFFICIAL. [Looking round] Will nobody dake ze Bub'?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [Moving a step faintly] Yes—I——

ENGLISHMAN. [Grasping her arm]. By Jove! Will you!

OFFICIAL. [Gathering himself for a great effort to take the BABY, and advancing two steps] Zen I goummand you—[He stops and his voice dies away] Zit dere!

AMERICAN. My! That's wonderful. What a man this is! What a sublime sense of duty!

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The OFFICIAL turns on him, but as he does so the MOTHER of the Busy is seen hurrying.]

MOTHER. 'Ach! Ach! Mei' Bubi'!

[Her face is illumined; she is about to rush to the LITTLE MAN.]

OFFICIAL. [To the POLICEMAN] 'Nimm die Frau'!

[The POLICEMAN catches hold of the WOMAN.]

OFFICIAL. [To the frightened WOMAN] 'Warum haben Sie einen Buben mit Typhus mit ausgebracht'?

AMERICAN. [Eagerly, from his perch] What was that? I don't want to miss any.

GERMAN. He say. Why did you a baby with typhus with you bring out?

AMERICAN. Well, that's quite a question.

[He takes out the field-glasses slung around him and adjusts them on the BABY.]

MOTHER. [Bewildered] Mei' Bubi—Typhus—aber Typhus? [She shakes her head violently] 'Nein, nein, nein! Typhus'!

OFFICIAL. Er hat Typhus.

MOTHER. [Shaking her head] 'Nein, nein, nein'!

AMERICAN. [Looking through his glasses] Guess she's kind of right! I judge the typhus is where the baby' slobbered on the shawl, and it's come off on him.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

OFFICIAL. [Turning on him furiously] Er hat Typhus.

AMERICAN. Now, that's where you slop over. Come right here.

[The OFFICIAL mounts, and looks through the glasses.]

AMERICAN. [To the LITTLE MAN] Skin out the baby's leg. If we don't locate spots on that, it'll be good enough for me.

[The LITTLE MAN fumbles Out the BABY'S little white foot.]

MOTHER. Mei' Bubi! [She tries to break away.]

AMERICAN. White as a banana. [To the OFFICIAL—affably] Guess you've made kind of a fool of us with your old typhus.

OFFICIAL. Lass die Frau!

[The POLICEMAN lets her go, and she rushes to her BABY.]

MOTHER. Mei' Bubi!

[The BABY, exchanging the warmth of the LITTLE MAN for the momentary chill of its MOTHER, wails.]

OFFICIAL. [Descending and beckoning to the POLICEMAN] 'Sie wollen den Herrn accusiren'?

[The POLICEMAN takes the LITTLE MAN's arm.]

AMERICAN. What's that? They goin' to pitch him after all?

[The MOTHER, still hugging her BABY, who has stopped crying, gazes at the LITTLE MAN, who sits dazedly looking up. Suddenly she drops on her knees, and with her free hand lifts his booted foot and kisses it.]

AMERICAN. [Waving his hat] Ra! Ra! [He descends swiftly, goes up to the LITTLE MAN, whose arm the POLICEMAN has dropped, and takes his hand] Brother, I am proud to know you. This is one of the greatest moments I have ever experienced. [Displaying the LITTLE MAN to the assembled company] I think I sense the situation when I say that we all esteem it an honour to breathe the rather inferior atmosphere of this station here Along with our little friend. I guess we shall all go home and treasure the memory of his face as the whitest thing in our museum of recollections. And perhaps this good woman will also go home and wash the face of our little brother here. I am inspired with a new faith in mankind. Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to present to you a sure-enough saint—only wants a halo, to be transfigured.

[To the LITTLE MAN] Stand right up.

[The LITTLE MAN stands up bewildered. They come about him. The OFFICIAL bows to him, the POLICEMAN salutes him. The DUTCH YOUTH shakes his head and laughs. The GERMAN draws himself up very straight, and bows quickly twice. The ENGLISHMAN and his WIFE approach at least two steps, then, thinking better of it, turn to each other and recede. The MOTHER kisses his hand. The PORTER returning with the Sanitatsmaschine, turns it on from behind, and its pinkish shower, goldened by a ray of sunlight, falls around the LITTLE MAN's head, transfiguring it as he stands with eyes upraised to see whence the portent comes.] AMERICAN. [Rushing forward and dropping on his knees] Hold on just a minute! Guess I'll take a snapshot of the miracle. [He adjusts his pocket camera] This ought to look bully!

CURTAIN

The Little Man

The playwright

John Galsworthy (1867 – 1933) is famous for his novels, particularly the *Forsyth Saga*, which deals with generations of middle class British life. Born in Surrey and educated at Oxford, he was one of the literary luminaries of his age. In addition to his novels, he is also famous for his plays, which often deal with social or moral questions. Galsworthy was not afraid to probe the society and moral postulations of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. With his sharp insight he exposes the hypocrisy and pretensions that parade as virtue. Many of his plays are more popular now than his novels, for example *Loyalty*, *Strife* and *Justice*.

The play

The Little Man has many literary qualities, not least among them being the obvious irony, so clearly depicted in dialogue, tone and action. In fact the very title is ironical for the little man may be small in stature, but he is large in heart and deed. The play portrays the courage of the Little Man, who is forced to carry a baby throughout a journey as the mother has missed the train and is following on the next train. Even though it is thought that the baby might be suffering from measles, an infectious disease that he might well contract, he continues to hold and comfort the baby until the mother arrives. The American, for all his tall talk about heroism, maintains a distance from the man and the baby, like all the other characters in the play.

In its exaggerated portrayal of racial qualities, such as the talkative and brash American, the haughty English, the carefree Dutchman and the stiff German, the play may be said to be a farce. The unexpected twists in action and situation add to the feeling of watching a well-modulated farce. The categorical difference between good and evil, in this case, between selfishness and altruism, make it a morality play. Galsworthy called it a *farfical morality*. The verbal idealism of the American, the aggressive politics of the German and the conservative prudery of the British are in contrast to the practical humanity of the Little Man. He does not belong to any nationality because he has a little of all of them, his father being half-English and half-American and his mother, half-German and half-Dutch. He is Galsworthy's idea of a true man and his actions are the dramatist's yardstick of humanity.

The play was first performed in Britain in 1916 and a few years later in New York, along with Chesterton's *Magic*. It has captivated audiences and readers alike as it probes human nature and tries to arrive at a definition of the ideal human being.

Notes

- swathed : wrapped up
- Oxford voice : in the accent of an Oxford University scholar
- Cambridge voice : in the accent of a scholar from Cambridge University
- recedes : moves out of sight
- Leo Tolstoi : Count Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), great Russian novelist and reformist thinker, most famous for his novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*
- Nietzsche : German philosopher and poet who propagated the idea of the Superman and the doctrine of power and rejected Christian morality
- St. Francis of Assisi : a rich man who gave up all his wealth after an illness and devoted himself to the service of the poor

- St. Julian : protector of travellers and patron saint of hospitality
 Don Quixote : popular romance by Cervantes
 George Washington : The first president of the United States of America; known for his patriotism and sense of justice
 eventuate : happen
 pestilence : disease

The passengers assume that the baby has typhus or measles and leave the compartment for fear of being infected, though they pretend that they are not afraid. The Little Man refuses to put the baby down and the American comments "This is the most sublime spectacle I have ever envisaged." When the German officers try to arrest the Little Man the American again speaks on his behalf, saying he has a heart of gold and that he is a "white man". He also dares the officers to arrest him, remarking that the baby has typhus. They at once move away. When the mother arrives, it is made clear that the baby was only dirty and not ill. The Little Man emerges the hero, having had the courage to carry the baby despite fears of infection.

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. When the play opens, where are all the travellers to be found?
2. Describe the poor woman and her possessions.
3. How is the Little Man different from the other travellers?
4. What does the American think about democracy?
5. What are the German's views about Tolstoy?
6. What happens when the train arrives?
7. Who is the last person to enter the compartment?
8. Why is the Little Man travelling with the baby?
9. What do the travellers infer about the health of the baby?
10. What is the reaction of the travellers to the baby's condition?
11. What do the officers want the Little Man to do?
12. What is the Little Man's reaction to the orders of the officers?
13. How do the travellers find out whether the baby is ill or not?
14. How does the mother show her gratitude to the Little Man?
15. What is the American's reaction to the mother's gesture?

II. Match the following

A	B
The British couple	always talking and commenting
The German	laughing all the time
The Little Man	reserved and withdrawn
The American	does not believe in sentiment
The Dutchman	believes in helping if he can

III. Language work

A. Replace the underlined word with a synonym:

1. What do you opine, sir?
2. This is an epoch of equality and high-toned ideals.
3. I've very little use for affections of the epidermis.
4. That is the most sublime spectacle I have ever envisaged.
5. ...you don't suspicion just how beautiful this is.

B. Complete the sentences with an adverb:

1. The American is talking ...
2. The British are waiting ...
3. The poor woman cries out ...
4. The Little Man seats himself ...
5. He laughs ...
6. The Little Man holds the baby ...

IV. Explain with reference to the context

1. Don't you believe in human nature?
2. The English are very humanitarian; they have a very high sense of duty.
3. I think we may esteem ourselves fortunate to have this little stranger right here with us. Demonstrates what a hold the little and weak have upon us nowadays.
4. There's nothing I admire more'n courage. Guess I'll go and smoke in the corridor.
5. I guess we shall all go home and treasure the memory of his face as the whitest thing in our museum of recollections.

V. Answer in a brief paragraph

1. The role of the American in the play
2. The choice of characters in the play
3. Action in the play
4. The title of the play

VI. Write an essay on

The Little Man is a farcical morality play.

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

- William Shakespeare

The poet – William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

William Shakespeare, it is believed, was born in Stratford-on-Avon in 1564.

A complete and authentic account of his life is lacking but it is generally accepted that he went to the local grammar school. In 1582 Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. He came to London to become an actor and stayed to become one of England's greatest dramatists. He secured the patronage of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton.

Shakespeare's characters reflect his deep understanding of human behaviour. His use of poetry and drama showcase his knowledge of the individual as well as social situations. He has managed to achieve universal appeal, transcending time and place, as he is still considered one of the greatest dramatists of all time. His plays have been acted all over the world for more than four hundred years and readers and critics are even now finding new meanings and interpretations. In addition to the considerable body of poetic work, such as the Sonnets and love poems, Shakespeare's mastery of poetry is evidenced even in his plays. Some of the best known "poems" of Shakespeare are actually found in his plays, as for example, this extract from *As You Like It*.

The poem

The poem is taken from the play *As you like it*. This poem is a part of Jacques' speech in the forest. Jacques is a melancholy character in the play, who seems to spend all his time mourning the negative side of man's character.

In this verse Jacques describes the seven stages of man's life on earth. He talks of the scenes of life from childhood to old age. Life is a play with seven acts in each of which man plays a different role. The world is his stage and man's birth, his entrance on the stage. He plays all his roles – of child, school boy, lover, soldier, judge, old man and finally second childhood, without teeth, eyes, and the ability to fend for himself.

Lines 1 to 5 - These lines introduce the idea of man playing several roles in his life. The world is his stage, his birth is his first appearance on this stage and his death, his exit. While he is on stage he plays many parts.

Lines 5 to 9 – These lines describe infancy and childhood. The baby in the nurse's arms is described as crying and being sick. The young child going to school very reluctantly is the next role he plays.

Lines 9 to 15 – The young child grows into an adolescent, who is smitten by love and writes sad verses in praise of his beloved's beauty. The soldier is the next role played by man. He uses language that is unfamiliar to the common man, sports a beard, is short-tempered and lays down his life seeking fame in death.

Lines 15 to 19 – The fifth role is that of a judge. Middle-aged, prosperous and looking well-fed, the judge is usually bearded, looks stern and makes wise statements.

Lines 19 to 25 – These lines talk of old age when man is a pathetic figure in slippers, needing spectacles to read, thinner than he was in his youth. His manly voice has become weak and feeble.

Lines 25 to 28 – Man is now in the last stage of life. He is in his second childhood. His teeth have gone, his vision is failing and his taste buds are dead.

Each man plays his part in life as each actor played his role on the stage, which was becoming very popular in Shakespeare's times.

Theme

Man's life, seen in the different stages that he goes through, forms the main theme of the poem. However Jacques' picture of man's life is rather melancholy. He sees only the unpleasant aspects of all the stages of man's life rather than the positive side. In Jacques' picture the infant is always crying, the schoolboy is reluctant to go to school, the lover is sad and unhappy, the young soldier seeks a 'bubble reputation', the judge is inclined to take bribes, the old man is losing his sight and voice and finally man lapses into second childhood.

Use of similes, metaphors, rhyme etc.

The poet uses metaphors and similes in describing the stages in a man's life. He uses the metaphor of the world as a stage and the people as actors.

The poet has used similes throughout the poem – the boy moving slowly like a snail, the lover sighing like a furnace and the soldier bearded like a leopard.

The poem is termed blank verse as there is no specific rhyme scheme.

Notes

players	: actors
exits and entrances	: the actors have to come on stage and leave at the right time
acts	: the seven stages of a man's life, which are compared to the seven acts in a play
mewling	: crying constantly
puking	: being sick
whining	: grumbling in a complaining voice
creeping like snail	: moving slowly like a snail because he is unwilling to go to school
sighing like furnace	: taking deep breaths in disappointment
woeful	: unhappy, sad
strange oaths	: a soldier uses swear words that he might have picked up on his travels
pard	: leopard
jealous in honour	: quick to react when it is a matter of his honour
sudden... quarrel	: quick to take offence and ready to fight
bubble reputation	: reputation that lasts as long as a bubble (the soldier seeks fame in death on the battlefield, but his service is quickly forgotten)
justice	: judge
fair round belly	: proof of the judge's riches (possibly a reference to corrupt judges who took chickens as bribes)
capon	: chicken
severe	: stern
formal	: sober
saws	: sayings
modern instances	: examples from everyday life
slipper'd pantaloons	: an old man wearing slippers and in pantaloons
hose	: close fitting stockings
shank	: leg
treble	: high pitched trembling or quavering voice

pipes... sound	: sounds as if air escapes through pipes; old people make such sounds while speaking
oblivion	: forgetfulness
sans	: without (French)

Exercise

I. Answer briefly

1. What are the different stages of a man's life that can be compared to Acts in a play?
2. How does Shakespeare describe the infant?
3. The schoolboy is described as having a shining morning face. What does it refer to?
4. Justify the comparison of reputation to a bubble.
5. Why is old age called "second childhood"?

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven stages
2. Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow.
3. In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
4. Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side
5. Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

III. Write an essay on each of the following

1. What is Jacques' view of life?
2. Can Jacques be called a cynical man? Justify your answer with reference to the poem.

Death the Leveller

The glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against fate;
Death lays his icy hand on kings:
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Some men with swords may reap the field
And plant fresh laurels where they kill,
But their strong nerves at last must yield—
They tame but one another still.
Early or late
They stoop to fate,
And must give up their murmuring breath
When they, pale captives, creep to death.

The garlands wither on your brow:
Then boast no more your mighty deeds;
Upon Death's purple altar now
See where the victor-victim bleeds.
Your heads must come
To the cold tomb:
Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in their dust

-J. Shirley

The poet

James Shirley was born on 18th September 1596 in England. He did his schooling in Merchant Taylors' school and then went on to St. John's College, Oxford and then acquired his Bachelors degree from Cambridge. He died in October 1666. George Fitzgerald, the sixteenth earl of Kildare, was his patron. He was a teacher by profession and taught at various places as St. Albans, London and Dublin. He died in the Great Fire of London.

The poem

The poem is like a dirge and seeks to show that no man can escape death. King or farmer, powerful or weak, all men must die one day. In the eyes of Death all men are equal. When faced with the inevitable end all men are on the same level irrespective of where they were placed in life till then.

Stanza : 1 The first stanza points out that all the glory and fame that we may pride ourselves upon have no substance or meaning. Fate is invincible and in the face of death, which is inevitable, we have no weapons or armour to defend ourselves. Death strikes the man who wears the crown or holds the sceptre as surely as it strikes the farmer who wields the scythe or spade.

Stanza : 2 In the second stanza the poet talks of the soldier as a farmer, who instead of reaping grain 'reaps' heads; in other words he cuts off heads (kills other men) where the farmer cuts grain. In their victory they may win laurels (fame) but sooner or later they also have to bow to death. When their turn arrives they are the captives of death and have to creep to their grave.

Stanza : 3 In conclusion the poet points out that the victorious soldier who won laurels has also to die and like his victim himself lies on the altar of Death. He tells the victor that he has no reason to be proud of his laurels as soon his wreath of victory will fade soon and he himself will die. He adds that only noble and just deeds will live on after a man's death as a sweet memory of his goodness.

The **theme** of the poem is the emptiness of man's pride in his achievements or his victories over other men. In life one man is a king while another is a farmer. The king in his pride as lord and master may seem great compared to the humble farmer. But in the final analysis, the king also has to face death even as the farmer will have to. The soldier who wins over his enemies may take pride in the number of men he has killed but his fame will also wither away when he dies, as he must, one day. In death all men are equal and the only thing that lives on after a man's death is the sweet memory of his goodness. The poem advises us to take pride in doing good rather than in conquests.

Technique

The poem describes the futility of pride in conquest or power and the sweeping power of Death. Like Shelley's *Ozymandias* it draws a picture of the victor being vanquished in turn by Death. Once the victor dies, his fame dies with him like a flower that fades and dies. The transient nature of life and the short-lived scent of fame are in contrast to the finality of death and the sweet memories of a man's just and good deeds which live on after his death.

Use of similes, metaphors, rhyme etc.

The poet uses metaphors throughout the poem to convey his ideas. Death is the enemy against whom we have no armour. Sceptre and crown personify the king while the crooked scythe and spade stand for the farmer. The soldier killing his enemy in battle may 'reap the field' and finally yield to 'fate', the mightier enemy, as 'pale captives' do. The image of a battlefield continues with the victor who killed his enemy himself becoming the victim of another conqueror – Death. 'The actions of the just' are remembered after their death – like the sweet flowers that bloom in the dust.

Notes

glories	: victories, fame
blood and state	: of kin and government/country
shadows	: worthless, not concrete
icy hand	: the body becomes cold once a man dies; as Death is personified as a man, his hands are cold
sceptre	: the ornate baton that is a symbol of power/royalty
tumble down	: fall down
laurels	: floral wreath that is used to crown a victorious man
strong nerves	: brave and courageous bearing
stoop	: bow
captives	: prisoners
garlands	: floral wreaths
wither	: fade
boast no more	: do not talk proudly of
victor-victim	: the victorious soldier now lies as the victim on Death's altar
cold tomb	: the place where man is buried after death ; cold because the body loses its warmth after death
blossom in their dust	: the fame of men who have done good deeds lives on like flowers that bloom on their graves

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. Why does the poet say we have 'no armour against fate'?
2. What is common to both the powerful king and the humble farmer?
3. What is the image the poet creates when he talks of one soldier killing another?
4. What is inevitable for even the victorious soldier?
5. What, in the poet's opinion, is the only thing that lives after a man's death?

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. Death lays its icy hand on kings
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down.
2. And must give up their murmuring breath
When they, pale captives, creep to death.
3. Upon Death's purple altar now
See where the victor-victim bleeds,
4. And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

III. Write on essay on each of the following

1. In your own words bring out the comparison between life and death and victory and loss on the battlefield.
2. What is the message that the poet wishes to convey to the reader? Substantiate your answer with lines from the poem.

Essay on Man

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
That, chang'd through all, and yet in all the same
Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame,
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glow's in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent,
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart;
As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns;
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.

-Alexander Pope

The poet

Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744) was the son of a London merchant. The family left London to escape persecution as Roman Catholics and settled in Windsor Forest. He educated himself because he could not attend school due to a deformity of the backbone caused by Tubercular infection. He was encouraged in his studies and literary efforts by his father. Pope proved himself a precocious writer, for he started an epic at the age of twelve. His published works include the early pastoral poems, *Essay on Criticism* (1711), *Rape of the Lock* (1712) and translations of Homer. His *Essay on Man* (1733-34) is a popular exposition in prose of the philosophical beliefs of his time. His literary efforts brought him enough money to live in comfort and entertain the famous people of his generation.

The poem

The *Essay on Man* was originally conceived as part of a longer philosophical poem. In the larger scheme, the poem would have consisted of four books: the first as we now have it, a second book of epistles on human reason, human arts and sciences, human talent, and the use of learning, science and wit "together with a satire against the misapplications of them"; a third book on the Science of Politics; and a fourth book concerning "private ethics" or "practical morality." The only part of the scheme, therefore, which was fully completed was the four epistles of the *Essay on Man*. Parts of the fourth book of *The Dunciad* were composed using material for the second book of the original essay and the four moral epistles were originally conceived as parts of the fourth book. The long philosophical treatise is in the form of poetry, with rhyming couplets. According to Pope himself, "This I might have done in prose; but I chose verse, and evenrhyme, for two reasons. The one will appear obvious; that principles, maxims, or preceptssso written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards: The other may seem odd, but is true I found I could express them more shortly this way than in prose itself..." The extract chosen here is typical of the larger whole in theme, treatment and tone. It expresses the poet's idea of Nature and God, and Man's own place in the scheme of things. The perfectly rhymed couplets give us a succinct picture of the scheme of life as seen from the perspective of the creator.

Notes

stupendous	: tremendous
ethereal	: airy, heavenly
informs	: orders
mortal	: that which perishes (as opposed to immortal)
vile	: base, bad
rapt	: absorbed (here, absorbed in the divine)
seraph	: angel
burns	: (here) burns with devotion

Paraphrase

In this extract, Pope expounds on the nature of godhead, in relation to all created beings. All the creatures on earth are part of the great spirit. The physical manifestation is what we see around us and call Nature; its immortal soul we call God. It is a part of each being, though in a different form or shape. As a result of its existence, the gross creatures on earth are as great as the spiritual ones in higher regions. It is this great abiding spirit which gives the sun its heat and the breeze its cool refreshment. It is the light in the stars and the fragrant flowers in the trees. It breathes through all living

creatures and is a part of their existence. Though it permeates all beings, it remains undivided; it works in each element, but its energy remains unspent. It is the life in each soul, making it immortal and gives the impetus to each body to act. Its nature can be seen in a slender strand of hair as well as in the faithful heart. It is manifest in the meanest man as in the highest order of angels who worship God in His glory. In the eyes of God nobody is high or low, great or small. He fills the earth with His bounty, provides the extent of life and connects all beings to one another. All creatures are equal in His creation.

Technique

Pope uses the rhymed couplet in the iambic pentameter. In his hand, it becomes a powerful tool to express his thoughts on the abstract subject of God. Unlike the mechanical and almost prosaic use of the verse form by other poets, in his handling, it achieves a life and grace not commonly found. The rhymes seem to flow naturally. Philosophic thoughts which are difficult to express even in prose are made vibrantly clear and powerful in a verse form that has often been mishandled.

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. What is the "stupendous whole" that Pope describes?
2. What is Nature?
3. What is the soul?
4. What remains unchanged?
5. What provides the elements with their essential nature?
6. How is God manifest in human beings?
7. How does Pope describe God's perfection?
8. How are creatures made equal?

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. Whose body Nature is, and God the soul
2. That, chang'd through all, and yet in all the same
3. Lives through all life, extends through all extent
4. Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part
5. As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart
6. He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.

III. Write an essay on each of the following

1. Pope's idea of God and His creation
2. How does God manifest Himself in His creations?

THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

1.

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
"Forward, the Light Brigade!
"Charge for the guns!" he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

2.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Someone had blunder'd:
Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
Their's but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

3.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

4.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

5.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

6.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wondered.
Honor the charge they made,
Honor the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

The poet

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was the son of a scholarly clergyman. His mother was a pious, gentle woman. Tennyson was educated at Cambridge, where as a student he won the Chancellor's Medal in 1829 for his poem *Timbuctoo*. In 1850 he was appointed Poet-Laureate; in the same year he married Emily Sellwood.

Tennyson's poetry is simple, musical and dramatic. Some of his famous poems are *The Lady of Shalott* and *The Passing of Arthur*.

The poem

The Crimean war (1854-56) fought by Turkey, France and Britain against Russia forms the backdrop of this poem. A fatal mistake forces a small band of soldiers to charge against the much stronger enemy contingent. Even though they knew that they were outnumbered and therefore doomed to die, the men fought bravely till almost all of them died on the battlefield. The poem is written in short lines which are so graphic that the reader can visualize the scene of battle and almost watch the six hundred dedicated soldiers riding forward to meet their death. The repetition of the lines "Into the valley of death / Rode the six hundred" gives the effect of a dirge.

Theme

The theme of the poem is the courage of a small group of soldiers who fight bravely, knowing that the odds are against them and that they are sure to meet their end in the battle. It is a tribute to the hundreds of brave men who die in battle as unsung heroes. It talks of their unquestioning devotion to duty, even in the face of certain death.

Technique

The poet makes effective use of rhyme and rhythm in the short lines to evoke the scene of battle. The short lines of the poem are an echo of the volley of cannon balls, the engines of death. As in his other poems, the poet captures the scene and atmosphere with a few suggestive but very effective words.

Notes

- league** : a measure of distance, about three miles.
- valley of Death** : the place of attack was sure to be a death trap for the soldiers
- brigade** : A cavalry brigade consisting of three regiments (The Light Brigade was made up of soldiers who had only swords as weapons as against the muskets and guns of other soldiers.)
- dismayed** : upset, shaken
- Their's not to....die** : Their job was to obey orders, whether right or wrong. They did not question the orders issued to them, but merely did what they were asked to do.
- Canon of them** : They were surrounded by the enemy who outnumbered them.
- battery smoke** : the smoke of the guns after they were fired
- sabring** : the soldiers carried sabers (a kind of sword) which they used to stab and kill the enemy

Cossack : the name given to the Russian cavalry
reel'd : tottered
shattered and sundered : their formation was broken and the men separated

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. Why does Tennyson describe the battleground as “the valley of death”?
2. How did the men of the Light Brigade react to the orders?
3. Describe the scene of the battle.
4. What happened in the battle?
5. Did any of the men survive to tell the tale?
6. Does the poet think that the men were brave or foolish? Justify.

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. ‘Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!’ he said;
2. Their’s not to reason why,
Their’s but to do or die;
3. Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
4. Charging an army, while
All the world wonder’d;
5. All that was left of them
Left of the six hundred

III. Write an essay on each of the following

1. Describe an ideal soldier.
2. Give an account of the heroic charge of the Light Brigade.

THE SOLITARY REAPER

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chant
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago.
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

- William Wordsworth

The poet

William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850) was born in the Lake District of Northern England, one of the most scenic places in the country. He did his early schooling at a nearby Grammar School and then went on to Cambridge.

Wordsworth and his friend Coleridge are credited with ushering in the era of Romantic poetry in English Literature. Their *Lyrical Ballads* marked a revolt from the structured Augustan style of Dryden and Pope. Their poetry is from the heart, simple and appealing even to the common man. There is no artificiality in expressions or ideas. Wordsworth became Poet Laureate in 1843.

In 1803 Wordsworth toured Scotland with Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge as his companions. The reapers in the harvest fields reminded Wordsworth of a sentence from a friend's book - 'passed a female, who was reaping alone: she sang in Erse as she bent over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard; her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious long after they were heard no more'. The poem was the result of his enjoyment of the sight as well as the words of the book.

The poem

The subject is a familiar scene from rustic life. To relate an incident from common life, the poet has used the language of the common people. Like many of his poems, it is a simple account of his experience. The distant sight of a young girl reaping all by herself, and singing a plaintive song, is transformed into a poem that has thrilled readers, old and young, for more than a hundred years. Such intensely personal poetry is the hallmark of Romantic poetry. It inspired younger poets such as Shelley and Keats to explore the domains of emotion and personal experience in their own poems.

Notes

Stanza 1

The poet comes across this young girl reaping and singing aloud as she works. He invites us to see her as she cuts and ties the sheaves of grain together, singing a sad song. The valley seems to be filled with the sound of her music and the passerby is asked to stand and listen or pass on quietly.

Stanza 2

The poet finds her song so melodious that he feels there can be no comparison to her music in the world. He thinks no song bird could sing so melodiously. In his opinion the nightingale whose music often cheered weary travellers in the desert sands of Arabia could not have sung more sweetly. The cuckoo that has a thrilling voice and sings in the spring time in the western islands of the Hebrides is not as sweet-voiced as this young girl.

Stanza 3

Even while the poet is fascinated by the music he longs to know what the girl sings. He does not understand her words, but from the music he can conclude that it is sad and wonders what sorrow could make her sing so sorrowfully. He wonders if she sings of old unhappy incidents like battles fought long ago or if the song refers to a more personal sorrow or loss of a loved one.

Stanza 4

Whatever the theme of her song, the poet feels her music has an endless quality about it. He stops to listen and watch her at her work and as he climbs the hill on his way, he bears the music in his heart even when he has gone too far away to hear it.

The theme

The universal appeal of beautiful music, whether one understands the language or not, is the theme of this poem. The poet paints a serene picture of a young girl reaping the grain as she sings a melancholy song. The haunting music is impressed upon the poet's mind and lingers in his memory even after it cannot be heard any longer.

Technique

The poem conveys the solitude of the reaper, her anguish and the poignant music that reflects her sadness. That music is captured in the lines of the poem. There is a lilt in the verses which tells us how beautiful the girl's music must have been, to leave such an impression on the poet. The last two lines have been quoted again and again and have become almost the essence of the poetry of Wordsworth, the memory of whose poems we bear in our memory long after we have read them.

The poet has used **rhyme** very effectively in the poem. In each stanza the first and third lines, the second and fourth, the fifth and sixth and the seventh and eighth lines rhyme. In the second stanza he compares the girl's song to the notes of the nightingale and the cuckoo, using the negative to show that her music surpasses the sweetness of even the birds. The effect of the poem is enhanced by the rhetorical question, "Will no one tell me what she sings?"

Indeed no one can tell him that, but he does not need to know it. The sound of that music is enough to inspire him to write an immortal poem.

Notes

- behold : see, look at (archaic English)
highland girl : a girl from the highlands of Scotland
stop here, : the poet asks the passerby to stop and listen or pass by
or gently pass : without making a sound
melancholy : sad, sorrowful
strain : tune
vale : valley
welcome notes : the nightingale's sweet song would make the weary traveller happy
shady haunt : an oasis in the Arabian desert
cuckoo : The cuckoo is a black migratory bird that flies back to the British isles in the spring and is known for its sweet voice.
Hebrides : a group of islands to the west of Scotland

The poet is trying to tell us that the girl's song is incomparable and no song-bird from the west or the east can match the sweetness of her song.

- plaintive numbers : musical notes that express sorrow
humble lay : simple song (a common sorrow rather than a great tragedy)
natural sorrow : sorrow or loss or pain that is a common experience
motionless and still : without moving (the poet uses the synonyms to emphasise his rapt attention to the music)
the music : the music was etched forever in the poet's memory

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. What was the solitary reaper doing when the poet saw her?
2. What are the two birds that the poet compares her music to?
3. Does the poet understand the song of the reaper? What does he think is the theme of her song?
4. What is the poet's reaction to her song?

II. The following sentences give you the summary of the poem. Rearrange them in the right order to follow the sequence in the poem.

1. The solitary reaper sang so sweetly that no nightingale or cuckoo could match the sweetness of her music.
2. The poet wondered if she sang about a personal loss or sorrow.
3. In other words it was an unforgettable experience.
4. He wondered what the theme of her song could be.
5. Once Wordsworth saw a young girl all alone in a field, reaping and singing.
6. The theme could have been a battle of long ago.
7. He carried the memory of her song in his heart.
8. The entire valley seemed to echo her melodious song.
9. He stopped to listen, without moving or making a sound.

III. Explain with reference to the context

1. O listen! For the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.
2. No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
3. A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
4. Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again
5. The music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more.

IV. Essay question

Recount in your own words the experience of the poet.

Abou Ben Adhem

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight of the room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold,
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the Presence in the room he said,
“What writest thou?” The vision raised his head,
And, with a look made all of sweet accord,
Answered, “The names of those who love the Lord.”
“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so.”
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still, and said, “I pray thee, then,
Write me as one who loves his fellow-men .”
The angel wrote and vanished. The next night
He came again with a great wakening light’
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.

-Leigh Hunt

The poet – Leigh Hunt (1784-1859)

English poet, critic and essayist, Leigh Hunt was Editor of the *Examiner*, a liberal journal (1808-1821). He came in contact with Shelley, Keats, Tenneyson, Browning and Dickens. Dickens caricatured him as Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House*. He joined Shelley and Byron in Italy in 1822 to edit a magazine, *The Liberal*, but the death of both the poets wrecked the enterprise and he returned to England. Although his poems are still read (e.g. *The Story of Rimini* and *Abou Ben Adhem*) his importance was as a focus of literary life. His essays and his autobiography (1850) provide valuable sketches of his friends, his opinions and the events in his life.

The poem

The poem shows how love of our fellow-men is even greater than love of God. God loves those who love their fellow-men best is a universal truth which this poem seeks to establish. Abou Ben Adhem was a biblical character who was known for his love of his people. He is believed to have served his people with selfless affection.

Lines 1 to 5: One night as Abou Ben Adhem slept peacefully he awoke in the night and found an angel in his room. The angel was writing in a book of Gold.

Lines 6 to 10: Abou Ben Adhem who was at peace with himself, having led a life of service, was bold enough to ask the angel what he wrote. The angel replied that he was listing the names of those who loved God.

Lines 11 to 15: Then Ben Adhem asked the angel if his name was on the list. When the angel replied in the negative Ben Adhem asked him to put his name down in the list of men who loved their fellow-men. The angel wrote and disappeared.

Lines 15 to 18: The next night the angel appeared again and showed Ben Adhem the list.

His name now was on the top of the list of men who loved God.

The theme

This poem is essentially spiritual, with a universal message. The poet by means of a simple tale, related in even simpler verse, seeks to tell us that love of God is synonymous with love of one's fellow-men.

Imagery

The poem conveys the picture of a happy man who is confident of having led a good life. He is sure that service to the people is what God cherishes most and so tells the angel that he is among those who love their fellow-men. There are no extravagant statements in the poem, only simple verse, making the message more powerful.

Use of similes, metaphors, rhyme etc

The poet has used the simile in only one place when he likens the room brightened by the Presence to a lily in bloom.

Every two lines of the poem end in rhyming words – increase, peace; room, bloom; gold, bold; said, head; accord, Lord; so, low, then, men; night, light; blessed, rest.

Notes

tribe	: people who belong to one race and have the same customs and beliefs.
Here the 'tribe' refers to	men like Ben Adhem who care for their fellow- men.
(‘May his tribe increase’ is used as a blessing,	wishing the person many children.)
Presence	: The holy and inspiring appearance of a heavenly angel
vision	: the appearance of a supernatural being
all of sweet accord	: in a pleasant manner
What writest thou	: archaic English for “What are you writing”
Nay	: archic English for “No”
cheerily	: in a cheerful manner
wakening light	: a bright light that would wake a sleeping person

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. What disturbed Ben Adhem's sleep?
2. How was the room already brightened by moonlight made more beautiful?
3. What gave Ben Adhem the courage to question the angel?
4. What did Ben Adhem ask the angel to do when he learnt that his name was not on the list?
5. What happened on the second night?
6. What caused Ben Adhem's name to top the list of those blessed by God?

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace
2. Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold
3. “And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so.”
4. “Write me as one who loves his fellow-men”
5. And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest

III. Write an essay on each of the following

1. Love of one's fellow-men is equal to love of God. Justify the statement with the help of the poem.
2. Describe how the poet uses the two incidents described in the poem as metaphor for life.
3. Can you think of any other story that has the same theme? If so, write the story in your own words.

Where the Mind is without Fear

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,
let my country awake

- Rabindranath Tagore

The poet

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941) went to England and studied at University College, London. But his works are typically Indian in thought, idiom and cadence. He wrote his poems in Bengali and personally translated them into English. His poetry reflects his nationalistic feelings and intense patriotism. He was a poet, musician, composer, novelist and dramatist – in short a genius. The university that he established, Shanti Niketan, flourishes to this day, and has produced many brilliant people. He won international acclaim as a poet – his *Gitanjali* won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Most of his poems are in free verse but still have a rhythm with a unique appeal.

The poem

In this poem he prays to God to fulfil his dream of a free India, unshackled by prejudices, proud of her heritage, with free access to knowledge, where people strive for perfection, where custom and habit do not blind people to reason. It is typical of Tagore to address God as a presence before him, with whom he holds a conversation.

- Lines 1 & 2** : Tagore visualises a land where there is no fear of persecution, where man lives with self respect and where knowledge is available to all.
- Line 3** : In this line the poet regrets the fact that the world is divided by Prejudices and broken into small communities.
- Lines 4 & 5** : He hopes for a society where nothing but the truth is spoken and where people work tirelessly to achieve perfection.
- Lines 6 & 7** : He laments that in the society of his day people have stopped being rational and have let themselves become slaves to irrational customs. He hopes that the future will see the emergence of a rational society.
- Lines 8** : The poet, having described a Utopian society, prays to the Almighty to lead his country into such a state of freedom.

The theme

Tagore's patriotism is evident in his dream for an ideal society in India. He sees the ills that afflict our society – fear, lack of self respect, ignorance, religious and other differences in society, hard work that is seldom rewarded by success, superstitious and blind beliefs (rather than rational thinking) that hold sway – and prays that God himself should awaken his countrymen to change their ways.

Imagery

The poem evokes images of an ideal society in which the poet would like to see his countrymen. The picture is of supplication to the Almighty who alone can rescue the nation from the depths into which it has fallen. It is the plea of a patriot who begs God to guide his country into that 'heaven' of a Utopian society. In describing the land of freedom, the poet shows by contrast what the land has now become; in asking for what is ideal, he portrays the sordid reality. The poem therefore achieves its effect by implying the sorry state of the present in contrast to the wonderful future that he envisages for his country.

Use of poetic devices (similes, metaphors, rhyme)

The poet uses **metaphors** to convey his ideas –

‘narrow domestic walls’ for prejudices based on religion, community etc,

‘tireless striving’ for the man working hard and stretching his arms out to perfection, ‘clear stream of reason’ for clarity in thought,

‘dreary desert’ for the old and thoughtless practices and finally

‘heaven of freedom’ for the liberated nation.

There is no rhyme in the poem, which may therefore be classed as **blank verse**.

Notes

head is held high	: man is proud of himself, has self respect
knowledge is free	: learning and knowledge are not denied to anybody
fragments	: bits and pieces
domestic walls	: divisions in society created by man
depth of truth	: absolute truth
tireless	: without giving up, ceaselessly
reason	: rational, logical thinking
widening	: broadening

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. What do you think Tagore is referring to, when he talks of the mind being without fear?
2. What do the narrow domestic walls refer to?
3. What do the words ‘dreary desert sand of dead habit’ refer to?
4. Where does the poet want his country to waken?

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. Where knowledge is free
2. Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
3. Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

III. Write an essay on each of the following

1. The conditions that prompt Tagore to pray for his country’s deliverance
2. The relevance of this prayer for India in the 21st century - justify your answer.

Indian Weavers

Weavers, weaving at break of day,
Why do you weave a garment so gay?...
Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,
We weave the robes of a new-born child.

Weavers, weaving at fall of night,
Why do you weave a garment so bright?...
Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green,
We weave the marriage-veils of a queen.

Weavers, weaving solemn and still,
What do you weave in the moonlight chill?...
White as a feather and white as a cloud,
We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

-Sarojini Naidu

The poet – Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949)

Sarojini Naidu, the “Nightingale of India”, was born in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, of Bengali parents. Her father was a scientist and her mother a poet. A brilliant student, she began to write poetry at the age of twelve. At the age of sixteen she went to England to study at King’s College, London, and Girton College, Cambridge, but poor health forced her to return home. In England she came into contact with some great literary figures of the day such as Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symonds, who helped her poetry to become mature.

Her published poetic works include *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912), *The Broken Wing* (1917), *Selected Poems* (1930), *The Sceptred Flute* (1937, with an introduction by Joseph Auslander), and *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961). Many of her speeches have also been published.

Her poetry is marked by sentimentality and romanticism. She uses rhyme and imagery very effectively to convey the colour and movement of the scenes she describes. Her poetry has beautiful words with metre and rhythm that make it possible to be set to music so that it can also be sung. It was only natural that she became famous as “Bulbul e Hind”. Maharishi SriAurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru were among the thousands who admired her work. Her poems may be termed as English songs set to Indian music! The rhythm in her poems is peculiarly and unmistakably Indian. Though some critics complain that she is not profound, this poem has music as well as philosophical thoughts.

The poem

The poem traces an entire lifetime, from birth to death, in just three stanzas, adding up to a mere twelve lines. Daybreak becomes a metaphor for birth, while evening ushers in the married state and night denotes death. It also captures the mood at the three important events of birth, marriage and death. The weavers produce garments in colours that suit each occasion, suggesting that each is significant in its own way.

Stanza 1 : The bright blue cloth at birth stands for hope that the life will be successful and well-lived. The weavers jubilantly proclaim that they are weaving robes for a new-born child. The use of monosyllabic words such as *wing*, *wild* and *child* suggests the quick and happy movements of a child at play.

Stanza 2 : The weavers make a solemn announcement that they are weaving a veil for the bride. The purple marriage-veil suggests the splendours and achievements of youth and middle age. Long-syllabled words like *plumes*, *purple*, *green* and *queen* lend majesty and purpose to the occasion.

Stanza 3 : The tone in the last stanza is suitably subdued, for a white shroud is being woven in the moonlit night for a life that has come to an end.

By varying the length of the syllables and the lilt of the song, the poet is able to suggest the different activities in the different stages of life.

The poem depends on the use of **similes** for its effect. The robes of the new-born child are *as blue as the wings of the halcyon*; the bride’s veil is *green and purple like the feathers of a peacock* and the shroud is *as white as a feather or cloud*.

The theme

The theme of this poem is essentially Indian, though there is a certain universal appeal to the idea. Weaving, as well as the mention of the colours and the material, symbolizes the events in the life of man. The birth of a child which is a cause for celebration is marked by the weaving of a ‘garment so gay’ while another equally happy event- marriage – is celebrated with a ‘garment so bright’. Death, the inevitable end to man’s life, leaves him cold and still. The occasion is solemn and in keeping with the sombre mood, a white shroud is woven.

Imagery

The poem conveys images of happiness and rejoicing at birth and marriage as well as the finality of death effectively. 'At the break of day' and for a new born child a 'garment so gay' paints a picture of blossoming life while the blue wing of the wild halcyon conveys a feeling of soaring joy.

The plume of the peacock with all its bright colours seems to talk of the colours of spring, the beginning of a new and happy chapter in the life of a young girl. Finally in solemn silence, a white shroud woven in the still, cold moonlight spells finality, the end of life and the sorrow of death.

Use of similes, metaphors, rhyme etc.

The poet uses several figures of speech in this poem. Similes are used in every verse of the poem. The blue of the robe for the child is compared to the wing of the halcyon, the marriage veil to the colours (purple and green) of the peacock and the dead man's shroud is as white as a feather and as white as a cloud. Every two lines of the poem end in rhyming words – day, gay ; wild, child ; night, bright ; green, queen ; still, chill ; cloud, shroud.

Notes

garment	: dress
halcyon	: a bird in mythology, believed to nest in the sea, keeping the wind and the waves calm and quiet. Also refers to the kingfisher.
robes	: the long dress in which a child is dressed for christening (naming ceremony)
plumes	: feathers
marriage-veils	: veil covering the head of a bride
solemn	: serious
still	: quiet, unmoving
shroud	: cloth in which a dead body is wrapped for burial

Exercise

I. Answer briefly

1. What work does a weaver do?
2. Describe the garments the weavers make.
3. What are the colours associated with the different ages of man?
4. What are the stages in the life of man that the poet describes?
5. Whom do they make clothes for?
6. Identify the moods you notice in the poem and substantiate them.
7. Would you like to do their job? Why?

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild
2. Why do you weave a garment so bright?....
3. Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green
4. What do you weave in the moonlight chill?....
5. We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

III. Write an essay on each of the following :

1. What is Sarojini Naidu's view of life?
2. Discuss the imagery in the poem substantiating your answer with suitable instances from the poem.

Graft

Black-cowled he sits, is he Notary or Scribe?
Or a juryman of a rigged set-up? Base thought!
His eyes flick away from the open law-book
as I cough out an amount I had quite forgot
the statue blurs to palimpsest, and hence
this dissertation on the buyer and the bought.
He doesn't have to wear a gargoyle-grin
he may not be given to liquor, females, betting
he is handsome, suave and yet a family man
his wife thinks this is overtime he is getting
You may adulterate oils, make tablets out of chalk
sell meal turning maggoty, fish turning stale
switch sawdust for jute, at the worst of times
the right buck at the right time tips the scales
To legalize a bastard you've to bribe the priest
— the catechism also has its price —
he'll wed you to a Turk or a Rabbi's daughter
even though you may be uncircumcised
The pity is decent chaps too are corrupt
Those who walk hospitals with a silent tread
who leave the car to stop urchins fighting
who will not force an ailing wife to bed
men who can stand a fight, a drink, a bullet

a rap without squealing, not those who say "Christ!"
on seeing a figleaf, frauds who observe
their navels sprouting into giant flowers of vice
but good men risen from the body's swamp
untangled from its carnivorous weeds
having swallowed their stomachs or transcended them
and yet the hand grasps, the nails gouge,
somewhere a socket bleeds
With extorted fruit the belly doesn't turn
to fire. The swift bacterial spread
across body junctions does not always follow
a fishy deal or an adulterous bed
And hands don't flame when they accept the bribe
Palm-lines are impervious to change
— fate heads for Saturn, Mount Jupiter remains raised
the lifeline extends to the elbow almost
nine notches denote nine children – God be praised.

-Keki Daruwala

The poet

Keki N. Daruwalla (1937 -) spent much of his life in Uttar Pradesh, where he worked as Assistant to the Inspector-General of Police. His first collection of poems, *Under Orion*, was published in 1970 by Writers Workshop, Calcutta. He is considered one of the best poets of his generation because of his mature poetic talent, literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness. His poems are remarkable for depth of feeling, economy of language and originality of insight.

The poem

As the title suggests, the poem is about corruption in public life. The poet is disgusted that wherever one turns, one confronts the insidious face of corruption. His rebellion against corruption erupts as a protest against those who give and receive bribes. The poem includes a list of the "graft" that one finds in all walks of life, from law to religion.

The theme of corruption, unusual for a poem, is handled with determination by the poet. He does not spare anybody, however exalted he may be. The tone suggests disgust rather than censure; there is also a veiled disappointment that men are not better than they have proved themselves to be. He is disillusioned that even the men whom he had thought were above corruption have succumbed to the temptation.

Technique: The poem takes the shape of four-line stanzas, except for the first, which has six lines, and the last, which has five lines. There is a rough rhythm and rhyme, generally in the last words of the second and fourth lines of each stanza, as in *betting / getting; stale / scales; price / uncircumcised; tread / bed; weeds / bleeds* and *raised / praised*. He combines freedom of form with a discipline of expression, using the word order of prose with half-rhymes to voice his thoughts on a subject that has raised his ire rather than wonder or rapture, which are the common emotions of poetry.

Notes

- Graft : corruption; dishonesty in public life
Black-cowled : wearing a black hood over his head
Notary : an official who draws up a formal document
Scribe : one who writes manuscripts or keeps records
rigged set-up : a situation that is made up
cough out : pay unwillingly
statute : written law passed by a constitutional authority
dissertation : discourse

dissertation on the buyer and the bought : This is the theme of the poem, expressed explicitly by the poet in the last line of the **first stanza**. The first four lines set the scene for the dissertation. The poet's anger and disgust probably stem from the fact that he has been forced to pay a bribe, much against his wish.

gargoyle-grin : grin like the face on rainwater spouts

In the **second stanza**, the poet tries to identify the person who is corrupt. He does not have an obnoxious grin and is not addicted to drink, women or gambling. His wife thinks that the extra money he brings home is the payment for working "overtime". She has no idea that he is corrupt and the money is a bribe that he has taken.

- adulterate : make impure by adding something cheap
maggoty : infested with worms
switch : exchange

tips the scales : figuratively, go in one's favour; literally, weigh heavily in favour of the criminal. The image is a reminder of the figure of the lady with the scales as a representative of the law.

In the **third stanza**, the poet lists the various offences, and sums up bitterly that the right amount paid at the right time can help one to escape from the clutches of the law.

In the **fourth stanza**, the target of the poet's disgust is religion, which he has described as "the devil's tailbone and original sin". Priests are as corrupt as anybody else and will help one to get anything, if they are paid their price.

From stanza five, the tone of the poem changes, from one of accusation to one of helpless dejection. Decent people, who are considerate and will help strangers as well as show concern for their family, are also grasping and willing to be bribed. The continuous list, flowing across five stanzas, includes all the good and the bad that men are capable of. The tone assumes that of a tirade and the poem ends with an exclamation that is almost an expletive.

Notes

- without squealing : without making a noise; without complaining to the authorities
Christ! : exclaim in horror (on seeing pictures of improperly clad people)
frauds ... vice : cheats who indulge in crimes (the word *naveis* is used in the context of the umbilical cord, as giving birth to vice or crime)
body's swamp : the image of society as a swamp
carnivorous weeds : weeds that devour animals and people
swallowed ... them : those who have no greed for food
gouge : pull out
socket : (here) eye socket (from which the eye has been gouged)
extorted fruit ... fire: money that is taken forcibly (bribe) does not destroy the corrupt man
The swift ... bed : Crimes such as cheating (a fishy deal) and adultery do not result in immediate infections or diseases.
And hands ... bribe : The hand that has accepted the bribe has no mark on it.
Palm-lines children : The fact that the man is corrupt and has taken bribes does not change his life or destiny in any way. He remains happy and confident.
God be praised! : The meaning intended is just the opposite.

Exercises

I. Answer briefly

1. What is the theme of the poem, "Graft"?
2. What makes the poet attempt the dissertation on the buyer and the bought?
3. How does the poet describe the corrupt man in the second stanza?
4. What are the crimes that go unpunished with the right buck at the right time?
5. What can one get from a priest by bribing him?
6. Who are the decent people who are corrupt?
7. What does not happen as a result of cheating or adultery?
8. What happens to the palm which accepts the bribe?

II. Explain with reference to the context

1. and hence this dissertation on the buyer and the bought
2. his wife thinks this is overtime he is getting
3. the right buck at the right time tips the scales
4. the pity is decent chaps too are corrupt
5. and yet the hand grasps, the nails gouge, somewhere a socket bleeds
6. And hands don't flame when they accept the bribe

III. Write an essay on each of the following

1. The technique used by the poet in pursuing the theme of corruption
2. The poem as a dissertation on corruption
3. The use of illustrations in a tirade on corruption

THE LECTURER

Listening was an experience
Of fingers of filigree feeling:
The worst made excellent sense,
The best was all concealing.
On truth's brink he stood,
His words memorable, cool,
Lovely, lingering on the good,
The true, the beautiful.

You couldn't tell truth from fiction,
Such elegance, such capable
Diction, such distinction the mind recalls.
All ritual,
All false, unutterably false

-P. Lal

The poet

P. Lal (1931 -) is justifiably famous in the context of Indian literature in English. He is an author, poet, translator and publisher. As the founder of the *Writers Workshop* in Calcutta, he has helped many aspiring poets to publish their works. He has to his credit five books of verse in English and his translations include *Great Sanskrit Plays in Modern Translation* (1964), *Sanskrit Love Lyrics* (1966), *The Dhammapada* (1967) *The Mahabharata*, and *The Mahanarayana and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishads*. He has lectured in many English and American Universities on Indian Literature and was awarded the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship. His poetry retains the flavour and imagery of Sanskrit poetry, unlike that of many modern Indian poets. At the same time, it has precision and economy.

The poem

The poem begins with an experience, of many sessions in classrooms. The efforts of the lecturer seem to find approval in his students, as the words "memorable" and "lovely" suggest. But in the next stanza there is a doubt that all is not what it seems, and this is confirmed in the unequivocal sentence pronounced in the last line, that it is all "unutterably false". It has often been pointed out that the vigour and certainty in Lal's poems, very different from the bored composure of his contemporaries, do not make an impact because of the images that crowd the utterance. The experience of the student and his reaction to the lecturer seem to have undergone a rapid change, taking him from enjoyment to disappointment in the course of a few lines. Before the images of enjoyment register with the reader, they are overshadowed with the declaration that it is all false.

Notes

Of fingers of filigree feeling : As in the best poems of P. Lal, **the imagery** is very concrete and based on the feeling of touch. The experience of listening is compared to touching and feeling a delicate piece of art, worked in metal. The use of alliteration increases the feeling of appreciation of beauty.

The worst ... sense : Even the worst in the lesson, was made enjoyable.
all concealing : covered in possibilities and conjecture, and so made even more interesting

In the **second stanza**, the poet expresses his admiration for the lecturer. He seemed to be poised on the verge of truth, giving his students a glimpse of the good, the true and the beautiful. These lines are reminiscent of Keats's words, "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty". The feeling of rapture is made more intense by the introduction of rhyming words in alternate lines: stood / good and cool / beautiful.

The moment of rapture, of having glimpsed the truth, is lost in the **third stanza**, which lapses into prose, disdaining even the obvious use of rhyme; so "Diction" is not allowed to rhyme with "fiction" and is sent to the next line. The alliterative sequence of "diction" and "distinction" loses its poetic effect, in the long utterance that spans two lines. The repetitive use of "such" adds to the effect of displeasure.

The **last stanza**, with the emphatic repetition that all is false, seems to be the final verdict, negating all the pleasure that has gone before.

Exercises

I. *Explain with reference to the context*

1. an experience
Of fingers of filigree feeling
2. The worst made excellent sense,
The best was all concealing.
3. On truth's brink he stood
4. Lovely, lingering on the good,
The true, the beautiful.
5. You couldn't tell truth from fiction
6. All false, unutterably false.

II. *Answer briefly*

1. What experience is described in the first stanza?
2. What is the impression created in the second stanza?
3. What is the lecturer accused of in the third stanza?
4. What is the significance of the last two lines of the poem?

III. *Write an essay on*

1. The contrasting experiences and moods described in "The Lecturer"

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