

The Dear Departed, a play by Stanley Houghton, explores the hypocrisy and greed of a family after the presumed death of their father, Abel Merryweather.

Characters:

1. **Mrs. Slater (Amelia)** – One of Abel Merryweather's daughters, an assertive, materialistic woman.
2. **Henry Slater** – Amelia's husband, a rather submissive man who follows his wife's lead.
3. **Mrs. Jordan (Elizabeth)** – Abel's other daughter, similar to Amelia in her materialism and selfishness, but more pretentious.
4. **Ben Jordan** – Elizabeth's husband, a jovial man who tries to add humor to the situation but is still focused on what they might inherit.
5. **Victoria Slater** – Amelia's precocious ten-year-old daughter, observant and witty.
6. **Abel Merryweather** – The elderly grandfather who is mistakenly thought to be dead but turns out to be very much alive.

Detailed Summary:

The play begins in the Slater household, where Mrs. Slater is preparing for the arrival of her sister, Mrs. Jordan, and her husband, Ben. They have all been informed of the death of their father, Abel Merryweather, who supposedly passed away in his sleep. Before the Jordans arrive, Mrs. Slater, driven by greed, instructs her husband Henry to take some of Abel's belongings, including a bureau and a clock, for themselves, under the pretext that Abel had promised these items to her before his death.

When Mrs. Jordan and Ben arrive, the conversation quickly turns to dividing up Abel's possessions. The two sisters, Amelia and Elizabeth, engage in petty arguments, subtly competing to secure more of their father's valuables. The Jordans are also curious about Abel's insurance money and whether it was paid in time.

As they are discussing funeral arrangements and mourning customs, Victoria, Amelia's daughter, announces that Abel is not dead after all—she saw him getting up. To everyone's shock and embarrassment, Abel enters the room, very much alive. He is confused by all the fuss and the fact that everyone is dressed in mourning clothes. The family is thrown into a panic, trying to cover up their behavior.

Abel, realizing what has happened, chastises his daughters for their greed and insensitivity. He mentions that he overheard them while lying down and now plans to make changes to his will. Instead of leaving his belongings to his daughters, he decides to marry Mrs. John Shorrocks, the landlady of a local pub, the "Ring-o'-Bells." The play ends with Abel cheerfully informing his daughters about the wedding and leaving them in shock.

Themes:

- **Hypocrisy and Greed:** The play showcases how materialism can override familial bonds. The daughters are more concerned about inheriting their father's belongings than mourning his supposed death.

- **Family Dynamics:** The strained and competitive relationship between the sisters highlights the superficiality of their concern for their father.
- **Irony:** Abel's "death" brings out the worst in his daughters, and the irony is heightened when he turns out to be alive, witnessing their greed firsthand.

The story "**The Dear Departed**" by Stanley Houghton is a satirical play that revolves around themes of family hypocrisy, greed, and the absurdity of materialism, focusing on the events following the supposed death of Abel Merryweather, the grandfather. The play is a sharp commentary on the lack of genuine familial affection and the absurdity of prioritizing material wealth over human relationships. The play uses satire to highlight familial tensions, greed, and the changing attitudes towards the elderly.