

Chapter 13 : Dear Departed

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4. Given below are the main incidents in the play. They are in a jumbled order.

Arrange them in the sequence in which they occur in the play.

1. Victoria is asked to fetch the bunch of keys to the bureau to look for the insurance receipt.
2. Mrs. Slater instructs Victoria to put her white frock on with a black sash.
3. Mrs Slater discovers that grandfather is 'dead'.
4. The Slaters fetch the bureau and the clock from upstairs.
5. The family sits down to have tea.
6. Henry wears the new slippers of grandfather's
7. Grandfather comes to know how his daughters were in a hurry to divide his things between them.
8. Grandfather announces his intention to change his will and to marry Mrs. Shorrocks.
9. Grandfather comes down and is surprised to find the Jordans.
10. They discuss the obituary announcement in the papers and the insurance premium payment.
11. The Jordans arrive and learn the details of grandfather's 'demise' from the Slaters.

Answer

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1. Victoria is asked to fetch the bunch of keys to the bureau to look for the insurance receipt.
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5. Answer the following questions briefly.

(1) How does Mrs. Slater plan to outshine the Jordans? What does it reveal about her character?

Answer

Mrs. Slater was not very happy with the mourning dresses that she and her family were wearing. In fact, she had ordered new dresses for everybody. However, she thought that her sister wouldn't have thought of mourning dresses and so she would outshine them there.

Mrs. Slater was a very superficial person. She was not concerned about the death in her family but was more bothered about her appearance and how to be better than her sister.

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

Answer

Mrs. Slater always liked grandfather's bureau. After his death, she decided to shift it to sitting room before her sister arrived lest she laid a claim on it.

Henry was shocked at the suggestion because he felt that the sisters should amicably divide grandfather's things. He also felt that it was too heavy and moreover, he was worried about the arrival of the Jordans while they were shifting it.

(3) What is the reason for the Jordans taking a long time to get to the house of the Slaters? What does it show about the two sisters' attitude towards each other?

Answer

Mrs Jordan took a lot of time to reach the home of the Slater's because she wanted to get a complete new mourning dress before coming. Both the sisters are not grief-stricken at the death of their father but are trying to outshine each other in wearing their best mourning dresses. For the sisters' grief is to be depicted through mourning-dress and not through the feelings in one's heart.

(4) What does Mrs. Jordan describe as 'a fatal mistake'? What is the irony in the comment she makes on Mrs. Slater's defense?

Answer

Mrs. Slater sends for Dr Pringle as soon as she realises that grandfather is dead. However, Dr Pringle could not come as he was out. It was this that Mrs. Jordan describes as a "fatal mistake". According to Mrs. Jordan grandfather could have been revived had Mrs. Slater sent for another doctor. It is this blunder on Mrs. Slater's part that Mrs. Jordan describes as fatal.

(5) Ben appreciates grandfather saying 'it's a good thing he did'. Later he calls him a 'drunken old beggar'. Why does he change his opinion about grandfather?

Answer

Ben appreciated grandfather when he came to know that he had gone out to pay his insurance premium. However, when he got to know that he had not paid the premium instead gone to a public house, he calls him a drunken old beggar.

Ben changed his opinion about grandfather when he realised that he hadn't paid premium because now after his death they could not claim the insurance money.

(6) What change does grandfather make in his new will? What effect does it have on his daughters?

Answer

Grandfather decided that in his new will, he would leave all his money and things to the person he would be living with when he died. This led to another spat between the daughters. Since both of them were very keen to get his money and things, they wanted that he should stay with them.

(7) What are the three things that grandfather plans to do on Monday next?

Answer

The three things that grandfather planned to do on Monday next was first to go to a lawyer and change his will, then pay his insurance premium and finally go to St. Phillip's church and get married.

6. Answer the following in detail:

(1) Bring out the irony in the title of the play.

Answer

The title of the play 'Dear Departed' is ironical. In the beginning of the play, we come to know that grandfather Mr. Abel has departed from this world. He is not dear to his own daughters though they pretend that he is dear to both of them. They are eager to divide his belongings between them. Even Mrs. Slater with whom he has been living fetches his clock

and bureau from his room where he is lying 'dead'. Even they can't wait for the last rites of his burial. Even their husbands Ben and Henry do not love grandfather. So, no one is grieved at his departure. In this way, we can say that the title of this play 'Dear Departed' is an ironical statement of dying love and absence of filial obligations.

(2) How does the spat between his daughters lead to grandfather discovering the truth?

Answer

Abel Merryweather recognises his bureau and wants to know the reason for its shifting. Mrs Slater had already told her sister that the bureau belonged to them. This lie is enough to set tongues wagging and tempers escalating. Mrs Jordan accuses her sister of stealing her father's things, thinking him to be dead. That is when Abel discovers that they had gathered there for the official mourning of his death.

(3) Compare and contrast Henry's character with that of his wife. Support your answer with evidence from the play.

Answer

Henry is timid and honest by nature. Soft at heart, he tends to get bullied by his dominating wife. Initially he protests against stealing the grandfather's slippers and bureau but when Mrs Slater forces him, he gets carried away. He is a worried looking man who believed what his wife says and ends up supporting her. Mrs Slater by contrast is vain, pretentious and greedy. She makes the plans and he executes them with his wife's help of course.

7. Bring out the traits in Mrs. Slater's personality quoting evidence from the play.

Trait	Evidence from the play
Greedy	
Overpowering/ dominating	
Blunt/ straight talking	
Impolite	
Insensitive	

Answer

Trait	Evidence from the play
Greedy	She shifted grandfather's bureau and clock from his room before her sister arrived so that she could not lay a claim on it.
Overpowering/ dominating	She made her husband shift the bureau in spite of his reluctance.
Blunt/ straight talking	She told everybody that her father had been a little drunk that morning
Impolite	She misbehaved with her sister when she accused her of robbing grandfather of his things in spite of the fact that she was guilty of the same.
Insensitive	She did not even wait for grandfather's funeral before she started dividing things between them.

8. Answer the following with reference to the context.

1. "Are we pinching it before Aunt Elizabeth comes?"

- a) What does 'it' refer to here?
- b) How does Vicky conclude that her parents are 'pinching it'?
- c) Mention the two reasons that Mrs. Slater gives for her action.
- d) What does it reveal about the difference between the attitude of the elders and that of Vicky?

Answer

- a) "It" refers to the bureau that was grandfather's room.
- b) When Victoria was told by her father that he and his mother were shifting the bureau downstairs, she concluded that her parents are "pinching it" because everything that was in grandfather's room had to be equally divided amongst the two sisters.
- c) Firstly, she always like the bureau of grandfather. Secondly, she knows that her sister Elizabeth would not let her take it.

d) The elders instead of mourning the death were busy dividing grandfather's things. Victoria, on the other hand, had wisdom beyond her years. She immediately understood the meaning of their actions. She did not like her parents shifting the burden.

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2. *"I don't call that delicate, stepping into a dead man's shoes in such haste."*

- a) Who makes this comment?
- b) What prompts the speaker to say this?
- c) Bring out the significance of this statement.

Answer

a) Mrs. Jordan made this comment.

b) When grandfather sees Henry wearing it, Mrs. Slater quickly gives them back to him. This prompts Mrs. Jordan to make this comment.

c) Stepping into dead man's shoe is to take the position of the dead man although one might not be capable of it. Mrs. Jordan on seeing her brother-in law wearing grandfather's shoes feels that he was in too much of a hurry to step into the grandfather's shoes. He didn't even wait for his funeral.

3. *"Now, Amelia, you mustn't give way. We've all got to die some time or other. It might have been worse."*

a) Who is the speaker of these lines?

b) What prompts the speaker to say these words?

c) What does he mean when he says 'It might have been worse'?

d) What does it reveal about the speaker's character?

Answer

a) Ben is the speaker of these lines.

b) When he sees Mrs. Slater shedding tears for grandfather, he makes this formal statement to console and sympathise with her.

c) He means to say that death of grandfather at the age of 72 is quite normal. His death might have been worse than this death.

d) The speaker Ben is not serious at all. He is ironical and formal.