Drama

UNIT 13

D.1 The Dear Departed

by Stanley Houghton

1. Read an excerpt from the diary of a man of 72 years



As I sit here alone and waiting
I gaze at people passing me by.
I try to smile and reach out to them
But no one notices; no one waits.
They look to me like I am nothing-
Are they afraid to be seen saying "Hi" to an old man like me?

Once my life, it's like a flower,
I had bloomed into a child.
Now, like the dying flower
Waiting for my one day to come-
It will be then that I am gone,
And yet, I still would not have heard that simple word, "Hi"
That for so long my heart had desired.

- What do you think is he feeling?
- What situation do you think leads to people feeling so?
- Can such people be helped? How?

2. Read the news story given below.

India's elderly face growing neglect

By Tinku Ray

BBC News, Delhi

There has been a steady rise recently in reports of cases of elderly being abused, harassed and abandoned in India.

Traditionally older people have been revered in India, signified by the touching of their feet by the younger generation.

Prime ministers and Pesidents have almost always been senior citizens.

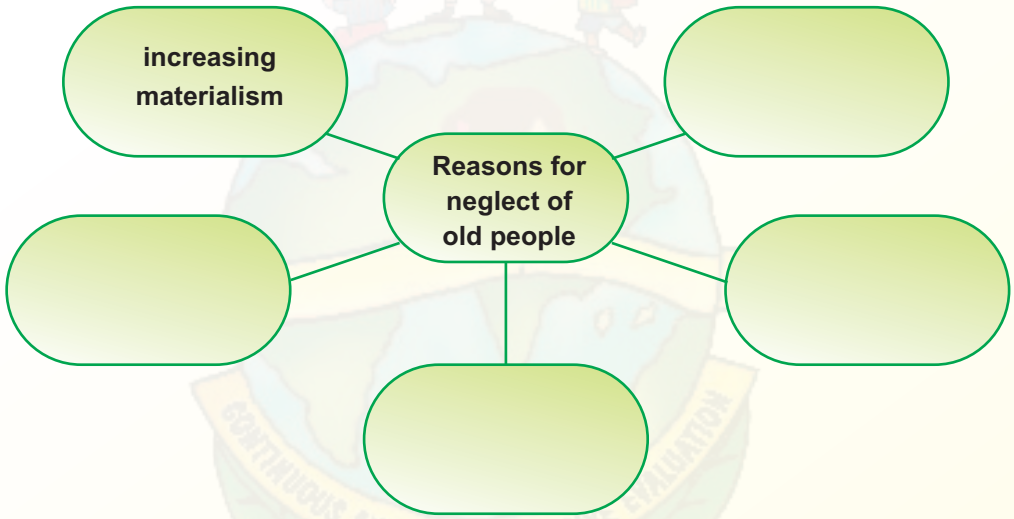
Joint family systems - where three or more generations lived under one roof - were a strong support - network for the elderly.

But more children are now leaving their parental homes to set up their own.

Discuss in groups:

a) **What are the reasons for the old people being "abused, harassed and abandoned" in India?**

b) **What are the problems faced by the old people as a result?**



3. **The play 'The Dear Departed' can be performed on the stage. The first step would be a dramatized reading of the play as a whole class activity. Later, your teacher will assign you roles which you will play after an audition. Later the play can be put up on stage.**

Characters

Sisters	MRS. SLATER
	MRS. JORDAN
Their Husbands	HENRY SLATER
	BEN JORDAN
VICTORTIA SLATER	A girl of ten
ABEL MERRYWEATHER	Grandfather

(The scene is the sitting room of a small house in a lower middle-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 a 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**[1] *and* **PEARSON'S WEEKLY**[2]*. Turning to the left through the door takes you to the front door; to the right, up-stairs. 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 for a moment and then goes to the window, opens it and calls into the street).*

MRS. SLATER *(sharply)* Victoria, Victoria! D'ye hear? Come in, will you?

(MRS. SLATER *closes window and puts the blind straight and then returns to her work at the table.* VICTORIA, *a* ***precocious***[3] *girl often, dressed in colours, enters.)*

MRS. SLATER : I'm amazed at you, Victoria; I really am. How you can **gallivanting** [4] 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**[5].

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* ***tailcoat***[6]*, grey trousers, a black lie and a bowler hat. He carriers a little paper parcel.*)

---

1 **TIT-BITS-** A British weekly magazine founded by George Newnes in 1881, which was in mass circulation in England.
2 **PEARSON'S WEEKLY -** A British weekly magazine founded by Sir Cyril Pearson (1866-1921) in 1890.
3 **precocious -** a person whose mental attitude is developed beyond his/ her age
4 **gallivanting -** go about seeking pleasure
5 **colours -** wearing gay dress
6 **tailcoat -** a man's black coat worn for formal daytime occasions and having a long rounded and split tail

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**[7], 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 an Elizabeth quarreled 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 an apple pie, 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 about that **bureau**[8] of grandfather's that's in his bedroom. You know I always wanted to have it after he died.

7 **till our new black's ready -** till a new dress of mourning is ready
8 **bureau -** a writing desk with drawers

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**[9] 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 : *(startled)* 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 out to fasten the 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?

MP.S.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 is going to bring grandfather's bureau down here.

VICTORIA : *(after a moment's thought.)*: Are we pinching it before Aunt Elizabeth comes?

9 **drive a hard bargain -** to argue in an aggressive manner and force somebody to agree on the best possible arrangement.

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 quit! 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* MRS. 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***[10]. VICTORIA *ushers in* BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN. *The latter is a stout, complacent woman with an impassive 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 adapt himself to the regrettable occasion. He has a bright, chirpy little voice.* BEN *sails into the room and solemnly goes straight to* MRS. SLATER *and kisses her. The men shake hands. Not a word is spoken.* MRS. SLATER *furtively inspects the new mourning.)*

MRS. JORDAN : Well,Amelia, and 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?

10 **ostentatiously -** showily

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-

MRS. 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 else does.)*

MRS. JORDAN *(pained)* : BEN!

(BEN *is crushed at once.*)

MRS. SLATER ***(piqued)***[11] **:** 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, its 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**[12]. I says, 'We're only waiting for 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.

11 **piqued -** experienced indignation
12 **as merry as a sandboy -** extremely happy and care free

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' em 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'?

HENRY : 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 business-like 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 ready we may as well have tea first.

(MRS. 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 forgot 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 'scared 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 license**[13], 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 to 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.

13 **Poetic license -** freedom to change facts or normal rules of language

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 fromthe 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. Philip's Church.

MRS. SLATER : To the **'Ring-o'-Bells'**[14], I'll be bound.

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

MRS. SLATER : That **public-house**[15] that John Shorrock's 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.

14 **'Ring-o'-Bells'-** the name of a retaurant
15 **public-house -** a pub, a place that is licensed to sell alcoholic beverages

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 you pick that up, Amelia? It's new since last I was here. *(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 secondhand. Look at those old masters.

(VICTORIA *returns, very scared. She closes the door after her.*)

VICTORIA : Mother! Mother!

MRS. SLATER : What is it, child?

VICTORIA : Grandpa's getting up.

BEN : What?

MRS. SLATER : What do you say?

VICTORIA : Grandpa's getting up.

MRS. JORDAN : The child's crazy.

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*)

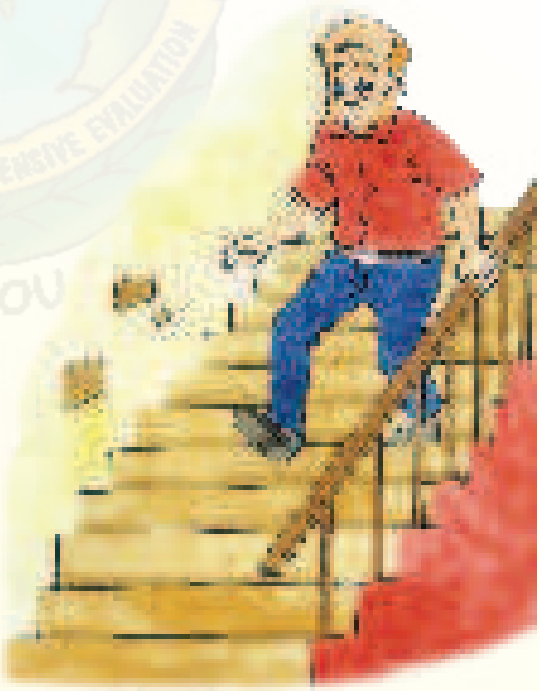
BEN : *(suddenly)*

Hist! Listen.

(They 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); Hello! What brings you here? How's yourself, Ben?

(ABEL *thrusts his hand at* BEN, *who skips back smartly and retreats to a 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 : *(irritated by the whispering)*

Of course it's me. Don't do that, 'Melia. What the devil do you mean by this **tomfoolery**[16]?

MRS. SLATER : *(to the others)* He's not dead.

BEN : Doesn't seem like it.

ABEL : 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 : Arc 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,* HENRY *gets out of his way to the front of the table.*)

ABEL : 'Melia, what the **dickens**[17] 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 ABEL, who puts them on and sits in armchair)

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?

16 **tomfoolery -** foolish behaviour
17 **dickens -** informal way of saying that you are annoyed or surprised

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) : Hang 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-FedAlb-Issac.

ABEL : Issac? 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 pie.

ABEL : Thank you. I'll make a start. *(He helps himself to bread and butter.)*

(HENRY *serves the pie and* MRS. SLATER *pours out tea. Only* ABEL *eats with any heartiness.)*

BEN : Glad to see you've got an appetite, Mr. Merry weather, 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. Damnit, 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 : 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 : I'll tell you what's been going on in this house. Father. Nothing short of robbery.

MRS. SLATER : Be quiet, Elizabeth.

MRS. JORDAN : *(rising)* 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 some one tell me what's been going on?

MRS. JORDAN : Yes, 1 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.*)

ABET : 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 whomever 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 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 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. SLATERand 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 do three things. I've got to go to the lawyer's 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 St. Philip's Church and get married.

BEN and HENRY : What!

MRS. JORDAN : Get married!

MRS. SLATER : He's out of his senses. *(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.)*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Stanley Houghton(18811913), was a famous English dramatist. He was one of the best of a group of realistic playwrights often called the Manchester School. In every play he sought to present an idea. He had a remarkable gift for dialogue that is evident in The Dear Departed. The Dear Departed was first produced in Manchester in 1908. Here Houghton satirizes the degradation of moral values in the British middle-class.

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.

5. Answer the following questions briefly.

1. How does Mrs. Slater plan to outshine the Jordans? What does it reveal about her character?
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?
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?
4. What does Mrs. Jordan describe as 'a fatal mistake'? What is the irony in the comment she makes on Mrs. Slater's defense?
5. Ben appreciates grandfather saying 'its' a good thing he did'. Later he calls him a 'drunken old beggar'. Why does he change his opinion about grandfather?
6. What change does grandfather make in his new will? What effect does it have on his daughters?
7. What are the three things that grandfather plans to do on Monday next?

6. Answer the following in detail:

1. Bring out the irony in the title of the play.
2. How does the spat between his daughters lead to grandfather discovering the truth?
3. Compare and contrast Henry's character with that of his wife. Support your answer with evidence from they play.

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	

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?

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.

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

b) Who is the speaker of these lines?

c) What prompts the speaker to say these words?

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

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

9. Writing

Victoria Slater is truly attached to her Grandpa. As she sees the elders in her family quarrel over the inheritance, she is bewildered and upset by their attitude. As Victoria write a diary entry outlining the incident and your feelings. (150 words)

10. Speaking

Grandfather says, "It seems to me that neither of you has any cause to feel proud about the way you've treated me." While it is true that the daughters disregard modesty, decency and filial obligation, grandfather cannot be fully justified in practically disowning his family. Besides, Victoria loves him and he seems to have spared no thought for her feelings.

Divide yourselves into groups of four or five and discuss the statement: **Grandfather is not entirely right in moving away from his daughters.**

After the discussion, a representative from each group will present the views of her/ his group to the class in about 3 minutes.