Chapter 2: The Address

Exercise 2.1 — Reading with Insight

Q1 'Have you come back?' said the woman. 'I thought that no one had come back.' Does this statement give some clue about the story? If yes, what is it?

SOLUTION

Yes, Mrs Dorling's remark is a significant clue about the story's historical and personal context. The phrase 'I thought that no one had come back' reveals that she had expected the entire family — including the narrator's mother — to have perished during the War. Her surprise at seeing the narrator indicates that those who were forced to flee or were persecuted during the War were generally not expected to survive and return.

The statement also hints at Mrs Dorling's bad conscience. She had taken away the family's valuables under the pretext of 'saving' them, believing that no one would ever return to claim them. Her guarded, unwelcoming manner — opening the door only a chink and refusing to invite the narrator in — suggests she had no intention of returning what she had taken.

The remark thus prepares the reader for the story's central conflict: the narrator has survived the War and come back to retrieve her mother's possessions, while Mrs Dorling clearly wishes to keep them for herself.

Answer: The statement reveals that Mrs Dorling expected the family to have died in the War and had kept their belongings for herself, expecting no one to return to claim them.

Q2 The story is divided into pre-War and post-War times. What hardships do you think the girl underwent during these times?

SOLUTION

During the pre-War period, the narrator's family faced the growing threat of persecution and displacement in Holland. They were forced to give away their prized household possessions — silver cutlery, antique plates, crockery, and decorative objects — to Mrs Dorling for 'safekeeping,' knowing they might have to leave their home at any moment. The narrator herself could only visit home 'for a few days' at a time, suggesting she was already living under restricted and uncertain conditions. The family had to accept the loss of their everyday comforts and the familiar surroundings they treasured.

In the post-War period, the hardships were of a different kind — emotional and existential. The narrator had clearly lost her mother (Mrs Dorling's remark implies the mother did not survive). She returned to a post-War city she found familiar but emotionally difficult to face, deliberately avoiding 'streets and houses full of memories from a precious time.' She lived in a small rented room, still bearing remnants of wartime blackout paper on the windows, with barely enough cutlery to fill a drawer. The War had stripped her of family, home, and possessions.

When she finally went to reclaim her mother's things at Mrs Dorling's house, she found them

displayed in a 'tasteless' arrangement in a 'strange atmosphere,' which oppressed rather than comforted her. The objects she had hoped would reconnect her to her past only deepened her sense of loss, showing that the inner hardships of displacement and grief outlasted the War itself.

Answer: Pre-War: forced displacement, giving away prized possessions, and family separation. Post-War: loss of her mother, poverty, emotional alienation from her past, and the painful discovery that her mother's belongings had lost all meaning in a stranger's home.

Q3 Why did the narrator of the story want to forget the address?

SOLUTION

The narrator decided to forget the address — Number 46, Marconi Street — because her visit to Mrs Dorling's house made her realise that retrieving her mother's possessions would bring her no comfort or connection to the past.

When she entered the living room, she found her mother's cherished things — the woollen table-cloth, the silver cutlery box, the still life painting, the antique plates — displayed in an alien environment, arranged tastelessly amid ugly furniture and a 'muggy smell.' The objects she had once loved in their proper place, embedded in the warmth of her family home, seemed entirely different here. As the narrator herself reflects: 'the objects that are linked in your memory with the familiar life of former times instantly lose their value when, severed from them, you see them again in strange surroundings.'

Furthermore, even if she had wanted to take the things back, she had nowhere to put them. She lived in a small rented room where 'no more than a handful of cutlery fitted in the narrow table drawer.' The objects belonged to a life that no longer existed — her mother was gone, the family home was gone, and the connection those things embodied could not be restored simply by possessing them.

Forgetting the address was, for the narrator, an act of emotional closure. Of all the painful things she had to let go of after the War, she felt this would be the easiest to forget, because it represented not a living bond but only the hollow shell of one.

Answer: The narrator wanted to forget the address because her mother's possessions, placed in a stranger's home, had lost all their emotional meaning; they could no longer restore the lost life they were associated with, and she had no place to keep them in any case.

Q4 'The Address' is a story of human predicament that follows war. Comment.

SOLUTION

'The Address' by Marga Minco portrays, with quiet precision, the profound human predicament that survivors face in the aftermath of war. The story does not describe combat or destruction directly; instead, it focuses on what comes after — the attempt to reclaim a lost past — and shows how this too can be a source of grief.

The narrator's predicament is threefold. First, she has survived a war in which most of her family, including her mother, perished. She carries the burden of being the only one who 'came back.' Second, she returns to a familiar city that is now emotionally inaccessible to her — she deliberately avoids streets full of memories, knowing that confronting them would cause more pain. Third, when she tries to recover the one tangible link to her former life — her mother's possessions stored at Mrs Dorling's house — she finds that the objects themselves have been severed from their meaning. Arranged in a 'strange atmosphere,' they oppress rather than console her.

Mrs Dorling represents another dimension of the post-war predicament: the moral ambiguity of those who benefited from others' misfortune. She took the family's valuables under the guise of 'saving' them, fully expecting never to be asked to return them. Her unwillingness to even acknowledge the narrator illustrates how war not only destroys lives but also corrupts ordinary human relationships.

The story's conclusion — the narrator resolving to forget the address — captures the central human predicament of the survivor: the impossibility of returning to a world that no longer exists. Memory without context becomes unbearable, and the only way forward is to let go of the past entirely. This is the quiet tragedy that war leaves behind long after the fighting has ended.

Answer: The story illustrates the post-war survivor's predicament: the loss of family and home, the moral corruption of those who exploited the crisis, and the painful realisation that possessions stripped of their human context cannot restore a broken past — leaving the narrator with no choice but to forget and move on.