**THE DEAR DEPARTED**

**Stanley Houghton's** ‘**The Dear Departed’** is a social play. It deals with the condition of the elderly people who are being abandoned and neglected by their own children. The play is optimistic that even elderly people may choose to live merrily, despite their old age. They can even opt to marry at old age to lead a happy life.

**Mr. Abel Merryweather** is the father of his two daughters – **Amelia** and **Elizabeth**. Amelia is married to **Henry Slater** and Elizabeth to **Ben Jordan**. **Victoria** is the **Slater’s** only daughter. The **Jordans** have a son – **Jimmy**. The problem is, the two daughters didn’t love their father, and especially since his wife died years ago. If the two daughters tolerated their father, it was only for his **wealth and assets**.

At present, tor the last three years, **Mr. Abel** has been staying with **Amelia’s** family, upstairs. Before that, he had been with daughter Elizabeth who quarreled with Amelia for not taking their father back. This morning, when **Victoria** went to see her grandfather, the old man was found dead. Without checking if the old man was really dead, the **Slaters** sent a telegram to **the Jordans** announcing the much awaited death.

**Mrs. Amelia Slater** is in mourning and she is getting ready to receive some guests. She beckons to her ten years old daughter **Victoria**, and instructs her to change into something sober. It is revealed that Victoria’s grandfather has passed away and the Slater family is getting ready to receive **Aunt Elizabeth** and **Uncle Ben Jordan**. Victoria expresses surprise at this news because her aunt uncle had not paid a visit for year’s altogether. **Mrs. Amelia Slater** reveals that they were coming over to talk about grandfather’s affairs, on hearing of his death. In the meanwhile **Mr. Henry Slater** enters. He is stooping and heavy man and he is also in mourning dress.

**Henry Slater** is doubtful of the visit of **Elizabeth** for last time **Mrs. Amelia Slater and Elizabeth** had quarreled. **Elizabeth** had vowed never to pay a visit again to their house. **Mrs. Slater** gives Henry new slippers of her father. She also plans to take away the **new bureau** of the grandfather and shift it to their room, before Elizabeth and Ben arrive. Both the husband and wife lock the front door and shift the bureau down and put their old chest of drawers there. **Victoria** wants to know why they were stealing grandfather’s things but her mother tells her to remain quiet. Grandpa’s **new clock** is also taken away. Meanwhile there is loud knocking at the door and the **Slaters** take plenty of time to look normal. **Mrs. Elizabeth and Ben** **Jordan** pretend to be emotional at the death of **Mr. Abel Merryweather**. Both the ladies compare their mourning dresses, criticizing the others outfit. **Mrs. Elizabeth Jordan** is surprised to discover that no doctor had been summoned to check her father. **Mrs. Slater** insists in a stubborn manner that she had been keen on **Mr. Pringle** and if he was out of station, they couldn’t be offensive to call someone else. **Mrs. Amelia Slater** reveals that her father had been happy in the morning and he had apparently gone to pay the premium of his **insurance policy**. He was generally going to “**Ring-O-Bells**’ (the name of Restaurant) frequently and the night before he had come drunk and had gone to bed without having dinner. **Mr. Ben Jordan and Elizabeth** prefer to have tea before going and look up father. All four of them start discussing about the **obituary** and the kind of announcement in the newspaper to be inserted. **Mrs. Elizabeth Jordan** wants a long poem but **Mrs. Amelia Slater** protests by saying that father had willed his gold watch to her son **Jimmy**. **Mrs. Slater** feels very offended and refuses to believe it.

**Mr Abel** didn’t pay his premium but had instead gone over to ‘The Ring of Bells’, the public house and managed by **John Shorrock’s** widow. Everyone starts blaming the old man for not playing his premium. **Victoria** is instructed to go over a grandpa’s room get the receipt of the premium. **Mrs. Elizabeth** is surprised to note a new bureau and she wishes to know the details because she doubts on **Mrs. Slater’s** version. Victoria enters, looking dazed. She gives the shocking news that grandpa was stirring and moving. After sometimes **Mr. Abel Merryweather** enters and is surprised to see his other daughter and son-in-law, **Mr. and Mrs. Jordan**. He reveals that he was well and just had a slight headache he notices **Henry** wearing his new slippers and takes them. **Mr. Abel** wishes to know, why all were in mourning dresses. Mrs. Jordan makes up some story to pacify him. **Abel Merryweather** enjoys tea and has a generous slice of the apple-pie. He grumbles and scolds **Mrs. Slater** for taking away his bureau.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Jordan** gets agitated and accuses her sister of robbing her father. The husbands also join their wives in hurling accusations at each other. **Abel** discovers about his death. He addresses his daughters directly and declares that he was going to **change his will** and all the money will go to the one, in whose house he dies. Both the daughters fight with each other to keep their father. **Abel** is candidly watching all the fun. At last, he makes his announcement which shocks everyone. On **Monday**, he would go to the lawyer and alter his will, and then he would go to the insurance office and pay his premium. After that he would go to the church and get married to **Mrs. Shorrock**. Everyone is shocked. **Abel** reveals that he had at last found someone who was happy to keep him. He exits with an invitation of his marriage. He also thanks **Mrs. Slater** for shifting the bureau down-stairs for now it will be easy to cart away to “Ring-O-Bells’.

**Terms and Meanings :**  
• **TIT-BITS** - A British weekly magazine founded by George Newnes in 1881, which was in mass circulation in England.  
• **PEARSON'S WEEKLY** - A British weekly magazine founded by Sir Cyril Pearson (1866-1921) in 1890.  
• **Precocious** - a person whose mental attitude is developed beyond his/ her age.  
• **Gallivanting** - go about seeking pleasure.  
• **Colours** - wearing gay dress  
• **Tailcoat** - a man's black coat worn for formal daytime occasions and having a long rounded and split tail.  
• **Till our new black's ready** - till a new dress of mourning is ready.  
• **Bureau** - a writing desk with drawers  
• **Drive a hard bargain** - to argue in an aggressive manner and force somebody to agree on the best possible arrangement.  
• **Money-grubbing** - seeking greedily to obtain money at every opportunity.  
• **Ostentatiously** – showily  
• **Piqued** - experienced indignation  
• **As merry as a sandboy** - extremely happy and care free.  
• **Poetic license** - freedom to change facts or normal rules of language.  
• **'Ring-o'-Bells'** - the name of a restaurant.  
• **Public-house** - a pub, a place that is licensed to sell alcoholic beverages.  
• **Tomfoolery** - foolish behavior  
• **Dickens** - informal way of saying that you are annoyed or surprised.

**Characters**

**Mr. Abel Merryweather – An aged widower**

**Mr. Abel** is an easy going old man. A widower for some long time, he has learnt the world and its multiple faces. He is a practical man yet a little given to drinking and jollity. Even at the age of **seventy** he is jovial and active. There is nothing that could stop him from his ways. He is proud of being **Abel Merryweather**. It has been a pain for him to accept the fact that he is just a lot unwanted. He witnessed himself how much despised he was. And how quarrelsome his daughters were and how cunningly they have hidden their hatred for him for long. **Abel Merryweather** was a man of his forebodings. He appears to be iron hearted. He destroyed his will and shamelessly married at the age of seventy. Surprisingly, it is hard to see why this amiable old man was equally despised/hated by all his dear ones.

**Amelia – Mr. Abel’s daughter, married to Henry Slater**

**Amelia Slater** was evil incarnated. The prime villain of the play, she had been taking care of her father for his possessions. She had been looking after her father for the last three years. But she was just waiting for the most wonderful happening in his life – his death. It is amazing that a daughter goes without any feeling for her father’s death. Not only that she didn’t get a doctor for her father on finding him ‘dead’ but also she left him to die there and went for her mourning costumes. It is the height of hypocrisy that she blames Victoria for being gallivanting while she was herself breathing the air of her father’s bereavement. Her pinching the bureau, the slippers and the clock are the least examples of her hardheartedness.

**Victoria – The Slaters’ daughter:**

**Victoria Slater** appears to be the only character in the story with a heart. She is not entirely innocent yet there are glimpses of goodness in her. She was happy to see her grandfather alive for some hazy reasons while it is she whom her mother blames for being gallivanting. If the mother, **Amelia**, were right in blaming her, **Victoria** too was a product of the same prototype. One thing is, however, certain that **Victoria** had a delicate heart that had soft and gentle feelings for her grandfather. She asks her parents, ‘are we stealing them?’ which means she was not as evil as her mother or as faceless as her father.

**Other Characters**

* **Elizabeth** – Mr. Abel’s daughter, married to Ben Jordan. As greedy and hardhearted as her sister Amelia.
* **Henry Slater** – A weak, short man. Not really commanding. He doesn’t appear to be as heartless as his wife, Amelia.
* **Ben Jordan** – A flat, funny man. He doesn’t know what to speak and when to speak. He makes you laugh.
* **Jimmy** – The Jordans’ son.