

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 5: MOTHER'S DAY



MOTHER'S DAY

~Summary~

-by JB Priestley

Introduction of Mrs Annie Pearson and Mrs Fitzgerald

Mrs Annie Pearson and Mrs Fitzgerald are next door neighbours. Apart from this, there is no similarity between them. Annie is a pleasant and nervous looking woman in her forties. Fitzgerald is older and heavier with a strong personality. Annie has a soft voice whereas Mrs Fitzgerald has a deep, throaty voice.

Mrs Fitzgerald is a fortune-teller. She has learnt this art from the East. She is reading Annie's fortune. She advises Annie to be strict and become the boss' in her family. Actually, Annie is not treated well by her family. At present, Mrs Annie Pearson has been reduced to the status of an unpaid domestic servant, who does all the work at home without even being requested for it or being thanked later on.

Mrs Fitzgerald Outlines the Plan to Reform Annie's Family

Mrs Fitzgerald is very angry at the way Annie is treated like a servant by her family. One day, she suggests that they should temporarily exchange their personalities by using a magic spell that she had learnt in the East. She takes Annie's hand and speaks some magic words. A transformation takes place and the personality of Mrs Fitzgerald shifts into the body of Annie and vice-versa.

Annie is scared, but Mrs Fitzgerald assures her that the change is reversible. Mrs Fitzgerald, now in the body of Annie, stays at Annie's house and sends Annie (in Mrs Fitzgerald's body) to her house where she can relax.

Doris Gets a Shock

Doris, the daughter of Mrs Annie Pearson, a beautiful girl aged 20, enters the house. She gets shocked at seeing her mother smoking and playing cards alone. Doris asks about her yellow dress, but her mother does not respond. She asks for tea and her mother answers rudely, telling her to iron her dress herself and make tea if she wants to. Doris gets angry, but gets a good scolding from her mother. Then Annie makes fun of Doris' boyfriend, Charlie Spence, for having projecting teeth and being stupid. She tells Doris frankly that at her age she would have found somebody better than Charlie Spence. This strange behaviour is too much for Doris and she goes out of the room crying.

Cyril also Gets a Shock

Cyril, Annie's son, enters the house and asks for tea in a demanding and angry manner. Annie tells him that she has not bothered to get tea ready. Cyril asks her if everything is all right with her. She replies that she has never felt better in her life. When Cyril enquires why she has not got the tea ready, Annie replies that she wanted a change and that's why she has not bothered to make tea. Cyril announces that he is short of time, so she should get the tea ready immediately. Cyril further enquires whether she has got his clothes ready. When she says no, he gets anguished. He asks his mother what will happen if they all talked like she was talking that day. Annie coldly replies that all three of them always talked to her like that, so what was wrong with her talking in the same tone. She says that if he does not want to do anything at home, he doesn't have to. She adds that she has become a member of the Union so that she gets what she deserves.

Argument between Doris and Mrs Annie Pearson

Doris appears on the scene wearing a shoulder wrap. Annie remarks sarcastically about her dress. An argument starts between Doris and Annie. Doris comments that if she was looking awful, it was due to her mother only, who made her cry. Then Annie enquires if any strong beer was left. Cyril is shocked to know that his mother wants to drink it. He is unable to understand what is going on.

Discussion Starts between Doris and Cyril

Both Doris and Cyril are filled with horror and shock at their mother's behaviour. Both wonder what has happened to their mother suddenly. Doris thinks that she got hit on her head by something. She says that the manner in which their mother spoke hurt her the most and made her cry. Both start giggling at the thought of what will happen if their mother keeps behaving in this weird manner in front of their father.

Annie's Remarks About her Family

Annie remarks that it was high time they grew up. Doris then asked her if they had done something wrong. Annie tells them that it is actually her children's and her husband's behaviour that bothered her the most. They always came, asked for something and went without bothering to know whether she wanted to go out or how she was feeling. She always does her best to keep everybody happy but all three of them were not bothered about her.

Annie also remarks that while the three of them do a job of eight hours a day with two days off at the weekend, she goes on working seven days round the clock. She warns them that on weekends, she will also going to take two days off.

Doris is really worried about what will happen if her mother takes a holiday on weekends. However, Annie assures Doris that she would do some work on Saturday and Sunday only when she is requested for it and thanked for whatever she does. She might go out for weekends also as she was fed up of staying in the house for years together. None of them has ever bothered to take her out.

Mr George Pearson is Shocked at his Wife's Behaviour

Mr George Pearson now enters the house. He is about 50 years old and considers himself as a very important person. He gets annoyed at his wife who is sipping beer when he enters. He tells her that he does not want any tea as he has to go to the club for supper. The wife tells him that she has not prepared any tea anyway. At this, George gets annoyed that his wife is not bothered about him.

Annie continues to rebuke him, telling him that he is not respected in the club where he keeps going every day. She tells him that people at the bar in the club call him 'Pompy-ompy Pearson' due to his self-important behaviour. George cannot believe what Annie says and confirms the truth from his son, Cyril.

Annie tells her son that sometimes it does people good to have their feelings hurt. On hearing a knock, Cyril checks who it is and reports to Annie that it is Mrs Fitzgerald at the door. Annie tells him to let her come in.

The Real Mrs Annie Pearson Returns

Mrs Fitzgerald (actually Mrs Annie Pearson) enters and finds Doris in tears. Her family continues to get a scolding in front of her also. Mrs Annie Pearson (actually Mrs Fitzgerald) informs her that she was putting everyone in their place. When Mr George Pearson shouts at his wife, she threatens to slap his big, fat silly face.

Mrs Annie Pearson and Mrs Fitzgerald Go Back to their Original Personalities

The real Mrs Annie Pearson (now Mrs Fitzgerald) gets really disturbed and wants everyone to leave as she wants to talk in private with Annie (the real Mrs Fitzgerald).

She tells Mrs Fitzgerald that it is enough. Let them change back and get into their true selves. Mrs Fitzgerald again speaks some magic words and they again get back to their own selves. Mrs Fitzgerald says that she enjoyed every moment in her changed personality. Annie remarks that she did not enjoy this changeover. Mrs Fitzgerald wants Annie not to be soft on her family. She wants her to remain firm.

Annie says that she will be able to manage her husband and children now. Mrs Fitzgerald warns her not to give any apology or explanation, otherwise they will again start treating her indifferently. She must wear a tough look and talk to them rudely if she wanted them to behave in the right manner. For a change, when Annie smiles, her family members smile back and feel very relaxed. As they had cancelled their going out Annie feels that they all as a family should play a game of rummy. She also asks her children to prepare supper for the family, for which they readily agree. She also wants to have a talk with George, her husband, for which everybody agrees. The play ends on a happy note where the children and husband are willing to do whatever Mrs Annie Pearson suggests.

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NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 52-53)

(Reading with Insight)

Question 1. This play, written in the 1950s, is a humorous and satirical depiction of the status of the mother in the family.

- i. What are the issues it raises?

Answer: The main issue raised by the play is that the lady of the house, who functions similarly to an axis, is never given due respect, especially if she is a simple housewife. The members of her family take her for granted. She is an unpaid servant. The second problem is that the mistress of the house ought to be firm in her stance. Rather than surrendering meekly, she should be prepared to argue her case with tenacity.

- ii. Do you think it caricatures these issues or do you think that the problems it raises are genuine? How does the play resolve the issues? Do you agree with the resolution?

Answer: No, I don't think it caricatures these issues, supporting that the problems raised by it are genuine.

The play helps to solve these issues by showing the audience what tends to happen if the mother neglects her responsibilities.

Yes, I agree with the proposed resolution. Every member of the family should spend some time with the angel who has brought so much colour to the family.

Question 2. If you were to write about these issues today what are some of the incidents, examples and problems that you would think of as relevant?

Answer: If I were to start writing about certain current issues, I would have to go quite far. The same thing happens in my house. We are three brothers and sisters who are all in school. My father is employed in the office. My mother gets up early in the morning to prepare four breakfast sets and tiffins. We take our time getting ready, but if there is even a 5-second delay on my mother's part, we all bring the roof down. The same ritual is performed in the evening. Mother gets up before the rest of us and goes to bed after the rest of us. Her presence had been taken for granted by all of us. My grandmother became ill one day, and my mother had to leave for two days. Without her, the entire house appeared to have been hit by a tornado. We all decided to

wait for her as if we were expecting a miracle to occur. When she eventually appeared, we all breathed a sigh of relief and vowed never to underestimate her.

Question 3. Is drama a good medium for conveying a social message? Discuss

Answer: Yes, drama is an effective medium for communicating a social message. It is an excellent platform for displaying most such problems and solutions in a matter of minutes. People have a great attachment to dramas and are likely to watch them for a long time. That is why television commercials are so well-known around the clock. Dramas undoubtedly play a significant role in bringing about social change.

Question 4. Read the play out in parts. Enact the play on a suitable occasion.

Answer: Do it yourself.

Question 5. Discuss in groups plays or films with a strong message of social reform that you have watched.

Answer: Do it yourself.