

## **ON THE FACE OF IT**

### **Summary**

This play deals with the problem of the disabled people and depicts that merely the encouraging words may change our tensed feelings. It is for us to see and understand life in every organism. It does not matter what we look like but it matters how we can uplift a disabled man. It is not the actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment that troubles a disabled man but the behaviour of the people around him. People discard him as a useless limb

and refuse to accept him in the mainstream of life. So he feels alienated from the society and wants to live in seclusion. In a way Derry suffers from inferiority complex. Mr. Lamb motivates him to think positively about life, people and things.

It is a fine day and Mr. Lamb is in his garden. He is an old man with a tin leg. He leads a lonely life and is always ready to accept any visitor who comes in his garden. One day Derry, a young boy of fourteen sneaks into Mr. Lamb's garden. He has a burnt face with acid so he looks very ugly. He has become defiant and withdrawn due to his disfigured face. He does not want to face the world with his ugly and disfigured face.

Derry climbs over the wall and cautiously walks through the long grass. He is quite close to Lamb. He is scared when Lamb speaks to him. Lamb asks him to tread carefully because the long grass is littered with wild apples dropped by wind. Derry is utterly confused as he has come there considering the place empty. Having been detected by Lamb, Derry panicks and wants to go. Lamb asks him not to leave as he does not mind anybody's coming into his garden. He keeps the gate always open. He advises to enter through the gate rather than by climbing over the garden wall. Lamb tells that all who come to his garden, are welcome. But Derry says that he has not come to steal but he wants only to come into garden. He rather tells Derry not to be afraid of anything but Derry points out that the people are afraid of him because of his ugly and disfigured face. Derry adds that he is afraid of himself when he sees his face in the mirror.

Lamb tries to console him. He asks him to face the harsh realities of life bravely. He tries to divert the views of Derry from his burnt face to the fruits in the garden, but Derry keeps on talking about his ugly face. Lamb tries to make him understand that it is the inner beauty of a person that matters, not his outer beauty. Derry does not agree with it. He tells Lamb that it is important to be handsome from outside also. He says that even his mother kisses him on the other side of his face. He says that he has to spend whole of his life with his half face. Mr. Lamb points out that there is no difference between a flower plant and a weed since both are living and growing plants. Derry remarks that Mr. Lamb can put on trousers and cover up his tin-leg. Then Mr. Lamb reminds Derry of a fairy tale of Beauty and The Beast in which the princess kisses the Beast who in turn changes into a handsome prince. This makes Derry understand that ugliness is only skin deep. A man is not what he looks like but what he really is. Handsome is that handsome does. This story is to inspire Derry and he should not care for his burnt face. But Derry tells that people stare at his face and they are afraid of him.

Derry tells Lamb that women talk of his ugly face. They say that none will kiss except his mother. Mr. Lamb tells him that he must have heard so many other things also. The best thing is to keep his ears shut and need not pay attention to such talks. Mr. Lamb talks about the bees in his garden. Some people like their buzzing while others hate. But Lamb calls it a sweet music. It is only the difference of attitude.

Derry tells that people stare at his face so he avoids them. But Mr. Lamb tells that keeping alone is not a fine thing. He tells a story about a man who was always afraid of being run over or getting infected or meeting with some accident. So he locked himself in a room. There a picture fell on his head and killed him.

Derry says that his family often talks about him downstairs when he is not there. They are worried to think what is going to happen to him when they are gone and how he will get on in this world. Mr. Lamb does not agree with him. Lamb encourages him that he has got two arms, legs, eyes, ears, a tongue and a brain. He can achieve whatever he likes. He can be better than others. He tells Derry that he has got a full body. He can do anything like other people or may do better than others.

He asks Lamb several questions to know more about him. Mr. Lamb says that he sits in the sun and reads the books. He likes the windows open to hear the wind. Lamb tells that he has a lot of friends everywhere. Everybody who comes in his garden is his friend. Derry wonders how a person can be his friend about whom he knows nothing. Derry says that there are some people he hates. But Lamb remarks that hatred would do him more harm than any bottle of acid. Acid only burns our face or so but hatred can burn us away inside.

Lamb asks him to be a friend. Derry asks how they can be friends only in one meeting. But Lamb tells him that he can come there at any time even if he is out. Derry thinks to help him. He tells Lamb that with one leg he can fall off a ladder and die. Derry offers to help him but he wants to inform his mother where he is since she will be worried. Lamb doubts if he would come back. Derry assures him to return but Lamb says to himself that people never come back though they say that they will come back.

Derry goes back to his house and tells everything to his mother. Derry says that he wants to go there, sit and listen to things and look. Nobody else has ever said the things the old man has said. His mother stops him from going to the old man's house. She tells that she has heard strange stories about the old man. She urges him not to go there again. Derry insists that he must go there otherwise he

will never go anywhere in this world. In spite of his mother's strong resistance, Derry slams the door and runs away to help Lamb in collecting crab apples.

In the meantime Mr. Lamb climbs on the ladder for the apples. The ladder falls back and Mr. Lamb is killed. Derry opens the gate and says excitedly that he has come back. Suddenly he catches sight of Mr. Lamb. He runs through the long grass and says, "I came back Lamey-Lamb. I did come back." But there is no response. Derry kneels by him and weeps and realizes that he has lost his only friend in this world.

### **Main Points**

1. Derry was a teenager, highly pessimistic and withdrawn from the mainstream society.
2. He developed this attitude after one side of his face was disfigured by acid. He avoided company of others and remained lonely lest he be noticed by other people.
3. He believed that no one loved him and his mother loved him because she was supposed to.
4. Once he heard two women commenting about his monstrous appearance. They said only a mother could love a face like his.
5. On another day Derry heard his parents conversing that he would not survive after their death because he was deformed.
6. The shock he received from these words was big.
7. On another occasion Derry heard his relatives saying that in their opinion a deformed boy like Derry could accommodate himself with other deformed boys and girls. Derry had his ears always open for such comments and used to respond to them in his silent way.
8. He concluded that the world altogether didn't need a boy like him.
9. One day Derry accidentally met a man called Mr. Lamb.
10. Mr. Lamb was an old man with a lame leg. After he became lame, Mr. Lamb began to develop a positive attitude with his deformity.
11. He worked hard to defeat this impairment and learnt to walk and climb ladders. He was happy to be alive and ignored his lameness.
12. He made everyone his friend and had a house with no curtains and open doors. He welcomed anyone who came to him.
13. While Mr. Lamb took his impairment as a challenge and tried to overcome it, Derry believed that he was unwanted and lost. His pain was physical and mental. Being a child he was not as strong as Mr. Lamb about suffering.
14. He couldn't take the sneering and sympathizing world as taken by Mr. Lamb. Mr. Lamb was able to sit smart and unaffected as long as he wore trousers and sat but Derry had no way to hide his face.

15. After meeting Mr. Lamb Derry realized how foolish he had been to believe his parents.

16. For him Lamb was a man who opened the doors of his closed world in an hour's time the same of which were shut on him by his parents and therefore believed that his company with Lamb would make him a perfect person.

17. At the end Derry goes back to his house where his mother cross questioned him. She had instructed him not to step out of the house.

18. Derry tried to convince his mother that Mr. Lamb was an extremely good man but she was not ready to listen.

19. Ignoring his mother's thoughtless restrictions, Derry left his home and ran to Mr. Lamb's garden.

20. On reaching, Derry found a motionless Mr. Lamb fallen from the ladder. He had fallen while pulling the crab apples down from the tree.

### **Short Answer Type Questions**

**Q1. Who is Mr. Lamb? How does Derry get into his garden?**

**Ans.** Mr. Lamb is an old man who has lost his leg in the war. He lives by himself in a big house, tending to his apples and enjoying his garden. Derry does not know that the gate of the house is wide open, and climbs over the wall into Mr. Lamb's garden hoping for some solitude.

**Q2. What is the attitude of Mr. Lamb to the small boy who comes to his garden?**

**Ans.** Mr. Lamb's attitude to the small boy is quite gentle, protective and accommodating. Like an elder in the family, Mr. Lamb advises the young boy to mind the apples lest he should trip and not to feel afraid.

**Q3. What is it that draws Derry towards Mr. Lamb in spite of himself?**

**Ans.** Mr. Lamb is a good inspirer, a motivator and a patient listener. He holds a positive attitude to life. On seeing Derry he neither asks anything about his face nor does he look disgusted rather he makes Derry feel comfortable with his burnt face. He instills confidence in Derry. He wants him to understand the world and see the difference by watching and listening. Due to these qualities, Derry is drawn towards Lamb.

**Q4. "I'm, not afraid. People are afraid of me," says Derry. What do people think on seeing his face? How do they react then?**

**Ans.** People think that it is the ugliest thing they have ever seen. They call him a poor boy as one side of his face has been burnt by acid. Some of them are afraid of his ugly and horrible face.

**Q5. How does Mr. Lamb change the subject from ugly face to ripe apples?**

**Ans.** There is a momentary pause in the conversation. Then Mr. Lamb changes the subject. He says that when it is a bit cooler, he will get the ladder and a stick. Then he will pull down those ripe crab apples. He makes jelly. He calls these orange coloured and golden apples magic fruit. September is a good time to make jelly. He tells the boy that he could help him.

**Q6. What does Mr. Lamb tell about himself?**

**Ans.** Lamb tells that he is old and has a tin leg. Children tease him calling Lamey-Lamb but still they come to his garden. They are not afraid of him because he is not afraid of them. He is never bothered about his old age or tin leg as life has many more things to offer.

**Q7. It's all relative, beauty and beast. Justify the statement.**

**Ans.** Mr. Lamb means to say that different people have different view points to look at the same thing. Some find one thing beautiful, others find it ugly. It all depends on outlook and attitude. It is, therefore, important to adopt a positive attitude towards everything just like the Princess Beauty who loved the monstrous Beast in the fairy tale. Mr. Lamb tells Derry there are plenty of things to stare at and if people look at their handicap they should not mind, as they will be tired of soon. Beauty or ugly depends upon individual's perceptions.

**Q8. How does Derry's attitude change?**

**Ans.** Due to his burnt face Derry had withdrawing attitude. He curses his handicap and is afraid of people's stare at him. But Lamb changed his attitude. Lamb instilled courage in him to live life as it is. He cited his own example. Children call him Lamey Lamb but he does not mind. He has a tin leg but that does not stop him from making friends.

**Q9. Why do these arguments fail to console Derry?**

**Ans.** Derry says all these consolations will not make his face change. He feels more hurt and pained by the comments of persons or what he overhears. Once he heard a woman in the street whispering to another, "Look at that, that's a

terrible things. That's a face only a mother could love." Derry calls it cruel of them.

**Q10. What peculiar things does Derry notice about the old man?**

**Ans.** Derry thinks that the old man is peculiar. He says peculiar things. He asks questions which Derry does not understand. There are no curtains at the windows in his house. He likes the light and darkness and hears the wind with the windows open.

**Q11. How should people be judged?**

**Ans.** People should not be judged by what they look like. They must be judged by their actions. Appearances may be deceptive. On the other hand, people with physical impairments overcome their disabilities and perform wonderful feats in different spheres.

**Q12. "There's plenty of other things to stare at." Which 'things' are worth staring at and why?**

**Ans.** According to the old man there are plenty of things to stare at. These include crab apples or the weeds or a spider climbing up a silken ladder, or his tall sun-flowers. All of them are beautiful and growing. Derry is surprised at the mention of 'things'. Mr. Lamb tries to convince him that it is all relative. Then he mentions 'Beauty and the Beast'.

**Q13. How does Derry convince his mother for going to the old man's garden?**

**Ans.** Derry says that the old man has a tin leg. He lives in a huge house without curtains. He has a garden. Derry wants to be there and listen to things that matter. Things nobody else has ever said. Things he wants to think about. They are not about his face and how he looks.

**Q14. What makes Derry resolve to go to the old man?**

**Ans.** He no longer cares about his face and looks. He is more concerned with what he thinks and feels, what he wants to see and find out and hear. He knows that if he does not go back there, he will never go anywhere in that world again.

**Q15. Comment on the moral value of the play.**

**Ans.** The moral of the play is very loud and clear. The physically disabled should focus on the brighter side of life and not to brood over the shortcomings. The society should accept them as they are and expand their social interactions. In this way they can fight out the loneliness, depression and disappointment.

### **Long Answer Type Questions**

**Q1. What is the bond that unites the two—Mr. Lamb and Derry? How does the old man inspire the small boy?**

**Ans.** It is the bond of physical impairment that unites old Mr. Lamb and the small boy, Derry. He got his leg blown off during the war and since then he has a tin leg. Derry got one side of his face burnt by acid. Their respective disabilities have not only caused pain and suffering to the body but to their mind and soul as well. They have to live with their physical impairment. Mr. Lamb has adjusted himself to the ways of the world and stopped bothering about what people call him. He keeps himself busy in meaningful activities like picking apples, making jelly, bee-keeping and preparing toffee from honey. He loves reading books, hearing music, observing beautiful things and thinking about them. He inspires the small boy by saying that he has all the God-given organs intact. He has to decide what to do. He must work for it and then he can outshine even the others. Derry admits that ‘Handsome is he as handsome does.’ For him his face or how he looks does not matter now.

**Q2. Compare and contrast the characters of Mr. Lamb and Derry.**

**Ans.** Both Mr. Lamb and the young boy Derry have one thing in common—their physical impairment. Both are victims of these disabilities after birth. The leg of Mr. Lamb was blown off during the war. Derry’s face was burnt by acid. One side of his face looked very ugly and frightful.

Apart from this, they have nothing in common. Mr. Lamb is old, Derry is a young boy of fourteen. Mr. Lamb enjoys company and wants to talk. Derry is very withdrawn and defiant. He does not want to come in contact with people.

Mr. Lamb does not bother about his lameness. He has developed love for reading books, hearing music, seeing beautiful things and thinking about them. He is calm and patient. He asks peculiar questions. He forces Derry to see that actions are more important than mere looks. In spite of his lameness he picks apples, makes jelly, maintains a beehive and makes toffees from honey. The gate of his garden is always open. Derry develops a new vision of life under his guidance.

**Q3. What impression do you form of Derry?**

**Ans.** Derry is a fourteen year old boy who is very withdrawn and defiant. One side of his face has been burnt by acid and it looks very ugly and frightful. This incident has made him a victim of inferiority complex. He is highly sensitive to what others say about him. Their anxiety, concern, fear and revulsion pains him most.

Derry is quite intelligent. When Mr. Lamb mentions the story 'Beauty and the Beast', Derry at once comes out with its moral: 'Handsome is as handsome does.' He, however, evokes self-pity by saying, "I won't change... and no one'll kiss me ever."

Derry is sensitive to the sufferings of others. He arouses sympathy for himself by making enquiries about the old man's leg, pain and how he passes his life alone. Derry has the capacity to learn. He is impressed by the old man's way of life in spite of physical handicap. In the end, he does not bother about his face or looks and wants to see, hear, learn and think and do what no one else has done.

#### **Q4. What impression do you form about Mr. Lamb?**

**Ans.** Mr. Lamb is the protagonist in the play. He dominates the play from beginning to end. He impresses us as a sensitive, watchful, kind, considerate and sympathetic person. He is quite gentle, accommodating and protective. He is more concerned about the boy's well-being than the apples.

He is a victim of alienation due to his physical impairment. Though he keeps his gates open and says he has many friends, actually he lives alone and is quite miserable. He loves company and wants to talk. He shares his thoughts even with the young boy.

Mr. Lamb is like a modern communicator and a psychologist who believes in drawing out the best of an individual. His tactful handling and peculiar questions make Derry shed some of his firmly fixed notions and respond to the things of the world around him. Thus he is a source of inspiration to Derry.

#### **Q5. How far do you find the ending of the play quite effective and meaningful?**

**Ans.** The ending is quite dramatic and stage worthy. Mr. Lamb, who has been picking apples, falls down along with the ladder. As Derry reaches the garden, he finds Mr. Lamb lying on the ground. He kneels by Lamb and cries that he has come back. He implores the old man to get up and talk. As the old man does not respond, he begins to weep. Mr. Lamb is dead.

It is a pathetic ending, no doubt, but it does not spread gloom. It is like a soldier making an exit with the satisfaction of mission accomplished. The old man has handed over his philosophy of life to Derry and inspired him to find out what he wants to be. Thus, though the old man expires physically, his ideas inspire

Derry to pursue higher goals and achieve them. In this sense, the ending is quite effective and meaningful.

**Q6. Mr. Lamb displays signs of loneliness and disappointment. What are the ways in which Mr. Lamb tries to overcome these feelings?**

**Ans.** Mr. Lamb displays signs of loneliness and disappointment and tries to overcome these feelings by doing different things. He says that when it is a bit cooler, he will get the ladder and a stick, and pull down those crab apples. He makes jelly. Derry could help him. Then he says he is interested in anybody or anything that God made. It may be a person, flower, fruit, grass, weeds or rubbish. There are plenty of things to look at. Some of them are his crab apples or the weeds or a spider climbing up a silken ladder or his tall sun-flowers. He also likes to talk and have a company. He has a hive of bees. He hears them singing. He sits in the sun and reads books. He likes the light and the darkness. He hears the wind coming through open windows. There aren't any curtains at the windows as they either shut things out or shut things in.