

Chapter 6

On the Face of It

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Read and Find Out

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

Answer: Mr. Lamb is an old man with a tin leg. His real leg was blown off years ago during the war. He lives all alone in his house. There is a garden near the house. It has ripe crab apples looking orange and golden in color. Mr. Lamb is sitting in his garden when Derry climbs over the garden wall to get into his garden. Though the gate is open, the boy does not use it.

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1. Do you think all this will change Derry's attitude towards Mr. Lamb?

Answer: Yes, all this will change Derry's attitude towards Mr. Lamb. Derry's burnt face made him the center of ridicule. Although people sympathized with him, it was never a heartfelt one. This resulted in his pessimistic approach towards life. He thought that everyone detested and despised him. On the contrary, Mr. Lamb did not show any pity towards him. He considered Derry to be his equal and welcomed him in his garden. Mr. Lamb had a tin leg and Derry had a burnt face. So Mr. Lamb could empathize. He helped the boy to love and live life happily without any contempt for his own self. Derry had initially considered the old man to be like others, but he gradually started respecting and liking him for what he said.

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Reading with Insight

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

Answer: Derry finds Mr. Lamb different from others. Mr. Lamb shows no shock or fear on seeing Derry's burned face. Rather he talks to him in a loving manner. He welcomes him to his garden. He offers to pluck apples and make jelly for him. He calls him his friend. He says that things look outwardly different, but inwardly they are all the same. He gives the example of flowers, trees, herbs and weeds. They look different, but they are all growing living things. Similarly, people can have different looks, but inwardly they are all the same. Derry says that he hates some people. When Mr. Lamb hears this, he says that it can do him more harm than any bottle of acid. Acid burns only the face, but hatred burns one's inside -- the soul. He tells Derry never to think of his burned face. He has two arms, two legs, eyes ears, tongue and a brain. And if he has a firm mind, he can do better than others. It is by such words of encouragement that Mr. Lamb draws Derry to himself.

2. In which section of the play does Mr. Lamb display signs of loneliness and disappointment? What are the ways in which Mr. Lamb tries to overcome these feelings?

Answer: Although the loneliness of Derry dominates the play, there are evident traces of Mr. Lamb's loneliness throughout the first scene of the play. The old man says that having heard the bees for a "long time" he knows that they "sing", not buzz. It not only depicts how his perception was different from others but also illustrates that he was lonely. He did not have any one to be with him. Another evidence of his loneliness is the fact that the whole day he sat in the sun and read books. This proves that books were his only true friends. He says that his "empty house" is full of books. This shows that the void of his empty life was filled in by books. By the end of this scene, it becomes even clearer that he is lonely and sad when he mutters to himself that no one comes back to him after the first meeting. Likewise, he does not expect Derry to return. He was so sure that Derry would never return that he climbed the ladder to collect all the apples himself. However, Derry had offered to help him after informing his mother, but the old man was not sure of his return. Ironically, he would have died unnoticed if Derry had not returned to fill the emptiness of his own life.

3. The actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment is often much less than the sense of alienation felt by the person with disabilities. What is the kind of behavior that the person expects from others?

Answer: A person with any physical impairment can live life with respect and honor, if he is not ridiculed and punished with heartless pity. He expects empathy rather than sympathy. If everyone looks down at him with a pessimistic approach, he may never be able to come out of his sorrow, and consequently, would recline to his own secluded world. He is already in tremendous mental and emotional pressure. So, he expects others to be understanding rather than remind him of his disability.

In the play, Derry and Mr. Lamb, both are caught in a similar situation. Mr. Lamb, as an adult, is able to cope with such problems, but Derry, being a child, is not able to untangle this web alone. He develops a strong liking for this old man because he spoke the words to a person who was suffering from the same ignominy. The old man thought the boy would wish to hear him.

4. Will Derry get back to his old seclusion or will Mr. Lamb's brief association effect a change in the kind of life he will lead in the future?

Answer: No, Derry will not get back to his seclusion. The brief association of Derry with Mr. Lamb boosted his self-confidence and helped him to respect his own self. The manner in which the old man made Derry realize the importance of his being self-dependent; of respecting himself and of holding on to hope helped Derry undergo a remarkable change. The new found self-esteem makes him tell his mother that his looks are not important. He starts believing in his strengths rather than his appearance. It is not likely that the death of Mr. Lamb would take him back to his secluded life. This big change in him is definitely there to stay and would not be undone due to setbacks.