

# On the Face of It

## Susan Hill

### *Let us Ponder*

*Persons with disabilities have to face challenges to live. It is not only about physical handicaps but mental blocks as well. More than their acceptance by the society, it is building self confidence and courage that matters a lot in leading a normal life.*

*The play On the Face of it by Susan Hill is about the bond between an old man and a young boy; who are physically challenged. Mr. Lamb supports young Derek gain courage and will to be normal as others are.*

### *Understanding the character of Derek and Mr. Lamb*

*Derry the young boy feels very unhappy with his appearance and wants to be aloof. He has withdrawn himself from the social life. He says-*

*I don't like being with people. Any people.*

*I won't ever look different. When I'm as old as you. I'll look the same. I'll still only have half a face.*

¶ Now locate from the text more such instances which convey Derry's feelings of inferiority.

- What does he feel for himself?
- What might the people have been saying to Derry?

***Mr Lamb is an old and experienced man. He converses with Derry whenever he finds him in his garden.***

Locate instances of conversation between Mr. Lamb and Derek.

You can follow the following points:

- Mr. Lamb breaks ice with Derry?
- Mr. Lamb does not only sympathise but engages with him logically.

- The conversation helps Derry overcome his inhibitions and feeling of inferiority.

**Now read the story A Man Who Had No Eyes by Mackinley. It is a story about two victims of a chemical explosion in Westbury who meet each other after an interval of fourteen years. The disaster had turned the course of their lives.**

## **A MAN WHO HAD NO EYES**

### **MACKINLEY KANTOR**

- A BEGGAR was coming down the avenue just as Mr. Parsons emerged from his hotel. He was a blind beggar, carrying the traditional battered cane and thumping his way before him with the cautious, half-furtive effort of the sightless. He was a shaggy, thick-necked fellow; his coat was greasy about the lapels and pockets, and his hand splayed over the cane's crook with a futile sort of clinging. He carried a black bag on his shoulder. Apparently he had something to sell.

The air was rich with spring; the sun was warm and yellowed on the asphalt. Mr Parsons, standing there in front of his hotel and noting -- the clack-clack approach of the sightless man, felt a sudden and foolish sort of pity for all blind creatures.

- And, thought Mr Parsons, he was very glad to be alive. A few years ago he had been little more than a skilled labourer; now he was successful, respected, admired ... Insurance ... And he had done it alone, unaided, struggling beneath handicaps ... And he was still young. The blue air of spring, fresh from its memories of windy pools and lush shrubbery, could thrill him with eagerness.

He took a step forward just as the tap-tapping blind man passed him by. Quickly the shabby fellow turned.

"Listen, gov'nor. Just a minute of your time."

Mr. Parsons said, "It's late. I have an appointment. Do you want me to give you something?" "I ain't no beggar, gov'nor. You bet I ain't. I got a handy little arti-cle here" — he fumbled until he could press a small object into Mr. Parsons' hand — "that I sell. One buck. Best cigarette lighter made."

- Mr Parsons stood there, somewhat annoyed and embarrassed. He was a handsome figure, with his immaculate gray suit and gray hat and malacca2 stick. Of course, the man with the

cigarette lighters could not see him ... "But I don't smoke," he said.

"Listen. I bet you know plenty people who smoke. Nice little present," wheedled the man. "And, mister, you wouldn't mind helping a poor guy out?" He clung to Mr. Parsons' sleeve.

- Mr. Parsons sighed and felt in his vest pocket. He brought out two half dollars and pressed them into the man's hand. "Certainly. I'll help you out.. As you say, I can give it to someone. May be the elevator boy would..." he hesitated, not wishing to be boorish<sup>4</sup> and inquisitive, even with a blind peddler. "Have you lost your sight entirely?"

The shabby man pocketed the two half dollars. "Fourteen years, gov'nor." Then he added with an insane sort of pride: "Westbury, sir. I was one of 'em".

"Westbury", repeated Mr. Parsons. "Ah, yes. The chemical explosion ... The papers haven't mentioned it for years. But at the time it was supposed to be one of the greatest disasters in ..."

"They've all forgot about it." The fellow shifted his feet wearily. "I tell you, gov'nor, a man who was in it can't forget about it. Last thing I ever saw was C shop going up in one grand smudge, and that awful gas pouring in at all the busted windows."

Mr. Parsons coughed. But the blind peddler was caught up with the train of his one dramatic reminiscence. And, also he was thinking that there might be more half dollars in Mr. Parsons' pocket.

"Just think about it, gov'nor. There was a hundred and eight people killed, about two hundred injured, and over fifty of them lost their eyes. Blind as bats ..." He groped forward until his dirty hand rested against Mr. Parsons' coat. "I tell you, sir, there wasn't nothing worse than that in the war. If I had lost my eyes in the war, okay. I would have been well taken care of. But I was just a workman, working for what was in it. And I got it. You're so right, I got it, while the capitalists were making their dough. They were insured, don't worry about that. They..."

"Insured," repeated his listener. "Yes, that's what I sell ..."

- "You want to know how I lost my eyes?" cried the man. "Well, here it is." His words fell with the bitter and studied drama of a story often told and told for money. "I was there in C shop, last of all the folks rushing out. Out in the air there was a chance, even with buildings exploding right and left. A lot of guys made it safe out the door and got away. And just when I was about there, crawling along between those big vats a guy behind me grabs my leg. He says, let me past you ...' May be was nuts. I dunno. I try to forgive him in my heart, gov'nor. But he was bigger than me. He hauls me back and climbs right over

me. Tramples me into the dirt and he gets out, and I lie there with all that poison gas pouring down on all sides of me, and flame and stuff... " he swallowed a studied sob — and stood dumbly expectant. He could imagine the next words: Tough luck, my man. Awfully tough. Now, I want to ... "That's the story, guv'nor."

- The spring wind shrilled past them, damp and quivering. "Not quite," said Mr Parsons. The blind peddler shivered crazily. "Not quite? What do you mean, you ...?"

"The story is true," Mr. Parsons said, "except that it was the other way around."

"Other way around?" He croaked unamiably. "Say, guv'nor ..."

"I was in C shop." said Mr Parsons. "It was the other way around. You were the fellow who hauled back on me and climbed over me. You were bigger than I was, Markwardt."

The blind man stood for a long time, swallowing hoarsely. He gulped: "Parsons. By heaven! By heaven! I thought you ..." And then he screamed fiendishly: "Yes. Maybe so. May be so. But I'm blind! I'm blind, and you've been standing here letting me spout to you, and laughing at me every minute! I'm blind."

People in the street turned to stare at him.

"You get away, but I'm blind! Do you hear? I'm blind"

"Well," said Mr Parsons, "don't make such a row about it, Markwardt ... So am I."

### ***Let us Reflect and Write***

***A .The man coming down the avenue was a blind beggar. Which words and phrases have been used to suggest his***

- Blindness?
- Poverty?

If the phrase is too long, shorten and simplify it.

***b. Mr. Parson was very glad to be alive because by sheer hard work he had overcome all his handicaps, and was now successful and respected person.***

- Find two more incidents which show his good will and generosity.

Mr. Lamb and Mr. Parson have shown courage in the face of adversity. They themselves have not only moved forward in their lives but encouraged others with disabilities to shed their negative mindset. Persons with disabilities want to lead a normal life. The sympathies of the people do not solve their problem rather it reminds them of their handicaps time and again.

***c. Do you think Mr. Lamb adopted a right approach of dealing with Derry. What was his approach? Give reasons for your answer.***

### **Do You Know**

In 1969 the Government of India approved a scheme for presenting National Awards to outstanding persons with disabilities.-*Divyangjan* as employers and employees. These awards have been instituted with the objective to focus public attention on issues concerning persons with disabilities and to promote their mainstreaming in society.

The National Awards are conferred on 3<sup>rd</sup> December every year on the International Day of Disabilities.

The Municipal Corporation of Indore Madhya Pradesh received the award in 2018 for the outstanding work in providing barrier free environment in offices, educational institutes, hospitals, health care centers to persons with disabilities. Public toilets are constructed or modified with facilities for persons with disabilities.

Ñ1 ***Collect more stories of people who have dared to live with dignity and meaningfully despite their handicaps.***

- You can visit the site of Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India
  - Talk to persons with physical challenges who are making attempts to be independent.
  - Find out about their hobbies and interests.

### **Discuss with Peers**

***Suppose you run into a man who uses his physical handicaps to make a living. Would you***

- ignore him?

- help him financially?
- advise him to help himself in spite of his limitations?

Give reasons for your answer.

- In 1984, a gas tragedy, like the Westbury explosion in the story A Man Who Had No Eyes, took place in Bhopal leaving many dead and many injured. What can you/the society do to help them live a normal life?