

Class XI English

The Address

Notes

INTRODUCTION:

‘The Address’ is a short story highlighting human predicament that follows war. The story beautifully delineates the pain, anguish, and mental torture of the survivors of war. The story tells how war affects the lives of civilians as well. It disturbs the normal life and leads to conflicts and tension. The setting of the story is post World War II and the persecution of the Jews by Hitler’s Nazi forces. The girl (the narrator) and her mother Mrs. S are Jews who lived in Germany. The girl goes back to the place of her mother’s acquaintance, Mrs. Dorling, to claim her old belongings only to find that they do not carry the same value in a different setting with unfamiliar people. The narrator loses interest in her old stuff because they evoke the memories of her former life and make her nostalgic.

GIST OF THE LESSON:

During World War II, the Germans (the Nazis under Hitler) invaded Holland where ninety percent of the people were Jews. Many of the Jews fled in fear to other countries. Thousands were imprisoned in concentration camps. A woman (Mrs. S) and her daughter (the narrator) also had to leave their home. The woman left all her things with a woman (Mrs. Dorling) known to her. After some time, Mrs. S died. However, her daughter remembered the address where she used to live with her mother. After the war, she came to the town where she used to live with her mother. She went to meet the woman (Mrs. Dorling) with whom her mother had left all her precious things. But the woman refused to recognize her because she didn’t want to return the things she had taken. The girl decided to go again and this time she was welcomed by Mrs. Dorling’s daughter. The narrator was sad to see all her mother’s precious articles kept in the untidy room in a tasteless manner. Then, she decided not to recover them. She even resolved to forget the address where those belongings were kept in unpleasant surroundings.

THEME:

The story depicts the complex human emotions of intimacy, trust, hope and betrayal. It speaks of the greed and vices that afflict a human being and how it makes them do horrible things like breaking other people’s hopes, lying, stealing, cheating etc. Mrs. Dorling refused to return what she took from her friend and do her duty as a friend and a responsible human being. She actually used the opportunity to take advantage of her friend’s difficult circumstances. This represents the worst of human nature. The background of war and persecution of innocent lives has strong connotations and beautifully foreshadows the story itself.

DETAILED SUMMARY:

The Return

- After the war had ended the narrator felt confident and safe enough to visit her old place. She started living in a small rented room. Reminiscing the old times she decided to visit the address – House Number 46, Marconi Street.
- This was the address of her mother's old acquaintance Mrs. Dorling whom the narrator had only seen once and that was before the war.
- She had taken her mother's precious possessions like cutlery, utensils, silverware, etc under the pretext of saving them in case their family had to flee their house protecting themselves against the Nazi repression.
- When the narrator reached the address, a broad-backed old lady opened the door incompletely as if to hide some secret. She was wearing her mother's green cardigan.
- The girl recognized the woman but the woman claimed to know nothing about her. The girl reminded her of Mrs. S, her mother and their house.
- The woman realized who she was and enquired how did she survive when the rest of her family died in the war and repression.
- The girl said that she had returned to the place after the war and wanted to see her mother's things.
- The woman rebuffed her advances and said that she did not have time to get into old stuff at that moment and that the girl should return some other time. The woman's daughter asked about the visitor from inside the house but the woman claimed that it was nobody familiar.
- The betrayal of her mother's old friend shocked and hurt the narrator. She decided to return with a heavy heart and dashed hopes.

The Memory

- On her way back the narrator remembers the day she came back to her mother at the beginning of the war.
- She may have returned from a hostel or a trip. She looked at the house and the rooms and found that several pieces of furniture, crockery, silverware etc were not there.
- She became worried and enquired about the missing stuff from her mother. Her mother downplayed the issue and instead appreciated her keen observation.
- One morning when the girl was striding down the stairs she saw a woman leaving her house and her mother escorting her out.
- This woman was carrying their crockery and precious things .
- She asked her mother about the woman and why she took their stuff.
- Her mother told her that she was Mrs. Dorling, an old friend of hers who had reconnected with her in recent times.
- She was taking their things to keep them safe in case they had to flee in an emergency.

- They would collect their things after peace was established and they were safe in their place.
- The girl did not feel comfortable and found the woman mysterious and sinister.
- Her mother asked her to refrain from suspecting her friend as she was helping them at the risk of her own life.
- She told the narrator about the woman's address at Marconi Street. It was house number 46.
- Unfortunately, the family was driven to the concentration camps and none survived but the narrator.

The Revisit

- Growing frustrated at her last visit, the narrator decided to go back to the same address and reclaim her mother's belongings.
- She was determined and approached the door. But this time a new face opened the door. It was Mrs. Dorling's daughter.
- She asked the narrator to come inside and escorted her to the drawing-room.
- The room was filled with the narrator's old things that belonged to her mother. The burnt mark on the table cloth to the silver spoons, everything reminded her of the past.
- The things looked the same but they were in a different place, lifeless and strange.
- They lacked the life they had before, they lacked the touch of her mother and the smell of their house.
- They were a reminder of what the narrator had actually lost and that it could never be recovered.
- The girl obviously did not know that her mother was a conniving and wicked woman.
- The narrator asked her if she knew where her mother had got those things from.
- The narrator was soon overwhelmed by the flushing memories and decided to leave the house and the possessions.
- Without giving any explanation to her host, she scampered from the house which became hauntingly difficult for her to stay in.
- She made a commitment never to return to the place and those forgotten things.
- In the end, she decided to forget the address and all the history associated with it.
- For her, it was a burden she was relieved to get off her mind and heart.

VOCABULARY:

1. Poignant – pathetic
2. Evoke – arouse
3. Resolves – makes up her mind
4. Chink – narrow opening
5. Fleeting – for a short time

6. Probable – perhaps
7. Musty – smelling damp
8. Nodded – shook her head in approval
9. Bay window – a window forming a recess
10. Enamel – paint
11. Jamb – side post of the door or window
12. Apparently – clearly
13. Acquaintance – familiar person
14. In one go – in one trip
15. Antique – of olden times and precious
16. Lugging – dragging heavy load
17. Crick – muscle problem
18. Entirely – fully
19. Convinced – assured
20. Reprovingly – in a scolding manner
21. Beckoned – called with the movement of hand
22. Liberation – freedom
23. Confronted – face to face with
24. Endured – survived
25. Glancing – watching
26. Possessions – goods, articles
27. Doing an errand – gone out on purpose
28. Passage – gallery
29. Cumbersome – heavy
30. Oppressed – troubled
31. Tasteless way – disorderly
32. Muggy – damp
33. Scarcely – hardly
34. Edge – border
35. Fancied – liked
36. Pewter – zinc, an alloy made of tin and lead
37. Intently – keenly
38. Jingling – metallic sound
39. Severed – separated
40. Shreds – small pieces

Solved Question Answers:

Q1. How did Mrs. Dorling rob Mrs. S of all her antiques and silver?

Ans. Mrs. Dorling was an old acquaintance of Mrs. S. She turned up unexpectedly during the war time. She had her eyes on her friend's belongings. She suggested that the silver and other antique valuables would be safe in her house. She won the confidence of Mrs. S and offered to take the risk herself. She carried away everything to her own house. Later on, when the narrator visited Mrs. Dorling's house, she received a cold welcome. Mrs. Dorling played foul and kept all the precious things with her.

Q2. Why did the narrator leave Mrs. Dorling's house in such a hurry?

Ans. The narrator had a painful experience on her first visit to Marconi Street. She got a very cold shoulder. But she could not help paying a second visit. She felt oppressed to see her things there. All her mother's antiques and precious silver and art facts were kept tastelessly in a small and musty room. Suddenly all those familiar things lost their value for her. She also thought that her rented room was too small for them. She did not want to see the dishonest Mrs. Dorling again. So, she left the house in a hurry.

Q3. Discuss the aptness and significance of the title of the story 'The Address'.

Ans. The Address is a tale of war. The title is quite apt. It is the spring wheel of the action. The whole action centres round it. Marga Minco focuses the reader's attention on it by her doubt whether she was mistaken and her self- assurance that she had reached the correct address. The narrator is a young girl who comes home during the holidays. Her mother, in her absence, meets her old acquaintance Mrs. Dorling. She allows her to take away all her silver and antiques for safe-keeping in her own house. She asks her daughter to remember Mrs. Dorling's address – Marconi Street, Number 46. The narrator remembers the address. At the end of the war, she goes to that address but Mrs. Dorling refuses to recognize her. The narrator goes to the same address a second time. She recognizes her mother's belongings set tastelessly in a strange place. She loses interest in them and returns home. The story ends dramatically with the narrator's resolve to forget the address. The wheel comes full circle. She had remembered the address for so many years and now since the belongings of her mother stored there have lost their usefulness, she finds that forgetting this address would be quite easy.

Q4. What were the narrator's experience and reaction when she went to Mrs. Dorling's house a second time?

Ans. The narrator had an unpleasant experience during her first visit to Marconi Street. Mrs. Dorling gave her a cold shoulder. But the narrator's urge to see her things and touch them did not cool down. She decided to try a second time. This time Mrs. Dorling's daughter opened the door. Her mother was not at home. The narrator said that she would wait for her. Following the girl along the passage, the narrator saw their old-fashioned iron candle-holder hanging next to a mirror. The girl made her sit in the living room and went inside. The narrator was horrified to find herself in a room she knew and did not know. She found herself in the midst of familiar things which were scattered in a tasteless way all around. The sight oppressed her. She dared not

look around her. The woollen table-cloth, the cups, the white tea-pot, the spoons, the pewter plate, everything was full of memories of her former life. She noticed her mother's beautiful tea set and the silver cutlery being used by that family in that small, musty room. Mrs. Dorling did not even know how to use those precious things. Suddenly, the objects linked with her former life lost their value. In strange surroundings, the things too appeared strange to her. She decided to leave the house at the earliest. Those things evoked the memories of her earlier life. She no longer desired to possess them. She got up, walked to the door, and came out of the house. She also made up her mind to forget her things and Mrs. Dorling's address.

Q5. Give a brief character-sketch of Mrs. S's daughter.

Ans. The narrator was a young Jewish girl living in Holland with her mother. When the World War II started, the Nazi army started evacuating all the Jews from Europe. The narrator and her mother became very insecure. During this period, an old acquaintance of Mrs. S befriended her and offered to keep all her valuable belongings in her safe custody. Mrs. S was a noble and trusting lady. She allowed Mrs. Dorling to take away her precious antiques and cutlery etc. The narrator had a keen power of observation. When she used to come home during holidays, she noticed that various things were missing from the house. At that time, her mother told her about Mrs. Dorling and asked her to remember the address – 46, Marconi Street. The narrator had some doubts about Mrs. Dorling but her mother silenced her. The narrator survived the war and came back to her old city. Now her mother was dead, her house belonged to someone else and she had no worldly possessions. Still, she was happy to be alive and tried to make a life for herself. One day she felt an urge to go to Mrs. Dorling's house and see all her mother's precious belongings. Her persistent efforts to remind Mrs. Dorling of her own identity and the latter's relations with her mother went in vain. She was determined and tried visiting the house a second time. This time Mrs. Dorling's daughter allowed her to enter the house. But when she saw that all her mother's beautiful things were kept by Mrs. Doling in a tasteless manner and she was even using them, the narrator lost all interest in those things. With a feeling of detachment, she went back to her own rented room and decided to start life afresh. She didn't like to remain tagged to the past. She was a brave and self-respecting girl. Her resolution to forget the address and move on shows her grit and forward looking nature.

Q6. Write a brief note on Mrs. Dorling.

Ans. Mrs. Dorling was an old acquaintance of Mrs. S. But the two were not in contact. Both had a daughter each. Mrs. Dorling was a mean, greedy and dishonest woman. During the war, she reestablished her contact with Mrs. S. She won the confidence of Mrs. S and carted away all the table silver and precious old things to her own house. She explained that she wanted to save all their nice things because they would lose everything in case they had to leave the house. The narrator's mother never doubted her intention. She rather felt obliged to Mrs. Dorling for taking all the trouble while carrying their things. Mrs. Dorling had taken for granted that the narrator and her family would not come back alive from the war. The sight of the narrator at her doorstep

gave her a shocking surprise. She did not allow the narrator to walk into her house. She sent her away dejected. When she saw the narrator at her doorstep, she became scared that the narrator would see all her mother's precious things and would ask to take back everything. Mrs. Doling was a greedy and mean person. In fact, when she had offered to take away all the antique and precious things of Mrs. S, to keep in her safe custody, her intention was not honourable at all. She had all the intention of grabbing all those things. She was quite sure that Mrs. S and her family would not come alive after the war.