



INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
SENIOR SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS XI
THE BROWNING VERSION
Terence Rattigan

Introduction

The play presents a conversation between a lower fifth grade science student, Taplow and Frank, a teacher.

This play highlights the attitude of a teenaged student towards his teacher. His comments are shocking because they are very close to reality. He imitates the voice of Mr. Crocker-Harris. He calls the man almost inhuman. He is mortally afraid of his teacher. His promotion depends on the whim or goodwill of his teacher. But he opens up when the other science teacher encourages him to do so. He hates the Greek play because he does not like the teacher's method of teaching. Mr. Crocker Harris seems to hate people in order to make them like him. But Taplow admits that, although like most students he had his share of fun at Crocker-Harris's expense, he does have sympathy for him.

A chance meeting between Taplow and Frank

The scene of the play is set in a school. The play opens with a sixteen year old boy, Taplow who has come to do extra work for his teacher, Crocker-Harris. He is waiting for his teacher, who has not yet arrived. Another teacher, Frank, finds Taplow waiting in the room and strikes a conversation with him.

Taplow awaiting his result

From the conversation between Frank and Taplow, we are informed that Taplow is waiting for his result to be declared on the following day. He is keen to specialize in science provided he gets a favourable result. The uniqueness of Mr. Crocker-Harris is hinted as he does not tell the results like the other teachers do. He follows the rule of the headmaster declaring the results on the last day of the term.

Taplow's views on art and science

Their conversation provides us an insight into the mind of Taplow. He lets Frank know how much he dislikes the play 'Agamemnon'. He is more interested in science. He admits that though the play is not that bad, the way it is taught is terrible- "Just a lot of Greek words strung together and fifty lines if you get them wrong".

The question of the "extra work"

Taplow is doing extra work as he had missed a class a week ago. Frank remarks that Taplow will certainly get his "remove" for doing the extra work. But Taplow feels the other way. He asserts such sort of rules do not work with Mr. Crocker-Harris, as he is not like other teachers who appreciate the students who do extra work.

Taplow's views about Crocker-Harris

As per Taplow, Crocker Harris is a different kind of teacher. He is too strict and 'hardly human'. Unlike other teachers, he does not tell his students their result before the judgement day. Taplow had asked Crocker Harris about his remove and in response Crocker Harris told him that he has given Taplow exactly what he deserves- "No less; and certainly no more".

Frank's suggestion to Taplow

After calling Taplow for extra work, Crocker Harris himself is late by ten minutes. Frank points that as Crocker Harris is late, Taplow has a chance to leave and play golf. However, Taplow seems shocked at this suggestion and is scared that Mr. Crocker Harris might follow him home.

Further contemplation on Crocker-Harris's character

Frank admits envying Mr. Crocker Harris for the effect he has on his students. He asks Taplow if he beats them. However, Taplow tells Frank that unlike one or two of the other teachers, Mr. Crocker Harris is not a "sadist". He is not a sort of a person who would beat students and vent his frustration. He is hard like a nut. He is heartless. He possesses no feelings at all.

Taplow's unusual liking towards Crocker-Harris

Taplow admits that in spite of all this, he still likes Crocker Harris. The boy narrates an incident when he laughed at a classical joke cracked by him, though he had not understood it. It was a gesture from Taplow's side to be polite to him.

Millie Crocker-Harris

At this point, Millie Crocker Harris enters the room. She was Mr. Crocker Harris's wife. She suggests Taplow to run away for a quarter of an hour and come back. She advises him to leave as Harris has been at Bursar's and may take quite a time to get back.

The behaviour and attitude of Mrs. Millie Crocker Harris, baffles Taplow. He is not willing to leave for it has been the order of his teacher whom he fears to disobey. Millie assures him that she will take the blame on herself. Proposing an excuse for his absence, she hands Taplow a prescription asking him to take it to a chemist and get it made up for Crocker Harris. Convinced Taplow accepts the proposal and leaves Frank and Mrs. Crocker Harris behind.

Answer the following questions in 30-40 words.

1. Why did Taplow come to see Mr. Crocker Harris'?
2. What do you gather about Crocker Harris from the play?
3. What subjects did Taplow want to opt for and why?
4. Why does Taplow feel that Crocker Harris is not a sadist?
5. Frank says, 'Bad luck. Still there's one comfort'. What is the bad luck and what is the comfort?
6. Does Frank seem to encourage Taplow's comments on Crocker Harris?
7. Why does Mr. Frank envy Mr. Crocker Harris?

Answer the following questions in 100-120 words:

1. Comment on the attitude shown by Taplow towards Crocker-Harris.

Taplow has a strange attitude towards Crocker-Harris. On one hand, Taplow feels that Crocker-Harris is a master who cannot appreciate the extra work done by the students. Taplow says that Crocker-Harris is "hardly human". He asserts that he is no "sadist" though he has no feelings at all. He is "like a nut". Taplow believes that he seems to hate people who like him. He is a teacher who a student can never disobey. And therefore, Taplow feels scared to escape meeting him and waits for Crocker-Harris even when he is late.

However, Taplow still likes Crocker-Harris. He laughs at his poor jokes to make a common gesture of politeness. He is respectful towards him and dares not cut the extra work even after Millie Crocker-Harris suggests him to do that. He only moves out when she hands him a task related to Crocker Harris himself. Although he does not appreciate the teacher much, he tells Frank, "The funny thing is that in spite of everything, I do rather like him. I can't help it."

2. What is the main idea of the play?