

# ENGLISH



## ON THE FACE OF IT

~Summary~

**-by Susan Hill**

### The Meeting in the Garden

The first scene of the play begins in Mr Lamb's garden. Derry, a young boy of fourteen, climbs over the garden wall and enters the garden. He walks in slowly and cautiously, thinking nobody is there, but is startled to hear Mr Lamb's voice. The old man tells Derry to not trip up on the crab apples which have fallen from the tree in the garden. Derry tries to explain to him that he didn't want to sneak in. He had presumed that the house was empty, and he didn't expect anybody there. He appears to be scared. Mr Lamb tries to put his fears at rest and says that the house is no doubt empty, now that he is in the garden. Mr Lamb assures him that there is nothing to be afraid of. His gates are always open and everyone is welcome.

### Derry Appears to be Apprehensive

When Mr Lamb tells Derry that there is nothing to be afraid of, Derry replies that he is not afraid but people are afraid of him. Derry is very furious because he thinks that Mr Lamb is having pity on him. He vehemently says that he is not a 'poor boy'. He is afraid of himself because one side of his face got burnt, as acid fell on it. Mr Lamb, seeing that the situation has become a bit heated, changes the subject. He says that he is going to make jelly out of the crab apples. However, this enrages Derry more. He tells Mr Lamb that he has changed the subject because he is also afraid of his burnt face, just as all other people are. He says that people pretend to be sympathetic towards him but are afraid to talk about his looks because he was ugly.

### Mr Lamb's Philosophy

Mr Lamb tells him to talk about it, but Derry has become upset. The old man says that it is possible Derry's face got burnt in a fire. Derry tells him that it is acid that has burnt his face. He says, "It ate my face up. It ate me up". Derry is confused at Mr Lamb's indifference and asks him if he is not interested. Mr Lamb replies that he is interested in everybody. There is nothing God made that doesn't interest him. He asks Derry why one green plant is called a weed and another a flower. Mr Lamb doesn't find any difference; to him, it's all life. His philosophy is to celebrate life in all its forms.

### Mr Lamb Reveals his Impairment

Mr Lamb tells Derry that one of his legs got blown off in a war, but that is not important. When he goes out, some kids call him 'Lamey-Lamb'. This doesn't bother him. He thinks that such a name suits him. Derry says that Mr Lamb could cover his tin leg with his trousers, and none would notice it or stare. But Derry could not cover his face. According to Mr Lamb, there are plenty of other things in the world which are important. Mr Lamb has a positive and optimistic attitude towards life. He feels that beauty is relative and reminds Derry of 'Beauty and the Beast'.

Derry is filled with bitterness. He says that he doesn't believe in fairy tales. His face will always remain the same. He also says that no one will kiss him, but his mother will kiss him because she has to. She kisses him on the other side of his face.

Mr Lamb tries to reason with him. He says that he should notice the beautiful things in the world and not care about his face. Derry begins to mock the idea, saying that one should think of all those people who are worse off than yourself. This may be true, but it won't change his face.

### Derry Calls Mr Lamb Peculiar

Derry narrates an incident which happened at the bus stop. He heard two women talk about his face. One of them said, "Look at that, that's a terrible thing. That's a face only a mother could love." He is very hurt and calls it cruel. Mr Lamb advises him not to believe everything that he hears. To this, Derry replies that he finds Mr Lamb 'peculiar'. He further tells him that he came in the garden because he liked it. But he doesn't like being near people.

Mr Lamb starts telling him a story about a man who was afraid to die. He feared each and every thing and locked himself in a room. Unfortunately, he died because a picture fell off the wall on his head. Derry laughs a lot at the story. Through this story, Mr Lamb wanted to show Derry that one cannot hide oneself or shun society just because of some fear. One should enjoy life as it comes.

### The Positive side of Life

Derry notices that there are no curtains on the windows of Mr Lamb's house. Mr Lamb replies that he is not fond of curtains because they shut things out and he likes to see the light and the darkness, and to hear the wind.

Derry also says that he likes to hear the rain falling on the roof. Mr Lamb says that Derry is not lost. It means that there is still a sensitive part in his heart but it is hidden because of the bitterness.

Derry tells Mr Lamb that even his family has pity on him. They think about his future and what will he do with that face. They feel that it would be difficult for him to get on in this world with a

face like that. Mr Lamb shows him that he is better than all the rest. He can live his life easily like others do.

Derry asks Mr Lamb if he has any friends. Mr Lamb tells him that everyone is his friend, even Derry. Derry is confused and asks him how they are friends when Mr Lamb doesn't even know his name. Mr Lamb explains that names don't signify anything.

To him, being friends doesn't mean that you should know all the details about a person.

At this point, Derry chooses to tell him his name. He says it's Derek, but hates being called that. He wants to be called 'Derry' only.

### **'Watching, Listening, Thinking'**

Derry tells Mr Lamb that he hates some people. Mr Lamb says that hatred is more dangerous than the acid that burned his face. Derry narrates another incident about the time when he returned home after the accident.

He heard someone say that he'd have been better in the hospital with others like him'. Mr Lamb contradicts it by asking what kind of a world would that be. Derry is amazed and asks how he understands all these things. Mr Lamb replies, 'Watching, listening, thinking'.

Mr Lamb tells Derry that he can come and go in his house as he wishes. Whatever belongs to him belongs to everybody. Derry tells Mr Lamb that his friends would run away at seeing Derry's face. Mr Lamb tells him that it is a 'risk' he has to take. He wants Derry to understand that he has to come out of his shell and shed his bitterness if he wants to live life to the fullest.

### **Derry Offers his Help**

Derry asks Mr Lamb how he is going to get the apples down, since his leg is blown off and he wears a tin leg. Mr Lamb assures him that over the years he has learned to deal with his handicap. Derry says that he could help him, but his mother won't allow him to come out once he gets home.

Mr Lamb tells Derry that it is not Derry's mother but Derry's bitterness and hesitation that won't let him go out. Derry tries to give a reason by saying that people worry too much and his house is three miles away. Mr Lamb excites Derry by saying that he is a young boy and he could do anything if he chooses to. The power of choosing what one wants lies in one's own hands. A small altercation takes place between them. Mr Lamb says that Derry doesn't have the guts to fight the odds. His burnt face is just an excuse. Derry becomes infuriated and mocks the tin leg of Mr Lamb. He promises to return to the garden.

### **Derry Chooses for Himself**

The second scene begins in Derry's house. He is fighting with his mother because he wants to return to Mr Lamb, and his mother is not allowing him to go. She says that she has been warned by many people that Mr Lamb appears to be an eccentric. But Derry insists that he wants to go. For the first time in his life, someone has shown him the right way. He wants to talk to Mr Lamb about things which matter to him. He wants to sit there and listen to things. His mother tells him to stay, but Derry tells her that he hates it. His mother doesn't react. She simply tells him that he is bound to say such awful things because of his face. Derry strongly replies that he doesn't care about his face anymore. The transformation has begun.

### **Derry is a Changed Person**

The final scene shifts to the garden again. Derry reaches there out of breath. He finds Mr Lamb lying on the ground. He has been trying to pick the apples off the tree when the ladder has slipped and he, along with it, has fallen on the ground.

Derry tries to awaken him, but Mr Lamb is unmoving. He is probably dead. Derry has lost his only friend and he begins to cry. Mr Lamb was able to do what he has been trying; he has taught Derry how to live.