

A Matter of Husbands

by Ferenc Molnar

Exercise, Notes, Summary, Questions and Answers

(Exam focused Questions)

Class 12 English

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About the Play

A Matter of Husbands is a humorous one act play by the Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnar. The play takes place in the drawing room of a famous Actress and mainly involves three characters: the Actress, Earnest Woman, and Alfred.

Earnest Woman is Alfred's wife. She believes that Alfred is having an affair with the Actress because of his frequent visits to the theatre, a bouquet of violets, and a love letter. She comes to confront the Actress and asks her to return her husband.

The Actress, however, uses her professional acting skills to create a false explanation for everything. She convinces Earnest Woman that Alfred is actually deeply in love with his wife. The final revelation shows that Alfred has been hiding in the next room and that the Actress has deceived Earnest Woman completely.

Setting

The entire action takes place in the drawing room of the Actress. The limited setting is important because the room becomes like a stage where the Actress performs her greatest role outside the theatre.

Short Summary

Earnest Woman enters the Actress's drawing room in tears because she believes that Alfred has fallen in love with the Actress. She has several pieces of evidence, including a love letter, Alfred's visits to the theatre, and a bouquet of violets.

Instead of admitting the affair, the Actress calmly creates a new explanation. She says that Alfred is actually madly in love with his wife but is too shy to express his feelings. According to her story, his visits to the theatre are meant to help him learn about romance, the violets are intended for his wife, and the love letter is only a draft.

Earnest Woman believes this explanation because it gives her exactly what she wants to hear. Her jealousy changes into happiness and gratitude, and she leaves believing that Alfred truly loves her.

After she leaves, the Actress calls Alfred out from the next room. This reveals that the affair is real and that the entire explanation was a performance. The ending creates dramatic irony because the audience knows the truth while Earnest Woman remains unaware.

Main Ideas

Deception can completely change how people understand facts.

People may believe explanations that satisfy their emotional desires.

Acting can be used outside the theatre to manipulate others.

Appearance and reality can be very different.

Truth can be hidden behind a convincing performance.

The play uses serious relationship problems to create comedy and irony.

Important Themes

Deception

Deception is the central theme. The Actress deliberately creates a false story to hide her affair with Alfred.

Appearance and Reality

The things Earnest Woman sees appear to prove one thing, but the Actress gives them completely different meanings. The final scene reveals the reality behind the false appearance.

Acting and Performance

The Actress uses her professional skills in real life. The drawing room

becomes her stage and Earnest Woman becomes an unsuspecting audience.

Jealousy and Insecurity

Earnest Woman fears losing her husband. Her emotional insecurity makes her vulnerable to the Actress's manipulation.

Psychological Manipulation

The Actress understands what Earnest Woman wants to believe. She uses this knowledge to turn suspicion into confidence and sadness into happiness.

Truth and Happiness

Earnest Woman leaves the room happy, but her happiness is based on a lie. The play therefore raises the question of whether temporary happiness can replace truth.

Character Information

The Actress

The Actress is confident, intelligent, quick thinking, witty, and highly skilled at manipulation. She does not panic when accused. Instead, she immediately creates a believable story that explains away every suspicious detail.

Her greatest strength is her understanding of psychology. She knows

that Earnest Woman desperately wants to believe that Alfred still loves her. Therefore, she creates a story that satisfies this emotional need.

She represents the connection between acting, illusion, and deception. Her greatest performance takes place not on stage but in her own drawing room.

Earnest Woman

Earnest Woman is sincere, emotional, loving, and deeply attached to her marriage. Her name reflects her genuine personality. Her pain, jealousy, and later happiness are all real.

Her sincerity also becomes her weakness. She wants to believe that Alfred loves her, so she accepts the Actress's explanation without recognizing the deception.

Alfred

Alfred is Earnest Woman's husband and the hidden centre of the conflict. He does not actively participate in most of the conversation, but the entire argument revolves around his actions.

His appearance at the end confirms that the Actress has been lying and that the affair is real. His hidden presence also creates the final dramatic irony.

Important Events

Earnest Woman enters the Actress's drawing room in tears.

She accuses the Actress of having an affair with Alfred.

She presents the love letter, theatre visits, and violets as evidence.

The Actress calmly invents a new explanation.

The theatre visits are presented as Alfred's attempt to learn romance.

The violets are presented as gifts intended for Earnest Woman.

The love letter is described as a practice letter.

Earnest Woman believes the Actress and becomes happy.

Earnest Woman leaves the room feeling grateful.

The Actress calls Alfred from the next room.

The audience discovers that the affair is real.

Important Symbols and Details

The Theatre

The theatre represents acting and deception. The Actress uses Alfred's visits to create a false explanation for his behaviour.

The Violets

The violets are evidence that Earnest Woman believes proves the affair.

The Actress changes their meaning by claiming they were actually meant for the wife.

The Love Letter

The love letter appears to prove Alfred's relationship with the Actress. The Actress claims that it is only a draft written while Alfred was practicing how to express his love.

The Drawing Room

The drawing room becomes the stage for the Actress's performance. It is the place where truth is hidden and a false reality is created.

Difficult Vocabulary

Word Meaning
Pretext An excuse or stated reason that hides the real reason
Deception The act of making someone believe something false
Infidelity Unfaithfulness to a husband or wife
Manipulation Controlling someone through clever or unfair methods
Earnest Sincere and serious
Jealousy Fear or anger caused by the possibility of losing someone's affection
Irony A situation in which the result is different from what is expected
Gullible Easily persuaded to believe something
Revelation The discovery or disclosure of something previously hidden
Pretext A false or convenient reason given to hide the real purpose

Key Message

The play shows how easily people can be influenced when a lie appeals to their emotions and desires. It also demonstrates the power of acting,

deception, and psychological manipulation. The contrast between what Earnest Woman believes and what the audience knows creates the play's main irony and humour.

Textbook and Understanding Questions

1. Why does Earnest Woman suspect the Actress?

She suspects the Actress because Alfred frequently visits the theatre, there is a love letter, and he has bought violets connected with the Actress. These things make her believe that Alfred is having an affair.

2. Why does Earnest Woman come to the Actress?

She comes to confront the Actress and asks her to return Alfred. She is deeply hurt and wants to save her marriage.

3. How does the Actress explain Alfred's visits to the theatre?

She claims that Alfred visits the theatre to learn about romance and understand how to become more romantic toward his wife.

4. What does the Actress say about the violets?

She claims that Alfred bought the violets for Earnest Woman but was too shy to give them to her directly.

5. How does the Actress explain the love letter?

She says that the letter was only a draft. According to her story, Alfred

was practicing how to express his feelings to his wife.

6. Why does Earnest Woman believe the Actress?

She believes her because the Actress gives an explanation for every suspicious detail and because the explanation satisfies Earnest Woman's desire to believe that Alfred still loves her.

7. Where is Alfred during the conversation?

Alfred is hiding in the next room. His presence is revealed after Earnest Woman leaves.

8. Why is the Actress able to manipulate Earnest Woman so successfully?

The Actress understands Earnest Woman's emotions. She knows that Earnest Woman is afraid of losing Alfred and wants reassurance. Instead of simply denying the affair, she creates a detailed story that gives Earnest Woman exactly the reassurance she wants.

9. Is Earnest Woman truly earnest?

Yes. Her feelings are genuine throughout the play. She is genuinely hurt when she suspects Alfred, and she is genuinely happy when she believes the Actress's explanation.

10. What does the final scene reveal?

The final scene reveals that the Actress has been lying. Alfred comes

out of the next room after Earnest Woman leaves, proving that the affair is real.

Reference to the Context

1. Alfred is not in love with me. He is madly in love with his wife.

This statement is the central deception of the play. The Actress tells Earnest Woman that Alfred is not interested in her and is actually deeply in love with his wife.

The statement works because it directly addresses Earnest Woman's greatest fear. The final appearance of Alfred proves that the statement was false.

2. He uses me as a pretext.

The Actress uses this explanation to account for Alfred's visits to the theatre. She claims that Alfred uses her as an excuse while actually trying to improve his relationship with his wife.

The explanation changes suspicious behaviour into apparently innocent behaviour.

3. He is too shy to give them to you.

This refers to the violets. The Actress claims that Alfred bought them for his wife but was too shy to give them directly to her.

The explanation changes the flowers from evidence of an affair into

evidence of supposed love.

4. The letter was only a draft.

The Actress claims that Alfred wrote the letter only as practice for expressing his feelings to his wife. This is another example of how she changes the meaning of evidence.

Reference Beyond the Text

Role of Deception in Human Relationships

The play shows that deception can temporarily change how people feel without changing reality. Earnest Woman becomes happy because she believes the Actress's story, but the affair continues.

The play therefore encourages readers to think about the relationship between truth, trust, happiness, and deception.

Is Earnest Woman Really Earnest?

Yes. She is sincere about her marriage, her jealousy, her pain, and her happiness. Her sincerity makes her emotionally genuine but also makes her vulnerable to the Actress's manipulation.

Does Earnest Woman Deserve to Be Blamed for Being Gullible?

Earnest Woman is gullible, but her behaviour is closely connected with her emotional condition. She loves Alfred and desperately wants to believe that he still loves her. The Actress also creates a detailed and

convincing deception. Therefore, her gullibility should be understood in the context of her emotional vulnerability.

Exam Focused Questions

1. How does the Actress use her acting skills to deceive Earnest Woman?

The Actress uses her professional acting skills, quick thinking, and understanding of human psychology. Instead of simply denying the affair, she creates a complete alternative explanation for the theatre visits, violets, and love letter. She performs the lie so convincingly that Earnest Woman accepts it as truth.

2. Why is *A Matter of Husband's* a comedy despite dealing with infidelity?

The play presents a serious subject through witty dialogue, irony, exaggeration, clever manipulation, and an unexpected reversal. The humour comes especially from the fact that Earnest Woman becomes grateful to the very woman who is actually involved with her husband.

3. How does the play present the conflict between truth and deception?

Earnest Woman believes that she knows the truth because she has evidence. The Actress changes the meaning of that evidence and creates a false reality. The final appearance of Alfred exposes the truth and proves that Earnest Woman has been deceived.

4. Why is Earnest Woman an easy victim of the Actress?

She is emotionally vulnerable, sincere, and deeply concerned about her marriage. She wants to believe that Alfred still loves her. The Actress understands this desire and creates a story that gives her exactly the reassurance she needs.

5. What makes the ending humorous and ironic?

Earnest Woman leaves believing that the Actress has helped save her marriage. Immediately afterward, the Actress calls Alfred from the next room, revealing that he is actually her lover. The audience knows the truth while Earnest Woman does not.

6. What is the significance of the title *A Matter of Husbands*?

The title is appropriate because the entire conflict revolves around Alfred, his marriage with Earnest Woman, and his relationship with the Actress. It also reflects the play's broader interest in marriage, jealousy, secrecy, and deception.

7. What does the play suggest about psychological manipulation?

The play shows that manipulation can be powerful when it is based on an understanding of another person's emotions. The Actress recognizes Earnest Woman's fear and desire and uses them to control her interpretation of the facts.

8. What does the play reveal about human relationships?

The play shows that trust, insecurity, desire, jealousy, and deception can strongly influence relationships. It also suggests that people may

interpret facts according to what they fear or hope to be true.

Commonly Confusing Points

Is Earnest Woman actually wrong about the affair?

No. Her original suspicion is correct. Alfred really is involved with the Actress. She is deceived into believing otherwise.

Is the Actress innocent?

No. The final scene reveals that she has been involved with Alfred and has deliberately deceived Earnest Woman.

Why does Earnest Woman become happy?

She becomes happy because she believes the Actress's explanation that Alfred is deeply in love with her.

Does Alfred appear throughout the play?

No. He remains hidden in the next room during the main conversation and appears only after Earnest Woman leaves.

What is the biggest irony in the play?

Earnest Woman believes that the Actress has helped save her marriage, while the audience knows that the Actress is actually involved with her husband.

Why is the drawing room important?

It becomes a symbolic stage where the Actress performs her deception. The real world of the play temporarily becomes another kind of theatre.

Quick Revision

Play: A Matter of Husbands

Playwright: Ferenc Molnar

Genre: Humorous one act play

Setting: The drawing room of the Actress

Main characters: The Actress, Earnest Woman, and Alfred

Central conflict: Earnest Woman suspects Alfred of having an affair with the Actress

Main evidence: Theatre visits, violets, and a love letter

The Actress's strategy: She gives every suspicious detail a new meaning

Major themes: Deception, appearance and reality, acting, jealousy, manipulation, truth and happiness

Turning point: Earnest Woman accepts the Actress's explanation

Ending: Alfred appears from the next room

Main irony: Earnest Woman leaves happily believing a lie

Central message: A convincing performance can manipulate people's understanding of reality, especially when it appeals to their emotional desires.

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