

Many Happy Returns of the Day 1856



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Scene

A Victorian dining room. Centre left is a large dining table which dominates the room. Five children's high chairs and four adult dining chairs are ranged around it. Seated front stage left is the Grandfather reading a newspaper. The maid enters through a door back stage right carrying a tray of tea things.

Grandfather Ah, there you are Mary. It's time the table was laid, my granddaughter Alice will return from her walk around the park very soon and expect her party tea to be ready.

Mary Begging your pardon Sir, but Cook needed me to run to the Grocers. At the last minute the Mistress decided that Alice should have a dish of sugar mice.

Grandfather (Chuckling) Ah, yes indeed. At Christmas she would eat nothing else.

Mary begins to set out the things on the table. An elderly lady comes slowly through the door, carrying a doll, and takes a seat.

Grandmother Thank goodness for a few minutes peace. The child has been in such a fever of excitement all day. When William suggested a trip to the park for one could have cheered.

Grandfather She'll only be six the once, don't deprive her of her fun.

Grandmother It's alright for those who hide behind newspapers. Whatever are you reading about?

Grandfather The end of the Crimean War and the return of our troupes.

Lots of noise is heard outside the door followed by 5 excited children rushing in with a mother and father and two older daughter close behind.

Alice Where's my special chair, Mary? You promised I would feel like a queen.

Mother The trimmings are right here behind the door, little miss, and here is a crown for you to wear (Mother puts a crown of flowers on Alice's head whilst Mary fixes a wreath of flowers to one of the high chairs) Don't let Queen Victoria see you or she will get jealous (Everyone laughs).

Alice (Climbing onto her chair). Is it time for my presents now?

Father It is if my best girl remembers her manners.

Grandmother Your Grandfather and I have brought you this doll. Treat her carefully, the arms and legs have joints so that she can move but they are made of porcelain and you don't want to break them.

Older daughter, Maud, takes the doll to Alice.

Maud This is beautiful, look at her lace petty coat and her perfect little hat.

Alice Thank you Grandmamma. I shall call her Jemima and she shall be my best and most senior doll and go everywhere with me.

Father Mary do you think we might have the gas mantels lit and the fire stoked. It feels a little chilly.

Mary Yes. Sir.

Mother And after that your father and I have a little surprise for you Alice.

Father It's time we had a glass of wine.

Grandfather Might I have some?

Now answer the following questions:

Key Stage 2 - Questions about the playscript

1. Who is Mary?
 - a. The cook
 - b. The maid
 - c. The grandmother
2. Which war had recently ended?
 - a. The Boar war
 - b. The Crimean War
 - c. The Second World War
3. Where had the family been?
 - a. To the zoo.
 - b. To the shops
 - c. To the park
4. What kinds of chairs did the children sit on?
 - a. High chairs
 - b. Dining chairs
 - c. Arm chairs
5. Who was the current Queen of England?
 - a. Queen Elizabeth
 - b. Queen Victoria
 - c. Queen Mary
6. How was Alice's chair decorated?
 - a. With balloons
 - b. With a wreath of flowers
 - c. With fairy lights
7. What was special about the doll?
 - a. It had jointed limbs
 - b. It was made of plastic
 - c. It could say "Mamma"
8. How was the dining room lit?
 - d. Electric light
 - e. Candle light
 - f. Gas light
9. What was the family going to drink?
 - a. Beer
 - b. Lemonade
 - c. Wine
10. What do you think the surprise will be?
 - a. A Noah's Ark
 - b. A computer
 - c. A game boy

Key Stage 1 - Questions about the picture

What were homes like a long time ago?

1. Alice is having a birthday party. How can you tell which is Alice?
 - a. She is drinking wine
 - b. She is holding a doll
 - c. She is sitting in an arch way of flowers.
2. What present is Alice about to receive?
 - a. A train set
 - b. A Noah's Ark
 - c. A computer
3. Alice is from a wealthy family. How you know?
 - a. The ladies are wearing long dresses
 - b. Her father is smiling
 - c. The room is full of expensive furniture and pictures

4. What is Alice's Grandfather doing?
 - a. Reading the paper
 - b. Drinking wine
 - c. Holding a present

5. Look carefully at the picture below. Look at Alice's face.
 - a. Does Alice look happy?
 - b. What does Alice's expression tell you about how she is feeling?
 - c. Can you explain why she feels this way?

