**Smoke Screen**

**Harold Brighouse**

          **Question# 1**  
**Discuss the title of the play?**  
  
          Smoke screen is a strategy generally used by the armies who generate a lot of smoke around their area to hide their movements from the enemy sight. Thus they shift from one place to another without being detected by the enemy forces. Another parallel of this phenomenon is seen in a marine creature, cuttlefish…the one that squirts out a flood of ink to hide itself from attack. Different people often use the smoke screen to present their deceptive image before the world. Simulation and dissimulation are the tools that help a man to envelop himself in a “smoke screen”.  The present play too is about the inter-play of different feelings and attitudes of some characters at a critical point of their lives. In the play everyone is trying to hide his true stance under the cover of an artificial reaction. Nobody is ready to show his true emotions.  
The mother in the play behaves as if she has no concern for her daughter and her business of taxicabs holds more importance for her. Her reaction at her daughter’s sudden decision of getting married to an ugly rugby player shocks her but she pretends to have no effect at all. The daughter knows everything about the troubled marriage of her parents but she never shows it. She knows the rotten nature of her otherwise handsome father and opts for a husband who is quite contrary to her father. Aunt Susan hides Primrose’s bag and tries to hold her at home but infact she wants her sister to realize that too much freedom has spoiled her daughter and as a payback she should dispossess her daughter as her heiress, leaving all her money to the International Peace Society. So, we see all the characters are trying to give a false picture of their real personality and hiding the truth behind one or the other smoke screen.  
  
                                                           **Question# 2**  
**What type of the girl primrose was?**  
  
                       Primrose, the heroine of the play is a free and liberal girl. She is young, pretty and stylish. She likes to hangout with her friends in parks and nightclubs. She is a perfect London-girl…very modern in thoughts and actions. She behaves very rudely to her aunt who contrives a plan to stop her from going out at night. She even remains indifferent to her aunt’s headache.  Her actions show her as an irresponsible and unsympathetic girl but in fact it is not true. Her parent’s broken marriage has a deep impact on her personality and decisions. She has always seen her mother struggling hard in her life and she is fully conscious of her mother’s achievements. She admits that she isn’t a brainy person like her mother, declaring herself “ a marrying women like aunt Susan”. She chooses an ugly man for her husband because she looks at his inner beauty only, thus giving a proof of her mature mind. So Primrose is a nice kid from inside with a hard surface.  
  
          **Question# 3**  
**Why does Susan hide her bag?**  
  
                 Susan Merridew is Lucy’s sister and Primrose’s aunt. She comes from a village to see her sister in London. She is old fashioned and likes to interfere in other people’s life. She has observed Primrose as an autonomous girl who is not in her mother’s control. Being an orthodox lady she is shocked to see her activities. She remarks adversely on everything that Primrose does; she has objections on her smoking, her lipstick and her routine of life. She tries to stop Primrose from going out at night and hides her bag. Primrose is frantically trying to find it but Susan never gives any inkling to her. After upending the room upside down, Primrose comes to know of her aunt’s brilliant plan. She threatens to spill her down on the floor and takes her bag that contains her only lipstick and her three-pound cash.  So aunt Susan’s plan fails badly because she can’t detain Primrose from “going to the devil”.  
  
                                                         **Question# 4**  
**Describe the ways of the Victorian parents?**  
  
                       Victorian parents were very strict with their children because they wanted to train them for the troubles of future. In those times marriages were not so uncertain and the parents stayed with their kids. The economic security was present forever and the kids were going to be rich when they grew up. They treated their young kids harshly so that they should be able to face all the harsh situations later in life. But the modern parents live an uncertain life; there is no surety of marital relationship. The economic conditions are uncertain. That’s why they give every facility and freedom to their kids as long as the going is good. They treat their children lovingly because they don’t know what their kid would come across in their future. So the technique of these two parents is quite different from each other corresponding to their subjective social conditions.  
  
                         **Question# 5**  
**What is the difference between a career woman and a marrying woman?**  
  
              Primrose gives a very significant statement about career and marrying women. She says that she is not a career woman like her mother but is a marrying woman like her aunt Susan. A career woman is one who likes to lead her life independently. She doesn’t want to become a burden on anyone else like Lucy who is cheated and divorced by her handsome husband. She refused to take alimony from her husband. Instead of marrying another man she came out of her home and struggled hard to achieve a sound economic base and respectable status in the society. A career woman is a living protest against the necessity of marriage. While a marrying woman is one who doesn’t want to work independently. She wants to be protected economically and socially by a man like aunt Susan who has a peaceful family with her caring husband and two obedient sons. Primrose decides to be a marrying woman because she has found the man of her dreams and looks forward to a hassle-free married life.  
  
                                                                 **Question# 6**  
**Why is Lucy so bitter about life?**  
  
                 Lucy Aston was a young energetic lady. She worked her way through life with extreme hard work and conviction in her own abilities. She married a handsome man who cheated her. She divorced him and was left alone with her little baby. She worked very hard to earn for herself and her little daughter. She had to perform dual duties; at home as well as in her business. Her experience with the world wasn’t straightforward and pleasant. She went through many crises but managed to sustain herself honourably. Her young daughter was a constant reason of tension for Lucy. She said that she fought life heroically but life fought back through Primrose.  The tough conditions of her life, her unhappy marriage and her apparently spoiled daughter were the cause of her bitter tone.  
  
  
                                                              **Question# 7**  
**What is the conflict between Lucy and Primrose?**  
  
Lucy was a successful career woman who had given every type of freedom to her daughter. Lucy had a bitter experience with marriage and she wasn’t in favour of her daughter’s marriage within her heart. She was apprehensive about the future of any marriage. She didn’t say it outright but her attitude showed her displeasure. Her daughter, Primrose decided to marry her friend Clarice’s brother who was an ugly rugby player. He was as different from her father Charles as two men could be. Her father was a lady killer but John wasn’t. She disclosed her intention of marrying him quite unexpectedly. Thus started the conflict between the mother and daughter. Lucy didn’t give vent to her displeasure rather she assumed an indifferent attitude. She tried to conceal her true feelings of concern and exaggerated about the importance of her taxicabs. Her daughter was much disappointed because she had been worrying about her mother’s reaction and asked disgustingly, “ They mean more to you than I do”?  
              So the distance and the difference of the basic principles of life brought the two main characters in conflict. Lucy wanted Primrose to remain unmarried while Primrose wanted to marry because she didn’t share her mother’s anti-marriage views.  
  
                     **Question# 8**  
**Draw character sketches of Primrose, Susan, and Lucy.**  
  
**Primrose**  
  
               Primrose is a smart girl of twenty years. She is pretty and takes care of her appearance a lot. She can’t go out without lipstick. She does everything that she wants… she likes to remain out a great deal.  She behaves rudely with her aunt because her aunt is too interfering and she doesn’t want to be the center of attention. Her aunt Susan asks her to give her some time, but she avoids it by saying, “it isn’t easy to be Primrose”. This statement shows her disturbed mental state because at that very day she is on the verge of making the most important decision of her life. Primrose asks her aunt to unleash her views after listening about her decision to marry her friend’s brother.    
  
                  She has her own specific views about every thing; she dismisses the traditional concept of honour and quotes Shakespeare who calls it  “blowing bubbles”. She talks about her habit of losing things and says that loss of a girl’s honour has nothing serious in it. She represents modern mentality where honour and manners are thought to be useless things. But it doesn’t mean that she is a bad girl rather she proves herself a mature sensible girl by making a prudent choice for her husband.  
She has learnt from her mother’s bad experience and has avoided the blunder of falling for a handsome man. She says that if her marriage too is a mistake then it is a different mistake from one made by her mother. Her mother is against men and marriage but she is not influenced by her mother’s biased point of view. She makes her own independent judgment.  
              On the whole her character is a perfect delineation of a girl who belongs to a broken family and whose emotional needs are not fully satisfied.  
  
**Susan**  
  
                   Susan is a fifty years old lady who comes from a village to visit her sister in London. She is living a peaceful life with her two immaculate sons and a husband with whom she can easily put up. She reads novels and listens to music and likes to remain in the home. She is an orthodox lady and wants her niece Primrose to stay in the limits of her own narrow morality. She maneuvers to keep her indoors because she thinks that Primrose is going to the Devil. She takes her to be a bad girl that in fact she isn’t. She hides her bag, criticizes her use of lipstick and cigarette in the public street. Susan is very intolerant and she doesn’t approve of any of Primrose’s action. She asks Primrose to give her some time because she wants to talk to her but Primrose refuses, as she will soon be disclosing the startling news of her marriage with John.  
               She is sarcastic and often gives unpleasant remarks about things. She is artificial and cares a lot about her appearance; she smoothes her hair before Lucy opens the door for Clarice. She is very impolite to Clarice and makes fun of her nervousness. While talking to Lucy she gives contradictory remarks as first she calls her a “heroine” and then tries to make her believe that she has been wrong at many occasions. She blames Lucy that she has made her daughter a mess and that she is unable to control her.  She gives evidence of her hypocrisy when she callously asks Lucy to disinherit Primrose and leave her money to the International Peace Society. She doesn’t care about Primrose but tries to show herself as a philanthropic lady, worried about the future of the world. She is talkative and interfering. She praises Charles repeatedly in spite of the fact that he has proved himself as a perfect scoundrel.  
         
 Overall Susan is a narrow-minded homespun lady who doesn’t understand the demands and ways of the modern times.  
  
**Lucy**  
  
                Lucy was a good looking and capable lady of forty years. She had her business of taxicabs and most of the time remained busy in her work. She had a beautifully furnished home in London.  
            She fell in love with a handsome man and married him but unluckily he cheated her. She decided to divorce him and live an independent life with her baby-girl. She had a strong sense of self-respect and refused to take the alimony from her husband. She said she would have scrubbed the floors instead of receiving any assistance from her ex-husband. At that time she only had a car that she hired out. Gradually she established a vast business and owned three garages and too many taxicabs. She had to create a balance between her career and her domestic duties. She brought her daughter up with much trouble; she even took care of sending her to the school where most of the children were without one or the other parent. She had a sense of loss as her daughter grew up but she decided to take everything realistically. Her business activities didn’t leave her with much time to spend with her daughter so they were not close to each other. They didn’t express their true feelings even at the most critical moment of their lives when Primrose decided to marry and leave her mother alone. She couldn’t react properly when Primrose told about her decision to marry John. Though she was much concerned about her future and in her aside she threatened to shoot John if he wasn’t kind to Primrose but in Primrose’s presence she assumed an indifferent attitude. She adopted a smoke screen behind which a loving mother was present to assure her daughter’s well being.  
 On the whole Lucy is a nice character that stands for the self assured working lady who decides to struggle in the face of disaster. Her character highlights the problems and tragedies faced by a lonely working-lady.