

11th Standard -English

Hornbill-The Browning Version Summary

This is an excerpt from Terence Rattigan's play 'The Browning Version'. The scene is set in a good school. Taplow, a boy of sixteen has come in to do extra work for his master Mr. Crocker-Harris. He has not yet arrived. Another master, Frank, younger in years than Mr. Crocker-Harris finds Taplow waiting. Incidentally, it is the last day of the term.

Taplow is a student in the lower fifth form. He does not know whether he will get his division all right or not. He tells Frank that Mr. Crocker-Harris does not tell them the results like the other masters. Frank informs Taplow that there is a rule that form results should only be announced by the headmaster on the last day of the term. Taplow says that no one except Mr. Crocker-Harris pays attention to it.

Frank then asks Taplow what he would like to study if his result is favourable. Taplow indicates his preference for science. Frank remarks that they get all the slackers in science. Taplow disagrees with him and says that he is extremely interested in science. Frank observes frankly that he is not interested in the science he is to teach. Taplow, on the other hand, finds the study of Greek play 'Agamemnon' muck. His objection is to the way, the play is taught to them-just a lot of Greek words strung together and fifty lines if one gets them wrong. Taplow's answers show that he is feeling a bit bitter. Frank is surprised that Taplow has come in to do extra work even on the last day of school. Taplow says that he missed a day last week when he was ill.

So he has to put in extra work. The weather is quite fine and he might be playing golf. He knows that Mr. Crocker-Harris must be quite busy then as he is leaving the school for good the next day.

The conversation then shifts to Mr. Crocker-Harris. Taplow had asked him the previous day if he had given him a good division and he said that he had given Taplow exactly what he deserved-No less and certainly no more. Taplow is afraid that he might have marked him down, rather than up, for taking extra work. The man is hardly human. Frank then encourages Taplow to repeat the remarks of Mr. Crocker-Harris. Frank does not find his imitation up to the mark and asks him to read his Aeschylus and be quiet.

Frank suggests to Taplow that he might cut the class and play golf as Mr. Crocker-Harris has not turned up. Taplow is shocked at the suggestion as he can't think of ever doing so. Frank envies Mr. Crocker-Harris for the effect he has on the boys. They seem scared to death of him. Taplow says that the Crocker is not a sadist like other masters. He would not be so frightening if he were. It would then seem that he had some feelings. He seems dry like a nut and hates people to like him. Still Taplow likes him. Sometimes Mr Crocker-Harris sees it and he shrivels up even more.

Taplow then relates an incident when his master related one of his classical jokes in the class. Nobody laughed, as they couldn't understand it. Taplow laughed as he knew he had meant it as funny. He felt sorry for his master for having made such a poor joke. Taplow has forgotten the joke, but offers to imitate the reaction of Mr Crocker-Harris.

The laughter of Mr Frank encourages Taplow to do so. Frank seems to enjoy the joke and asks Taplow to tell it to others.

In the meanwhile Millie Crocker-Harris enters. Frank and Taplow are surprised to see her. Taplow is afraid that she might have overheard their joke. If she told her husband, Taplow's division would be in danger. Frank dismisses his fear. Millie tells Taplow that her husband is at the Bursar's and might be there quite a time. She says that if she were Taplow, she would go. Taplow is filled with doubt. He says that Mr Crocker-Harris had especially asked him to come. Millie then suggests that he might run away for a quarter of an hour and come back. Taplow is still uncertain and wonders what will happen, if he gets there before his arrival. Millie offers to take the blame. She then hands him over a prescription and asks him to go to the chemist and get it made up. Thus he can do a job for him. Taplow agrees and leaves the room.