

## **John Osborne**

### **LOOK BACK IN ANGER**

#### **What is the book about?**

The book is about a married couple, which is pretty unusual – the wife (Alison) and the husband (Jimmy) live together with a friend of Jimmy's – Cliff. The couple has many problems – they come from different social classes and they argue a lot. Alison comes from a higher class and had married Jimmy also to resent her parents. Jimmy hates Alison's family and her family hates him.

Cliff is a good friend of both of them; always caught between them, "on the no man's land".

Every Sunday, they have the same ritual; the men read newspapers, Jimmy constantly insults Cliff and Alison, Alison is busy ironing. They talk about all sorts of things, and though Jimmy keeps attacking Alison, she says nothing until Jimmy knocks over the ironing board and she gets burned. Jimmy leaves the room and while Cliff is taking care of Alison's leg, she tells him she is pregnant and that Jimmy knows nothing about it yet.

When Jimmy returns, she wants to tell him about the baby, but then Alison's old friend, Helena, rings because she wants to stay with them for a while. Jimmy doesn't like that because he hates her.

After two weeks Helena still lives there. Things are getting worse and worse. Alison tells her all about her relationship with the two men and Helena wires Alison's father to come and take her home. While Jimmy is on a funeral of an old friend of his, Alison leaves him and Helena takes her place. After several months Cliff leaves. Alison comes back and catches Helena and Jimmy kissing on the kitchen table. Jimmy leaves the room and the women start talking. Helena decides living with Jimmy is a mistake and leaves him and so does Alison. Jimmy ends up all alone.

#### **1. Jimmy**

Jimmy had had a tough childhood and feels a constant need to complain. Alison also tells that in the Act II.: "Don't try and take his suffering away from him – he'd be lost without it." He is a very unhappy person – he has problems in relationships with women (though he does have sex-appeal), and with friends and family as well. He wants everybody to do what he says; his women (both Alison and Helena) and Cliff. He is really hard to get along with.

#### **2. Cliff**

Cliff has good, relaxed, easy going relations with everybody. He is always nice and keeps doing favours to everyone. He calms down the fights between the other three. Without him their relationships would probably collapse.

#### **3. Alison**

Alison is from an upper-class family, but has married Jimmy (though her parents were strongly against that) and accepted the role of a working-class housewife. She rarely replies Jimmy's constant insults and provocations. When she can't handle it anymore, she leaves.

#### **4. Helena**

She is Alison's friend from upper-class, who is at first Jimmy's greatest enemy but becomes his mistress. She does not let him hurt her, as he did Alison. She has a strong character and

high self-esteem and she leaves Jimmy when she finds out that this kind of life leads her nowhere.

**What would you do if you were Alison?**

If I were Alison, I would leave Jimmy even earlier than she did. Even better: I wouldn't even marry him. She lets him abuse her and never does anything until Helena does it for her. I wouldn't let him step on me and use me. I would find someone better or live alone.

I would forgive Helena for being so stupid and falling in love with such a man and stay her friend forever.

**Can you imagine yourself as Helena?**

She is a stronger character than Alison. She resents Jimmy and keeps things under control. That is something I would do, too. However, it is very rude of her that she practically sends Alison away to be with her man. I don't think I could do that.