

A Photograph

Introduction

A Photograph is a poem written by **Shirley Toulson**. The poem explores the themes of **loss, memory, time and the transient nature of human life**. The poet looks at an old photograph of her mother as a young girl and remembers her. The photograph brings back memories of her mother's childhood and makes the poet realise how time changes everything.

The Photograph

The Scene in the Photograph

The photograph shows the poet's mother as a **young girl of about twelve years old**. She is standing on a beach with her two cousins, **Betty and Dolly**.

The three girls are holding hands and smiling at the camera. The poet's mother is standing in the middle, while her two cousins are on either side of her.

The photograph was taken by the girls' uncle.

The Sea

The Unchanging Sea

The poet describes the sea as "**terribly transient**" for the humans in the photograph. The sea has remained almost unchanged for thousands of years, while human beings grow old and eventually die.

The sea represents the **permanence of nature**, whereas human life is temporary.

The Poet's Mother

Memories of the Past

Years later, the poet's mother looked at the photograph and laughed at the way she and her cousins were dressed and posed.

For the poet's mother, the photograph brought back memories of her childhood. The photograph had become a reminder of a happy and carefree time that had long passed.

The Passage of Time

Changing Human Life

The poem shows how quickly human life changes with time.

The photograph captures a moment from the poet's mother's childhood. Many years later, the poet looks at the same photograph and remembers her mother. The mother has now passed away, making the photograph even more meaningful.

The photograph therefore connects **three stages of time**:

- The mother's childhood
- The mother's adulthood
- The poet's present

Loss and Death

The Poet's Grief

The poet's mother has died, and the poet feels a deep sense of loss. The photograph reminds her of the person her mother once was.

The poet does not directly describe her grief in detail. Instead, her silence and the final words of the poem suggest that her mother's death has left a deep emotional emptiness.

The poem shows that **memories remain even after a loved one is gone**.

The Final Silence

"Its Silence Silences"

At the end of the poem, the poet says that the loss of her mother has left her speechless.

The repeated use of the word "**silence**" highlights the depth of her grief. The poet finds it difficult to express her feelings in words because the pain of losing her mother is too deep.

The ending is powerful because it suggests that some emotions are beyond words.

Themes

Loss and Grief

The central theme of the poem is the pain of losing a loved one. The photograph reminds the poet of her mother, who is no longer alive.

Passage of Time

Time changes everything. The young girl in the photograph grows old, and eventually her life comes to an end.

Memory

The photograph preserves a moment from the past. It allows the poet and her mother to remember a happy childhood.

Transience of Human Life

Human life is temporary, while nature continues to exist. The sea in the poem symbolises the lasting nature of the natural world.

Poetic Devices

Personification

The poet describes the sea as "**terribly transient**" in relation to human life. The sea is presented as a contrast to the temporary nature of humans.

Alliteration

The phrase "**stood still to smile**" uses repetition of the '**s**' sound, creating musical quality.

Oxymoron

The phrase "**laboured ease of loss**" combines contrasting ideas to express the complicated feeling of accepting the loss of a loved one.

Repetition

The word "**silence**" is repeated at the end of the poem to emphasise the poet's deep grief and inability to express her feelings.

Important Points

- The poem is written by **Shirley Toulson**.
- The photograph shows the poet's mother as a young girl.
- The mother is standing with her cousins **Betty and Dolly**.
- The photograph was taken by their uncle.
- The sea represents the permanence of nature.
- Human life is shown as temporary and ever-changing.
- The photograph connects the past with the present.
- The poet's mother has passed away.
- The poet feels deep grief and loss.
- The final silence represents emotions that cannot be expressed in words.

Chapter Summary

A Photograph is a touching poem about **memory, time and loss**. The poet looks at an old photograph of her mother as a young girl standing on a beach with her cousins. The photograph reminds the poet of her mother's childhood and also of the passage of time. The sea remains unchanged, while human life passes away. The poet's mother once laughed at the photograph, but after her death, the same photograph becomes a source of pain and remembrance for the poet. The poem ends with silence, showing that the grief caused by the loss of a loved one can be too deep to express in words.