

Chapter- 2

CHAPTER NAME: A PHOTOGRAPH

Concepts

- The transience of human life.
- The inevitability of death and mysteries surrounding life.
- Glorification of childhood.
- Man's transitory relationship to his surroundings.
- Experience of loss in various stages of life.
- The pain of separation.
- Acceptance of the reality of life.

Characters

- The PoetessThe speaker of the Poem
- The poetess' mother
- Betty and Dolly-The two cousins of the poetess' mother
- The poetess' mother's uncle

Introduction to the Poem and the Poetess

- The poem "A Photograph" which depicts the different stages of human life over time is a tribute to the Poetess' mother.
- The poem, 'A photograph', contrasts the eternal state of nature and the transitory state of human beings.
- The poetess describes a photograph that captures enticing moments of her mother's childhood when she went for a sea holiday with her two girl cousins.
- The poetess draws a contrast between nature, changing at a snail's pace and the fast-changing human life.
- The three stanzas of the poem depict three different stages of life i.e. early adolescence (girlhood), adulthood and death.

- Shirley Toulson is a celebrated English Poetess and an influential authoress of many books on social history.
- She was born on 20th May 1924 in Henley-on-Thames, England as the daughter of Douglas Horsfall Dixon and Marjorie Brown.
- A passionate writer, Shirley Toulson served as the editor for many leading magazines.
- She married Alan Brownjohn on 6th February 1960. They had three children - Janet Sayers, Ian Toulson and Steven Brownjohn.
- But after nine years they divorced in March 1969.
- Celtic Christianity influenced her greatly that most of her major works like "Celtic Alternative" in 1987 and "Celtic Year" in 1993 were on that topic.
- But these works indeed made her more famous.

Steps to Comprehensive Explanations

a) *“The cardboard shows me how it was*

*When the two girl cousins went paddling,
Each one holding one of my mother’s hands,
And she the big girl — some twelve years or so.”*

- The poetess looks at an old photograph from a photo album made up of cardboard.
- The cardboard here refers to a thick and stiff paper which reflects the photograph of the poetess’ mother and her two girl cousins.
- The old photograph of the poet’s mother which was pasted on cardboard makes the poetess recall the old memories of her mother’s childhood.
- The photograph is a depiction of her mother’s enjoyable moments at a sea-beach with her two girl cousins who were younger to her.
- They were walking in shallow water with bare feet near the beach.
- The poetess explores her mother who is standing in the middle and holding hands of her two cousins, standing on each side.
- The poetess’ mother was twelve years old then.
- It shows that the photograph was very old but the poetess has kept it with utmost care as it reminded her of sweet memories of her mother’s childhood.

The photograph also indicates how enjoyable her mother’s childhood was.

b) *“All three stood still to smile through their hair*

*At the uncle with the camera. A sweet face,
My mother’s, that was before I was born.
And the sea, which appears to have changed less,*

“...Washed their transient feet.”

- The stanza is a depiction of -
 - the transience of human life.
 - how the photograph was captured.
- The photograph shows that all the three girls – the poetess’ mother and her two cousins – stood still and smiled at the camera when their Uncle clicked their photograph at the sea beach.
- Their ecstatic mood...having spent happy moments at the sea beach.
- The poetess’ description of her mother’s beauty in her youth.
- The Poetess’ ideas on changes since the mother’s childhood.
- The mother’s growing old and loses her precious childhood.
- The death of the poetess’ mother and the poetess reviving her memories associated with her.
- The poetess’ ideas on the fleeting nature of time and the sea remaining unchanged.
- The mention of the word ‘transient’ indicates the ever-changing lives of human beings as well as the transitoriness of their stay on this World, in contrast to the permanence of nature.
- The girls’ life being changed drastically during this period but the sea has not changed.

c) “Some twenty-thirty – years later

**She’d laugh at the snapshot. “See Betty
And Dolly,” she’d say, “and look how they
Dressed us for the beach.” The sea holiday
Was her past, mine is her laughter. Both wry
With the laboured ease of loss.”**

- Human life is a mixture of happy as well as adverse times. We must accept this reality and learn to move on with the help of those happy memories that bring to us so much of enjoyment and happiness.
- Happy moments give us solace and fill our hearts with joy and empowers our positivity which is required during times of difficulty.
- Even 20-30 years later, the poetess’ mother would look at the photograph and laugh nostalgically remembering the happy memories of her bygone days.
- The poetess says that her mother would look at the photograph and comment on the dresses worn by the cousins- Dolly, Betty and herself.

- The sea- the holiday was her mother's past and her mother's laughter has become a thing of the past for the poetess as her mother was now dead.
- The poetess still recalls how her mother would laugh at the photograph recollecting the sea-holiday with a fondness as well as a sense of loss because that time would never come back.
- In the same way, the poetess feels nostalgic thinking about her mother and her laughter which has become a thing of the past.
- The words 'laboured' and 'ease' are contrary to each other, but describe the same entity, loss.

**d) "Now she's been dead nearly as many years
As that girl lived. And of this circumstance
There is nothing to say at all.
Its silence silences."**

- Death is inevitable.
- The poetess recalls that it is nearly twelve years since her mother died.
- The poetess is consumed with grief but is left with no words to express her inexplicable loss and pain.
- She is absorbed in memories of her dead mother. The painful silence of this situation leaves the poetess speechless.
- She can feel the grief but is unable to express it through words.
- Sick at heart, the poetess explores herself in a state of sheer psychological distress.
- The silence caused by death makes the atmosphere gloomy, where no one can utter words.

Drilling of words and Linguistic expressions:

- cardboard – very stiff paperboard on which the photograph was pasted
- paddling – walking through shallow water in bare feet
- big girl – mother is referred to as the big girl as she was the eldest among the three girls
- still – without moving or shaking

- smile through – smiling faces could be seen through their hair which was flying over their faces
- terribly – extremely
- transient – temporary, lasting only for a short time
- snapshot – photograph
- dressed us – put on clothes
- wry – disgusted
- laboured – achieved after a lot of hard work, done with great effort
- ease – comfort
- circumstance – situation
- silences – make someone unable to speak

Related Question from the portion taught:

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

1. **The cardboard shows me how it was**
When the two girl cousins went paddling
Each one holding one of my mother’s hands,
And she the big girl-some twelve years or so.

Questions-

- (i) What does the word ‘cardboard ‘in the first line suggest?
- (ii) What does the cardboard depict here?
- (iii) Who is ‘the big girl ‘mentioned here?
- (iv) What feelings are aroused in the above lines?

2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow :

All three stood still to smile through their hair

**At the uncle with the camera. A sweet face,
My mother's, that was before I was born.
And the sea, which appears to have changed less,
Washed their transient feet.**

Questions-

- (i) What does the poetess mean by the expression 'smile through their hair'?
- (ii) What does the poetess say about the sea here?
- (iii) What do the expression "terribly transient feet" refer to?

3. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

**"Some twenty-thirty –years later she'd laugh at
the snapshot. "See Betty and Dolly," she'd
say,"and look how they Dressed us for the
beach." The sea holiday was her past, mine is her
laughter. Both wry with the laboured ease of loss.'**

- (i) How does the poetess react on seeing the photograph?
- (ii) Why does the poetess say, "The sea holiday was her past, mine is her laughter?"
- (iii) Bring out the idea contained in the expression 'laboured ease of loss'.

4. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

***"Now she's been dead nearly as many years
As that girl lived. And of this circumstance
There is nothing to say at all.
Its silence silences."***

- (i) Who does 'she' refer to?
- (ii) Why is there nothing to say about the death of the poet's mother?
- (iii) Bring out the idea contained in the expression 'Its silence silences'.

Lesson continuation with comprehensive explanations:

- The poem “A Photograph” which depicts the different stages of human life with time, is a tribute to the Poetess’ mother.
- The poem, ‘A photograph’, contrasts the eternal state of nature and the transitory state of human beings.
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- The poetess draws a contrast between nature, changing at a snail’s pace and the fast-changing human life.
- The three stanzas of the poem depict three different stages of life i.e. early adolescence (girlhood), adulthood and death.

THE END