

CHAPTER-02

IT WAS LONG AGO

SUMMARY OF THE POEM

"It Was Long Ago" is a simple poem by Eleanor Farjeon and records the poet's earliest memory, an incident that occurred when she was around three years old. While she was walking along a dusty road, she saw an old lady sitting under a tree. The lady invited her over and gave her bilberries (similar to blueberries) and cream to eat, a 'feast' that the poet recalls with pleasure. Although it seems as if the poem has no serious theme or purpose, the last lines suggest some importance, more than just telling about her childhood. She shows that this simple, pleasant memory means much to her because, 'then I grew up, you see'. We are reminded that 'growing up' is not always so pleasant. Sadly, being an adult can sometimes dull us so that we no longer appreciate the simple pleasures of life. The poem is also a reminder to the reader that moments that had passed can only live on in memory. "Then I grew up, you see." And that is exactly what children do. With age and experience, their fresh, young eyes of innocence are replaced with adult eyes of knowledge and understanding.

TONE, MOOD AND STYLE

The poem is gentle and nostalgic. The poet wants to recreate the memories as well as the feelings of her childhood memories. The poet begins by asking our permission: 'I shall tell you, shall I, something I remember?' In the manner of a small child, she regularly checks to see that we are attending, that we understand: 'You know'; 'You see'. Thus the poem has a confiding, warm feel to it. She uses a conversational tone in telling us of her memories – almost as if she is just chatting to the reader.

STRUCTURE AND FORMAT

This poem has a simple structure of 12 stanzas of three lines each. Perhaps the most striking feature of it is the strong use of repetition. This simple structure is appropriate for the situation of a child remembering the simple pleasures of her childhood. The language used is also simple. Words are uncomplicated, tending to be single syllables, with a lot of repetition of words. The first line in every stanza ends with the word 'remember', and there are only two other sounds 'ee' and 'oh', used absolutely regularly throughout the poem. The rhythm is gentle and slow, appropriate to the subject matter. Such a simple structure and rhyme emphasise the simplicity of the child's memory.

USE OF IMAGERY AND POETIC DEVICES

The poet succeeds in involving our senses. She introduces concrete objects ('a mountain, an old house, and a tree'), and simple colours ('in a red shawl with a grey cat'), to help us visualise the scene. She invites us to hear the memory ('and while she hummed, and the cat purred'), to taste it ('...the taste of berries'), and feel it ('the feel of the sun I remember') as she draws upon her own sense memories. Thus, the memory is evoked for us in a much clearer way. By using the senses as well as the simple words, structure and rhythm, she involves the reader in the poem. While sharing the goodness of her memories we have longings for our own childhood. The words "you know" are repeated constantly, appearing three times at the ends of stanzas, plus a concluding "you see". "Long ago" is used four times (apart from the title) and words rhyming with "me" and "know" are scattered throughout, lending a pleasing sense of rhythm to the lines.

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