

**TEXT :HORNBILL
POEM -1 (Page 11-12)
A PHOTOGRAPH**

SHIRLEY TOULSON

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

About Author



1. Shirley Toulson was born on 20th May, 1924 in England.
2. A Writer, Editor came under influence of Celtic Christianity.
3. Toulson In Poem "Photograph" Describes the emotions felt as she remembered the story behind the image and what it means to the poet.

SHIRLEY TOULSON, who lives in Somerset, was drawn into the spell of Celtic Christianity as she worked on her books dealing with the oldest roads and folklore of Britain and Ireland, and found herself following the routes taken on their journeys by the saints of the early church.



The poem, 'A photograph', contrasts the eternal state of nature and the transitory state of human beings. The poet describes a photograph that captures interesting moments of her mother's childhood when she went for a sea holiday with her two girl cousins. The poet draws a contrast between nature, changing at a snail's pace and the fast-changing human life.

The poet recollects how her mother laughed at the photograph and felt disappointed at the loss of her childhood joys. The sea holiday was her mother's past at that time, while her mother's laughter is the poet's past now. With great difficulty and at different periods of time, both reconcile with their respective losses and the pain involved in recollecting the past.

For the poet, the death of her mother brings great sadness and an acute sense of loss. The painful 'silence' of the situation leaves her with no words to express her grief. Thus, the 'silence silences' her.

The three stanzas of the poem depict three different stages of life i.e. early adolescence (girlhood) adulthood and death.

A PHOTOGRAPH by Shirley Toulson

The cardboard; here it refers to the photo frame; showed the speaker how life was when the two cousin sisters went paddling; to propel or travel in a canoe or the like by using a paddle: to row lightly or gently with oars: to move by means of paddle wheels, as a steamer: to propel with a paddle: to spank or beat with or as with a paddle: to stir, mix, or beat with or as with a paddle: to convey by paddling, as a canoe: here it means walked barefoot in shallow water; with each one of them holding the speaker's mother's hands. The bigger girl of the cousin sisters must be about twelve years old.

All three of them stood still shoulder to shoulder to smile through their long hair at the camera whose picture was taken by the uncle holding it.

The mother had a sweet and pleasant smile before her child was born into this world.

The sea in which they were paddling; which seemed to not have been changed; washed their terribly transient; not lasting, enduring, or permanent; transitory: lasting only a short time; existing briefly; temporary: staying only a short time: here it means short lived; wet feet.

After twenty to thirty years later, the mother took out the photograph and laughed at the snapshot. The two cousin sisters were Betty and Dolly. She found it so hilarious at the manner that they dressed up for the beach.

The sea holiday was her past for the mother while it was laughter for the speaker. Both mother and daughter wry; produced by a distortion or lopsidedness of the facial features: abnormally bent or turned to one side; twisted; crooked: devious in course or purpose; misdirected; contrary; perverse: distorted or perverted, as in meaning: bitterly or disdainfully ironic or amusing; at the labored ease of loss.

But now the mother has been dead for the past few years just as one of those cousin sisters' lives. Out of all these circumstances, there is nothing else left to say. The matter is closed and silence has sealed its fate.

UNDERSTANDING THE LESSON THROUGH KEY SENTENCES:

1. The poet looks at the cardboard on which there is a childhood photograph of her mother.

2. She had gone for a sea holiday with two her cousins Betty and Dolly
3. While they were paddling, their uncle took a photograph of them.
4. Both the cousins were holding the hands of her mother who was the eldest among the girls.
5. This was before the poet was born
6. Time fled past since and all those who are in the photograph under went changes while the sea remained the same.
7. Her mother would look at the photograph after about twenty to thirty years and laugh nostalgically.
8. Now for the poet her mother's laughter and her sea holiday is a thing of the past.
9. Her mother died about 12 years ago.
10. The silence of the photograph silences the poet.
11. She experiences great loss.

USE OF OXYMORON IN THE POEM 'A PHOTOGRAPH'

An oxymoron is a term or statement that contradicts itself, or seems to. Examples often given are "giant shrimp" or "controlled chaos". Some are literary effects designed to create a paradox, while others are done for humor.

The poem "A Photograph" contains the oxymoron "laboured ease", which in the context of loss may mean avoiding the public display of grief.

REFERENCE TO THE CONTEXT BASED QUESTIONS

STANZA – 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.

a. What does the 'cardboard' show the poet?

Ans: The 'cardboard' shows the poet the scene on the sea beach with three girls.

b. Why did the two girl cousins hold one of the poet's mother's hands?

Ans: As the poet's mother was 'the big girl' i. e. elder in age so the two girl cousins hold one of her hands.

c. How old was the oldest girl among the three cousins.

Ans: The oldest among the three cousins was some twelve years old.

d. How did the girls go to the sea beach?

Ans: The girls went to the sea beach 'paddling' means barefooted.

STANZA – 2

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.

a. How long has the poet's mother been dead?

Ans: The poet's mother has been dead for about twelve years.

b. What is the meaning of the word 'circumstance' in the poem?

Ans: The word 'circumstance' in the poem means the death of the poet's mother.

c. Why is there nothing to say at all?

Ans: There is nothing to say at all because the poet has lost her mother and her beautiful smile forever.

d. What silences the silence?

Ans: The silence of the death silences the silence.

TEXT BOOK QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What does the word 'cardboard' denote in the poem? Why has this word been used?

‘Cardboard’ refers to the photograph only. In the past photographs used to be fixed to a cardboard and hung from the wall for every one to see it.

2. What has the camera captured?

The camera has captured some happy moments from the childhood of the poet’s mother. It was a scene taken from a beach where she had gone with her cousins and her uncle for a sea holiday. The girls were paddling in the water.

3. What has not changed over the years? Does this suggest something to you?

The sea has not changed over the years. It is still the same. The sea symbolizes eternity.

4. The poet’s mother laughed at the snapshot. What did this laugh indicate?

This laugh indicates her remembering her past. She looked back to her childhood with nostalgia and remembered the innocent joys of her childhood days.

5. What is the meaning of the line “Both wry with the laboured ease or loss”

‘Both’ refers to the sea holiday as remembered by her mother and the poet remembering her mother’s laughing face. Both these now belong to the past. Her mother is no more now.

6. What does “this circumstance” refer to?

‘This circumstance’ refers to the circumstance when the photo was taken.

7. The three stanzas depict three different phases. What are they?

The three stanzas depict three different phases. The first stanza refers to the childhood of the poet’s mother. The second stanza refers to the poet’s childhood when her mother was an adult. The last stanza refers to the poet’s adulthood when she is not with her mother.

ADDITIONAL SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. What scene from mother’s childhood has been captured in the photograph? Who had taken the photograph?

The scene that has been captured in the photograph is from mother’s childhood when she went for paddling with her two cousins. Mother’s uncle had taken the photograph.

2. How did the cousins accompany mother for paddling?

Her cousins accompanied mother by holding her hands when they went for paddling.

3. Explain the contrast given in the last two lines of the first stanza.

The contrast is between the sea and the humans. The sea had remained the same for all these years, but the humans have undergone changes.

Her mother grew up and now she had been dead for the past twelve years.

4. How does the poet feel when she remember the sea holiday of her mother?

The poet feels sad when she remembers the sea holiday of her mother. Her mother died twelve years ago.

5. Why doesn't she want to think about the photograph any more?

She doesn't want think about the photograph any more because it brings the pain of loss to her mind.

6. Describe the three girls as they pose for the photograph?

Ans: The three girls went to the sea beach to be photographed by their uncle. The younger cousins were holding hands of the elder cousin. They smiled through their hair as they stood still for a photograph.

7. Why would the poet's mother laugh at the snapshot?

Ans: The poet's mother would laugh at the snapshot as it would revive her memories of the old happy days on the sea beach and the strange way in which they were dressed for the beach.

8. What are the losses of the poet's mother and the poet?

Ans: The poet's mother's loss is of her old happy days on the sea beach while the loss of the poet is the beautiful smile of her mother as she is now dead.

9. The entire poem runs through the lament of loss of something near and dear. Which feeling is presented prominently here?

Ans: The nostalgic feeling is presented prominently the poem.

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