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Class 11 English (Hornbill) Notes

A PHOTOGRAPH

Key Notes and Important Questions with Answers

POETRY

Poem -1

A Photograph **By Shirley Toulson**

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 the 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.

Very Short Answer Questions

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.
 - a. What does the cardboard 'show' to the poet?
 - b. Who is 'she' in the last line? Why did the two girl cousins hold one of her hands'? (Hint-affection, security etc.)
 - c. What has happened to 'she' now?

2. 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 terribly transient feet.
 - a. Who are 'the three' referred to in the line?
 - b. Where are they standing and why?
 - c. Why are their feet referred to 'terribly transient'?
 - d. When and why is the poet recollecting this moment?
3. 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. What do you think was the age of 'that girl' in the photograph?
 - b. What does the word 'circumstance' mean in the poem?
 - c. How has 'this circumstance' affected the speaker?
 - d. What does 'silence silences' refer to here?
4. The sea holiday
Was her past, mine is her laughter.
Both wry With the laboured ease of loss.
 - a. Which sea holiday is the poet talking about?
 - b. What are the two losses the poet is talking about?
[Hint:- for poet it is mother's death, for mother it is loss of girlhood]
 - c. Explain: 'laboured ease of loss'.
[Hint:- Both the mother and the poetess labour to bear the loss with ease]

Short Answer Questions

Answer the following questions in not more than 30-40 words.

1. What has the camera captured?
2. Why did mother laugh at the snapshot?
3. In what context has the phrase 'terribly transient feet' been used in the poem?

4. What does the poet tell us about the sea?
 5. What does 'this circumstance' refer to?
 6. Both the poet and her mother experience losses in their lives. What are those losses?
 7. 'Its silence silences', says the poet. What has silenced the poet?
 8. The three stanzas depict three different phases. What are they?
 9. What impressions do you form of the poet's mother after reading the poem, 'A Photograph'?
 10. Describe the three girls as they pose for the photograph.
 11. The poet's mother laughed at the snapshot. What did this laugh indicate?
 12. What has not changed over the years? Why?
 13. What are the feelings of the poetess when she sees her mother's photograph?
 14. What philosophy of life does the poem reflect?
 15. Comment on the tone of the poem. [NOSTALGIC]
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