

POETRY

Chapter - 1

A PHOTOGRAPH

-Shirley Toulson

MAIN POINTS

- The poem is written by Shirley Toulson.
- The poem describes three stages.
- In the first stage, the photograph shows the poet's mother standing at the beach enjoying a holiday with her two cousins.
- She was twelve or so at the time.
- The second stage takes us twenty or thirty years later.
- The mother would laugh at the way she and her cousins Betty and Dolly were dressed up for the occasion.
- In the third stage, the poet remembers her mother with a heavy heart.
- The photograph revives nostalgic feelings in the poet.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Who is the poet of the poem 'A Photograph'?**
 - Shirley Toulson
 - Ted Hughes
 - Walt Whitman
 - Markus Natten
- The photograph is made of which material?**
 - paper
 - cardboard
 - plastic
 - metal
- The cardboard shows the pictures of:**
 - Two school girls
 - Two real sisters
 - Two neighbours
 - Narrator's mother and her two cousins
- What are the girls seen doing in the photograph?**
 - Running
 - Swimming
 - Dancing
 - Paddling
- Where were the girls when the photograph was taken?**
 - At home
 - At school
 - At beach
 - In market
- The 'big girl' here means:**
 - The eldest cousin of her mother
 - The tallest girl
 - Narrator's mother
 - The heaviest of the girls
- What was the age of the mother when the photograph was taken?**
 - 11
 - 13
 - 10
 - 12
- Besides the narrator's mother:**
 - One more girl stood there
 - Two more girls stood there
 - Three more girls stood there
 - Her uncle stood there
- The uncle was:**
 - Standing silently
 - Paddling
 - Holding his mother's hand
 - Standing with a camera
- The sweet face the photograph showed was:**
 - Narrator's cousin
 - Narrator's father
 - Narrator's mother
 - Narrator's brother
- The photograph was taken when:**
 - The narrator was about twelve
 - About twelve years ago
 - The narrator was a child
 - The narrator was not even born
- The word 'transient' shows :**
 - Changing nature of the sea
 - Permanent feature of the sea
 - The momentary or ephemeral life
 - Changing life of man

13. **'She'd laugh at the snapshot.' She in the line stands for:**
- The narrator
 - Mother's cousin
 - The narrator's aunt
 - The narrator's mother
14. **Who were 'Betty' and 'Dolly'?**
- Narrator's cousin
 - Narrator's sisters
 - Narrator's mother's cousins
 - Narrator's neighbours
15. **What was 'her past'?**
- Narrator's memories
 - Mother's youth
 - The sea holiday that mother enjoyed with her cousins
 - Mother's childhood
16. **What did the narrator's mother laugh at?**
- Snapshot
 - Her cousin
 - Her uncle
 - The narrator
17. **"And look how they dressed us for the beach." Who is the speaker of this line?**
- Betty
 - Dolly
 - Narrator's mother
 - Uncle
18. **What is the narrator's past?**
- Mother's laughter
 - The sea holiday
 - narrator's childhood
 - Mother's childhood
19. **'That girl' stands for.....**
- Dolly
 - Betty
 - Narrator's mother
 - Narrator's sister
20. **The narrator talks about whose death in the last stanza?**
- Betty
 - Dolly
 - Uncle
 - Her mother's
21. **'This circumstance' means**
- The circumstance of the sea holiday
 - The death of the mother
 - The circumstances of the poet
 - The way the narrator lived
22. **'Its silence silences' means:**
- Death's silence
 - Silence only brings out deeper silence
 - Poet's silence
 - Silence caused by the mother's death gives

birth to a pall of silence

23. **How many stages were depicted in the poem?**
- One
 - Two
 - Three
 - Four
24. **What was the last stage in the poem?**
- After the death of mother
 - After the mother is grown up
 - After the poet is grown up
 - None of the above
25. **What does "terribly transient feet" mean in the poem?**
- Her feet represent the mother who changed with time while the sea remained the same
 - Temporary situation
 - Age is temporary
 - None of the above
26. **What was the favourite memory of the poet?**
- Her mother's memories
 - Her mother's laughter
 - Her own vacation memories
 - Her childhood memories

ANSWER KEY

1-a, 2-b, 3-d, 4-d, 5-c, 6-c, 7-d, 8-b, 9-d, 10-c, 11-d, 12-c, 13-d, 14-c, 15-c, 16-a, 17-c, 18-a, 19-c, 20-d, 21-b, 22-d, 23-c, 24-a, 25-a, 26-b

VERY SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

- Who is the poet of the poem "A Photograph" ?**
Ans. Shirley Toulson
- What does the cardboard show?**
Ans. The cardboard shows the photograph of the poet's mother and her two cousins.
- Who was with the narrator's mother?**
Ans. The two cousins of the narrator's mother were with her.
- How many stages are described in the poem?**
Ans. Three stages are described in the poem.
- What does the photograph show ?**
Ans. The photograph shows the poet's mother and her two cousins standing at the beach?
- Whose face has been described as 'sweet**

face’?

Ans. The poet’s mother’s face has been described as the ‘sweet face’.

7. Why did the poet’s mother laugh at the snapshot?

Ans. The poet’s mother laughed at the way they were dressed for the beach.

8. Who took the photograph?

Ans. The photograph was taken by the mother’s uncle.

9. What has not changed over the years?

Ans. The sea has not changed over the years.

10. How long has the poet’s mother been dead?

Ans. The poet’s mother has been dead for twelve years, as many years her age was in the photograph.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What does the cardboard show?

Ans. The cardboard shows an old photograph. It shows the poet’s mother standing with two girl cousins, Dolly and Betty. All of them were standing at the beach. They stood smiling at the uncle who was standing at a distance with a camera.

2. What has the camera captured?

Ans. The camera has captured all the three girls at the beach in it. It has captured the pretty face of the poet’s mother who was a girl of twelve at that time. It has captured the smiling faces of two girl cousins, Betty and Dolly. They were holding the hands of the poet’s mother in their hands.

3. What does the word ‘cardboard’ denote in the poem? Why has this word been used?

Ans. The word cardboard means a very stiff and thick paper. Here the cardboard is a part of the frame that keeps the photograph intact. Its use in the poem is ironical. It keeps the photograph of that 12-year-old girl safe who herself was ‘terribly transient’. She had been dead for twelve years.

4. How has the poet expressed her sense of loss?

Ans. The poet feels a sense of loss by looking at an old photograph of her mother. She remembers her mother’s reaction (an embarrassed laughter) to that photograph later in life. These memories make her personal loss acute.

5. What does “this circumstance” refer to?

Ans. “This circumstance” refers to the death of the poet’s mother. The photograph of the dead mother brings sad and nostalgic feelings in the poet. But the poet has nothing to say at all about this circumstance. The silence of the poet makes the pall of silence prevailing there still deeper.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. The three stanzas depict three stages. Describe the stages.

Ans. Shirley Toulson’s ‘A Photograph’ describes three stages. The first stanza depicts the first stage. The photograph shows the poet’s mother standing at the beach, enjoying a holiday with her two cousins. The poet’s mother is shown as a twelve year old girl with a pretty and laughing face. She went paddling with her two cousins. The second stanza depicts the second stage. This stage describes the middle-aged mother, laughing at her own snapshot. The mother would laugh at the way she and her cousins, Betty and Dolly were dressed up for the occasion. The third stanza depicts the third stage. The poet remembers her dead mother with a heavy heart. The stage also describes the chilling pall of silence that the death of the mother has left in the life of the poet.

2. Why did the poet’s mother laugh at the snapshot?

Ans. Time flies on wings. Twenty or thirty years had passed since the photograph was taken. In the photograph, the poet’s mother stood with her two girl cousins at the beach. Of the three, she was the big girl, about twelve or so. All the three were dressed for the beach. Perhaps they looked quite funny in those clothes. She could not help laughing at the moment she looked at the snapshot. She remarked, how funny they all looked in those old-fashioned clothes.

3. ‘Both wry with the laboured ease of loss.’ What is the loss the poet speaks about? Describe the ironical situation.

Ans. Both the poet’s mother and the poet herself suffer a sense of loss. The mother has lost her carefree childhood. She cannot have those moments of enjoyment again that she once experienced at the beach. She cannot be the sweet smiling girl of twelve again. This is also the poet’s loss. Perhaps she will never see that smiling face and experience her laughter again in life. The irony of the situation is that both of them, the mother in the past and the daughter in the present, struggle to bear the loss with tolerable ease.