

## **My Grandmother**

by Elizabeth Jennings

She kept an antique shop – or it kept her.  
Among Apostle spoons and Bristol glass,  
The faded silks, the heavy furniture,  
She watched her own reflection in the brass  
Salvers and silver bowls, as if to prove  
Polish was all, there was no need of love.

And I remember how I once refused  
To go out with her, since I was afraid.  
It was perhaps a wish not to be used  
Like antique objects. Though she never said  
That she was hurt, I still could feel the guilt  
Of that refusal, guessing how she felt.

Later, too frail to keep a shop, she put  
All her best things in one narrow room.  
The place smelt old, of things too long kept shut,  
The smell of absences where shadows come  
That can't be polished. There was nothing then  
To give her own reflection back again.

And when she died I felt no grief at all,  
Only the guilt of what I once refused.  
I walked into her room among the tall  
Sideboards and cupboards – things she never used  
But needed; and no finger marks were there,  
Only the new dust falling through the air.

### **Glossary:**

1. Antique: a collectable object that has a high value because of its age and quality.
2. Kept: owned *or* looked after something.
3. Apostle spoons: spoons with a carved image of a saint on the handle.
4. Bristol glass: expensive crafted glassware.
5. Salvers: serving trays.
6. Frail: weak and fragile.
7. Sideboards: cupboards used to display or store objects.

## **Summary**

Stanza 1: The speaker remembers her grandmother owning an antique shop. She looked at her reflection in the antique objects but she did not see the need for love.

Stanza 2: The speaker did not want to go out with her grandmother and felt guilty for that. The grandmother did not show that she was hurt but the speaker knew that she was.

Stanza 3: At a later stage the grandmother gives up her shop and moves all her things into a long narrow room because of her age. No one goes to visit the grandmother and she cannot see her reflection anymore.

Stanza 4: When the grandmother dies the speaker says that she was not sad but felt guilt for not wanting to go out with her. The speaker sees no finger-marks on the cupboards in the grandmother's old room, just dust.

## **Themes:**

1. Loneliness
2. Aging and death
3. Guilt: the speaker refuses to go out with her grandmother.
4. Relationships: the speaker is not sad when her grandmother dies.
5. Materialism: the grandmother's focus is on possessions not people.

**Tone:** reflective, distant, cold.

**Mood:** sad, depressed, thoughtful.

## **Figurative language**

1. Personification: the shop "kept" (looked after) the grandmother in line 1.
2. Simile: "It was perhaps a wish not to be used like antique objects." Line 10
3. Metaphor: "The place smelt old, of things too long kept shut, the smell of absences where shadows come that can't be polished." Line 15-17. The smell in the small room is being compared to the grandmother's loneliness and lack of relationships.
4. Symbolism:
  - a. The long narrow room can symbolise a coffin. Line 14.
  - b. Dust can symbolise loneliness. Line 24.
  - c. Finger-marks can symbolise affection/love. Line 23.

## **Questions:**

1. Describe the relationship between the speaker and her grandmother. (2)
2. What do you think is more important to the grandmother? Refer to stanza 1. (2)
3. How do you know that the grandmother was lonely? Refer to stanza 3 to support your answer. (2)
4. Why do you think that the speaker was "afraid" of to go out with her grandmother? Line 8. (2)
5. What do you think the lesson of the poem is? (2)

## **Swift things are beautiful**

by Elizabeth Coatsworth

Swift things are beautiful:

Swallows and deer,  
And lightening that falls  
Bright-veined and clear,  
Rivers and meteors,  
Wind in the wheat,  
The strong-withered horse,  
The runner's sure feet.

And slow things are beautiful:

The closing of day,  
The pause of the wave  
That curves downward to spray,  
The ember that crumbles,  
The opening flower,  
And the ox that moves on  
In the quiet of power.

### **Glossary:**

1. Swift: quick
2. Swallows: commonly found small bird
3. Meteors: a rock which lights up as it falls from space.
4. Withered: well-developed part between the shoulders.
5. Ember: a small piece of burning wood in the dying fire.
6. Ox: a big cow or bull

### **Imagery**

Make a list of all the beautiful things which the speaker mentions in each line of the poem.

line	Swift things	line	Slow things
2	Swallows and deer	10	
3		11	
4		12	
5		13	
6		14	
7		15	
8			

## **Questions**

1. Why do you think the speaker refers to swift and slow things specifically? (2)
2. Which image in stanza one refers to a human quality? (1)
3. Mention three images in the poem which are related to the sky? (3)
4. Which two lines contain repetition? (1)
5. What effect does this repetition have in the poem? (2)
6. Explain how a meteor can be swift (line 5). (2)
7. Identify the figure of speech used in line 3-4. (1)

And lightning that falls  
Bright-veined and clear,

8. Explain why the figure of speech used in line 3-4 is effective. (3)

[15]

## **Fireworks**

by James Reeves

They rise like sudden fiery flowers  
That burst upon the night,  
Then fall to earth in burning showers  
Of crimson, blue and white.

Like buds too wonderful to name,  
Each miracle unfolds  
And Catherine wheels begin to flame  
Like whirling marigolds.

Rockets and Roman candles make  
An orchard of the sky,  
Where magic trees their petals shake  
Upon each gazing eye.



## **Glossary:**

1. fiery: burning brightly
2. crimson: deep red
3. buds: growing flowers
4. Catherine-wheels: a firework that spins when attached to a pole.

5. Whirling: rapid movement going in circles.
6. Marigolds: yellow/orange golden flowers
7. Roman candles: fireworks which explode multiple times.
8. orchard: exotic, colourful flower
9. whence: "from where"

**Questions:**

1. Which one thing does the speaker compare fireworks to?
2. Refer to stanza 1. Which three colours do the fireworks make?
3. Explain the metaphor in line 11-12.  
    Whence magic trees their petals shake  
    Upon each gazing eye.
4. Refer to stanza 2. What's the speaker's attitude to the fireworks?
5. Identify the figure of speech used in line 7-8.  
    And Catherine-wheels begin to flame  
    Like whirling marigolds.
6. Explain why this figure of speech is effective.
7. Which of the 5 senses does the poet focus on in the poem?

## **The Sea**

by James Reeves

The sea is a hungry dog,  
Giant and grey.  
He rolls on the beach all day.  
With his clashing teeth and shaggy jaws  
Hour upon hour he gnaws  
The rumbling, tumbling stones,  
And 'Bones, bones, bones, bones! '  
The giant sea-dog moans,  
Licking his greasy paws.

And when the night wind roars  
And the moon rocks in the stormy cloud,  
He bounds to his feet and snuffs and sniffs,  
Shaking his wet sides over the cliffs,  
And howls and hollos long and loud.

But on quiet days in May or June,  
When even the grasses on the dune  
Play no more their reedy tune,  
With his head between his paws  
He lies on the sandy shores,  
So quiet, so quiet, he scarcely snores.

### **Glossary:**

1. clashing: to have a forceful impact.
2. shaggy: thick, long-haired.
3. gnaws: constantly biting.
4. rumbling: a continuous deep sound
5. tumbling: falling suddenly.
6. moans: to make a low sound
7. bounds: jumps
8. snuffs: puts out
9. hollos: loud, long sound
10. howls: loud, long sound
11. reedy: long and thin
12. scarcely: almost never

### **Questions:**

1. The whole poem is a metaphor. What two things are being identified?
2. 'Giant and grey'. What two qualities of the sea is James Reeves emphasising?
3. What are some of the qualities the sea and a dog have in common?
4. Can you suggest why the poet writes 'bones' four times in the line?
5. 'With his head between his paws...' what does this dog-picture indicate about the sea?
6. In the last two lines of the poem, the poet uses quite a number of sounds. What picture of the sea do these sounds give you?

## **The Windmill**

by Henry Wadsworth

Behold! a giant am I!

Aloft here in my tower,

With my granite jaws I devour

The maize, and the wheat, and the rye,

And grind them into flour.

I look down over the farms;

In the fields of grain I see

The harvest that is to be,

And I fling to the air my arms,

For I know it is all for me.

I hear the sound of flails

Far off, from the threshing-floors

In barns, with their open doors,

And the wind, the wind in my sails,

Louder and louder roars.

I stand here in my place,

With my foot on the rock below,

And whichever way it may blow

I meet it face to face,

As a brave man meets his foe.

And while we wrestle and strive

My master, the miller, stands

And feeds me with his hands;

For he knows who makes him thrive,

Who makes him lord of lands.

On Sundays I take my rest;

Church-going bells begin

Their low, melodious din;

I cross my arms on my breast,

And all is peace within.

**Background:** Originally windmills were used for lifting water from wells, they were also used to saw wood, cut hay and crush grain. Watch this video to see how a windmill works:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wusde3i5ajs>

**Glossary:**

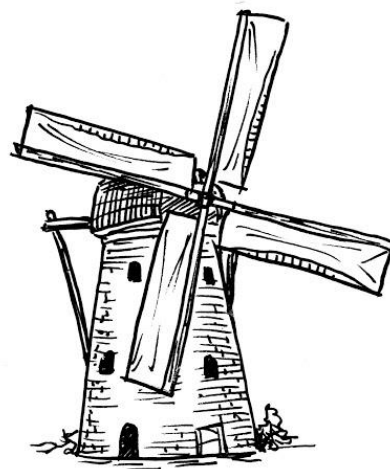
1. aloft: up higher.
2. granite: a very hard rock used for building.
3. devour: eat quickly
4. rye: a grain.
5. fling: to quickly throw something.
6. flails: a short heavy stick used for cutting.
7. threshing-floors: a hard, flat floor on which grain is crushed.
8. foe: enemy
9. strive: aim for
10. miller: a person who own a mill
11. thrive: be extremely happy
12. melodious: musical
13. din: a loud noise

**Form:**

1. How many stanzas are there in the poem?
2. How many lines are there in each stanza?
3. What is the rhyme scheme?

**Questions:**

1. In the first stanza, what human characteristics has the poet given to the windmill? (2)
2. In the second stanza, what human things does the windmill do? (3)
3. In the third stanza, what human quality has the windmill acquired? (1)
4. What is the windmill's relationship with the miller in the fifth stanza? (1)
5. In the last stanza what actions of the windmill suggest that it is human? (1)



## **Mother to Son**

by Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it,

And splinters,

And boards torn up,

And places with no carpet on the floor—

Bare.

But all the time

I've been a-climbin' on,

And reachin' landin's,

And turnin' corners,

And sometimes goin' in the dark

Where there ain't been no light.

So boy, don't you turn back.

Don't you set down on the steps

'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—

For I've still goin', honey,

I've still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.



### **Glossary:**

1. tacks: small sharp nails
2. bare: uncovered
3. set: to put down
4. crystal: highly transparent glass associated with wealth.

### **Summary:**

The poem consists of a mother's advice to her son about the challenges of life. It also shows how sometimes life becomes too heavy, but a person should never give up. The mother's life is surrounded by misery. She knows that the best way to overcome her situation is by staying strong. She encourages her son to follow her by pushing through life. To the mother, optimism and endurance are the only ways to overcome difficulties in life.

**Themes:**

1. Hardship
2. Hope
3. Courage

**Poetic devices and figures of speech:**

1. Metaphor: the mother's life is compared to a staircase.
2. Symbolism: the staircase symbolises hardships.
3. Free verse: there are no specific patterns of rhyme.
4. Repetition: 'life for me aint been no crystal stair'

**Questions:**

1. What do you think is the effect of the repetition of the line in line 2 and line 20?
2. What does the mother's language tell you about her?
3. How would you describe the mother and the son's relationship?
4. Which type of life do you think the mother lived up to this point in contrast to the "crystal stair"?
5. What would you say is the mother's attitude toward life's challenges?
6. Which two reasons does the mother use for encouraging the son not to stop climbing?

## **Prayer to the Hunting Star, Canopus**

Said by X-nanni

Xhoagu, give me your heart  
that you sit with in plenty.  
Take my heart, my heart  
small and famished without hope  
so that like you too I may be full  
for I hunger.

You seem to me full-bellied, Xkoagu  
and in my eyes not small  
but I am hungry.

Star, give to me your belly  
that fills you with a good feeling,  
and you shall take my stomach from me  
so you as well can know its hunger.  
Give me your right arm too  
and you shall take my arm from me,  
my arm that does not kill  
for I miss my aim.

Xkoagu, blind with your light  
the Springbok's eyes,  
and you shall give me your arm  
for my arm that hangs here  
that makes me miss my mark.

### **Notes:**

1. Animism: the belief that natural objects have a supernatural power.
2. Oral poetry: usually spoken not written down and passed through generations.

### **Glossary:**

1. Canopus: the hunting star
2. Xkoagu: another name for the hunting star
3. Plenty: a lot
4. Famished: extremely hungry

### **Summary:**

A hunter prays for courage from a star in order to fill his hunger. The speaker compares his situation the star's and sees it as full-bellied. He wants Xkoagu's full belly and right arm which he views as good for hunting. Finally, the speaker asks Xkaogu to "blind" the eyes of the springbok and to give him his arm because his arm misses the mark.

**Themes:** survival, hunger, nature, devotion

**Figurative language:**

1. Personification: the star is described as full-bellied and having a heart and an arm.
2. Repetition: “give me” (line 1, 10, 14 and 20) and “take my” (line 3, 12 and 15).
3. Apostrophe: speaking to a star as if it can hear and respond to him.

**Questions:**

1. Which three human characteristics does the star have in the poem?
2. What is the speaker praying for?
3. Do you think that the speaker wants Xkoagu to blind the Springbok’s eyes literally or figuratively?
4. How do you think that the Springbok’s eyes could be “blinded”?
5. What is the speaker asking for when he asks Xkoagu to give him its heart?