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Crossroads

We all get to a point in our lives, at one time or another, when we feel as though we need to change something about ourselves. In this poem, "Crossroads," Joyce Sutphen is talking about what she wants the second half of her life to be like. She uses many comparisons to explain to people how her life will be different in the future from the way it is now. She makes it seem as though the first half of her life was hard and not what it should have been. I got the feeling she did not treat herself properly, or care about many things. Now she is ready to turn things around, make a better life herself, and be happier. I think a lot of people go through something similar to this; wanting to make the second half of their life better than the first. When many people reach middle age, they look back on their lives, and they realize their life was not what they wanted it to be. This can be seen as a good thing though because after realizing this, most people want to do something about it. They start to turn their life around, and start living life to the fullest.

The poem does not really have much of a tone to it; it is not necessarily happy or sad. There are parts in the poem where I feel like she is looking forward to the future.

This is when she lists all the things she wants to do with her life. There are also places in the poem where she is sort-of dreading getting older. In the first stanza she uses imagery to express the fact she is getting old. She also says things about getting older in other parts of the poem to keep this thought in the readers' mind. Along with not really having a tone this poem is free verse, and does not follow any rhyme or meter patterns. I relate the fact there is no rhyme in the poem to how she wants to live her life freely in the future, and not be forced to follow someone else's rules.

The first stanza starts out by saying "The second half of my life will be black/ to the white rind of the old and fading moon," (Sutphen 1-2, see appendix). Using the colors black and white shows how the second half of her life will be opposite of the first half because black and white are opposites. Also, she uses the description of the old and fading moon. This relates to how she is getting older, and in the second half of life everyone experiences death. Someday she will reach the old and fading part of her life, so this phrase was probably the saddest one in the poem. After this to the end she talks about how much better this part of her life will be, and the poem becomes very positive.

Now her life will be "water/ over the cracked floor of these desert years," (3-4). It will be soothing and refreshing to the hard years she has had prior to this. She then states "I will land on my feet this time," (5). In other words, she will get off to a better start and be better prepared for whatever may come her way. In the rest of the first stanza she goes on to say how she will make the most of her life from here through the duration of it, by having motivation and doing what she wants to do to make her happy. I really like when

she says, “and my hair shall be/ whatever color I please,” (8-9). She is going to help herself feel even younger by dying her hair. If it turns gray it will not bother her because she knows she will change it to whatever color she wants it to be. This statement proves she is not scared of getting older and looking older like most women are. She says, “everyone will go on celebrating the old/ birthday, counting the years as usual, / but I will count myself new from this/ inception, this imprint of my own desire,” (10-13). In her mind she is young, and to her life starts over now. She is not going to focus on getting old and dreading it the way everyone else does, instead she is going to embrace it.

In the second stanza of the poem she moves on from explaining how this part of her life will be different, and she starts to explain what types of things she is going to do differently in her life. She says “my life will be swift,/ past leaning fence posts, a gravel shoulder,/ asphalt tickets, the beckon of open road,” (15-16). She wants to travel around the world and see new things. As a child or younger adult she probably did not have many opportunities, if any at all, to travel and experience things she was interested in. Now she is older and knows there is no time better than the present to do the things she wants to do. This part of her life will be fast with all of the new activities she will experience. She says she is going to take everything in by saying “the second half of my life will be wide-eyed,” (17). She also says, “arms loose at my sides, wandering feet,” (line 19). She will be relaxed, not tense or stressed out about her life. There will be no job tying her down or keeping her long hours. There will be no financial problems always troubling in the back of her mind. There will be no addictive, abusive habits keeping her from her dreams.

Whatever was holding her from them before is gone, and now she is free.

In the third and final stanza of the poem, the author sums up everything her new life will be. I love the way she says her life “will be” because it is such a confident attitude and also positive outlook on things. She is not questioning or suggesting her life will be this way, she is stating the fact of how it will be. “The second half of my life will be ice/ breaking up on the river,” (24-25). A change is going to happen; a major breakthrough in her life. “rain soaking the fields, and hand/ held out,” (25-27). She wants to help people who are in need and make a difference for someone. If she does these things her life will have a purpose. The last sentence in the poem says, “and smoke going/ upward, always up,” (28-29). She will always keep her head up and be positive while seeing the bright side of life. There will be no more of a glass half empty approach to life; in her eyes the glass will always be half full. She seems very optimistic about growing older and experiencing the world differently.

Throughout the poem the author does a great job of using literary elements to bring out the meaning of the poem. There is one particular word I noticed a couple of times throughout the poem; the word old. She is getting older, and by reusing this word during the poem her age is always in the mind of the reader. Many descriptive words are also used in this poem. They help the reader form a better mental picture of the things the author is writing about. For instance, she is continually saying her life will be things most people normally do not compare their lives to. Such as: “black/ to the white rind of the old and fading moon,” (1-2), “water/ over the cracked floor of these desert years,” (3-4),

and “ice/ breaking up on the river,” (24-25). When she uses this imagery we are able to get a sense of the person she is, and it also allows us to get a sense of the person we are. While using words to create imagery, the author also uses the way she visually shapes the poem to add meaning to what she is saying. This poem is about getting older and realizing the number of years left to enjoy life is getting smaller. The very end of the third and final stanza visually shows how the author’s life is getting shorter. The lines keep getting shorter until the very end where they are only three words long. There are also many metaphors in this poem. The author is constantly comparing how her life will be something. All of the things she is comparing her life to are nature related. This shows she is going to love both the world and herself more while just taking everything in. Because of the imagery and metaphors, during this poem I could really hear the speaker telling how she is going to change her life.

I think this is a great poem for anyone to read, especially someone who is feeling the same way about their life as she did about the first half of hers. Sure, most people go through some pretty hard times in their lives, but you have to look to the future with a positive attitude and know things will be better. You cannot sit around and be depressed about the way your current life is. If you want it to get better you have to do something about it yourself. I feel this poem portrays these ideas very well and most people in the world could relate to it in one way or another.

Crossroads

1. The second half of my life will be black
2. to the white rind of the old and fading moon.
3. The second half of my life will be water
4. over the cracked floor of these desert years.
5. I will land on my feet this time,

6. knowing at least two languages and who
7. my friends are. I will dress for the
8. occasion, and my hair shall be
9. whatever color I please.
10. Everyone will go on celebrating the old
11. birthday, counting the years as usual,
12. but I will count myself from this
13. inception, this imprint of my own desire.

14. The second half of my life will be swift,
15. past leaning fenceposts, a gravel shoulder,
16. asphalt tickets, the beckon of open road.
17. The second half of my life will be wide-eyed,
18. fingers shifting through fine sands,
19. arms loose at my sides, wandering feet.
20. There will be new dreams every night,
21. and the drapes will never be closed.
22. I will toss my string of keys into a deep
23. well and old letters into the grate.

24. The second half of my life will be ice

25. breaking up on the river, rain

26. soaking the fields, a hand

27. held out, a fire,

28. and smoke going

29. upward, always up.

Works Cited Page

Sutphen, Joyce. "Crossroads." The Academy of American Poets, 1997. 3 April 2008

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