What happens?

A daughter imagines her mother’s youthful life before motherhood.

The main idea

A daughter’s imaginative love recovers the mother’s independent youth while questioning a child’s possessive claims.

1. “Marilyn”

Method: Cultural allusion

A film-star comparison makes the remembered young woman glamorous.

2. “possessive”

Method: Self-description

The speaker recognises her own childhood claim on the mother.

3. “ghost”

Method: Metaphor

Memory brings back an earlier identity that cannot be physically recovered.

4. “sparkle”

Method: Dynamic verb

The ending preserves vitality rather than reducing the woman to a parental role.

Form and structure

Four five-line stanzas in free verse; direct address crosses between imagined photographs and personal memory.

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Development, voice and tone

Young woman and friends — Playful and admiring. The daughter pictures a lively identity from before her own birth.

Imagined past and memory — Affectionately possessive. The speaker recognises both the mother's freedom and the demands motherhood brought.

Dancing recollection — Celebratory. Movement keeps the youthful woman imaginatively alive across time.

Context

Duffy looks beyond the role of mother to a woman's social life, glamour and desires before her child existed.

Comparison links

Eden Rock: imagined parental youth. Follower: admiration and changing perspective.

Recall question

How does the title combine affection with possessiveness?