What happens?

A speaker imagines young parents calling from across a stream.

The main idea

Precise family memories make an uncertain crossing feel both intimate and mysterious.

1. “twenty-five”

Method: Precise age

The father appears in youth rather than as an elderly parent.

2. “three suns”

Method: Unreal light

The intensified brightness transforms an ordinary sky into a visionary setting.

3. “other bank”

Method: Symbolic boundary

Physical distance suggests a possible threshold beyond the picnic scene.

4. “like this”

Method: Ambiguity

The final phrase withholds a complete explanation and invites reflection.

Form and structure

Four quatrains lead to a tercet and an isolated final line; a calm first-person vision develops into an ambiguous ending.

Development, voice and tone

Parents and picnic — Affectionate and precise. Ages, clothing and household objects make the vision vividly particular.

Light and stream — Dreamlike. Ordinary recollection becomes less realistic as the parents beckon from another bank.

Last isolated line — Surprised and contemplative. The speaker acknowledges an unexpected experience without defining it.

Context

Causley draws on family memory. The stream can suggest a boundary between life and death, but the poem never names a single meaning.

Comparison links

Before You Were Mine: imagining young parents. Walking Away: separation and connection.

Recall question

How can the stream be read literally and symbolically?