What happens?

A daughter recounts a pilot’s return and the family’s subsequent rejection of him.

The main idea

A decision to survive can lead to social exclusion so severe that ordinary ideas of life and death become unstable.

1. “one-way”

Method: Fatalistic adjective

The mission’s intended endpoint is embedded in its preparation.

2. “incantations”

Method: Ritual diction

Patriotic teaching acquires the repetitive force of a spell.

3. “green-blue translucent sea”

Method: Sensory imagery

The living world offers a vivid alternative to the mission.

4. “which”

Method: Interrogative word

The ending leaves the relative costs of different deaths unresolved.

Form and structure

Seven six-line stanzas; a daughter’s account incorporates imagined memories and uncertainty about the pilot’s mind.

Development, voice and tone

Departure — Ceremonial and expectant. Preparations establish a mission shaped by national duty and anticipated death.

Sea and childhood — Sensuous and speculative. The daughter imagines what natural beauty and remembered family life might have awakened.

Return and rejection — Cold and mournful. Physical survival is followed by a loss of recognition within the family.

Context

Kamikaze missions were Japanese suicide attacks in the Second World War. The poem examines the family cost of expectations of honour.

Comparison links

Poppies: family and conflict. The Emigrée: belonging and exclusion.

Recall question

How is surviving made to resemble a different kind of loss?