What happens?

A remembered meeting in a bleak landscape becomes an image of failed love.

The main idea

A failed relationship makes one memory into a lasting lens through which the speaker interprets love.

1. “the sun was white, as though chidden of God,”

Method: Colour imagery

The sun fails to provide the warmth conventionally associated with it.

2. “a few leaves lay on the starving sod;”

Method: Personification

The earth seems deprived of nourishment, reflecting the relationship.

3. “The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing”

Method: Superlative paradox

A smile, normally a sign of life, becomes an image of emotional extinction.

4. “keen lessons that love deceives,”

Method: Personification

The speaker converts a particular loss into a broad, pessimistic lesson.

Form and structure

Four quatrains with enclosing ABBA rhyme; the final stanza returns to details from the opening.

Development, voice and tone

Pond and winter — Bleak. Colour and life appear drained from the setting.

Eyes and smile — Bitter. The lovers' exchanges make intimacy seem exhausted and hostile.

Later lesson — Disillusioned. The remembered scene becomes a general belief about deception in love.

Context

Written in 1867, Hardy's lyric uses a remembered landscape to test optimistic expectations about love.

Comparison links

When We Two Parted: enduring hurt. Winter Swans: weather and relationships.

Recall question

How does the landscape become part of the memory?