

Mother to Son

Literary Analysis

This poem is based on the idea of hope and encouragement to move forward in life, despite all difficulties, and no matter how tough life may become. It is also the demonstration of the **love** a mother has for her son. Behind this love, the poet emphasizes the idea of never giving up in any situation.

The speaker in this poem is a mother who gives advice to her beloved son, who may also be seen to represent the younger generation. Since **the mother** has successfully faced the challenges of life, she wishes her son to be courageous and bold in the face of these challenges and to also succeed in life. The poem is grounded in the memories and experiences of a mother. The tone of the poem is didactic, encouraging, and hopeful.

The poet opens this poem by presenting a **comparison** between the mother's life and a treacherous staircase in order to show that her life has not been easy and perfect. The mother begins by addressing her son: "*Well, son, I'll tell you: / Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.*" Her life was full of challenges and difficulties, such as, "*It's had tacks in it,/And splinters.*" The use of extended **metaphor** comparing the mother's life to a staircase continues throughout the poem, with the **repetition** of the line, "*Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.*"

The mother seems to have been born in poverty, as the images reveal: "*And boards torn up,/And places with no carpet on the floor.*" This indicates that she experienced hazardous circumstances, which somehow she needed to step over to arrive where she stands now. Then, she goes on to say, "*But all the time /I'se been a-climbin' on*" demonstrating that, despite her hardships and troubles, she kept moving on and climbing the staircase. She goes on to say

that she did this “...*sometimes goin’ in the dark*,” by which she means the low moments of her life where there has “*been no light*.” The use of local **vernacular** she uses to give advice to her son— “*So boy, don’t you turn back*”—is a reflection of the love the mother has for her son. Finally, she motivates him to never feel dejected due to any failures in life. She encourages him to move on just like she did, despite all difficulties.

Hughes alludes to the Biblical **imagery** of Jacob’s Ladder by using the **extended metaphor** of a staircase. In addition, **imagery** of dark and light evokes periods of uncertainty in his mother’s life, which Hughes’s has reclaimed as a lesson for him in his own life.

Structural Analysis

This is a short free **verse** poem containing twenty lines, which are without any regular **rhythm** or formal **rhyme** scheme. There are a few instances of rhyme in the poem, especially the connection between “stair” in the second line and “bare” in the seventh line. The poem is written in irregular metrical pattern, though some follow trochaic **meter** as in “***Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.***”

The language is colloquial, such as “*Cause you find it’s kinder hard.*” The **vernacular** language gives the impression that the woman is less educated and probably from the countryside. **Alliteration** is sparingly used in the poem such as the “d” and “s” sounds, as in “*Don’t you set down on the steps.*” The poet has used device of **anaphora** in that “*And*” is used at the beginning of many of the lines. In order to emphasize the idea that the mother’s life was not ideal and perfect like a crystal stair, a line is repeated twice: “***Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.***” **Enjambment** is used

throughout poem as, “*And splinters,/ And boards torn up.*” The language is unpretentious and informal.

Guidance for Usage of Quotes

The poem is a **monologue** that conveys the idea of encouragement and hope. The poem is based on the **theme** of advice given by a mother to her son. Her life is full of challenges. She tells her son that she faced these challenges and hardships, but she never gave up and continued her journey with patience and resilience. Mothers can encourage their sons with quotes from the poem, such as:

*Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters.*

Also, they can use the following quote to motivate sons to rise again after failure and face the challenges of life confidently:

*Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.*