

Grandfather Gillian Bickley

My grandfather was a quiet man;
an allotment near the railway line,
where his working life was spent,
gave him additional quiet.

“Ask your grandfather to take you there,”
the family suggested.

He showed me his shed,
but most of all the robin’s nest
with blue eggs or bald young,
and an alert bright-eyed brown nesting bird,
on a high shelf in the dark,
which a curious small girl could just
stand tip-toe to see.

“Don’t touch it now!” he warned,
quite sternly, for him.
“She’ll abandon the nest, fly away,
perhaps never return.”

His own mother had done that;
died when he was fourteen.

For the rest of his life, on one day of the year,
The quiet man was quietest of all.
“What’s the matter?” his wife or daughter
(my mother and grandmother) would ask.

“This was the day my mother died,”
came his unchangeable reply.

“Grandfather” was published in *Grandfather’s Robin* by Gillian Bickley, p.15. Copyrights © 2020 by Proverse Hong Kong. Reprinted by permission of Proverse Hong Kong. Please approach Proverse Hong Kong by email (proverse@netvigator.com) for permission to use this poem or others in the collection.



A visual representation of "Grandfather" by Gillian Bickley

Mow Hang Ting
St. Stephen's Girls' College



The poem ‘Grandfather’ explores the themes of family love and memory. It illustrates the love of the poet’s grandfather for his mother who passed away when he was young. The facial expression of grandfather portrays his loneliness, and his gaze on the lilies highlights his silence conveyed through the repeated use of the word ‘quiet’ in the poem. The boxes of lilies signify the death of his mother as they are usually seen at funerals. With lilies as a symbol of purity and commitment, they also represent the purity of grandfather’s love for his mother.

A number of decorations in the shed were painted to visualise the symbolism in the poem. The portrait of the young grandfather and his mother, which was hung on the wall after all these years on the top right corner, depicts grandfather’s timeless love for his mother and their close relationship. On the other hand, the robin’s nest symbolises mother’s care and nurturance. The jar of marbles near the window represents memories of childhood.

I used warm colours like red, orange and yellow to display the warmth associated with the theme ‘family’ and the remembrance of the beloved mother.

Positive value(s) and attitude(s):

Family love

Positive message(s):

The care and nurturance of parents are priceless and we must treasure them.

