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Two Mothers Remembered

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CLASS 9 ENGLISH LITERATURE GUIDE

Theme of the Poem

The central theme of the poem is the **devastating impact of dementia or Alzheimer's disease** on an aging parent and their relationship with their child. It deeply explores how a progressive medical condition can alter a vibrant, familiar mother into a completely different person—effectively creating "two mothers" out of one individual's memory and persona.

Beyond the tragedy of mental decline and identity loss, the poem highlights themes of **unconditional familial love**, the inevitable **role reversal** where the child becomes the active caregiver, and the bittersweet, continuous **cycle of life** that connects multiple generations.

Stanza-by-Stanza Paraphrase

STANZA 1

*I had two mothers - two mothers I claim,
two different people, yet with the same name.
Two separate women, diverse by design,
but I loved them both because they were mine.*

Paraphrase: The poet states that she feels she has had two distinct mothers over the course of her life. Though they were two entirely different people with completely contrasting personalities and behaviors, they shared the exact same name. Even though they were vastly different from one another, the poet loved both of them deeply simply because they both belonged to her.

STANZA 2

*The first was the mother who carried me here,
gave birth and nurtured and launched my career.
She was the one whose features I bear,
complete with the facial expressions I wear.*

Paraphrase: The poet describes her "first" mother, who was her healthy, biological mother. This mother brought her into the world, gave birth to her, raised her up with care and love, and supported her to succeed in her career. The poet shares a strong physical resemblance with this mother, inheriting both her physical features and the distinct facial expressions used to show emotion.

STANZA 3

*She gave her love, which follows me yet,
along with examples in life that she set.
As I got older, she somehow younger grew,
and we'd laugh as just mothers and daughters do.*

Paraphrase: This biological mother provided the poet with an enduring love that remains with her even today, along with setting positive examples and life lessons to guide her. As time passed and the poet grew into adulthood, her mother managed to keep a youthful, energetic spirit. They used to share happy moments and laugh together freely, just like any normal mother and daughter.

STANZA 4

*But then came the time that her mind clouded so,
and I sensed that the mother I knew would soon go.
So quickly she changed and turned into the other,
a stranger dressed in the clothes of my mother.*

Paraphrase: Eventually, a period arrived when her mother's mind became confused and clouded by illness (dementia). The poet sensed that the conscious, vibrant mother she had known all her life was slipping away forever. Her mother transformed so rapidly that she turned into the "second" mother—a complete stranger who merely looked like her mother from the outside and wore her familiar clothes.

STANZA 5

*Oh, she looked the same, at least at arm's length,
but now she was the child and I was her strength.
We'd come full circle, we women three,
my mother the first, the second and me.*

Paraphrase: From a slight distance, this altered version of her mother looked exactly the same as she always had. However, internally their roles had completely reversed; her mother had become as dependent and helpless as an infant, and the poet had to step up to become her pillar of strength and caregiver. This completed a natural circle of life involving three distinct identities: the original healthy mother, the illness-stricken second mother, and the poet herself.

STANZA 6

*And if my own children should come to a day,
when a new mother comes and the old goes away,
I'd ask of them nothing that I didn't do.
Love both of your mothers as both have loved you.*

Paraphrase: In the final stanza, the poet reflects on the future. She states that if her own children ever have to face a similar situation—where she herself loses her memory and transforms into a "new" stranger due to old age—she expects nothing more from them than what she did for her own mother. She advises her children to love both versions of her (the healthy mother of their childhood and the frail mother of old age), just as both versions loved them unconditionally.