

Kenton Kyger

Mrs. Rutan

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Beware the Blackberry Bush

Every good parent wants the best for their children. They want to direct their children in the right direction and teach them to make the right decisions. Unfortunately, the world seems to constantly play the devil's advocate when it comes to encouraging emotional maturity and good decision-making. "Blackberry Picking" by Wendy Mooney summarizes any parent's worst nightmare.

In the poem, a woman watches helplessly as her two daughters grow up and go out into the world invested in the wrong things and insecure about themselves. They are blinded by a false sense of sophistication and a desire for the "mature" things they could not partake in as children. In the beginning, the girls are described "dashing into the blackberry bushes" (5). Charging into blackberry bushes, which are scraggly and thorny, is a very arrogant, harmful thing to do, and it represents the girls' fall, or perhaps leap, to vain aspirations.

The girls begin to talk with "Centipedes between their teeth,- A thousand legs of conversation" (6-7). With so many different discussions, some are bound to be about topics inappropriate for children. Being able to "handle" this talk gives the girls a feeling of maturity, and they begin to insist on using makeup, a benchmark for girls often viewed as a sign of sophistication. However, these cosmetics are merely "moss and cobwebs" (12), as they represent

the girls' shallowness and investment in ultimately meaningless things. Nobody that could see clearly would adorn themselves with moss and cobwebs.

In a moment of reflection, the poem states that the two girls have “..bloomed into two self-conscious woman,- Two mountain ewes with long lashes” (14-15). Sheep are helpless enough without openly calling out for the attention of would-be predators, as the long lashes would do. Not only are these two daughters sheep with long lashes, they have made their home in the mountains. One wrong move could send them crashing down the steep slope. Their actions have put them both into a very precarious and delicate situation that is almost certain to end poorly.

The mother is devastated into a stupor by all of this. She is left with her mouth is so full of blackberries, the fruits of her daughters' actions, that they swell her cheeks and the juice escapes down her chin (20-21). Some of the ripe berries (their good actions) would be sweet, but the tart ones (their poor choices and wrong desires) would take over and leave a bitter taste in her mouth. The leaking juice would stain the mother's skin, just as her daughters' actions would have certainly left a stain on her pride and joy in them. Parents want to be proud of their children. What the two daughters have done here is not something their mother can be proud of. As a parent, there would be guilt (whether substantiated or not) mixed with a fear for their children's future.

“Blackberry Picking” portrays a very realistic struggle that hopefully causes parent and child readers alike to consider their standings and take warning. No parent would want to see their child off this way, nor would any child want to make these types of mistakes with full

knowledge and acceptance of the consequences. The lesson in this poem is very clear: stay out of the blackberry bush.