

Crossing the Water Summary

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Summary

Crossing a Black Lake: Two black people, the speaker and his companion, are crossing a black lake on their boat. Everything is black there. *"Black lake, black boat, two black, cut-paper people."* The lake, the boat, and even the travelers are black. The travelers are like *"cut-paper."* It means they are lifeless and fragile. The huge black trees drink from the lake. Their shadows are so large that they could even reach as far as Canada.

Little Light: There is a little bit of light coming through the water flowers. The leaves of these flowers do not want the travelers to hurry. The leaves are round and flat. The leaves seem to give them warnings.

Blackness and Pale Hand: The oar shakes the cold water as the boat moves. The feeling of blackness or darkness is not just outside, but also inside the people in the boat. The blackness is also in the fish of the water. A snag (dead tree branch) sticks out of the water. It rises like a *"pale hand"* (dead hand), like a farewell gesture.

Sirens: Now, stars appear among the lilies. But the speaker thinks the lilies are *"expressionless sirens."* In Greek myth, sirens look beautiful, but they lure sailors into the sea to be drowned. The scene is full of silence. The silence of this scene is described as the silence of astounded () souls, as if the travelers are overwhelmed by mystery and wonder.

Analysis: A Journey into the Speaker's Mind

On the surface, the poem is about two people crossing a dark lake. In a deeper sense, it is a journey into the speaker's troubled mind, where we can see darkness, sadness, isolation, uncertainty, and fear.

Everything in the poem is dark: the lake, the boat, the trees, and even the people. Plath repeats the word *"black"* four times in the first stanza. It means the speaker's world is really black: full of sadness and without hope. The people are described as *"cut-paper."* It means they feel lifeless and fragile. The trees and their shadows seem huge. The shadow covers everything. It is like a sad thought or sad memories that fill a sad mind.

A little light appears through the water flowers. It is like little hope. The leaves of these flowers do not want the travelers to hurry. They give them **“dark advice.”** It means that little hope does not give the speaker any comfort.

The oar of the boat stirs **“cold worlds.”** The **“spirit of blackness”** is inside everything — in the speaker, in the fish, in the environment. It means everything is sad and scary for the speaker. A dead tree branch in the water lifts a **“pale hand,”** as if to say goodbye. This scene is full of fear. This is just like the speaker's mind, which is full of fear.

In the end, stars appear, and beautiful lilies float. But they offer no comfort. The lilies are compared to **“expressionless sirens.”** In Greek myth, sirens look beautiful, but they lure sailors into the sea to be drowned. So, the journey ends in a world of danger and silence.

Form, Meter, Rhyme Scheme

The poem is written in four tercets. Tercets are three-line stanzas. So, the poem has 12 lines. It is written in free verse, so there is no fixed rhythm scheme or meter. Though the poem has no rhyme scheme, it creates rhythm through literary devices like repetition and alliteration. Plath repeats the word **“black”** three times in the first line. It creates rhythm.