

# ASM TUITION ACADEMY

## Climbing my grandfather

### **Climbing My Grandfather**

By Andrew Waterhouse

I decide to do it for free, without a rope or net.  
First, the old brogues, dusty and cracked;  
an easy scramble onto his trousers,  
pushing into the weave, trying to get a grip.  
By the overhanging shirt, I change  
direction, traverse along his belt  
to an earth-stained hand.  
The nails are splintered and give good purchase,  
the skin of his finger is smooth and thick  
like warm ice. On his arm I discover  
the glassy ridge of a scar, place my feet  
gently in the old stitches and move on.

At his still-firm shoulder, I rest for a while  
in the shade, not looking down,  
for climbing has its dangers.  
Then pull myself up the loose skin of his neck  
to a smiling mouth to drink among teeth.  
Refreshed, I cross the brow of his head,  
a smiling mouth to drink among teeth.  
Refreshed, I cross the brow of his head,  
to a place where his hair  
is thin and white as frost.  
Reaching for the summit,  
where gasping for breath I can only lie  
watching clouds and birds circle,  
feeling his heat, knowing  
the slow pulse of his good heart.

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### **Summary of "Climbing My Grandfather"**

In "*Climbing My Grandfather*", Andrew Waterhouse uses the extended metaphor of climbing a mountain to describe the speaker's exploration of his grandfather. The speaker begins at the feet, works their way up the body, and finally reaches the summit, the grandfather's head. Through this physical journey, the speaker reflects on the qualities of the grandfather—strength, wisdom, and warmth. The climb symbolizes the process of getting to know someone deeply, appreciating their past, and recognizing their emotional and physical presence. The poem portrays a deep admiration for the grandfather and an intimate connection between them.

## Poetic Devices

### 1. **Extended Metaphor:**

- The entire poem is an extended metaphor comparing the grandfather to a mountain. The physical act of climbing represents the speaker's emotional journey of understanding and connecting with his grandfather. The mountain symbolizes the grandfather's strength, stability, and depth, and the climb suggests both the difficulty and the reward of truly knowing someone.

### 2. **Imagery:**

- Waterhouse uses vivid and tactile imagery throughout the poem to create a sense of physical connection between the speaker and the grandfather. Descriptions such as "dusty and cracked" brogues, "splintered" nails, and skin "like warm ice" evoke a detailed and intimate portrait of the grandfather's body. These images reflect both the age and experience of the grandfather while highlighting his enduring warmth and vitality.
- The imagery of the "glassy ridge of a scar" and the "thin and white as frost" hair adds depth to the characterization of the grandfather, portraying him as a man shaped by experience and time.

### 3. **Enjambment:**

- Waterhouse uses enjambment (the continuation of a sentence or phrase beyond the end of a line or stanza) to create a sense of movement and flow throughout the poem. This technique mirrors the continuous and unbroken process of climbing the grandfather's body, emphasizing the ongoing discovery and connection between the speaker and the grandfather.

### 4. **Symbolism:**

- The climb symbolizes the journey of understanding and emotional connection. As the speaker ascends the grandfather's body, they are metaphorically delving deeper into the grandfather's life, character, and legacy.
- The summit of the grandfather's head represents a moment of achievement and realization, where the speaker feels a strong connection to the grandfather's heart and life force, symbolized by the "slow pulse of his good heart."

### 5. **Tone and Mood:**

- The tone of the poem is one of admiration, reverence, and tenderness. The speaker deeply respects the grandfather and is engaged in a reflective, almost meditative process of getting to know him. The mood is intimate, creating a sense of closeness and personal discovery as the speaker embarks on this metaphorical climb.

## Analysis

### **Exploration and Discovery:**

- "*Climbing My Grandfather*" explores the theme of discovery, both emotional and physical. The act of climbing represents a process of learning about the grandfather, understanding his experiences, and appreciating the qualities that define him. The speaker embarks on this metaphorical climb without a "rope or net," symbolizing a fearless, intimate approach to connecting with a family member.

### **Admiration for Generations:**

- The poem highlights the admiration the younger generation holds for the older. The speaker sees the grandfather as a source of wisdom and experience, and the mountain metaphor suggests that the grandfather has an enduring presence that has stood the test of time. This admiration is reflected in the careful, deliberate way the speaker climbs, taking time to appreciate each detail of the grandfather's life and body.

#### **Physicality and Connection:**

- The poem emphasizes the physical nature of the connection between the speaker and the grandfather. Waterhouse uses tactile imagery to describe the grandfather's body, focusing on the roughness of the skin, the scars, and the aging process. This physicality reinforces the speaker's intimate bond with the grandfather, suggesting that understanding someone deeply involves engaging with both their external and internal qualities.

#### **The Passage of Time:**

- The imagery in the poem reflects the passage of time, with references to the grandfather's "dusty and cracked" brogues and "thin and white as frost" hair. These details emphasize the grandfather's age and life experiences, portraying him as someone shaped by time and memory. The scar on his arm hints at a life marked by challenges and endurance.

#### **Emotional Climax:**

- The emotional climax of the poem occurs when the speaker reaches the summit, where they feel the "slow pulse of his good heart." This moment symbolizes the speaker's deep emotional connection to the grandfather, having completed the metaphorical journey of understanding. The "slow pulse" reflects the calm, steady presence of the grandfather, and the word "good" reinforces the speaker's admiration for his character.

#### **Conclusion**

*"Climbing My Grandfather"* is a tender and intimate poem that uses the metaphor of climbing a mountain to explore the speaker's relationship with their grandfather. Through vivid imagery, the poem conveys a sense of admiration, warmth, and connection, emphasizing the physical and emotional depth of the grandfather's character. Waterhouse uses poetic devices such as enjambment, symbolism, and extended metaphor to create a flowing, reflective narrative that highlights the theme of intergenerational connection and the process of truly understanding and appreciating a loved one.

**COMPARISON WITH,**  
**Mother any distance**  
**Follower**  
**Before u were mine**

Here's a comparative analysis of "*Climbing My Grandfather*" by Andrew Waterhouse, "*Mother, Any Distance*" by Simon Armitage, "*Follower*" by Seamus Heaney, and "*Before You Were Mine*" by Carol Ann Duffy, focusing on their themes, tone, structure, and use of imagery.

## Summary of the Poems

- **“Climbing My Grandfather”**: The speaker metaphorically climbs their grandfather, describing him as though he were a mountain, representing strength, stability, and warmth. The climb is a journey of discovery, as the speaker seeks to understand and connect with the grandfather, appreciating his physicality and character.
- **“Mother, any distance”**: In this poem, the speaker reflects on their relationship with their mother as they prepare to become more independent. The act of measuring distances in a new home becomes a metaphor for the emotional distance that is growing as the speaker transitions into adulthood.
- **“Follower”**: This poem explores the father-son relationship, with the speaker recalling his admiration for his father's skill as a farmer. The roles reverse as the father ages and becomes dependent on the son, representing the natural shift in roles as time passes.
- **“Before You Were Mine”**: In this poem, the speaker reflects on their mother's life before becoming a parent. The speaker imagines the mother's youthful, carefree life, before the responsibilities of motherhood took over. The poem reflects both admiration and longing for that lost version of the mother.

## Thematic Comparison

1. **Parent-Child and Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships:**
  - **“Climbing My Grandfather”** focuses on the relationship between the speaker and their grandfather. The poem highlights the speaker's admiration for the grandfather's stability, wisdom, and warmth. It's a metaphorical exploration of the bond between them.
  - **“Mother, any distance”** is about the evolving mother-child relationship as the child grows independent. The mother provides support, but the speaker acknowledges that distance is inevitable as they grow up.
  - **“Follower”** focuses on the father-son relationship, initially emphasizing the speaker's admiration for his father's physical strength and skill, before shifting to the father's dependence on the son in later life.
  - **“Before You Were Mine”** reflects on the mother-daughter relationship, focusing on the mother's life before parenthood. The speaker feels a sense of loss for the carefree woman her mother used to be, admiring her independence and spirit before becoming a mother.
2. **Admiration and Reflection:**
  - In **“Climbing My Grandfather”**, the speaker's admiration for the grandfather is central. The metaphorical climb reflects an exploration of the grandfather's character, portraying him as a figure of strength and stability.
  - **“Mother, any distance”** reflects a bittersweet admiration for the mother's support, recognizing the need for independence but acknowledging the strong bond they share.
  - **“Follower”** conveys deep admiration for the father's skill and expertise as a farmer. However, there's also a sense of frustration in the speaker's childhood,

as he struggled to follow in his father's footsteps. The admiration evolves into care and responsibility as the roles reverse.

- **"Before You Were Mine"** shows admiration for the mother's carefree, youthful self. The speaker imagines her mother's vibrant past, feeling a connection with and longing for that version of her.

### 3. **Transition and Change:**

- **"Climbing My Grandfather"** focuses on the process of getting to know and understand the grandfather. It's less about literal transition and more about personal discovery and connection.
- **"Mother, any distance"** deals with a literal and emotional transition, as the speaker grows more independent. The growing distance between mother and child is symbolic of the natural process of becoming an adult.
- **"Follower"** explores the reversal of roles between father and son. The father, once strong and authoritative, eventually becomes dependent on the son, highlighting the inevitable changes that time brings to relationships.
- **"Before You Were Mine"** reflects on the transition from a woman's youthful freedom to her role as a mother. The speaker feels that her mother's life changed drastically after having children, and the poem reflects on the loss of that earlier identity.

### 4. **Generational Connection:**

- In **"Climbing My Grandfather"**, the generational connection is strong, with the speaker metaphorically climbing the grandfather to understand and connect with him. The poem explores the strength and wisdom that the older generation passes down.
- **"Mother, any distance"** also touches on generational connection, as the mother helps the speaker during a moment of transition. The relationship is one of support, but the growing distance suggests a generational shift.
- **"Follower"** reflects on the connection between father and son, particularly in terms of farming tradition. The speaker once struggled to follow in his father's footsteps, but later, the roles reverse as the son becomes the stronger figure.
- **"Before You Were Mine"** deals with the connection between the speaker and her mother, focusing on the mother's past. The speaker imagines a time before she was born, exploring the idea of how parenthood changes a person's life.

## **Poetic Devices and Imagery**

### 1. **Metaphor:**

- **"Climbing My Grandfather"** is an extended metaphor, comparing the grandfather to a mountain. The act of climbing represents the speaker's journey of understanding and connecting with him. The imagery of the climb emphasizes the grandfather's strength and solidity.
- In **"Mother, any distance"**, the tape measure symbolizes the bond between mother and child, with the distance representing the emotional and physical separation as the speaker grows older.
- **"Follower"** uses farming as a metaphor for the father-son relationship. The son's struggle to follow behind his father's plough reflects his admiration and desire to live up to his father's standards, while the reversal of roles later in life is subtly implied.
- In **"Before You Were Mine"**, the speaker reflects on her mother's past, imagining the streets where her mother danced and lived freely. The metaphor

of those streets and youthful activities represents the mother's lost freedom and identity.

## 2. Imagery:

- **"Climbing My Grandfather"** uses vivid physical imagery, describing the grandfather's body as though it were a mountain. Details like "earth-stained hand," "glassy ridge of a scar," and "the thin and white as frost" hair create a tactile sense of discovery.
- **"Mother, any distance"** uses spatial imagery like "acres" and "prairies" to convey the vastness of the growing emotional and physical distance between mother and child, while the "endless sky" represents the possibilities of the speaker's future.
- **"Follower"** is rich in agricultural imagery, with references to ploughing, sod, and furrows. These images highlight the father's strength and skill and the son's struggle to follow in his father's footsteps.
- **"Before You Were Mine"** uses imagery of a vibrant, youthful past, such as "the fizzy, movie tomorrows" and "Marilyn," to evoke the mother's carefree life before motherhood. The imagery contrasts with the responsibilities of being a parent.

## 3. Tone and Mood:

- **"Climbing My Grandfather"** has a tone of admiration and discovery. The speaker's journey of "climbing" is one of reflection and connection, creating a mood of intimacy and respect.
- **"Mother, any distance"** has a bittersweet tone, balancing between admiration for the mother's support and the speaker's excitement and apprehension about independence. The mood is reflective and slightly melancholic.
- **"Follower"** begins with a tone of admiration for the father's strength and skill, but it shifts to one of frustration as the speaker struggles to live up to his father's standards. The mood becomes more melancholic in the final stanza, as the father becomes dependent on the son.
- **"Before You Were Mine"** has a tone of admiration mixed with longing. The speaker imagines her mother's life before she was born, evoking a sense of loss for that version of her mother. The mood is reflective and slightly wistful.

## Conclusion

*"Climbing My Grandfather"*, *"Mother, Any Distance"*, *"Follower"*, and *"Before You Were Mine"* all explore relationships across generations, whether between parent and child or grandparent and grandchild. Each poem uses vivid imagery and metaphor to reflect on admiration, transition, and the shifting roles between generations. While *"Climbing My Grandfather"* focuses on the stability and wisdom of the older generation, *"Mother, Any Distance"* and *"Follower"* explore the growing independence of the younger generation and the emotional complexities that come with it. *"Before You Were Mine"* takes a different approach, reflecting on a parent's life before parenthood, emphasizing the generational changes and the sacrifices of motherhood. All four poems capture the intricacies of familial relationships, highlighting the bonds, challenges, and shifts that occur as time passes.