

Orchids at the start stress their significance.
* Symbol for the potential relationship between Kay and birth mother.
* Kay as a baby needing cared for - fragile.
* The mother's guarded and secretive personality.

Unusual first line - we don't expect the poet to be only meeting her mother for the 1st time.

Enjambment - unsettles reader as this suggests something is wrong.

* Poem deals with Kay meeting her birth mother for 1st time.
* Symbol of orchid - a gift from her mother - portrays difficulties in their relationship.
* 2 line stanzas create sense of coming together as the 2 women unite.

Keeping Orchids

The orchids my mother gave me when we first met are still alive, twelve days later. Although

Simile - buds compared to secrets - mystery, impenetrable, connects flowers to mother and her determination to hide her past.

some of the buds remain closed as secrets.

Twice since I carried them back, like a baby in a shawl,

Simile - has been protective of them - links back to the past when Kay was a baby in need of protection that the mother couldn't provide.

from her train station to mine, then home. Twice since then the whole glass carafe has crashed

Clear separation of the two of them.

falling over, unprovoked, soaking my chest of drawers. All the broken waters. I have rearranged

Intrusion into the order of her life - parallel to unwanted child.

List - suggests her passivity - happens without her involvement and she must deal with the aftermath. Reflects her childhood adoption?

the upset orchids with troubled hands. Even after that the closed ones did not open out. The skin

Transferred epithet - reflects her feelings.

shut like an eye in the dark; the closed lid.

Twelve days later, my mother's hands are all I have.

Symbolism - the orchids refuse to open up, as does her mother - still secretive.

Personification of the flowers - simile reflects how secretive the mother is - "dark" suggests how lost Kay feels.

Her voice is fading fast. Even her voice rushes through a tunnel the other way from home.

Alliteration to emphasise loss of connection - no real depth between them yet.

I close my eyes and try to remember exactly: a paisley pattern scarf, a brooch, a navy coat.

A digital watch her daughter was wearing when she died.

Now they hang their heads,

Ambiguous imagery - flowers wilting or parents feeling guilt?

and suddenly grow old - the proof of meeting. Still, her hands, awkward and hard to hold

Word choice - Kay is "her daughter" too but we get the sense she doesn't see herself this way - feels no connection.

Synecdoche - can only remember clothes and not her face - detached, impersonal.

fold and unfold a green carrier bag as she tells the story of her life. Compressed. Airtight.

A sad square, then a crumpled shape. A bag of tricks. Her secret life - a hidden album, a box of love letters.

Unsure of whether it's her life as her mother that's hidden - suggests she kept it a secret for a reason.

One word sentences sound bitter - suggests she thinks it's an excuse for adoption. Well-thought out?

A door opens and closes. Time is outside waiting. I catch the draught in my winter room.

Cold, severe, harsh, inhospitable

Airlocks keep the cold air out.

Boiling water makes flowers live longer. So does

cutting the stems with a sharp knife.

Jackie Kay

This an "cutting stems" both harsh actions but keep flowers alive - decision to give up baby was right thing to do?

Last line on its own reflects separation from mother.

Nothing has really changed as time has stopped - meeting has little effect on her life outside. Short sentences reflect this severity.

Themes

* Adoption
* Family Relationships

Has clearly put a lot of effort into caring for them - difference between her and her mum.

Assonance - creates slow motion sense of vase crashing - creates sense of panic.

Minor sentence connects incident to birth - disruption to calm surface - life upturned.

Not really the orchids that are upset - her feelings.

Struggles to remember mother.

Repetition to show it's all she's thinking about.

Voice is metaphorically rushing away from her - link to separate train stations and distance between them.

Alliteration emphasises the lack of warmth or connection between them - still doesn't come easy.

Bag changes shape before her eyes - does this reflect the mother? Bag of tricks suggests deception.

Ambiguous - could be the door to the cafe or her past - shows how quickly her hopes have been shut down.

Could represent mother or daughter's defences - cold air could be truth or pain caused by this meeting.