Hide and Seek by Vernon Scannell

Hide and Seek by Vernon Scannell is a free verse poem that explores the major theme of irresponsibility or negligence. Just as the title of the poem implies, the poem is about the infamous game of hide and seek that every child has countless memories of playing. In this poem, Vernon tells the story of a child who starts playing the game of hide and seek with great enthusiasm and excitement. However, as the story plays out we learn that he played the game a little too long and missed out on the opportunity of ending the game with his friends; resulting in being left completely alone in the end. This simple game can easily be a metaphor for a person who hides away from people and friends in great energy and childishness, and when he finally decides he is ready to be in their company and be of any use or benefit to them, they are no longer there. They are no longer waiting for him, and no longer seeking him. You can read the full poem here.

Hide and Seek Summary

This poem is twenty six lines long and written in just one stanza, with a first and second person point of view. It starts off in the voice of the child, it seems as though perhaps the child is now much older and wiser, looking back at the memory of this game and speaking to himself, advising himself. Lines one through eight display the excitement of the child as well as a detailed account of his surroundings (the tool shed that smells of the sea side). We learn that he is calling out to his friends to come find him. He figures he will never be found in this “salty dark”ness, and makes sure to hide himself properly. He also reminds himself to be quiet and still, so he is not found easily. Lines nine through twelve discuss his state when the other children are so close to finding him. He can hear their voices “whispering at the door” of the tool shed. They linger there for a bit while the hidden child can hear their hushed voices laughing and muttering to each other. Here, the child then instructs himself to be still and “hide” in his “blindness” to ensure the other children do not realize that his whereabouts are so close.

Finally they decide to leave the area outside the tool-shed. Lines thirteen through nineteen describe the child’s wait, as he decides that the other children must be searching for him “puzzled” and declaring that he is quite “clever” for being able to find such a good hiding spot. Nonetheless, he starts to notice that they’ve been gone a “long time” and he himself is getting tired of hiding as he realizes how cold and “stiff” he is. He can also now feel “the smell of sand” moving to his throat. Lines twenty through twenty three show the child declaring himself the “winner” and deciding it was times the others recognized him for it. The last three lines: twenty four to twenty six conclude the poem by revealing that “nothing stirs as he realizes he has been left behind. None of the other children were there looking for him.

Hide and Seek Analysis

Hide and Seek by Vernon Scannell is a poem that centres around the metaphorical narrative of hide and seek. The title itself announces that the reader is about to indulge in an account of concealment and pursuit. A closer look at the poem exposes the prominent theme of negligence.  This negligence can essentially be related to anything, but to be specific we will discuss the negligence of responsibility/maturity in relation to opportunities that life presents to an individual. This theme fits perfectly, with the narrative of the poem being that of a child playing the childish game of hide and seek.

The poem begins with the obvious energy of the child as he calls out to the other children to come and find him. This energy is an easy parallel to the energy of an individual who decides he is ready to conceal his sense of duty for all his responsibilities in order to “play” the “game” of life. This childish person throws caution to the wind and expects others to come “find” him to pick up his slack.  He hides himself in a tool shed- which is quite fitting to the metaphorical narrative as the character has put his responsibilities in “storage”. Even though he is in the tool-shed it smells of the seaside; this could easily symbolize how delusional he is to hide away in a tool shed only to think that he is close to a picturesque seaside. While he sits and waits for others to come find him, he doesn’t want to be found. He doesn’t want to call out for others to help him as they may pull him back to the reality outside his “game” – his responsibilities.  So he does not “risk another shout” whilst considering himself all the wiser for it. The floor he is sitting on is “cold”, translating to the foundation of his immaturity being unsympathetic to the responsibilities that he must uphold in his life. He continues to wait silently holding himself back to ensure that he isn’t caught by others to face his negligence.

Then comes a point in his life when he can hear people at his door; people who he had initially called out in play to find him. They search for him by trying to make him see what he is losing out on in life by playing childish games and not stepping up to his responsibilities. All he hears is them “muttering” and “whispering” because of how much he has indulged and lost himself in negligence. When he starts to realize their presence he tells himself to be “dumb” and to “hide” in his “blindness”. This tells us that he is aware of what he is doing; his actions of negligence are not out of ignorance, but rather a conscious choice that he is making to stay blind to his responsibilities and opportunities in life. Eventually there comes a point when he realizes that everyone is “gone”. No one is reaching out for him anymore. He begins to panic but doesn’t want to seem desperate so he decides to wait until he is sure no one will try to pull him out of his negligence. He waits until his immaturity of being unsympathetic to his responsibilities starts to “bite” him and he can see the “dark”ness and feel the “damp”ness of his situation.

Now, he decides he has won his game of life. He has childishly hidden away from his responsibilities and opportunities long enough that the excited energy from the beginning has turned more into a rushing panic. He pushes off the “sacks” of immaturity that have been holding him back and decides to step out and join the others around him in living a proper life. He believes he has “caught” up with the others just by acknowledging that his silly games are over. Unfortunately, he realizes that it is too late. Just because he has now chosen to pick up his slack does not mean others were willing to pause their lives for him, for as long as it was convenient for him. “The sun is gone”; the source of warmth, life and essentially life, is gone from his life.  He is too late. There he is standing all alone, realizing the consequences of his negligence. In his hiding, he lost all those who sought him