

Amanda

Summary of the Poem Amanda!

Amanda! by Robin Klein

Stanza 1

*Don't bite your nails, Amanda!
Don't hunch your shoulders, Amanda!
Stop that slouching and sit up straight,
Amanda!*

In this stanza, the poet says that Amanda is getting instructed, most probably by her parents for biting nails and sitting lazily with her shoulders bent. The tone of instructions here is not a friendly one and thus fails to make any sense to Amanda. The poet here, focusses on the aspects related to the upbringing of a child (girl) and how parents go to any limit to bring proper sense to their child. Amanda is thus, getting trained for the society she is a part of. The pressure of making oneself presentable to the society triumphs over every other behaviour and manners. The last phrase or word 'Amanda!' is used with an exclamation mark which shows the irritation and frustration of the parent.

Stanza 2

*(There is a languid, emerald sea,
where the sole inhabitant is me—
a mermaid, drifting blissfully.)*

It is quite interesting that the above lines are given within brackets. Brackets are used to provide more meaning to the phrase.

In this stanza, the poet uses it (brackets) to present the imagination of the little girl, the free-flow of pure thoughts. Amanda uses her imagination as an escape point from day to day commands of her parents. She feels suffocated in the real world and thus finds peace in her very own created world where there are no restrains. Amanda is lost in a world of her own away from the

disorders and principles of the society. She imagines herself to be a joyful mermaid sailing without any confines alongside soft waves of the green sea. This world of Amanda is free and contained in itself and her happiness doesn't require any other human being. It is important to note that Amanda not requiring her father or mother points that she is being tortured by both of them. Her life is not going the way she wants, and there is no one to support her. For a child, mermaid is a symbol of freedom and wonder. Another meaning that is attached with mermaid is that they don't wish to be disturbed as they live in their own environs and would do anything to be like that. For this reason Amanda wishes to be a mermaid.

Stanza 3

Did you finish your homework, Amanda?

Did you tidy your room, Amanda?

I thought I told you to clean your shoes,

In this stanza, the poet says that Amanda is now being asked about whether she has finished her homework, or tidied up her room and also whether she has cleaned her shoes. These set of instructions marks a shift from the instructions given in first stanza. Now Amanda is being coached about the things that are related to her surroundings. The pattern of instructions explains that how every aspect of her is related to questioning and proper guidance. She is being disciplined for every little thing, making her lose every aspect of hers. Her innocence is eventually getting lost with passage of time. The way these instructions are delivered points out the regular nature of these lessons. Her name being called again with an exclamation mark shows that the parents seem to be losing their cool and are troubled. They are helpless in bringing correct 'senses to this girl as she is not paying proper heed to the instructions given by them.

Stanza 4

(I am an orphan, roaming the street.

I pattern soft dust with my hushed, bare feet.

The silence is golden, the freedom is sweet.)

In this stanza, the poet says that Amanda is again lost into her own world. After getting a fresh list of instructions from her parents, she wishes to be away from this daily routine life. The very first line is awfully depressing where Amanda hopes to be an orphan suggesting how much depressed she is because of her parents. This is indeed a very sorry place for a child to be in. Parents should be very careful in making their kids understand the ways of the world. While doing so, they should respect their child's awareness about the things around them. Amanda perceives herself as an orphan roaming on the streets, moving aimlessly without any purpose. She seems happy as she draws patterns using her bare feet. Patterning of dust by Amanda is important here as it brings order to the carefree world of hers. The shouting and yelling of her parents are too harsh for her to bear that she desires for this calmness.

Stanza 5

*Don't eat that chocolate, Amanda!
Remember your acne, Amanda!*

In this stanza, the poet says that the set of instructions provided here indicates how much essential it is for Amanda to understand the value of external beauty, and steps to be taken to preserve it start from a very tender age. Amanda is stopped by her parents from eating a chocolate as previously that had caused her acne. Here, we see how a child is made conscious of a natural experience such as acne. However, Amanda is still lost in her own thoughts and doesn't care enough to look up to her scolding parents. This carelessness further angers the parents and they ask for her attention when she is being scolded. The role of appearance in the society is given more significance than the basic values and creativity.

Stanza 6

*(I am Rapunzel, I have not a care;
life in a tower is tranquil and rare;
I'll certainly never let down my bright hair!)*

In this stanza, the poet says that Amanda is still lost in her own dreams. She pictures herself to be the long golden-haired Rapunzel who lived in a castle and had no care about anything. Amanda imagines that the life of Rapunzel must have been very peaceful and fantastic in the tower. But she wishes to evade the fate that was met out to Rapunzel as she is unwilling to let her hair down. Amanda doesn't want her peace to be disturbed anyhow. She seeks a life which is away from any other human form. We can see here how the presence of her parents and their inhuman behaviour had made her against any human connection. In the story of Rapunzel, it is because of a prince that Rapunzel is able to understand and receive happiness but Amanda doesn't require any prince, even though she is totally unaware about the feelings of love. The terrific effect of her parent's teaching on Amanda can be seen pretty apparently. Hence, she only wanted to live by herself as the presence of another being in her life would require her to act in a certain way. Amanda wanted to live free and happy.

Stanza 7

Stop that sulking at once, Amanda!
You're always so moody, Amanda!
Anyone would think that I nagged at you, Amanda!

In this stanza, the poet says that the parents keep instructing Amanda on the do's and don'ts, but Amanda remains lost in her own dreams. The parents believe that Amanda is not reacting because she is annoyed. Amanda's behaviour has made her parents look bad and they are worried about their image. They are concerned about how society will perceive them if their child always remains in a foul mood. They want to prove themselves as responsible parents who manage to balance out what the child wants and what the society expects out of Amanda. However, they have already failed in their efforts.

Quick Revision Notes

- The poem deals with the upbringing of a small child, Amanda. It highlights the struggles faced by the child. Poet Robin Klein makes an important point

that a child should never be denied freedom.

- Though it is parents who are responsible for proper upbringing of their child but that should not make a child feel trapped. Here, Amanda is prepared to be acceptable in society, and this training needs her freedom to be cut short.
- Her imagination is not given enough space; thus making her so angry that she wishes to be an orphan. The continuous nagging has, thus, made her moody.