

talk
to
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH

First Flight

Amanda!

1. Summary

This poem is written by Robin McMaugh Klein (born 28 February, 1936), an Australian author of books for children. Some of her notable works are *Hating Alison Ashley*, *Halfway Across the Galaxy* and *Turn Left and Came Back to Show You I Could Fly*.

The title of the poem – *Amanda!* with an exclamation mark hints that it is about someone's frustration or excitement. This is a poem about an adolescent girl who is constantly being nagged and scolded by a parent. She is criticized for many things: biting her nails, not sitting up straight, not finishing her homework, not cleaning her room and her shoes, eating chocolate, not looking at the parent when he/she is speaking to her, sulking, and being moody.

The parent is concerned about Amanda's habits and wants her to improve, but is not able to voice his/her concerns in a positive manner. Instead, in each stanza, the parent shrieks 'Amanda' three times.

Amanda's reaction is to withdraw and daydream about a world which is completely different from the world she is living in. So the communication from the parent remains completely one sided. Amanda remains silent.

Three themes are repeated in Amanda's imaginary world: she is alone, at peace, and free to do what she wants. She imagines that she is a mermaid drifting happily in a peaceful green sea, or that she is an orphan, so that she can roam freely, and in silence, on the streets, or that she is the fairy-tale character Rapunzel, who lives in peace, alone in a high tower. Silence plays a major part in her dreams. The parent's constant shrieking 'Amanda!', 'Amanda!', 'Amanda!' has obviously disturbed the child.

The first stanza describes the nagging. The next shows Amanda's withdrawal into a contrasting, peaceful fantasy world. The next few stanzas alternate in a similar manner: scolding, withdrawal, scolding, withdrawal.

The irony of this poem is that the parent seems to be unaware that he/she is nagging the child constantly!

To see a dramatization of the poem, click on the link below. The fifth stanza recited here is slightly different from the poem above.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhsD6TRtA7E>

This is what a mermaid looks like in story books.



To watch the story of Rapunzel, click on the link below –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaB470di-w>

2. Explanation Stanza by Stanza

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

The first stanza starts with Amanda's mother scolding her for biting her nails, and for slouching with hunched shoulders.

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

The second stanza, in parenthesis, is about Amanda's day dream. Amanda imagines that she is a mermaid. She is the only person drifting happily in a peaceful green sea. The word 'drifting' is significant here. It indicates lack of control, of moving aimlessly. It shows that Amanda is trying to escape from the controlling behavior of her parent.

*Did you finish your homework, Amanda?
Did you tidy your room, Amanda?
I thought I told you to clean your shoes,
Amanda!*

In the third stanza, Amanda's parent continues with her nagging and scolding - about her homework, tidying her room and cleaning her shoes.

*(I am an orphan, roaming the street.
I pattern soft dust with my hushed, bare feet.
The silence is golden, the freedom is sweet.)*

Amanda again escapes into an imaginary world. Her parent has made her life so unhappy, that she imagines that she would be happier as an orphan. As a reaction to her mother asking her to clean her shoes, she imagines that she does not have any shoes and that she is roaming freely on the streets, making patterns in the dust with her bare feet. The silence of the street is as valuable as gold for her, and her freedom is sweet.

*Don't eat that chocolate, Amanda!
Remember your acne, Amanda!
Will you please look at me when I'm speaking to you,
Amanda!*

Amanda is back to her reality. Her parent forbids her to eat chocolate as that will make her acne worse. Amanda is not looking at her parent when he/she is speaking to her, and gets scolded for that as well.

*(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!)*

Here, Amanda imagines that she is the beautiful fairytale character, Rapunzel, with very long golden hair. She is shut in a tower by a wicked witch. There are no stairs to climb the tower and the only way in which anyone can enter the tower is if Rapunzel lets down her hair, and allows them to climb up using it as a rope.

Amanda imagines that she is Rapunzel living a peaceful and carefree life in a tower all by herself. She says that she doesn't want anyone there with her and so she will certainly never let down her hair to let anyone climb into the tower.

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

Here, Amanda is being accused of sulking and being moody. The parent mistakenly believes that he/she is not nagging or scolding Amanda, and so there is no need for her to be upset.

3. Vocabulary

1. **Controlled** – ordered, or limited someone's action or behaviour
Drug use in the country is very strictly **controlled** by law.
2. **Instructed** – to order or tell someone to do something, especially in a formal way
The police have been **instructed** to guard her as she has received many threats from terrorists.
3. **Curtailed** – to stop something before it is finished, or to reduce or limit something
She **curtailed** her holiday and returned home early.
4. **Alternate** – with first one thing, then another thing, and then the first thing again.
The cake had **alternate** layers of chocolate and cream.

5. **Hunch** - to bend your shoulders and back in a round shape
During lunch break, the boys **hunch** around the carrom board.
6. **Slouching** – to sit, stand or walk with shoulders hanging forward and head bent slightly over, so that you look tired or bored
Whenever he is free he is **slouching** around the beach.
7. **Languid** – relaxed, unhurried
The friends went for a long **languid** walk in the evening.
8. **Emerald** – a bright green precious stone; here, bright green colour of the sea.
I will wear an **emerald** green dress for my birthday party.
9. **Sole** – only
She was the **sole** person sitting in the cinema hall.
10. **Inhabitant** – person or animals that live in a place
Lions are the natural **inhabitants** of the Gir forest in Gujarat.
11. **Mermaid** – an imaginary creature with the head and upper body of a female and the tail of a fish that lives in the sea
Children love the story book, 'The Little **Mermaid**'.
12. **Drifting** – moving aimlessly, without direction or control
The boat was **drifting** slowly on the calm sea.
13. **Blissfully** – extremely happy
I was **blissfully** happy when I stood first in my class.
14. **Orphan** – a child whose parents are dead
She became an **orphan** at a very young age.
15. **Pattern** – making designs
When you walk on sand your feet leave a **pattern** on it.
16. **Hushed** – quiet, soft
People were standing outside the room, speaking in **hushed** voices.

17. **Acne** – a skin condition that occurs when hair follicles become plugged with oil. It often causes pimples on the face. Acne is common among teenagers. Maya refused to attend the party as her face had broken out into **acne**.

18. **Rapunzel** – a young girl in a German fairy tale with extremely long hair
People will start calling you **Rapunzel** if you allow your hair to grow so long.

19. **Tranquil** – calm
I love to stand on the beach and watch the **tranquil** sea.

20. **Rare** – not common, unusual
White tigers are very **rare**.

21. **Sulking** – to be silent and refuse to smile or be pleasant to people because you are angry about something that they have done:
He is **sulking** because his father did not give him permission to go to the movies.

22. **Moody** – someone is moody when their moods change suddenly and they become angry or unhappy easily
Her brother became very **moody** and irritated all of a sudden.

23. **Nagged** - to constantly complain to someone about their behavior.
Amita is constantly being **nagged** by her sister about her untidy appearance.

4. Questions

Thinking about the Poem

- 1. How old do you think Amanda is? How do you know this?**
- 2. Who do you think is speaking to her?**
- 3. Why are Stanzas 2, 4 and 6 given in parenthesis?**
- 4. Who is the speaker in Stanzas 2, 4 and 6? Do you think this speaker is listening to the speaker in Stanzas 1, 3, 5, and 7?**
- 5. What could Amanda do if she were a mermaid?**
- 6. Is Amanda an orphan? Why does she say so?**
- 7. Do you know the story of Rapunzel? Why does she want to be Rapunzel?**
- 8. What does the girl yearn for? What does this poem tell you about Amanda?**
- 9. Read the last stanza. Do you think Amanda is sulking and is moody?**

5. Literary Devices

The following literary devices have been used in this poem:

1. **Rhyming scheme:** The rhyming scheme is as follows – aaba ccc.
The poem is in a conversational tone.

Don't bite your nails Amanda! a

Don't hunch your shoulders, Amanda! a

Stop that slouching and sit up straight, b

Amanda! a

(There is a languid, emerald sea, c

Where the sole inhabitant is me— c

a mermaid, drifting blissfully.) c

2. **Alliteration:** This is the repetition of a consonant sound at the start of two or more closely placed words.

(i) **Stop that slouching and sit up straight**– the 's' sound is repeated

(ii) **I thought I told you to clean your shoes**– the 't' sound is repeated

(iii) **Stop that sulking at once, Amanda!** – the 's' sound is repeated

3. **Anaphora:** This is the repeated use of a word at the start of two or more lines

Examples –

Don't bite your nails, Amanda!

Don't hunch your shoulders, Amanda!

Did you finish your homework, Amanda?

Did you tidy your room, Amanda?

4. **Assonance:** This is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line.

Example –

Don't hunch your shoulders, Amanda! – repetition of the vowel sound 'o'

5. **Repetition:** The word Amanda is repeated throughout the poem.

6. **Allusion:** This is the reference to something or any circumstance which is not related to the context directly.

Examples –

- (i) **Mermaid** – taken from fairy tales, refers to the feeling of wanting to be free.
- (ii) **Rapunzel** – taken from a German fairy tale about a beautiful girl who is locked up alone in a tower. Nobody can meet her unless she lets down her long hair, and allows them to use it as a rope to climb up. This speaks of Amanda's need to be alone and in control of her own life.

7. **Metaphors:** Metaphors are symbolic of something else without using any comparative word.

Examples –

- (i) Emerald sea – the colour of the emerald gem is ascribed to the sea
- (ii) Silence is golden – the precious quality of gold is given to silence
- (iii) Freedom is sweet – freedom is considered to be so good that it tastes sweet.