

AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGER

Summary

In the poem 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers' a woman expresses her suppressed feelings through her art. Aunt Jennifer is the victim of the male-dominated society. She has

no one to tell her mental and physical pain. She makes a picture to convey her deep feelings. The speaker describes the tigers which her aunt produced on the panel. They are set in motion. They are moving quickly by raising the front legs and jumping forwards on the back legs. In the green jungle they look free, bright, brave, fearless and magnificent.

There are men sitting under the tree, but the tigers do not care for them. They move on to their goal boldly and smoothly. Jennifer finds it difficult to make pictures by using the ivory needle. She is tired of doing the household work after she got married. She can't get herself involved in her artistic work. She has to do it in her leisure time. Even then she has to be sure whether her husband is watching her or not. So her hands are terrified. She will not be free from fear until she dies. She will be dominated by her husband. She will die, but her art will express her desire to move proudly and fearlessly like the tigers she has made.

Main points

1. In this poem, the poet addresses the constraints of married life, experienced by a woman.
2. Aunt Jennifer weaves tigers into the panel. These tigers are brave & have no fear of men.
3. Aunt Jennifer is terrified by her dominating husband. Her finger flutters due to the mental suppression. She is not happy with her married life.
4. She will die but her art will express her desire to move proudly and fearlessly like the tigers she has made.

Important Extracts

1. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

*Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree:
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty."*

Q1. What does prancing tigers symbolize?

Ans. Prancing tigers are a symbol of the spirit of freedom within Aunt Jennifer which remains subdued.

Q2. Why are they referred to as 'denizens of a world of green'?

Ans. The tigers are the dwellers of the green forest so they are referred to as denizens.

Q3. What qualities of the 'tigers' are highlighted here?

Ans. Fearlessness and ferocity of the tigers are highlighted here. Aunt Jennifer's nervousness and timidity are in sharp contrast to wild ferocity of the tigers who are not afraid of hunting men. Unlike Aunt Jennifer, the tigers fear nothing.

Q4. Explain; "They pace in sleek chivalric certainty".

Ans. The movement of the tigers are sleek, stealthy, sure, majestic and elegant. They are sure of their purpose. Gallant and confident, they move ahead fearlessly undeterred by any obstacles or hindrances.

2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

*Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand."*

Q1. Why do Aunt Jennifer's fingers flutter through her wool?

Ans. Aunt Jennifer lives in constant fear of her husband. She feels so nervous and terrified that her hands shake and flutter when she sits down to knit.

Q2. Why does she find it hard to pull the ivory needle?

Ans. She finds it hard to pull the ivory needle more because of mental suppression than because of physical weakness. Due to constant fear that she confronts, has become a nervous wreck.

Q3. Explain: 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band'.

Ans. The expression is symbolic of male authority and power. Matrimony binds the woman physically as well as mentally. Likewise Aunt Jennifer is trapped in gender oppression and feels herself burdened by the authority of her husband.

Q4. How is Aunt Jennifer affected by the 'weight of matrimony'?

Ans. Aunt Jennifer cannot do things freely. She tries to come up to the expectation of her husband. She seems to have lost her identity. The freedom that she dreams of through her art, is itself symbolic of her oppressed self.

3. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

*When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid."*

Q1. What is Aunt Jennifer's death symbolic of?

Ans. Aunt Jennifer's death is symbolic of her complete submission to her suppression.

Q2. Explain: "terrified hands".

Ans. Aunt Jennifer is terrified by her dominating husband and hence her hands are shivering.

Q3. What does 'ringed with ordeals' imply?

Ans. Aunt Jennifer has been so victimized in her life that even after death she remains trapped. We find her a victim of gender injustice and oppression.

Short Answer Type Questions

Q1. How do the tigers made by Aunt Jennifer look like?

Ans. The tigers, made by Aunt Jennifer on the screen, are jumping and playing about without any fear of the men beneath the tree. They walk in elegance and style displaying the spirit of courage, fearlessness, strength and confidence.

Q2. What do the tigers made by the Aunt symbolize?

Ans. The tigers made by Aunt Jennifer symbolize the spirit of courage, strength and fearlessness Aunt Jennifer, a victim of male oppression, expresses her crushed feelings in the form of art. So, the tigers are symbolic of the fear of male domination with which Aunt Jennifer suffers.

Q3. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer's hands are fluttering through her wool? Why is she finding the needle so hard to pull?

Ans. Aunt Jennifer is victimized by the overbearing and dominant nature of her husband. Her life has become a torture due to her suppression by her atrocious husband. The fear of her authoritative husband has gone so deep into her being that she seems to have lost all strength and energy. Thus her hands shake and flutter so much that she is not even able to pull the needle through the tapestry.

Q4. What do you understand by "massive weight of uncle's wedding band"?

Ans. Generally 'wedding band' is a symbol of joy and happiness. But in case of Aunt Jennifer, it has become a symbol of torture and oppression. Her relationship with her authoritative husband has become a painful burden to carry. Her 'wedding band' has brought her a world of pain, misery and torture. She has lost her freedom and entered a world of humiliation and oppression.

Q5. Explain 'her terrified hands will lie, still ringed with the ordeals she was mastered by'.

Ans. These lines convey Aunt's complete submission to the oppressive authority of her husband. The fear of her husband has gone so deep into her being that even death cannot liberate her from the chains of her mental suppression. Memories of her husband's tortures and atrocities which bent her into a humiliating slavery, will continue to haunt her even after her death.