Out from the Shadows: A Character Analysis of Amelia from “Blown Away”

Often times it is heard, “behind every good man is a good woman.” Certainly this is true for one of the characters in “Blown Away” by Jane Yolen. The story is told through the point of view of the farmhand, Tom, and details the account of what the family that Dorothy leaves behind goes through when Dorothy is blown away by a tornado in their hometown in Kansas. Tom is a central character, and his wife, Amelia, stands by him throughout the story. She is the push behind everything he does: she is supportive of his ventures in furniture making and in his side jobs on Uncle Henry’s farm. However, as the story evolves, Amelia shows her own independence and leaves her husband behind to pursue her own interests. In “Blown Away” by Jane Yolen, Amelia transforms from a behind the scenes character to an independent and outspoken woman.

Even though readers don’t get a lot of information to begin with about Amelia, her behind the scenes data is very important in setting up who she is. Amelia is only referred to as the narrator’s wife for the first half of the story, and these mentions are merely in reference to background information Tom gives the audience about his own life. However, in section four of the story, readers learn of Amelia’s behind the scene purpose. Tom tells readers, “When [my mother-in-law] became bedridden, my wife took care of her” (Yolen 255). Readers see that Amelia is busy as the full-time caregiver to an ailing mother. Amelia is also behind the scenes in her role as a supportive wife to Tom. Tom goes back and forth between jobs and she is there to keep him motivated in the work that he loves. She stands beside him when he takes a year to focus on his woodworking, and at the end of the story, she encourages him
to stick with his chosen craft: “Start that woodworking business for real this time. It’s the only thing you’ve ever really loved” (Yolen 263). She knows how much his business means to him and pushes him to keep going with it. It is Amelia’s plot function as a behind the scenes character as supportive daughter and wife that gives her relevance to the story. Amelia begins the story as a character behind other characters: a character that others can depend on.

Toward the middle of the story, however, Amelia begins to exhibit a change in her personality. She begins to show seeds of independence. It is this independent spirit that readers see sparked alive in Amelia; unknowingly, she desperately wants to escape the life of confinement as a caretaker and wife and find something new for herself. Tom describes Amelia as she watches Dorothy tightrope walking: “[she] watched Dorothy on the wire with an intensity she’d never shown for anything else…and she wanted to learn it” (Yolen 259). This shows a spark of desire for Amelia to do something with her life, something different. Amelia also breaks out of her shell when “she and Ozmandia became instant pals” (Yolen 262). Ozmandia is the bearded lady that comes to bring Dorothy back to the circus she had become a part of. Amelia is never mentioned to have very many friends, so this immediate attachment to a new and unusual person is a change that is seen in her character. Overall, Amelia’s exposure to Dorothy and her new friends and her new talents awakens something in Amelia’s own character: her desire to be independent.

Readers see Amelia’s final transformation in her decision to leave Kansas and travel with Dorothy, Ozmandia, and the Emerald Circus. After Amelia’s time spent as the sole caregiver for her dying mother, Amelia no longer wants to give herself to another person; she wants to live for herself. Readers can see this directly as when Tom tries to take her hand lovingly, she tells him, “I can’t…I just can’t any more” (Yolen 262). Tom is trying to show her love and tenderness, but she has given all she can to other people; she can’t do it anymore. Tom recounts Amelia’s decision to leave with the circus:
“…she told me last night, ‘I have never done anything for myself before. First there was Mother, and then there was you’ (Yolen 263). Amelia has been living her life for other people for too long, and she has finally realized that she wants something different for herself. Tom narrates that Amelia is willing to do anything like taking tickets, selling refreshments, or cleaning animal cages just to take a step away from her old life (Yolen 263). Even mundane activities like these give Amelia a sense of self, a sense of independence knowing that she is creating her own life. Amelia, even though she is a smaller character within the scheme of the story, goes through a huge internal battle to free herself from her constrained life. She did not have a bad life because there is never any mention of cruelty from her husband, but readers imply that she has never lived for herself and thus makes a difficult decision to leave her husband for a life on her own.

Overall, Amelia’s character is very minor in the story “Blown Away,” but her drastic change from behind the scenes character to an independent woman making her own life decisions parallels Dorothy’s transformation in this story as well. Amelia is unnamed for much of the story and thus becomes just a part of Tom’s life as his wife. She stays hidden in her caretaking of her mother and her support for her husband. But once Dorothy comes back with new ideas and interesting friends, Amelia is able to allow herself to explore thoughts of her own life changes. By the time Amelia’s ailing mother dies, Amelia has found the strength and will-power to move into a life of her own. She leaves Tom in a peaceful and amicable manner, but she is truly out for herself. Her drastic change in character is proven by her decision to leave with the Emerald Circus. Amelia proves that every good woman behind every good man deserves to have her own shot at a fulfilling life.
Work Cited