

The first place poem, "What I Wanted," demonstrates the poet's maturity as a writer. The deceptively easy lyrical style, the knowing line breaks, the poetic devices used, and specific diction mark this poet as someone who takes writing seriously.

This nineteen-line poem enumerates items, activities, and wishes that the speaker wants or dreams of. What caught my attention is the way this writer mixes his or her matter-of-fact wishes with the whimsical and even the far-fetched ones, giving clues to the speaker's personality and desires.

The poem opens with a variety of wishes that keeps our attention:

I always wanted a shorthaired doll  
made of glass, a rock collection  
all different, unique,  
a real gold ring with a diamond set in,

These first desires are vivid and specific. The doll has to be "shorthaired" and "made of glass," and the speaker asks for no ordinary rock collection, but one that is "different, unique." The ring has to be "real gold . . . with a diamond set in." The writer's word choice and effortless lyrical rhythm draw the reader in. Notice how the writer uses enjambment\* here and throughout the poem. The poet uses two periods in the entire poem—after "stage" in line seven, and to end the poem. The remainder of the lines end with commas or no punctuation, which moves the reader more quickly through the poem. The poem's two, grammatically correct sentences and its economy of language designate a writer nuanced in what makes a poem work amid the demands of the English language.

The next six lines offer more insight into the speaker's wishes. Like many, this speaker wants to "grow faster / be a bigger age / to perform on stage." The poet's randomly connected desires are disarming. This section moves on to more creative desires: "I always wanted wings like a pilot wears / ink that shines with light / making words only I can see."

Toward the end of the poem, the speaker becomes more personal. He or she desires "a locket with my parents' picture inside," but then immediately shows a child's whimsy with "to swim with the dolphins, / swirl like a twirling tornado / dance on pointe." One feels joy in these images.

The poem concludes with five well-crafted lines:

"to read like a grownup,  
fly from a cliff  
way high and steep,  
and every night  
a really good sleep."

These lines establish that "What I Wanted" is told with a confident voice, and, similar to the rest of the poem, mixes realistic and fanciful wishes. I enjoy the whimsical desire to "fly from a cliff / way high and steep" that is followed by the realistic and so necessary one: "every night / a really good sleep."

\* Enjambment is the continuation of a sentence or clause over a line-break without a period. Enjambment ends a line in the middle of a phrase, allowing it to continue onto the next line. It gives the poem more flow when read and impacts the poem's mood and energy.

The poet's effective use of sound devices such as rhyme and assonance contribute to the pleasing tone and playful mood of the poem. The occasional use of end rhyme as seen in: "age" and "stage," "steep" and "sleep" and the interior rhyme of "swirl" and "twirling," plus the clever "swim" and "dolphin" help achieve cohesion. Most importantly, these rhymes do not control the poem, do not substitute rhyme for meaning, nor do they encourage a singsong rhythm.

Besides rhyme, the use of the sound device assonance\* improves the rhythm and continuity of the poem. Assonance is especially found in lines nine, ten and eleven using the long 'i' vowel sound with the words "shine," "light," "I," and "inside." All of the sound devices make the poem pleasurable to read.

This first place poem gives the reader a litany of wishes that reflect a child's fanciful and realistic desires. The effective use of line breaks, punctuation, sound devices, and vivid diction point to an imaginative poet and a well-crafted poem. We need to hear more from this gifted writer!

*Thank you for the pleasure of reading your work!*

Marie Kane, Final Judge  
Sarah Mook Poetry Contest, 2018

*\*Assonance is the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds in neighboring words (as in "fish and chips" and "bad man"). Assonance is closely associated with internal rhyme. However, assonance differs from rhyme because that sound device involves both vowels and consonants that rhyme.*