

# Amanda Gorman - Roar

## THE MOTH



Amanda Gorman:

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"I'm going to be a mighty king, like no king before. Everybody, look left, look right, everywhere you look, I'm standing in the spotlight." These were the words that I repeated to myself as I walked into the LA audition room where 100 other girls were trying out to be Nala on Broadway in New York. The air smelled of Hollywood and desperation. It was crammed with these monster mothers and their savage children. You have no idea, these kids are like little demons. They'll step their foot out to trip you, they'll be doing pirouettes around just to show off, randomly just do a backflip because they can, whatever.

Walking in, I was just really glad that I would never be like that and that most of all, my mom would never be like one of those crazy loco stage moms. I walked in and I remember her saying, "Amanda, don't worry about it. Just have fun, and try your best." I remember, being in the corner, having my name on my back, doing my dance moves, stretching, getting it on, and a mother walks by and she goes, "That's cute, but it's not amateur night." Yes, my mom snaps. She went, "Hell, no! I know that lady didn't say that to my daughter." The *Lion of the King* grew out. All of a sudden, it was just no lines drawn. Yelling nasty comments at the other girls like, "Mm-hmm. I'm sure you other white girls didn't get the memo, but *Lion King* takes place in Africa. You can't learn melanin, honey. Okay, can't do makeup for that."

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I'm in the corner, trying to pretend that my mom isn't my mom and my twin sister's there. She's there not only for emotional support, but just to let me know how much I can fail. She comes up to me, she's like, "Yo, Amanda. I know you're nervous to audition, because you have a speech impediment and everything, an auditory processing disorder and you look like the black girl version of Russell Brand. But just have fun and be yourself." My mom said, "Move out the way. You can have fun when I have my one-way ticket to New York City." "Mom, what about being myself?" "Being yourself won't get mommy-- I mean, Amanda to the *Lion King*. Amanda, come over here. There's something you need to learn. You need to put yourself out there. So when you see the casting director, tell him you've already menstruated. You're post-pubescent, you won't grow, you'll look nine for forever. And if that doesn't work out, you can always act like a monkey, walk on your hands or some crap like that, and they may cast you as Rafiki."

[00:03:38]

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I am trying to kind of hear what my mom says, but also stay sane. I remember closing my eyes and just feeling I was so close to my dream. In my head, I saw myself loud and proud on a stage in front of a crowd, proving that a girl who's black and skinny and geeky and had a speech impediment could make it to Broadway.

Finally, after a little bit, they call my number, I walk into the audition room and in my head, I'm reciting the lyrics. "I'm gonna be a mighty king like no king before. I'm working on my roar, trying to be heard but these words don't sound right. Could I ever be in the spotlight?" And I'm there in front of the casting director and I remember what my mom told me so I said, "Yo, good news. I've already had my period. So, this is as high as I'm gonna get, I can stay Nala for a really long time if you know what I mean." "What I--?" I cannot imitate his face, I'm not going to try it.

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And then I tell him, "I know I just sing that little *Mighty King* song, but I have other stuff in me." [singing *Lion King* song] And then I heard my mom's voice in my head telling me to pull out all the stops that, if worse came to worst, and this was worst at the moment, I should, you know, walk on my hands or something and act like a monkey. So I do not lie, I stepped back-- [walks on hands] -- And walked on my hands out of the audition room. True.

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I was waiting there with the other girls. Everyone's so tense. The monster moms are pushing people out the way so they can hear. They start listing the names of people who get callbacks, and I'm so excited. They haven't called my name yet. The casting director comes out and says, "Thank you everyone for coming. That is all." I remember feeling so broken by what was supposed to be my big break. My mom came over to me and said, "It's okay. You tried your best. You're always going to be Nala in my heart." Part of me was so glad to know that I would never be like one of those girls who made it to Broadway because I would still make it here. I'd still make it to now being loud and proud in front of a crowd on a stage where I know I am a mighty king, mightier than before. I might be working on my roar, but look left, look right, here I am tonight in the spotlight.