Realistic Hardships Between A Mother And A Daughter In Two Kinds

Amy Tan, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, is a Chinese American author who was born and raised in California and attended numerous colleges to pursue her writing ambitions. Tan, who was once a rebellious teen, wrote the fictional short story “Two Kinds”, revealing the strained relationship between a mother and a daughter using the character along with symbolism to support the theme.

Jing-mei, the main character, is a very stubborn and defiant girl. At first, she was excited to discover her hidden talent, but not soon after did that quickly fade away when her mother constantly smothered her with new unrealistic tests, “The tests got harder- multiplying numbers in my head, finding the queen of hearts in a deck of cards, trying to stand on my head without using my hands, predicting the daily temperatures in Los Angeles, New York, and London” (Tan 640). She did not like to be compared to her cousin, Waverly, because she was a “prodigy”, “I thought she was snotty. Waverly Jong had gained a certain amount of fame as Chinatown’s Littlest Chinese Chess Champion” (Tan 643). She would try her best, but would still disappoint her mother when she failed and that would upset herself, “And after seeing my mother’s disappointed face once again, something inside of me began to die. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations… Such a sad, ugly Girl” (Tan 641).

From then on she decided to stop trying and didn’t display any effort in her mother's newfound ideas, which only disappointed her mother greatly. She grew angry and started to resent her mother for she could not meet her mother’s expectations, “The girl staring back at me was angry, powerful...I had new willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won’t’s. I won’t let her change me, I promised myself. I won’t be what I’m not” (Tan 641). When her mother made her take piano lessons she hyperbolized the agony she endured, “When my mother told me this, I felt as though I had been sent to hell. I whined and then kicked my foot a little when I couldn’t stand it anymore”. (Tan 642). After Jing-mei snapped back at her mother, she never had to play the piano again. Her mother finally gave in and did not demand Jing-mei to become a prodigy anymore. These actions between the mother and Jing-mei only affected their relationship negatively, “And for all those years, we never talked about the disaster at the recital or my terrible accusations afterward at the piano bench. All that remained unchecked, like a betrayal that was now unspeakable” (Tan 646). The author uses the title of the story to portray the idea that there were “two kinds” of ways Jing-mei felt towards her mother, younger naive Jing-mei full of anger and confusion and older Jing-mei, who finally understands her mother’s reasons, “Who ask you be genius, she shouted. Only ask you be your best. For you sake” (Tan 642).

The musical piece that Jing-mei played in the talent show was called “Pleading Child”, which she realized when she was older, it symbolized her younger self. She would beg her mother to accept her for who she was, which sadly was not a prodigy, “Why don’t you like me the way I am? I’m not a genius! I can’t play the piano” (Tan 642). Tan uses the piano to symbolize the mother’s dreams for Jing-mei. Jing-mei’s mother gifts the piano back to Jing-mei for her birthday as a chance to repair their broken relationship, move forward and to leave everything that happened in the past, “I had not played in all those years, I saw the offer as a sign of

forgiveness, a tremendous burden removed” (Tan 646). When she finally noticed the song “Perfectly Contented” beside “Pleading Child ", she knew that’s how she felt about her mother. She realized the only reason her mother pushed her so much to be someone she wasn’t was because she only wanted the best for her, it was tough love and all is forgiven, “And after I played them both a few times, I realized they were two halves of the same song” (Tan 647).

Although Jing-mei’s relationship with her mother was nowhere near perfect she gained a better understanding as to why they were in that position. Even though Jing-mei’s mother wanted the best for her, she also tried living through her, but Jing-mei knew who she was and that was finally enough. The author did a profound job displaying the realistic hardships between a mother and a daughter using the change of character within Jing-mei and the clever symbolism to deliver the theme of the brilliant short story “Two Kinds”.