

Jennifer Klitzke

Colleen Abel

Writing II

Analysis of Two Kinds

1 November, 2008

Breaking the Curse In Two Kinds

Disguised in Mother's view of two kinds of daughters, "those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind" (473), are two kinds of mothers, those who nurture their child's talents and those who coerce their child to live their dreams. This generational curse is perfectly illustrated through point of view, symbolism, and conflict in "Two Kinds" by Amy Tan.

The point of view is spoken through the character, Jing-Mei who was the product of her mother's betrayal. Mother conceived Jing-Mei as a way to escape China and her mother's coercion. Just like Jing-Mei reaped the disappointment of her mother, Mother was never good enough to appease her mother, so she conspired a way to betray her mother so badly that she would be disowned as if dead. Mother had an affair with an American and became pregnant. It was a ticket out of China and to the life she always wanted. However, Mother's plan was costly: it meant losing her inheritance, first husband and children; but life in America would be worth the "regret." It was where "all...mother's hopes lay" (466).

Throughout the story Jing-Mei reflects back to the painful conflict with her Mother. After nine years in America, her parents were neither "rich" nor "famous" (466). This was when Mother made Jing-Mei the focus of her unspeakable "regret." She began to coerce the piano prodigy out of Jing-Mei. After all, Jing-Mei was the interruption that caused her to "[lose] everything in China" (466). Mother was repeating the dreadful curse her mother imposed on her.

The piano became symbolic of the conflict. Jing-Mei felt the sting as an unwanted child, one that had to perform to earn acceptance and love. “Why can’t you like me the way I am?” (469), Jing-Mei pleaded.

Although Jing-Mei was musically gifted, she was “determined not to try” and “determined to put a stop to [Mother’s] foolish pride” (470). Jing-Mei willfully chose to defy her mother and follow “her own mind” (473). This was her response to the curse.

The conflict intensifies at the piano recital. Jing-Mei’s piece, “Pleading Child,” was riddled with “sour notes” (471). Written on Mother’s “blank look” and “stricken face” were a message that “she had lost everything” (472).

After the “talent-show fiasco” (472) the conflict comes to a climax. Jing-Mei was certain she would “never [have] to play the piano again” (472) after embarrassing her parents, but to her shock, Mother ordered her back to piano practice. In adamant defiance, Jing-Mei refused and said, “I wish I wasn’t your daughter. I wish you weren’t my mother...I wish I were dead! Like them” (473). Jing-Mei watched while her Mother’s “face went blank” (473), catatonic. She watched the unspeakable resurrect – the “regret” Mother left buried in China. For the first time, Mother saw herself in Jing-Mei, the rebellious child who “followed her own mind” and left everything for the American dream. Then it struck her. Mother realized that she had become her mother – the source of her childhood misery.

Jing-Mei moves forward several decades and returns to the symbolism of the silent piano in Mother’s living room. Its lid shut “out the dust, [Jing-Mei’s] misery, and [Mother’s] dreams” (474). Before Mother died, she gave Jing-Mei the piano on her thirtieth birthday. Its symbolism was significant: “a sign of forgiveness, a tremendous burden removed” (474), an effort to reverse the curse, and leave Jing-Mei an inheritance – something her mother never did.

To Jing-Mei, the conflict was not fully over until Mother died. That's when she opened the piano lid, dusted off the recital piece, "Pleading Child," (475) and began to play. The notes returned, along with the memories. As a child Jing-Mei wondered why Mother "had hoped for something so large that failure was inevitable" (474). Then as an adult, she realized the cost of Mother's empty pursuit: the betrayal in China, the unfulfilled dreams in America, and fulfilling the very curse she ran from. This was the very reason that inspired Jing-Mei to remain unmarried and childless – breaking the curse once and for all.

Then Jing-Mei continued to the next song, "Perfectly Contented," and "realized they were two halves of the same song" (475), perhaps a description of what was to come. Now that Mother was dead, along with the regret, misery, and curse, Jing-Mei was free to develop the piano prodigy in her all along and discover life *perfectly contented*.