

Summary on the good daughter by caroline hwang essay



The Good Daughter by Caroline Hwang is an essay about the author's identity and dual culture as an American and her ethnicity as a daughter of Korean immigrants. She starts her anecdote with her trip to the dry cleaning store wherein she met a woman who is also of Korean ethnicity. She tried to identify herself as a fellow American-Korean by doing a customary Korean greeting. When the woman asks Caroline her name, she is inclined to ask if she is Chinese. The reason being is because Caroline mispronounces her last name, Hwang.

After Hwang explains to her in English of her ethnicity, the woman bursts out in laughter and corrects her. Caroline takes this a little offensive, probably because of the fact that she had just dropped out of graduate school and her "sense of identity" was disappearing. Confused and aggravated, Hwang calls her parents as soon as she gets home, and asks them why they never told her how to correctly pronounce her last name. Her mother responds by saying, "So what if you cannot pronounce your last name? You are American (13)." She was unsatisfied and disgruntled on what her mother had to say about the whole situation.

Hwang also begins to explain how her parents immigrated to the United States 30 years ago, and how her parents brought her up to thinking that she could be a very powerful person one day if she wanted to. Hwang, however, points out that she has to straddle with two different cultures on a daily basis, and she also feels displaced in her own country. Hwang's parents wanted her to attend law school, but she had other aspirations of being a writer. Hwang however, did not want to break her parents' spirits, and ultimately decided that being a writer would be riskier than being a lawyer.

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She explains how she is indebted to her parents and that she owed them “the fulfillment of their hopes” for her. Hwang was devastated by suppressing her true dream, and as a result, took up a Ph. D. in English Literature. She had thought that this would have been the perfect compromise, but sadly, she was not able to labor through a major she did not have any interest in. Although her parents were disappointed, they were not completely broke. Hwang on the other hand thought she was staring at the bottom of her life.

As Hwang approaches the culmination of her essay, Hwang explains how she had to make concessions in her love life as well. Her parents expected her to marry somebody Korean and give them Korean grandchildren. This was something that Hwang was willing to do when she was a young teenager, but now, so much in her life had changed and she wasn't ready to make that sort of commitment. Hwang wonders if her parents' expectations are responsible for the lack of passion in her life. Hwang concludes by saying that the children of immigrants are the first and last generation of a family that moves away to another country.