“I Stand Here Ironing” At A Glance

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Introduction and Plot Overview

The following paper states the summarized plot of “I stand Here Ironing” and also analyzes the character of the narrator as a good mother. This short yet deep story was written by Tillie Olsen in the year 1961. The story commences with the thinking of the narrator while ironing, and her mind wanders toward the request she presumably received from a teacher of her daughter Emily. Through her reflection, the narrator travels into her past and thinks about the era when her daughter was born. Evidently, the narrator is a remarried woman who has an elder daughter, Emily, from her first husband, and as the story goes on, the audiences become aware that from her second marriage, she has four more children. The reflections of the narrator’s past reveal that Emily faced a hard time due to the absence of her father and the Great Depression, and therefore, the narrator is not very sure about her talents (Gawthrop, 2022).

Emily’s Childhood and Maternal Sacrifice

The narrator was a single mother before getting remarried, and therefore, she had to leave Emily with the neighbors to go to work. At the age of two, the narrator sent Emily to the nursery, where the conditions and atmosphere were awful. The narrator’s retrospect shows that eventually, she got married again, and when she gave birth to another daughter, Emily caught measles and was therefore sent to a convalescent home. Later on, the narrator comes to know the horrible situation of that convalescent home. These ups and downs of life made Emily very complicated and unsociable. To pass the time in school, she started to mimic the people. She was a talented girl, and because of that, she is going to perform in her school as a comedian. Her performance was admirable and amazed the narrator, as she was dubious about her skills.

The Narrator as a Caring Mother

If one analyzes the story consciously, one will find out that the narrator is a caring, hard-working mother and has a great admiration for her daughter. Throughout the retrospect, the narrator takes delight in recalling the beautiful memories of her elder daughter, Emily. She is a caring mother as she remembers each and every little detail about Emily, and she recalls that when Emily was a little one, she loved the textures, light, music and colors. The story says that “she was a beautiful baby. She

blew shining bubbles of sound. She loved motion, loved light, loved color and music and textures. She was a miracle to me." (Olsen, 1) This piece of memory and monologue of the narrator shows a mother who cares for her daughter a lot and notices even little things about her beloved child (Althobaiti, 2022).

Hardship and Maternal Responsibility

Moreover, the memories of the narrator assert that she is a hard-working mother and she went through very tough times to eke out a better life for her daughter. The tragedy of the narrator implies that she does not have any choice but to stay stronger, and in due course of standing erect in the harsh living conditions, she learns to repress her true feelings and to neglect the outcomes. Due to the economic situation and the absence of the narrator's husband, it was complicated for the mother and daughter to survive in the dominant male society where men are supposed to earn, and females are subject to supervising domestic affairs. But in the life of the narrator, she has to play the roles of male and female altogether; that gradually made her work hard, and because of her hard work, she even ignores her elder daughter. The narrator states her hard-working days by reflecting that "I was nineteen. It was the pre-relief, pre-WPA world of the depression. I would start running as soon as I got off the streetcar, running up the stairs, the place smelling sour, and awake or asleep to startle awake, when she saw me she would break into a clogged weeping that could not be comforted, a weeping I can hear yet." (Olsen, 1) This memory of the narrator portrays the absolute need for her hard work as well as the helplessness of both mother and daughter (PapersOwl, 2023).

The Mother-Daughter Relationship

Throughout the story, it is also evident that the narrator has a hidden admiration for her elder daughter and silently appreciates her presence in the narrator's life. Emily shares a special connection with the narrator because she was the firstborn child and was always there to silently ease the burden of her mother. The narrator reflects in admiration that because of her hardships, her eldest daughter learns to suppress her feelings and acts like a grown-up, even in her early years. She recalls that Emily never cried in school like other kids, and when she was scared of bullies, she just fabricated different excuses to stay away from school and never told the truth to her mother to save her from stress. She recalls that "She (Emily) always had a reason why we should stay home." (Olsen 2) Furthermore, she remembers that despite being a child, Emily always tried to find an excuse: "But never a direct protest, never rebellion." (Olsen, 2). By thinking about all of her daughter's sacrifices and devotion, the narrator feels sick in her gut and regrets demanding so much goodness from a little girl (Interesting Literature, 2023).

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Emily’s Talent and Personal Growth

This admiration makes the narrator appreciate and admire the talent of her daughter and respect her stability that, despite all hindrances, she made her place. At this point, she narrates the scenario of the stage where Emily performs and gets loads of praise. The narrator says with the enthusiasm of a mother, “You must have seen it in her pantomimes; you spoke of her rare gift for comedy on the stage that arouses laughter out of the audience so dear they applaud and applaud and do not want to let her go.” (Olsen. 2) The backdrop of the narration affirms that the narrator is a good mother, and regardless of facing extreme hardship in her life, she secretly cares for and admires her daughter and is secretively grateful for her presence in her life. All these incidents and the inner feelings of the narrator affirm that she admires her daughter a lot. The above-given analysis affirms that the narrator is a good mother because she is a caring, hardworking mother and admires her daughter.

References

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