Daughter Of Fortune Essay, Research Paper

Daughter of Fortune

In the book, Daughter of Fortune, by Isabel Allende, the characters are ever changing. You have Eliza, who through most of the novel dresses as a boy, Jacob Todd who transitions between a Bible salesman and a newspaper reporter, Joe Bonecrusher who transitions from a tough, emotionless woman to a very caring person, and Joaquin who transitions from an innocent, poor Chilean boy to a person who is hunted down and killed. Many of the characters in Daughter of Fortune experience a transition in their life, and I will tell you about four of those characters.

A transition can mean a lot of things. One of the more known transitions is the boy becoming a man idea. One example I thought of that expressed this well was the one I read in “Proofs” by Richard Rodriguez, about the young boys who risked their lives to come across the border. Rodriguez stated, “You are a boy from a Mexican Village. You have come into the country on your knee with your head down. You are a man” (34). This is just one example, but there are all kinds of transitions an individual goes through in their life. One transition can be as simple as getting older and maturing. Another can be changing your views or your beliefs. You can also make a transition by turning into a totally different person like Joaquin Andieta and Jacob Todd did in the novel.

Daughter of Fortune starts out with a baby left on the doorstep of Jeremy Sommers. He and his sister Rose had arrived in Valparaiso from London a year and a half before Eliza came into the picture. They moved into a very nice mansion, and acquired the services of mama Fresia. Rose was determined to keep and raise the baby as her own. While Rose made sure of it that Eliza knew how to layer her petticoats and play the piano, mama Fresia spent hours with Eliza gardening and cooking. Eventually, Eliza meets a young man by the name of Joaquin Andieta, who works for her uncle, John Sommers. They end up having a love affair, where they would meet secretly in the middle of the night. Joaquin decides to take off to California to mine for gold, leaving Eliza behind. The pregnant Eliza takes off after him hidden on a ship with the help of a Chinese physician by the name of Tao Chi’en. Eliza falls ill, loses her baby and Tao Chi’en is there to take care of her.

Disguised as a man, Eliza spends several years searching the mining camps of northern California for her lover. At first, she is disguised as a Chinese boy. Then she transforms herself into a Chilean boy, acting as if she is the brother of Joaquin. Eliza will come in contact with a traveling brothel, where she decides to go along and play the piano for them. She eventually makes it back to San Francisco to live with Tao Chi’en. Together they start saving the lives of young Chinese girls who are sold to brothels, and are living in horrible, filthy conditions. They form an underground system where they have the help of Quakers, and Babalu the bad from the traveling brothel. Eliza soon hears word that Andieta had became a bandit and a group of men were sent out to search for him, bringing him back dead or alive. The men bring back what they say is Joaquin’s head, and display it for all to see. Eliza learns his head is on display and wants to go and see it immediately. With Tao Chi’en by her side, Eliza takes one look at the head, states she is free, and walks away.

I want to start off with the transitions that Eliza went through. She had made the most transitions of all the characters. Her first transition was going from a little girl to a young woman, when she falls in love with Joaquin. She gets carried away with the illusion of love, and falls head over heels for him. Her second transition was when Tao Chi’en had made the decision to sneak her off the boat as a Chinese boy. She decided she actually liked dressing in men’s clothes because they weren’t as restricting as women’s. She then transitions to a Chilean boy, who is supposed to be the brother of Joaquin. Her final transition was at the end of the book when she starts to pull out her dresses that she had brought with her. She had started to get the feeling back of wanting to dress like a woman again. “Ultimately, Eliza discovers strength, resilience, independence and true love, none of it the easy way” (Carman).

Although Eliza had made the most transitions, Jacob Todd’s was the oddest. His first transition started in the beginning of the novel, when he had lost a bet. The narrator stated, “With the braggadocio of a high-living man with too much beer in his belly, he had bet at a gaming table in his London club that he could sell Bibles anywhere on the planet” (Allende 13). His bet took him to Valparaiso, where eventually he would be found out, and shamed. So, he returned to England. That was the last we hear of Jacob Todd until the end of the novel when you come across him in California as Jacob Freemont, the newspaper reporter. He went from a Bible salesman to a newspaper reporter. What a transition!

Then you have Joe Bonecrusher. She was the madam of a caravan that included the four women who worked for her, Tom No-Tribe, and Babalu the bad. Joe believed she was a man trapped in a woman’s body. She portrayed herself as this tough, unemotional woman who hated it when her adopted son, Tom No-Tribe would call her grandmother. Joe responded to this by saying, “Hell’s fire, I’m not anyone’s grandmother. I’m the Bonecrusher, do you hear what I’m saying, you damn brat?” (Allende 298). I believe her transition took place when people started coming down with dysentery. She took every single sick person in that needed her help to get better. She would cook for them, clean up after them, and read letters they received from back home. She had made the transition from an unattached, tough lady, to realizing she really had feelings, and could express them.

Lastly, we have Joaquin Andieta, who is somewhat of a mystery. When Eliza first met him, he was working for her uncle’s Import and Export Company. He would write Eliza these wonderful, deep love letters about how he felt and how much he loved her, but was a totally different person when they would meet in the middle of the night. Then, when gold fever hit, he decided to take off to California with no promise to come back for Eliza. Here is where he makes his transition from a young, innocent Chilean boy to a bandit. He ends up with men hunting him down and killing him. They bring back only his head and put it on display for everyone to see.

Daughter of Fortune was all about change. The characters made transitions in their lives, whether it was for the good or bad, that effected their lives forever. Eliza ended up somewhere and with someone you never would have expected, Jacob Todd was able to start a whole new life despite his problems in Valparasio, Joe Bonecrusher lost her tough girl appearance and Joaquin was murdered. This was truly a novel of transformation.

Allende, Isabel. Daughter of Fortune. New York: HarpersCollins, 1999.

Carman, Diane. “Allende pens suspenseful masterpiece”.Rev. of Daughter of Fortune, by

Isabel Allende. Denver Post Book Review Oct. 10. 2000.

Rodriguez, Richard.“Proofs.”California Dreams And Realities.Sonia Maasik and Jack

Solomon.Editors.Boston.Bedford/St. Martins.1999.