

京大過去問 1999年 第2問

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Susan Lichtman is sitting in the crowded reception area of the dentist's office. She is waiting for her daughter, Nicki, to arrive, even though Nicki's last words out the door this morning were to forget it, she had no intention of letting anyone put braces on her teeth, and that no one could make her. Not even her mother. Especially not her mother, Susan thinks now, the emphasis hers.

She checks her watch. Almost four o'clock. Still a few minutes before Nicki's scheduled appointment. Even if she does show up, Susan recognizes, she'll be late. Nicki is always late, unlike her mother, who is always early.

(1)She stares toward the reception room door, willing it to open and Nicki to walk through. But Nicki has been remarkably resistant to her mother's will of late, and the door stays firmly closed. Are all fifteen-year-old girls so stubborn? So argumentative? What happened to the little girl whose love for her mother was once so absolute and unquestioning, whose every glance was filled with sweet and total admiration? Now whenever Nicki deigns to look her way, it is through eyes heavy-lidded with disgust, as if she is overwhelmed that this woman so out of touch with reality, this archaic, irrelevant remnant of the dark ages, could actually be her mother. Surely someone, somewhere, has made a terrible mistake.

The mistakes are all hers, Susan acknowledges silently. She's the one who is either too lenient or too strict, too inquisitive or too disinterested, too old-fashioned or too trendy, too much or too little. Too angry. Too protective. Too moody. Too intense. Too tired. Whatever she can be, she's too much of it, except for the one thing all the books say mothers should be — consistent. Unless consistently inconsistent counts for something, she thinks hopefully.

Not like her own mother.

Susan's eyes automatically brim with tears, as they do every time she thinks of the mother she lost to cancer just months after Nicki was born. So beautiful. So patient. So instinctively correct in everything she said and did. (2)What would she think of the mother her daughter had become? What advice would she give her? How would she have handled the increasingly challenging young woman her infant grandchild had grown into?

As if on cue, the door to the reception area opens and Nicki sweeps through. Nicki always sweeps. She moves as if there is a camera following her, recording her every gesture, her eyes on guarded alert for the camera's telltale red light that signals she is "on." Susan watches in awe of

her daughter's total self-absorption as Nicki removes her jacket and hangs it up, fluffs her long brown hair in the small mirror next to the coat rack, then retrieves a magazine from the coffee table in the middle of the room. She has yet to acknowledge her mother's presence.

"Hi, sweet thing," Susan whispers as Nicki occupies the seat beside her.

She hears a grunt, close-mouthed, barely audible. Maybe "Hi," maybe not. Nicki stares straight ahead, then without warning flicks her hair away from her shoulders, absently whipping it across the side of her mother's cheek.

"Ow! Watch that," her mother says, a touch too loud.

(3) Nicki's entire body tenses, her soft features hardening into a frown. Not here two minutes, Susan thinks, and I've already managed to offend her. She wonders only briefly why it's her daughter who's angry when she's the one who's been hurt.