

# Mrs.T

## A Character's Journey to find Herself Through Grief in *The Astonishing Color of After* by Emily X.R. Pan

Meets Expectations

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In the novel *The Astonishing Color of After*, Emily Pan, showcases the protagonist, Leigh, and her shifting journey through the painful aftermath of her mother's death. It is through this journey Pan reveals the theme that while tragedy may momentarily weaken us, it is how we find our resolve and grit to move forward that ultimately helps shape and define our character. When Leigh discovers that her mother has committed suicide in the master bedroom of their family home, she is devastated. This is shown when Pan writes: "In the beginning, that mother-shaped hole was made of blood. Dark and sticky soaked to the roots of the carpet" (1). The pain goes so deep, that Leigh does not feel that she can overcome her weakness and move forward. She must now seek comfort elsewhere as her initial place of refuge is damaged and broken. Her voyage then takes her to Taiwan, where she finds herself in culture shock and conflict with her identity. The author states: "People see [her] as different. And now finding [herself] so directly named - *hunxie*, mixed blood - like a label printed out and affixed to [her] forehead...it makes something twist in [her] guts in a dark and blue-violet way" (Pan 80). Her focus now is not just about overcoming the loss of her mother, but also about finding herself. As Leigh bridges gaps with her family and her culture, she must finally prepare to accept her grief and rebuild personal relationships back in the United States. In the text it states: "The ache for [her] mother is still there. [She realizes that] It's never going to leave. But [she acknowledges that] it's tucked deep inside layers and layers of remembering. Some of it good, some of it bad. All of it important" (Pan, 427). Leigh recognizes the importance of holding onto all of the memories of her mother, even the tragic memories, in order to move forward with her life.