

The Bonesetter's Daughter

By Amy Tan
(Flamingo)

Ruth Young is a Chinese-American living in California with a successful career as a ghostwriter for self-help books. But at 45, she finds can hardly speak up for herself.

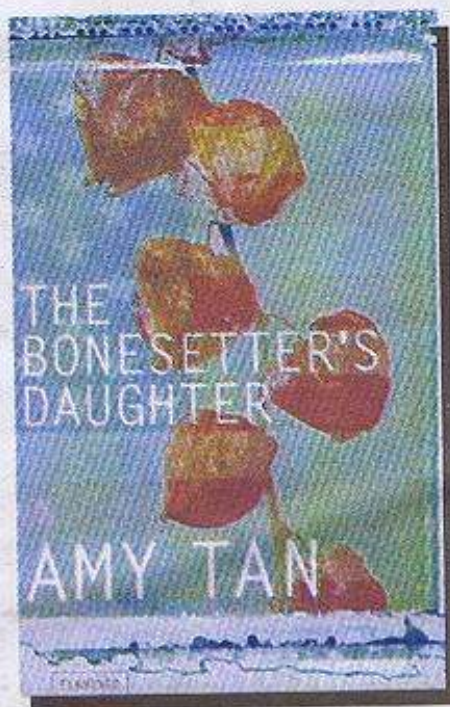
In fact, she is so fearful of causing a catastrophe that she regularly loses the ability to speak at all – a symptom of the cautious character implanted in her by her demanding mother, LuLing, who Ruth regards with quiet resentment until she develops Alzheimer's.

As LuLing becomes increasingly dependent on her only child, Ruth struggles to get to know her for the first time as a mature adult, uncovering a traumatic past.

Born to a rural family in the early 20th century, LuLing grew up in the sure belief that ghosts were real, the blind were prescient and that the special oracle bones found near her village could cure virtually any disease.

In her teenage years, LuLing's own mother resorted to suicide to prevent her daughter from marrying into a family she abhorred.

Although this was only the first of several tragic events to befall her, the shock of her mother's suicide



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and her own guilt affected LuLing for the rest of her life, adding a paranoid dimension to her strict adherence to traditional values.

In turn, Ruth spent her life resenting her strict upbringing, which occurred against the permissive backdrop of 1960s California, and her mother's own unyielding attitude. But in uncovering the set of traumatic events that explain – if still failing to completely justify – her mother's erratic behaviour, Ruth fully realises the impact that events long past still have on her own life.

An insightful book which highlights the culture gap within families where different generations have wildly varying life experiences, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* does not have any pretensions to high literature, and doesn't particularly need them.

The book's relationships and interactions aside from that between Ruth and LuLing tend to be simplified rather than subtly complex, but they are all plausible. The plot contains enough twists and turns to keep you turning pages, and the prose is solid.

A cut above other books of this genre, it's definitely a piece worth considering for anyone with a complicated family history.



Roslyn Fuller is the author of political thriller *ISAK*. More information about the Canadian, her work and the

Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at www.irishwriters-exchange.com