

Daughter of Fortune Study Guide

Daughter of Fortune by Isabel Allende

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Plot Summary

Eliza is abandoned as a baby on the doorstep of Rose and Jeremy Sommers. The brother and sister have immigrated to Valparaiso, Chile, from England along with their other brother, John, a sea captain. The three siblings agree to take her in and raise her as a member of their family. Much of her upbringing is left to Mama Fresia, the head of the servants in the household, but Rose keeps her hand in as well.

As she comes of age, Rose wants Eliza to marry well and makes sure she is trained in all the graces society prefers. However, Eliza falls in love with a poor Chilean, Joaquin Andieta, who works as a clerk in her uncle's shipping company. He knows he is not in a social position to marry her, so when word comes of vast quantities of gold lying on the shores of California for the taking, he joins in the gold rush of 1849. He wants to earn enough to return and marry Eliza. Soon after he departs, Eliza learns she is pregnant and decides to follow Joaquin.

Eliza goes to the port in Valparaiso looking for a way to secure passage to California without her family discovering her plan. She meets up with Tao Chi'en, a cook off her Uncle John's ship to whom she had been recently introduced. He helps her stow away on a sailing ship bound for San Francisco and joins the crew himself as the cook. When she becomes ill en route and loses the baby, Tao Chi'en takes care of her and saves her life. When they arrive in San Francisco, he cannot abandon her in the mostly male frontier town. They dress her as a boy, tell people she is his brother, and set out to find Joaquin.

Eliza and Tao Chi'en circulate through the Chinese and Chilean communities that have sprung up, looking for her lover. They learn what they can about the mines and the way of life there. Meanwhile, their friendship grows and deepens. When Eliza decides it is time to set out into the wilderness to search for Joaquin, however, she goes without him. She travels with various groups of adventurers, still posing as a boy, claiming she is seeking her brother. Although she finds many leads, she never finds Joaquin.

Eliza has many adventures in the California wilderness. She keeps in touch with Tao Chi'en, who eventually finds her and convinces her to return to San Francisco with him. In the growing city they work together and live together, becoming a family without having an intimate relationship. Eliza continues her search for Joaquin, but more out of curiosity than desire by this point. She can no longer imagine settling down as his wife, enjoying the freedom she has found. As California becomes a state and civilization begins to arrive, Eliza finally abandons her male persona and becomes a strong woman in a new land.



Chapter 1-2

Summary

Chapter 1 (Eliza). Chapter 1 introduces the reader to Eliza and her family. She was found on the Sommers' doorstep in a soap crate when she was just a baby. The story has several versions. Mama Fresia, the Chilean cook and housekeeper describes her as being wrapped in a man's sweater and covered in her own excrement with a runny nose and sunburned complexion. Rose Sommers' version is that Eliza came in a beautiful wicker basket wearing a lace-trimmed nightgown and mink coverlet. However, the details of her story change with each telling, whereas Mama Fresia's stay the same.

Rose Sommers arrived from England a year and a half before the baby appeared on their doorstep. She came with her brother, Jeremy, who is climbing the ranks of the British Import and Export Company in Chile. They came to Chile for two reasons: for Jeremy's career advancement and to escape the fallout of Rose's past indiscretions. She keeps house for him and is content to be a relatively independent woman who does not have to answer to a husband. The two of them have another brother, John, who is a sea captain. He travels around the world, but makes regular stops in Chile. Rose and Mama Fresia raise Eliza in their own separate ways. Rose gives her lessons in things like etiquette and playing the piano. Mama Fresia teaches her to cook and tells her Indian legends and myths.

Also introduced in Chapter 1 is the character of Jacob Todd. He is a man from England who lost a bet and has come to Chile to sell bibles. He arrives on John Sommer's ship and has struck up a friendship with the captain during the journey. John introduces him to Jeremy and they invite Jacob to visit them at home. Following this conversation Jacob gets his first look around Valparaiso, Chile.

Chapter 2 (The English). This chapter focuses on life in Chile for the English immigrants. Most of it is seen from the perspective of what Jacob Todd experiences. He gets to know the Sommers family. He is particularly enchanted by Rose, who shows no inclination to return his affection. He also becomes familiar with Eliza and Mama Fresia when he becomes ill from drinking the native water. They treat him when the English doctors failed to heal his symptoms.

Soon after he recovers from his illness, the country is beset by floods and small earthquakes, which result in looting, parties, and massive prayer sessions. Jacob notes the prayer sessions appear to have the desired effect of ending the natural disasters. He takes advantage of the calm after the chaos to propose to Rose, who turns him down flat. He does not lose hope, though, staying longer than his bet required and becoming known as a missionary. The Sommers' contacts lead to many donations from other English expatriates to his mission trip. However, Jacob is not very inclined to sell bibles to the Indians and uses the money to support himself instead. With the Sommers'



help, he is introduced into the highest social circles in Valparaiso and lives quite comfortably.

Analysis

The first two chapters of the book serve as an introduction to some of the main characters and provide a view of the time and place in which they live. The reader is introduced to the main characters of Rose, Jeremy, John, and Eliza Sommers and Jacob Todd. There is a lot of background given on Eliza Sommers and Jacob Todd, but just a hint of the story behind the rest of the Sommers and their decision to resettle in Chile.

The setting of this book is influenced by England under Queen Victoria, which was a society bound by strict rules of living. These chapters demonstrate how many of those rules followed the English to Chile and were used there as well. It also shows how different Chile is from England, highlighting the natural disasters and the drinking water issues, plus the native rituals that included religious processions and ceremonies and native cures for illness.

Vocabulary

batiste, sepulchral, totted, suffragettes, niggardly, protégée, prodigious, braggadocio, braziers, fastidious, ruminated, aberration, courtesan, phlebotomist, incendiary, abnegation



Chapter 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3 (Senoritas). Chapter 3 has two distinct sections. The first one describes Eliza growing into womanhood. She learns she has become a young woman instead of a child when she begins menstruating. She has lessons with Rose, who is now determined to get her into the best school in Valparaiso, in order to secure a decent husband. These lessons consist of sitting with a metal rod strapped to her back to improve posture, learning embroidery and piano, and learning to control her tempestuous nature. She also reads voraciously. Tutors teach her French, writing, geography, history, and Latin. From Mama Fresia she learns to cook, grind corn, do laundry, and perform other household tasks. Jeremy, however, is not inclined to send Eliza to school. Even as Jacob Todd defends her right to equal treatment, Jeremy reminds him she is just an orphan left at their door and should not be introduced into society as if she were a member of the family. Eventually Rose uses her wiles and insists Eliza be treated as her daughter. The family starts building up her trousseau and she continues to practice the talents that will make her marriageable.

The second section of this chapter recounts a story demonstrating the Chilean class system and introduces two minor characters. A daughter of a Chilean aristocrat, Paulina del Valle, falls in love with a member of the new rich, Feliciano Rodriguez de Santa Cruz, who made his fortune in gold after the floods and earthquakes exposed new lodes in the Chilean mountains. When her father forbids their marriage and sends her to a convent, Jacob Todd helps the couple elope.

Chapter 4 (A Ruined Reputation.) Jacob Todd makes a new friend, Joaquin Andieta. Joaquin is a clerk for the British Imports and Exports Company. He spends his free time in a local bookstore, discussing ideas with other intellectuals. Joaquin comes from the poorest Chilean society. He has no father and his mother is ill. He is a strong proponent of communal living, under which the people would govern with flexible laws. He is not a fan of government making rules for people, since he feels the rich always benefit at the cost of the poor. Jacob tries to help Joaquin financially, but he is very proud and refuses all offers of help.

Jacob's comfort in Chile ends when a chaplain arrives from England and looks into the state of Jacob's mission project. He discovers the numerous funds which have been donated to the mission have been appropriated by Jacob for his personal use. When this scandal is revealed, Jacob becomes a social pariah. He is disgraced and takes John Sommers up on an offer to return to England on his ship. As he leaves his friend on British soil, John tells him they will meet again. Jacob expresses doubt at this possibility.



Analysis

Chapter 3 continues to develop the characters of Eliza and her guardians. The different attitude each of the adults in her life has toward her coming of age reveals much about their personalities. Jeremy is concerned with how she will look in the eyes of others. Rose is concerned with Eliza making a good match. Mama Fresia is concerned with how vulnerable Eliza will be now that she is a woman.

Chapter 4 serves to introduce the important character of Joaquin Andieta. This man and his beliefs will serve as the catalyst for the second two parts of the book. Learning about his background and his intellectual ideas is crucial for following the progress and the focus of the story's plot line.

Both chapters also give further evidence of the class situation in Chile at the time. There are two distinct examples. One is the marriage of Paulina and Feliciano. Paulina's father (old money) is outraged at the impudence of Feliciano (new money) thinking he is good enough to ask for Paulina's hand in marriage. The fact that Paulina was willing and able to run off with him anyway also shows her determination and strength. The second example is the social exile of Jacob Todd. Although he has been a favorite with society since his arrival, when a hint of scandal surrounds him all of his associates (with the exception of the Santa Cruzes and John Sommers) desert him. There is no room in Victorian society for error.

Vocabulary

immolated, pragmatic, dissembling, coffer, augmented, colonnades, sporadic, innate, evangelized, virile



Chapter 5-6

Summary

Chapter 5 (Suitors). Rose begins actively searching for a suitable husband for Eliza. Eliza has matured into a young woman and is introduced into society by means of Rose's weekly musical soirees. Rose selects an officer of the English fleet, Michael Steward, as a likely candidate for Eliza's husband, although she does not share that information with Eliza. She arranges ways for them to be together during group outings, at dinners, and at balls. He begins to send flowers to the house. Rose does all she can to woo Michael on Eliza's behalf, but the plan backfires when Michael falls in love with Rose and assumes it is she who is interested in him. Eliza is surprised to learn Rose intended Michael for her and is determined to make her own match.

She meets Joaquin Andieta by chance when he comes to her home to deliver some merchandise for storage. She falls instantly in love. In the ensuing weeks, Rose and Mama Fresia both see the signs in Eliza and set about blocking the romance. Mama Fresia even goes to a medicine woman to ask for help, but is told no spell can cure Eliza's love.

Chapter 6 (Miss Rose). This chapter gives the reader the background story of Rose Sommers. She is watching Eliza's budding romance with an inappropriate man and recalls the single romance of her life. She fell in love with an Austrian opera singer, Karl Bretzner. She became first his groupie, then his lover. He had been involved with many of his fans before, but seemed to feel this was the genuine article. He taught her to love and they enjoyed a summer with each other before obligations in other cities took him away. They escaped to the seaside for a weekend together before his departure, but Jeremy followed them there and divulged Karl already had a wife and children. Rose was devastated and never got to say goodbye to the love of her life. Following this affair, she was deemed damaged goods and would never be able to marry, so she went with Jeremy to Chile when the opportunity arose.

Analysis

These chapters focus on romance and its implications for women in the nineteenth century. First the reader gets a look at the common games played in society. Eliza is unknowingly being set up by her guardian. Secret matchmaking occurred on a regular basis. In this case, however, the plan failed dismally, but left Eliza looking for someone for herself. Joaquin Andieta appears in her life at just the right moment. She has had little exposure to men and now feels like she needs to find one herself or someone else will do it for her. Joaquin is young, handsome, and taken by her as well. Mama Fresia represents the voice of caution, by trying to stop the romance before it happens. Her interaction with the medicine woman provides the message to the reader that love cannot be stopped.



The other story dealing with romance is Rose's affair with Karl. They conduct their affair quietly over a summer. Rose is in love and gets involved with him physically even knowing what it could do to her reputation. When the affair ends with heartbreak, as a woman she is left without options. It is made clear she will never marry, at first by circumstances and later by choice. There is a hint at the end of the chapter she is still in love with Karl and she maintains that fantasy in some way. It is not until much later in the book the reader understands what this means.

Vocabulary

metamorphosis, vagaries, belladonna, epizootic, profusion, desiccated, exuberant, stellar, apoplectic, odalisques, incandescent, karakul, amatory, relegated



Chapter 7-8

Summary

Chapter 7 (Love). Eliza has spent several weeks fantasizing about Joaquin. When he returns to the house, she gives him a note telling him to meet her in three days at a secluded spot on the property. Even though Rose and Mama Fresia are keeping an eye on her and concerned about this burgeoning romance, they have not been able to catch her doing anything they can stop. Joaquin appears at the appointed meeting time and the two begin to get to know each other. He brings her love letters each time they meet and they have long discussions about their families and their futures. Eventually, they meet in a storeroom at Eliza's house where they make love for the first time. Each time they meet in secret there, it is magical. Eliza idealizes her first love, overlooking some of his flaws. The most prominent one, she feels, is his tendency to drone on about his political passions. But she convinces herself he is more the man of his romantic love letters, and less the hasty lover with extreme political views that interest him more than she does.

Part 2

Chapter 8 (The News). In 1849 large pieces of gold are discovered in California. When the news reaches Chile, there is a scramble to get to California and take advantage of the opportunity to become rich. Feliciano Rodriguez de Santa Cruz wants to take advantage of it and makes arrangements to head to America to get a stake. His wife, Paulina, advises him the real money will be made in selling supplies to the miners. She decides to buy a steamship with the money he has been investing for her. The other character intent on finding gold is Joaquin. Against the wishes of his mother and Eliza, he decides finding gold will be the best way to get his mother out of poverty and make himself wealthy enough to deserve Eliza. However, lacking the funds to embark on this adventure, he ends up embezzling money from the import and export company and leaving Eliza in a hurry.

After his departure, Mama Fresia finds the love letters to Eliza. When she confronts Eliza with them, the girl admits he has gone to California and reveals she is pregnant. Mama Fresia offers to perform an abortion for her. Before that can happen Captain John Sommers comes back to Chile. He introduces his family to a new friend, his cook from his most recent voyages, Tao Chi'en of China. During his visit, he tells them the stories he has heard about California, which Eliza listens to eagerly. On the night the abortion is to be performed, Eliza is waiting until everyone in the house goes to bed, but is caught by John, who asks her what is going on. She denies there is anything wrong with her. He disagrees and tells her of the plan he and Rose have made to send her to England to be introduced into society there. Their conversation lasts all night and the abortion never takes place.



Analysis

These two chapters set up the rest of the book. Eliza's affair with Joaquin sets into motion her next actions. She thinks she is in love with him and finds herself pregnant, which will cause her to take some action. He thinks he is in love with her which causes him to get money however he can in order to capitalize on the gold rush and be wealthy enough to marry her. His departure for California will influence her upcoming decisions. The discovery of gold is significant for other characters as well. It gives Feliciano a new business opportunity and Paulina a chance to use her investments independently. It opens up a new job for John Sommers, who will switch from being a sailing captain to steamboat captain.

The other significant occurrence in these two chapters is brief, but crucial. It is the introduction of Tao Chi'en. Although Eliza meets him in Chapter 8 only in passing, he will prove to be an important part of the rest of her life. All of these integral events lead rapidly to the denouement.

Vocabulary

germinating, chamois, convoluted, librettos, temblors, oligarchy, visceral, gumption, conquistadors, harangue, illusory, meticulously, parsimony, quince



Chapter 9-10

Summary

Chapter 9 (The Farewell). When the Sommers family goes to town, several of them are planning to leave. John Sommers meets with the Santa Cruz couple, who ask him to be the captain on their new steamboat enterprise. They catch up on old times, including an update on Jacob Todd. Meanwhile, Eliza, unwillingly accompanied by Mama Fresia attempts to find passage on a ship to California. She follows another woman into a saloon, only to be accosted by drunken men who mistake her for a prostitute. She is rescued by Tao Chi'en, who reluctantly agrees to help her sneak on board a ship. That night he smuggles Eliza onto The Emilia, whose crew he has joined as a cook. He secures her in a storage hold for the duration of the voyage. He will have access to her in order to bring her food and water. She must stay below with only a cat for company. Mama Fresia, bids Eliza farewell and slips back into the Indian villages of Chile without a word to the Sommers.

Chapter 10 (Fourth Son). This chapter provides the background story of Tao Chi'en. He was born in China, the fourth son of a poor, traveling medicine man. He had a happy childhood, but a series of tragedies then struck his family leaving its members broken and poor. At the age of ten, Fourth Son (as he was then known) was sold into slavery. While traveling with his new masters, they were attacked. He had the opportunity to heal one of the attackers using the knowledge he had gained from helping his father. They were so impressed they sold him to a doctor in Canton. The doctor became his mentor and surrogate father. It was he who gave him the name Tao Chi'en. He learned the art of eastern medicine and many life lessons as well. When the doctor died, however, Tao Chi'en was on his own with a small amount of money he had stashed away to use for the aging doctor's care.

Analysis

Chapter nine is the real launching point for part two of the story. It is the moment when Eliza makes the decision to keep her baby and set off in search of Joaquin. She learns her first lesson about the place of a female in this venture when she tries to secure passage on her own, only to be mistaken for a prostitute. She requires the help of Tao Chi'en. When he agrees to help her, it alters the course of both their lives. They begin a relationship that will endure through many challenges.

Chapter ten gives the reader the first background on Tao Chi'en. Until then, he is just a peripheral character that touches the Sommers family briefly. In this chapter, like the chapter detailing Rose's past, the reader receives the full back story of an important player in the novel. The lessons that Tao Chi'en learns in this chapter will come to serve him in the future, particularly the ones dealing with medicine, gambling, and women.



Vocabulary

impeccable, shanghaied, proffered, subterfuge, pharmacopeia, calamity, voraciousness, charlatanism, venerate, mendicant, magnanimous, pustules, enclaves, crepuscular



Chapter 11-12

Summary

Chapter 11 (Tao Chi'en). The story of Tao Chi'en continues. He goes from Canton to Hong Kong, eager to begin his own life. He quickly forgets the teachings of his mentor, though, and loses all his money gambling. Determined to start fresh, he tattoos his hand with the word "no" to remind himself never to place a bet again. He bargains in the marketplace for food, trading his medical services for essentials. He begins to build up a business. He also makes friends with a British doctor, Ebanizer Hobbs, who is interested in learning eastern medicine and will teach Tao Chi'en western techniques. As Tao Chi'en's reputation grows, so does his bank account. He decides he wants to find a wife of good quality, meaning one from a good family who has bound her feet.

When he has accumulated enough money, the matchmaker finds him a wonderful match. Even without meeting before the wedding, they love each other in marriage. Tao Chi'en is delighted with her tiny feet, but soon learns the drawbacks to that way of life. His wife, Lin, suffers from ill health. She is unable to be physically active due to her dysfunctional feet, so the rest of her body is weak as well. She becomes pregnant and loses the baby at birth. Weakened by the still birth and chronic tuberculosis, she eventually slips away. Devastated, Tao Chi'en turns to alcohol and his medical practice is ruined.

One night he is called to a bar to try to fix a sailor whose head has been split open in a fight. When he sees there is nothing he can do for the man, he agrees to have a drink or two with the pilot who called him to help. The drinks knock him out and he wakes up on board a ship out at sea. He has been coerced into signing a contract to become the ship's cook for the next three years. Although tempted to desert at the first port, Tao Chi'en realizes he has nothing waiting for him in Hong Kong. He begins to enjoy life in the open air and makes friends with the captain, John Sommers. He is able to use his medical skills as well as learn to cook for the sailors. After several years of sailing together, they arrive in Valparaiso, Chile. John Sommers offers him a position on the steamship he will be captaining, but Tao Chi'en refuses. He does not trust steam, so John gives him a recommendation to join the crew of *The Emilia*.

Chapter 12 (The Voyage). While en route to California, Eliza falls ill. At first she is seasick, then she miscarries. She is unable to eat or drink. Tao Chi'en takes great risks in getting down to the hold to care for her and stealing food for her. When she seems likely to die, he is ready to give up. The ghost of his wife appears to him and instructs him to care for Eliza as he would have cared for her. He takes her message to heart. He is limited, however, in needing to attend to his legitimate duties on the ship first. Finally, he realizes he needs to have help. He recruits one of the prostitutes who is on board traveling to San Francisco where there are many men and few women. She has been helping with ill passengers already. He offers her one of Eliza's jewels from her trousseau to tend to her several times a day. When the ship arrives in San Francisco,



Tao sees it will be difficult to smuggle her out in a sack the way she came on board; cargo is being closely inventoried. So he disguises her as a Chinese boy and they walk off the ship with the other Mexican and Chinese workers who arrived at the port to unload the ship.

Analysis

Chapter 11 continues the tale of Tao Chi'en and how he came to be in Chile. The reader learns he has had a loving marriage and discovers the qualities he values in a woman. It also adds more depth to the historical era in which the book is set, by describing Tao Chi'en as being shanghai'd in Hong Kong, a common occurrence at that time.

Chapter 12 produces the crisis that will bond the characters of Eliza and Tao Chi'en together. After he spends weeks taking care of her, they have a deeper relationship that is not easily broken. This chapter also uses some mysticism in the character of Lin's ghost. Tao has shown signs before of following the eastern beliefs that the ghosts of his ancestors need to be taken care of. Here the reader sees how the relationship the living have with the dead is beneficial to the living. Lin gives Tao Chi'en the strength to go on. Finally, at the end of the chapter, Eliza dons the disguise she will wear for quite a while. Her transformation from woman to boy is necessary in their new world.

Vocabulary

sampan, nubile, reminiscent, abysmal, tremens, imbued, obligatory, litany, prostrate, hemorrhaging, stipulated, diaphanous, hirsute



Chapter 13-14

Summary

Chapter 13 (The Argonauts). Eliza and Tao Chi'en have arrived in San Francisco, which is not much more than a frontier encampment at this point. They explore and quickly learn the various countries represented there are segregated into their own areas. Eliza realizes it may be more difficult than she thought to find Joaquin and begs Tao Chi'en to stay with her instead of returning to the ship as he had planned. He feels guilty abandoning her in a rough town with no women and no idea where to look for her lover. Together they find accommodations for the night, though they are not given beds since it is thought they are both Chinese. The next day they find someone who has heard of Joaquin and are directed to the settlement of Sacramento. Once again Eliza convinces Tao Chi'en to accompany her and they sail to Sacramento.

When they arrive, there is no sign of Joaquin, so Tao Chi'en determines they will put down stakes and make some money. He establishes himself as a doctor much as he did in Hong Kong, by building his reputation and she cooks meals for the miners, who are thrilled to have home cooked food. He builds a small shelter for them to call home and plants some medicinal plants outside. He seems content with the new life they are establishing, but Eliza is restless to search for her love. Finally, she buys a horse and disguises herself as a cowboy. When Tao Chi'en refuses to come with her, she sets out on her own.

Chapter 14 (The Secret). Back in Valparaiso, the Sommers discover Eliza's disappearance. John has signed a contract with Paulina (who has a crazy scheme to use ice from a glacier to keep fresh fruits cold all the way to California) and is at sea. But Rose and Jeremy soon learn Eliza did not spend the week with friends in the country as they had believed. Rose learns the identity of Joaquin and goes to see his mother. She informs Rose Joaquin went to California weeks before Eliza disappeared. When John returns to Chile to load up the ship and head for California, he is confronted with Eliza's disappearance. Rose breaks with family tradition and brings up her own past, comparing Eliza's situation to her own. When Jeremy protests it is not the same since Eliza is not really family, the truth comes out. Eliza is John Sommers' daughter.

Meanwhile, in California, Eliza, disguised as a cowboy, joins with other travelers and puts out the story that she is looking for her older brother, Joaquin. As she rides through the territory searching, she sees many atrocities. There is illness, injury, and violence between the various groups of miners all trying to stake their claims. Finally she hears a definite story about Joaquin in which some Americans and some Hispanics got into a fight over a piece of land. The outcome was a foregone conclusion: the Americans took the land and the Hispanics, one of which was Joaquin, had to move on.



Analysis

Chapter 13 is the reader's first look at the kind of place California is in 1849. San Francisco is a rough mining town where the only women are prostitutes. This sets up the reasons Eliza must continue to pose as a male. However, this change for her also plants the seeds of independence that become a crucial part of her character development. As a boy she is able to work as a cook and eventually outfit herself as a cowboy and head out on her own. This chapter also reinforces the relationship between Eliza and Tao Chi'en. He cares for her, but there is still a lot of obligation in the relationship. He is not necessarily helping her for any reason other than guilt at abandoning her. When she makes the decision to set out on her own, he does not stop her or feel that he must go, too.

Chapter 14 reveals much about the dynamics of the Sommers family. When attempts to resolve Eliza's disappearance fail, the truth comes out. The openness of the relationship between John and Rose (who knew his secret all these years) is in direct contrast to their relationship with Jeremy, who is hurt and upset they did not confide in him. The comfort of the family has been constructed on this carefully woven web of hidden truths, so revealing the secrets changes the way the family behaves. This chapter also introduces the conflict between the various ethnic groups in California. Joaquin's involvement in the land dispute foreshadows his role in upcoming events.

Vocabulary

placers, stevedores, Argonauts, heterogeneous, fortified, repugnance, pettifoggers, wraiths, equilibrium, pretext, cirrhosis



Chapter 15-16

Summary

Chapter 15 (El Dorado). Eliza is enjoying her new freedom and continues to travel throughout California looking for Joaquin. She is running out of funds however, and has to find a way to make ends meet. When betting on bear baiting does not pay off, she makes some income by writing letters home for the many men who are illiterate. In one town, a traveling brothel arrives to great fanfare. They travel with prostitutes, pornographic books, and a piano to encourage dancing. When they ask if anyone can play the piano, Eliza (still disguised as a boy) volunteers. She makes a healthy sum in tips and is introduced to the bouncer of the group, Babalu the Bad. She tells him she is looking for her “brother” and he advises her to stay with them because all the men end up there eventually.

Chapter 16 (Business Dealings). John Sommers arrives in California with Paulina’s steamship. While he and Feliciano are celebrating the sales of their fresh products, John is amazed to see Jacob Todd. With Feliciano’s help he has come to California, changed his name to Jacob Freemont, and become a reporter. The men go to see the sights in San Francisco, particularly the peep shows and brothels. While they are out carousing, John mentions to Jacob that Eliza is missing and presumed to be somewhere in California with Joaquin Andieta. Jacob promises to keep an eye out for them.

Eliza has taken up life with the traveling brothel, playing piano for them. She continues her charade as a boy, Elias. Babablu the Bad is constantly trying to toughen her up, but she just laughs. In addition to playing the piano, Eliza helps take care of the young Indian boy who is the ward of the madam, Joe Bonecrusher, and reads aloud to keep the other members of the troupe entertained. She grows fond of this group of “soiled doves” and misfits.

Analysis

These chapters illuminate Eliza’s new lifestyle. She is enjoying freedoms that would never have been possible if she were not passing as a male. Although she is still actively looking for Joaquin, there is less mention of him and more focus on her own industriousness. When she meets Joe Bonecrusher and her caravan, Eliza finds a different kind of family. They each have roles and are comfortable with each other. An affection is growing between them. In both chapters, the x-rated books are mentioned. The significance of these is yet to be revealed. Chapter 14 also reveals the newest whereabouts of Jacob Todd, now Jacob Freemont. His role as a reporter will prove significant toward the end of the book.

Vocabulary

raucous, obsidian, provocation, stagnant, centenary, atavistic, limn, flotilla, usurer, clandestinely, gastronomic, insatiable, prestidigitator, hermetic, bacchanals



Chapter 17-18

Summary

Chapter 17 (Soiled Doves). Joe Bonecrusher's caravan settles into a small town for the winter. Eliza, as Elias, gets to know the girls who work for Joe. They all went into the profession for different reasons, but all believe they are better off than they were before they found this new family. In addition to their usual services, it turns out the members of the caravan are excellent nurses. When dysentery runs rampant through the community, they are the only ones willing to help. Eliza also gets to put the medical skills she picked up from Tao Chi'en to use when a miner who needs his fingers amputated shows up at their door in the middle of the night. When Eliza asks if he has heard of Joaquin Andieta, he tells her of a man named Joaquin Murieta who might be the same person. He says he will tell Murieta his "brother" is looking for him.

In the middle of winter someone sets fire to the barns where the caravan is staying. Following the loss of all their possessions, the members of the troupe are supported by the community and they rebuild quickly. One of the women even marries the blacksmith. Watching that romance occur causes Eliza to resolve to resume her search for Joaquin as soon as spring arrives.

Chapter 18 (Disillusion). Tao Chi'en is making his living in San Francisco. Lured by reports of a whole Chinese city within the city, he returns there from Sacramento. He hears from Eliza via letter from time to time, but is making plans to return to China. Then something happens that delays his return.

At the same time, Paulina's business ventures have been so successful she arrives in San Francisco to establish herself as one of the city's leading citizens. She is brought there by John Sommers, who has also brought another load of erotic books to sell to the miners. It turns out the books he is selling were written by Rose. For years she has written pornographic books as an outlet for her own fantasies regarding Karl. They have been published in England and have provided a steady income which has helped support Eliza. While in town, John visits with Jacob, who has become a widely read correspondent for the papers back east. They go out together and John spots a prostitute who is wearing a piece of Eliza's jewelry. When he confronts her and demands to know where she got it, she admits to having nursed Eliza on the ship on the way over. But she lies to the captain in an effort to protect Eliza who she believes does not wish to be found, and tells him Eliza died on the voyage.

Rumors of a vigilante named Joaquin Murieta are running rampant throughout California. Although the physical description matches that of Joaquin Andieta, the violence he and his compatriots exhibit does not match Eliza's memory of her lover. Murieta is supposedly fighting for the rights of the Hispanic miners, who are being railroaded at every turn. Laws have been passed that grossly favor the white miners and the Mexicans, Chileans, and Peruvians are losing their claims and their fortunes.



The troupe run by Joe Bonecrusher encounters financial trouble. With the marriage of one of the girls to the blacksmith, they cannot make ends meet. Just as Eliza and Babalu are making plans to go on the road to search for Joaquin, Tao Chi'en shows up to see Eliza. She is overjoyed to see him. He convinces her to return to San Francisco with him, telling her the city is changing. She may even be able to dress as a woman. She agrees to go.

Analysis

These chapters illustrate how rapidly California is changing. Here the reader gets snapshots of life in the small mining communities. There is a sense of how communities rally around each other in times of trouble, no matter who is in need of help. This image is contrasted by reports of growing violence out by the claims. The racial tension is constantly erupting into lynchings and other rigged trials. The character of Joaquin Murieta is emerging as someone who stands up for the underdog, although in violent fashion. (Murieta in Spanish means "died.") Also, California has become a state and women are beginning to arrive to civilize it. Paulina coming from Chile and Tao Chi'en inviting Eliza back to San Francisco are both examples of this. There is also some foreshadowing concerning Tao Chi'en's reasons for remaining in America.

Vocabulary

dilapidated, titanic, mien, engender, vicissitudes, gangrene, splendiferous, invoked, convoking, impresarios, impunity, unmitigated, effervescent, odalisques



Chapter 19-20

Summary

Chapter 19 (Singsong Girls). Jacob Freemont decides it is time someone wrote about Joaquin Murieta. Unfortunately, no one can actually track him down. So Jacob takes what rumors he has heard, combines it with how he imagines Joaquin to be and writes amazing articles with virtually no basis in reality. His reasoning is that no one else knows enough about the subject to contradict him.

Tao Chi'en has a new project he is working on and he recruits Eliza to help him. While he was still in San Francisco on his own, he was called to the deathbed of a prostitute. He learned that the madams generally use a girl up, then poison her to get rid of her. Appalled, he sets about rescuing as many of the "singsong girls" as he can. Now he treats patients at all the brothels for free, in return for being given the dying girls. Once he has them, however, he does not know what to do with them. When Eliza learns of his efforts she has an idea how to help.

Chapter 20 (Joaquin). San Francisco continues to develop into a center of culture and trade. People from all walks of life and hundreds of cultures are turning the mining boom town into a thriving city. However, the violence out by the mining communities continues unabated. Jacob continues to spin tales about Joaquin Murieta, giving him a beautiful wife and a reason for vengeance. Eliza, working with Tao Chi'en in San Francisco, goes searching for Joaquin two times in two years. But it is mostly out of habit. When she and Tao Chi'en discuss it, he advises her to give her search one more year, then give it up for good. She agrees, but says she will stay in California and open a restaurant. She feels there are more possibilities for her in America than in Chile. Tao Chi'en jokes that if she cannot find Joaquin she could marry him, but the comment causes tension between them and they become awkward around each other. They both realize they are deeply emotionally connected, but in this time and place an interracial marriage was not even a remote possibility.

Analysis

The threads of the story are starting to come together. Tao Chi'en and Eliza have been reunited in a project to help the Chinese prostitutes. Paulina is at the forefront of the movement to civilize California. Joe Bonecrusher's troupe has become respectable. And Jacob Freemont is writing about Joaquin. These chapters bring the majority of the main characters who are still in play to the same general location. From here the storylines will be resolved.

The major development in these two chapters is the subtle acknowledgement of Tao Chi'en and Eliza's relationship. Although never consummated, the idea they are bound as closely as husband and wife is apparent.



Vocabulary

ineffable, irrigated, stalwart, motley, fetid, ignominy, ostentation, mettle, rhetoric, quixotic, chimera, aplomb, presages



Chapter 21

Summary

Chapter 21 (An Unusual Pair). Eliza has taken to heart Tao Chi'en's advice to set a deadline in her search for Joaquin. She does not even remember why it was so important to be with him in the first place. She chalks it up to first love, but wants a sense of closure. To that end she seeks out Jacob Freemont to learn where she might find Joaquin Murieta. She is still dressed as a man, so Jacob does not recognize her. He is unable to give her any information, since all of his interviews are made up, and tells her only Joaquin sets the time for their meetings. It is only after she leaves Jacob is finally able to place who she is, but by that time she has disappeared. When John Sommers returns to San Francisco, Jacob finds him and delivers the news that Eliza is alive, but dressed as a male. When she finds out, Rose packs her bags for California.

Eliza and Tao Chi'en continue to help the singsong girls. In addition to the dying girls from the brothels, they now save their money to buy as many as they can off the boats before they can be sold into a life of prostitution. The girls are then smuggled to the blacksmith who married Joe Bonecrusher's girl, who is a part of the underground railroad which he uses to find good homes for the girls. His biggest assistant is Babalu.

The violence of Joaquin Murieta reaches an unacceptable point according to the new law of the land. The governor puts a bounty out for Joaquin. Troops of deputies go on a man hunt. Finally, they bring him down. His body is displayed in San Francisco prior to his burial. Eliza has decided, after three years of being Elias, to reclaim her dresses. She puts on her Sunday best and appears to Tao Chi'en. He accompanies her first to have her portrait taken, then to view the body of Joaquin Murieta. She confirms it is her old lover and declares herself free.

Analysis

Chapter 21 brings the story to a conclusion. The traffic of Chinese girls for the sex industry has not stopped, but Tao and Eliza are saving as many as they can, with help from Joe Bonecrusher and the connections Eliza made there. Rose determines to come to California, symbolizing a fresh start for her and demonstrating her real affection for Eliza. Eliza finally sets aside her male persona to embrace being a woman again. She is able to do so because women in California have much more independence than in the culture she was accustomed to in Chile. When she does this, she goes to Tao Chi'en and acknowledges, very subtly, that they are together. Her final act of the novel is to cut her last tie with her old life by declaring herself free from Joaquin.



Vocabulary

degenerate, morass, behemoth, indefatigable, pergola, opportune, repudiated, anisette, tantamount, immutable, fripperies, caprices



Characters

Eliza Sommers

Eliza is a girl who was left in a soapbox on the doorstep of a merchant and his sister in Valparaiso, Chile. She is adopted and raised by them. As she reaches adulthood she follows her lover to California in the heat of the Gold Rush of 1849, aided by the cook from one of her uncle's ships, Tao Chi'en. There she lives life as a boy, discovering the exhilaration of freedom and independence.

Rose Sommers

Rose is a émigré from England who settles in Chile after a scandal at home ruins her marriage prospects. She keeps house for one of her brothers, who is a merchant in Valparaiso. She takes Eliza in and raises her in the European style, hoping she can make a good match for her. Rose keeps many secrets, including her authorship of raunchy novels and the true identity of Eliza's father.

Jeremy Sommers

The merchant brother of Rose, he agrees to keep and support Eliza when she lands on their doorstep, but does not bother himself with her upbringing. He is concerned at all times about the propriety of actions and works hard to cover up any hint of scandal around the family.

John Sommers

John is Jeremy and Rose's brother. He is a sea captain who travels much of the time. He contributes financially to Eliza's upbringing. He also knows the identity of Eliza's father. It is John who introduces Eliza to Tao Chi'en

Tao Chi'en

Tao Chi'en is a Chinese doctor who is shanghaied by the pilot of John's ship and forced to become his cook. He helps Eliza escape to California to pursue her lover. Once there, they form a strong friendship that helps them survive in the harsh conditions of frontier California.



Jacob Todd (aka Jacob Freemont)

Jacob comes to Chile because he loses a bet. He stays because he likes it there, especially Rose, who does not return his affections. He supports himself, however, by collecting for a mission trip that never happens. When he is exposed, he is forced to flee back to Europe. He ends up in California during the Gold Rush, as well, reporting for newspapers back East.

Joaquin Andieta

Joaquin is a desperately poor idealist who works for Jeremy Sommers. He falls in love with Eliza. When the Gold Rush begins, he embezzles money from Jeremy's company to fund his venture to California, hoping to get rich enough to deserve Eliza. Once there, only rumors of him materialize. He apparently becomes a bandit, fighting for justice for all the Hispanic workers in mine country.

Mama Fresia

Mama Fresia is Eliza's Chilean housekeeper and nanny. She takes care of Eliza as a girl and helps her escape to California.

Paulina de Santa Cruz

Paulina is a Chilean girl who marries an up and coming merchant against her father's wishes. She and her husband enjoy a remarkably equal relationship and she turns into a shrewd business woman who becomes one of the first prominent citizens of San Francisco.



Objects/Places

Valparaiso, Chile

The story begins in Valparaiso, Chile. The port city is a mixture of native “Indians” and European immigrants. The Europeans tend to be merchants and missionaries and the native residents are usually the laborers. The colony is well established and there is little tension between groups, but they do not interact socially.

California

The Gold Rush is on in California in 1849. It becomes the new frontier, drawing people from Europe, the United States, South America, and Mexico. Everyone thinks they have a great opportunity to become wealthy without effort. California is in a state of near anarchy which develops slowly into a hierarchal society based on wealth and race.

China

Tao Chi'en is originally from China. China is the symbol of the East. The people who live there are divided sharply by class. The poor have very few opportunities to improve their situations. This location can be used to compare and contrast the lifestyles of the people here to those in Chile and California.

Acupuncture Needles

These tools belong to Tao Chi'en. They are his claim to his profession and the symbol of eastern versus western medicine. He uses them to make his way as he travels from small town to big city in China, then to Chile and finally in California.

Bawdy Novels

The writings of Rose are mentioned several times throughout the novel. Only when John Sommers brings a shipment of bawdy novels to California to sell to the miners does the reader realize what Rose has been writing all these years. They represent her independent sexuality and ability to support herself without a man.

Clothes

Clothes are a big part of the symbolism in this book. From the clothes that Rose makes over for herself, to Tao Chi'en's simple Chinese tunic and queue. Eliza's fine dresses contrast with the years that she spends dressing as a male. The clothing of the



prostitutes is frequently described and in several instances they are transformed into more respected people by dressing in a different fashion. This is a case of clothing making the man.



Themes

Racism

In this book racism is a constant theme and is practiced equally by all races. It is particularly evident in California, where Europeans, Asians, and Hispanics all come together to search for gold. Although they all start out on equal footing, the precedents of their societies cause them to quickly divide into ethnic communities and form a pecking order. Hate crimes are carried out by each group against the others. Underlying this is the relationship between Eliza and Tao Chi'en, she is at least part Caucasian while he is Chinese. They have a friendship with deeper feelings they do not even consider acknowledging because an inter-racial affair is unthinkable.

Gender Equality

The theme of gender equality is complex in this novel. In Chile and Europe, women are still considered delicate and second-class. They do not own property and their only career options are housekeeper or prostitute. Rose expresses to Eliza that being a widow is the best possible option, since it provides freedom and an income without loss of respect from others. It is notable when Pauline de Santa Cruz makes a bargain with her husband to keep a percentage of the profits he makes on a speculation that she suggested. She ends up creating a successful business alongside her husband in California.

The situation in the United States with regards to gender is slightly different. There are hardly any women in California in the beginning; only prostitutes have arrived. But as women arrive with their husbands, Eliza observes they are a hearty stock working side by side with the men. She eventually finds it possible to consider dressing as a woman again and dreams of starting her own restaurant.

By contrast, China is the most repressive of the societies toward women. Female infanticide is common practice and foot binding is considered an asset in a bride. Women there have no rights and no hope of being anything but a slave or a prostitute. Even the peasant women work themselves to death.

Class

In each culture the class difference is an issue. In Chile there is a hierarchy between the European immigrants, the landed aristocracy of Chile, and the newly wealthy who capitalized on floods and landslides to find gold in their native land. In China there is an even starker distinction between classes. The emperor and the Chinese aristocracy mandate that most of what is produced by the working classes be turned over to them. The peasants are forced to work harder for less all the time. Finally, although California starts out as an egalitarian society with an equal chance for all, there quickly becomes a

divide between those who have succeeded in finding and keeping gold and those who have not. As the gap widens, those who have taken advantage of the gold rush become the ruling class determining the future of the state of California.



Style

Point of View

Daughter of Fortune is written in third person. The narrator changes perspectives depending on the focus of the chapter. Each character is followed with omniscience, with the exception of Joaquin Andieta, who remains a mystery to all of the other characters until the end of the book. The reader knows what each character is doing and thinking, even when other characters are still unaware.

Setting

This is a novel of historical fiction. It takes place in the middle part of the nineteenth century. The first part of the book is set in Valparaiso, Chile. Next there is a section on a ship sailing to California, interspersed with background information set in China. Finally, most of the last part takes place in California, between San Francisco and Sacramento.

Language and Meaning

The author uses very complex language in this book. Many of the words are reminiscent of the way literature of the era would have been written. In addition, she uses Spanish and the occasional Chinese word to add to the sense of being immersed in that culture.

Structure

The book is divided into three parts. Each part has seven chapters. The first part introduces the characters and describes their lives in Chile. The second part announces the discovery of gold in California and transports many of the people in the story to San Francisco. The third section follows the changes in California and brings to a conclusion the main story lines.



Quotes

Everyone is born with some special talent, and Eliza Sommers discovered early on that she had two: a good sense of smell and a good memory. (Chapter 1)

The only good thing about marriage is becoming a widow.
-- Rose (Chapter 2)

The ancient landed aristocracy, which had always had the upper hand in the country, felt its privileges threatened, and new wealth became a social stigma. (Chapter 3)

We must improve the disaster of the here and now. The first thing is to organize the workers, the poor, and the Indians, give land to the campesinos and seize power from the priests. We must change the constitution, Mr. Todd. Here only the property owners vote, which means the rich govern. The poor don't count.
-- Joaquim Andieta (Chapter 4)

She had the clear sense of beginning a new story in which she was both protagonist and narrator. (Chapter 9)

It seems that like everyone who came to California we found something different from what we were looking for.
-- Tao Chi'en (Chapter 21)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

This is a novel of historical fiction. In what ways do the settings affect the plot of the story? How would the characters be different if they existed in a more modern time period? How do the locations for the story (i.e. Chile, China, California) affect the plot of the story? Could the story be set in different places and have the same outcome?

Topic 2

The title of the book is “Daughter of Fortune.” How does Eliza fit this description? Are there other female characters in the story who could also be described as such? What are the definitions of “fortune” and which of them fits with the meaning of the title?

Topic 3

Prejudice against people can be based on many things. What are some examples of ways in which people were discriminated against? Why was Eliza forced to dress as a boy in California? Could she have changed back to presenting herself as a woman earlier in the story? What was the significance of her deciding to do so when she did? How was Tao Chi'en the victim of prejudice? Did he or Eliza discriminate against people too?

Topic 4

Joaquin wants to create a communistic society with the people making all the decisions. Jacob attempts to start a utopian society. What do these two idealistic societies have in common? How are they different? What influences the men in their wish to bring about change in the government? Later in the story, Joaquin becomes a bandit and Jacob becomes a reporter. How do these occupations reflect their viewpoints on society?

Topic 5

There are many different examples and attitudes toward marriage in this book. Why does Rose want to see Eliza married when she refuses all offers herself? What makes the marriage between Paulina and Feliciano work? How is it unconventional for the times? Tao Chi'en has an arranged marriage and Rose tries to arrange one for Eliza. Can arranged marriages be successful? Would they work in today's society? What do you think is the author's attitude towards marriage?