

Dreams of Joy: A Novel Study Guide

Dreams of Joy: A Novel by Lisa See

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Plot Summary

Written in the alternating first-person perspectives of both nineteen-year-old Joy and her adoptive mother, Pearl, *Dreams of Joy* describes the events that occur when Joy runs away to communist China in the 1950s in search of her birth parents and true meaning in her life. After finding out that the woman Joy believed to be her aunt was actually her birth mother and that her birth father is an artist living in communist China, Joy steals her college fund and runs away in the middle of the night to China. Joy quickly reunites with her birth father, an artist named Z.G.. However, he is being sent by the government to live with peasants in the countryside to reassess his imperialistic mind. Joy, who has studied Chinese politics in school, is anxious to travel with him, as she believes life on a commune is the most efficient way to live. When Joy and her father arrive at the Green Dragon Village, peasant life is everything Joy hoped for where everyone works so everyone eats. She is able to spend time reuniting with her birth father and even falls in love with a promising young artist, Tao. Although she misses many of the conveniences of living in the West, such as running water, shopping centers, and the ability to freely speak your mind, Joy feels as if she is truly contributing to the Chinese way of life. The work is backbreaking and at times, the food is scarce, but this punishing lifestyle keeps Joy from thinking about her heartbreak at leaving home, and the suicide of her adoptive father Sam. Sam hung himself a week before Joy ran away from home because the government was pressing him to name Joy as a communist. Rather than exposing the truth of Joy's parentage and possibly getting her into governmental trouble, he killed himself, leaving Joy overwhelmed with guilt.

Meanwhile, Joy's adoptive mother, Pearl, chases after Joy, breaking through the bamboo curtain into China. Pearl has not been back to China since she escaped from Shanghai as a teenager, after being beaten and raped by attackers. When Pearl returns to China, she is overcome initially by a multitude of memories, including her long-lost love for Z.G., Joy's biological father. When Pearl was a teenager, Z.G. painted propaganda posters for Pearl and her sister May. Both sisters fell in love with the charming artist, but only May succeeded in bedding him, resulting in her unexpected pregnancy with Joy. Neither sister ever stopped loving Z.G. and Pearl quickly learns that Z.G. has never stopped loving May. Pearl puts herself in grave danger by returning to China, particularly because she has her sister secretly send money to support her so Pearl will not lose any of the money to the untrustworthy government. Almost immediately upon entering the country, Pearl is called in for making a nuisance of herself at the Artist Association where Z.G. works and forced into thought rehabilitation. Now that her name is written into government records, Pearl knows it will be much harder for her to sneak Joy back to America, if she ever finds her. As she waits for Joy to return from the countryside, Pearl gets a job as a paper collector and moves back into her childhood home where she is reunited with an old friend Dun.

After a few months on the commune, Joy and Z.G. return to Shanghai and are reunited with Pearl. Joy is unsure how she feels about being reunited with the woman who lied to her throughout her entire life and she is desperate to get back to Tao on the commune. She returns to the countryside against her parents' wishes and marries Tao. Almost



immediately after getting married, Joy realizes that life on the commune is not what she expected and that perhaps her husband does not love her as much as he lead on. She worries that he is using her as a way to escape China. Joy's fears are realized when the government orders the peasants to begin planting more crops than they can possibly grow in their allotted fields. Food is already growing scarce on the commune. The subsequent harvest is a complete loss as the seeds that were planted too close together, eventually choked each other. All across China, peasants begin to starve to death and rationing is so tight in the cities that even the wealthy begin to lose weight. People around Joy begin to die. She realizes that government has lied to the people and that there is no chance of escape. Slowly, Joy realizes that Tao is cheating on her and that he no longer loves or respects her. Despite Tao's demands that Joy beg her father for travel cards, Joy still believes in the Chinese government and refuses to leave the commune. Soon, Joy gives birth to a daughter, Samantha, named after Joy's deceased father. Tao loathes Sam, having wished for a son, and refuses to give either Joy or Sam any respect or affection. When Joy asks the commune for a divorce from Tao, she is refused. To make matters worse, the entire community within the commune turns against her for being too imperialistic despite her dedication to Red China. Joy realizes that she needs to escape immediately. Things in the commune turn desperate as people starve to death and even resort to cannibalism. Tao even tries to sell Samantha as food to another couple. With her last bit of strength, Joy manages to sneak photographs of herself and her starving daughter to her parents in Shanghai, hoping they will come for her before its too late. Pearl, Z.G. Dun, Samantha, and a rescued starving boy all manage to safely escape to Hong Kong where May is waiting for them. Although the book does not follow the characters to America, it is safe to assume that everyone made it there safely.

Prologue, Part One: The Tiger Leaps: Chapters 1 - 3

Prologue, Part One: The Tiger Leaps: Chapters 1 - 3 Summary

Prologue: The prologue, which is written entirely in italics and may be missed by some readers, recounts the events of *Dreams of Joy's* prequel, *Shanghai Girls*. Written from Joy's perspective, the reader learns that Joy has recently discovered her family's plethora of lies. She had been raised her entire life believing that Pearl was her mother and May was her aunt, only to learn that May is actually her birth mother and Pearl is actually her aunt. Her birth father is an artist named Z.G. who lives in the People's Republic of China. The man Joy always believed was her father, Sam, committed suicide by hanging himself after the FBI demanded that he turn in Joy as a communist sympathizer. Rather than harm his family, Sam chose to end his life, and Joy feels solely responsible for his death. In college, she joined the Chinese Students Democratic Christian Association, which the government believed was a communist cell. In the wake of Sam's death, all the family secrets tumbled out, overwhelming an already guilt-ridden Joy. In the middle of the night, Joy packed up her belongings and ran away to China in the hopes of finding her birth father and her true self.

Chapters 1 - 3: The novel is written in modulating perspectives between Joy and Pearl. Chapters 1 - 3 are all written from Joy's perspective. Joy has just run away from home and ambles wildly through the streets of Chinatown where she grew up. She calls her boyfriend Joe to tell him that she's run away and that she's ready to move to China with him, like they've always talked about. Joe is shocked, and it's immediately clear to Joy that his promises to run away with her were empty fantasies. Disappointed, Joy hangs up and heads straight for the airport. She uses the cash she's stolen from her mother to purchase a ticket to Shanghai. During the long travels to China, Joy contemplates what she knows about her birth father, Z.G. All she knows is that he's an artist who used to paint portraits of her mother and aunt for propaganda posters. Once she lands in Hong Kong, Joy takes a ship to China. On board, she attempts to change some of her American dollars into Chinese Yuan with the help of the captain. The captain pockets more than half of her money before changing over the rest. Joy is shocked, but understands that the ways of China are far different than they are in the States. At 8:00 am. Joy arrives at Chinese passport control. She repeats some of the propaganda mottos she learned at the Chinese Student Democratic Association, assuring the agent that she's here to help build the People's Republic. The agent allows her to enter the country, but not before he confiscates her American passport. Then he takes Joy to have her bags searched. They remove many "bourgeois" items from Joy's luggage, including her brassieres. The luggage inspector pockets half of Joy's cash and then poses for a picture with her to be hung on the Comrade Wall of returned Chinese.



Once she's out on the streets, Joy immediately makes her way to the Artist Association in search of her birth father, Z.G. Joy locates Z.G. just as he is leaving a meeting. Quietly, she follows him home so she can speak to him privately, and after a few tense minutes, musters up the courage to ring his doorbell. A servant opens the door and ushers Joy into a massive house full of dynastic furniture and stunning artwork. When Z.G. enters the room, Joy immediately bursts out that she is his daughter, a product of his love affair with May Chin, her mother. When Z.G. seems uncomfortable with Joy's presence in his house, she attempts to prove her patriotism to the new, Red China, which only seems to agitate him further. Finally, Z.G. says that he's leaving for the countryside tomorrow morning, and that Joy can accompany him, only because the people in the countryside are too ignorant to realize that Joy is from America, which could be particularly dangerous for her.

In the morning, Z.G. and Joy head toward Green Dragon Village, 200 kilometers from Shanghai. They travel by bus over unpaved, bumpy roads. When they arrive, Joy takes in the view: Green Dragon Village is a commune where everyone works together to honor The Great Leap Forward by working harmoniously in the rice paddies, building roads, and working with the harvest. Immediately upon entering the collective, Joy meets a handsome young man named Tao and a friendly young mother, Kumei. All around the collective hang Z.G.'s political posters praising Chairman Mao and The Great Leap Forward. He is clearly respected by the peasants living on the commune, and many are eager to start their art lessons with such a renowned artist. At the first art lesson, it is clear that Tao is talented, despite the fact that he is an uneducated peasant. Joy is torn between admiration for Tao and the praises he receives from Z.G., although Chairman Mao has outlawed personal praise. All praise should have gone to the collective or China as a whole - and feeling disappointed that her father doesn't offer her any words of encouragement. After the lesson, Joy and Z.G. are brought to the Party Secretary's villa, which is massive. When she sees its size, and compares it to the small mud and thatch huts the villagers live in, Joy wonders why more people don't live on the giant estate. Kumei waves away Joy's question and she doesn't push it further.

Prologue, Part One: The Tiger Leaps: Chapters 1 - 3 Analysis

The prologue is perhaps the most important chapter in the novel as it fills the reader in on all the back-story they will need to process *Dreams of Joy*. From this intro the reader is privy to the conflict between America and China due to communism that will be a large part of the backdrop for the duration of the novel. The reader also learns about the division that occurred as a result of Sam's suicide. This information motivates much of the characters' behaviors, from Joy's decision to leave America, to Pearl's hesitation about following her. Once in China, a full cast of important characters are introduced: Kumei, Tao, Z.G. will all be integral to the plot later in the novel. It should be noted that twenty years ago, Z.G. painted posters of both Pearl and May. These posters highlighted the sister's beauty, a characteristic outlawed by Chairman Mao. Now, Z.G. must work exclusively for the Chairman, with each of his posters exemplifying the

Chairman as a great leader, and communism as the greatest political system. At this point, it is unclear how Z.G. feels about his role as the state artist, but it is safe to say that this position affords him many luxuries such as the dynastic furniture, exotic food, and servants that have otherwise been outlawed in communist China.

When she arrives in China, Joy quickly realizes that the Shanghai she sees today is nothing like the exquisite city her mother and aunt remember from their childhood memories. There have been great political changes happening in the country, and although Joy has studied Chinese politics, it is clear that she doesn't really understand the complex changes initiated by Chairman Mao. When she arrives at Green Dragon Village, Joy is not prepared for a peasant's life and is shocked to find that the people live not only without indoor toilets, but without even toilet paper. She admits to feeling worried, even afraid, but would never voice these concerns out loud. Whenever anyone, including her father, ask how she is adjusting, Joy always quotes her dedication for China and being "red". Joy does her best to be optimistic and genuinely doesn't understand why Z.G. seems so disappointed to be in the village. Whenever she says something upbeat about life on a commune, Z.G. rolls his eyes. Joy doesn't really understand what life will be like living on a commune, but Z.G.'s reaction to her optimism, however false it is, signals to the reader that there is something to fear in communist China. As for the rest of the commune members, they seem relatively happy in their peasant life, despite the fact that they don't have money of their own. They work for the greater good of their community, and for their country as a whole. As the novel progresses, the reader will learn the downside of communism as the Green Dragon Village falls apart at the seams. Later, the villagers' optimism will be forced as they are brainwashed by the government and living in fear, but for now, their positive attitudes seem genuine. Only Z.G. is weary of life on the commune, but the reader doesn't yet understand why.

The section titles such as The Tiger Leaps all refer to Chinese zodiac signs. Joy is a tiger and is therefore strong-willed, brave in the face of danger, and as bold as the animal's stripes. Throughout the novel, each of the characters' zodiac signs is explained and should give the reader insight into the characters' actions. Under Chairman Mao, all forms of religion and superstition have been outlawed, but evaluating others by their zodiac sign, including whether or not couples are a good match, is still common practice as the belief seems to be ingrained in the Chinese people.

Part One: The Tiger Leaps: Chapters 4 - 6

Part One: The Tiger Leaps: Chapters 4 - 6 Summary

Pearl: On the plane chasing after Joy, Pearl considers how her life has changed so drastically in the past few days. Her husband Sam killed himself only a few days ago, and now her daughter has runaway to China. Pearl hasn't been back to China since she escaped from Shanghai as a teenager with her sister May. Although she knows a widowed woman should never be with another man and should spend the rest of her life In mourning, she wonders if she will find Z.G. in China, Joy's birth father. Pearl's relationship with the artist is complicated. They met when Z.G. painted her portrait for propaganda posters, and she fell in love with him. Z.G. only had eyes for May, however, and May loved him back. Their relationship resulted in the birth of Joy, whom Pearl raised as her own daughter despite the fact that she was actually Joy's aunt. Even now, when Pearl thinks about Z.G., her chest constricts. Pearl imagines that it will extraordinarily difficult for her to gain access into China with its "closed" borders, but it is relatively easy. At the border, a worker from the Soo Yuen Benevolent Association explains that despite border control, China still has a large export business, particularly of herbal medicine. He also helps Pearl set up a contact across in Hong Kong to help forward mail to her once she arrives in China.

Once inside China, Pearl is forced to undergo the same scrutiny and searches Joy endured. After she has her photo taken, Pearl quickly scans the wall of returning Chinese and spots Joy's face. She is elated, knowing that Joy has likely made it into the country and that she is on track to find her. She asks if any of the guards remember this girl, and one of them nods, saying that he sent her to the Artist Association in search of her father. Pearl races from the immigration office to the Artist Association, but the secretary at the front desk refuses to give Pearl any information about him, saying that she shouldn't try to contact him as he has a black mark against him. With no help from the Association, Pearl is forced to search through her memories of Shanghai to remember where Z.G. lives. At his apartment, Z.G.'s servants tell Pearl that he has been sent to the countryside to redeem himself, to learn from the peasants how to be more humble, and to remember the goals of communist art. They admit that it could have been far worse - they could have sent him to the labor camps, or simply killed him. Depressed, Pearl leaves Z.G.'s house, knowing that she will never find Joy in the countryside. She must simply wait for them to return, IF they ever return. She walks slowly to her old family home, taking in the sights and sounds of the city she once loved so dearly. Today, it is nothing like the city she remembered. There, she finds that the boarders who rented rooms from her parents twenty years ago still live in the home. She finds that they have kept her childhood room exactly how she left it, albeit completely covered in dust.



A few days later, Pearl is called into a government office after "making a pest out of herself" at the Artist Association. The government official states that she should stay far away from Z.G. because of his black mark. He interrogates her for an hour, and forces her to register all her information in a system so the government can track her and her money. This will make it far more difficult for Pearl to search for Joy, and hopefully help her escape from China, without being found out. If the government thinks she is working against their ideals, they will not hesitate to have her shipped to a labor camp or killed. Pearl is sentenced to weekly thought-reform sessions to help her shed her imperialist mindset, and is given a job as a paper collector - what was once an honored profession is now little more than a trash collector.

Joy: Joy is slowly adjusting to life in the commune, but she finds much about life in the village shocking. She enjoys living with Kumei and her son in the villa, but is slightly afraid of Yong, the elderly woman with bound feet who also lives with them. Every morning, Joy and Kumei walk to the fields together to work, passing Tao's family hut. The hut is cramped and full of people since Tao has eight siblings but Joy finds the poverty of it romantic. Kumei teases her every morning about how Joy and Tao are a perfect match since Joy is a tiger and Tao is a dog. When they are around other people, Joy and Tao are careful how they interact with each other since flirtation and romantic relationships have been strictly outlawed by the government. While working the fields one morning, there is a terrible shout, and most of the workers rush over to the corn fields to find out what's going on: a woman has thrown herself in the way of the hay cutter, slicing open her neck. Blood pools around her, and she quickly dies. Joy's immediate response is to wonder where the ambulance is, where is the nearest hospital? The workers comment on how red the woman's blood is, a good sign for communism. After, while walking back home from the fields, Tao grabs Joy's hand and pulls her into the woods toward the Charity Pavilion. Before she can object, he kisses her. Joy is terrified of being found out, but Tao is persistent. An elated and dizzy-headed Joy trips her way back from the woods to the village meeting. Her elation is short-lived as she witnesses her first public criticism. The dead woman's husband has been called up in front of the villagers to admit the ways he has failed the New China. Many of the women in the commune are outraged by the woman, Ping-li's, death. They claim that he regularly abused her, but the new government wouldn't allow her to leave him. They are angry that in New China, women are supposed to be treated as equals to men, but in this case, Ping-li wasn't. In the days that follow, the people are banned from talking about Ping-Li or her death, as it could incite unhappiness in the commune. Joy continues to take her art lessons with Z.G. and sneak off every night with Tao. She has never felt more strongly about a man in her life and she knows that she will never leave the commune.

Part One: The Tiger Leaps: Chapters 4 - 6 Analysis

When Pearl arrives in Hong Kong, she realizes that there has been propaganda about communist China from both the Chinese government and the United States government. In America, she heard that returning Chinese citizens were often taken outside of the borders and shot, to save the Chinese people from their imperialist ways.



This was Pearl's greatest fear about Joy's unexpected return. When she reaches Hong Kong, however, she learns that this is not the case, and that many foreigners still enter the country despite its "closed" borders. Lisa See makes a point of explaining the strong export business now, as this business will be vital to Pearl's eventual escape from China at the end of the novel. In Hong Kong, Pearl also sets up her contact to help forward mail. The Chinese government does not allow direct contact with anyone outside of China, and even within the borders, all mail is heavily censored and any gifts - monetary or not - will likely be confiscated. For this reason, it is vital for Pearl to manage her correspondences with May carefully. Hong Kong was an interesting geography in the 1950s as it had recently won its independence from mainland China, but is still considered a sister-country to the People's Republic. For this reason, many Chinese people escaped to Hong Kong because it was easier to sneak through this border and then used the leniency of travel in Hong Kong to escape to Europe or the United States.

In the 1950s, when this novel is set, many Chinese women took a vow of mourning after their husbands passed away. In Chinese society, it was expected for women to live the rest of their lives in mourning, never breaking that vow to find love or romance with another man. In China, most men would not be interested in romancing a widow because of this societal stigma. Because Pearl is so fixated on this vow, it is safe for the reader to assume that her morals will be challenged at some point during her trip. Pearl's interaction with the Chinese government is significant, and will forever alter her ability to maneuver through China without difficulty. During her meeting, she learns that as an overseas Chinese, she will be allowed special ration cards in exchange for family support from abroad. These remittances are one way in which the Chinese government blackmailed returning Chinese. When families sent money from abroad to support their Chinese family members, officials often stole some or all of the money to build their new government. Pearl has arranged for May to send her monetary support secretly, through the mail service she's arranged in Hong Kong.

In Joy's chapter, the reader watches as her relationship with Tao begins to unfold. It is interesting to note that the government has outlawed both arranged marriage, and "free" love in which young couples can court, so Tao and Joy must sneak around in constant fear of being caught. All individuals are meant to be considered equals, so in the government's mind, there is no need for romantic relationships other than to produce more children. Romance is considered imperialistic and distracting from the aims of New China, therefore, it is outlawed. It is an interesting juxtaposition for See to pair Joy's new romance alongside the death of comrade Ping-Li. Ping-Li's story hints at the failures of the communist government to truly give women freedom and equality. There are hints of full government control when Joy hears that Ping-Li had begged for a divorce from her abusive husband but was continually told to work for the greater good of China by being a better wife. Desperate, she committed suicide by throwing herself in front of the hay cutter. It is interesting to note that the villagers commented on how red her blood was, a sign of a good communist. There were not repercussions for Ping-Li's husband and dissent began to take over the women in the commune who claimed their rights weren't being respected. A few days later, the villagers were banned from speaking about Ping-Li's death. These are hints of the dangerous control that is to come in the novel. Although Joy momentarily questions the government control, she is too

smitten by her new relationship with Tao to question how this control might soon affect her own life.

Part Two: The Rabbit Dodges: Chapters 7 - 10

Part Two: The Rabbit Dodges: Chapters 7 - 10 Summary

Joy: Joy is assigned the task of arranging a propaganda play for the village about the Marriage Law, women's rights, and right thinking in New China in the wake of Ping-Li's death. As she listens to the propaganda about working hard without questioning, Joy remembers seeing the water buffalo working in the commune fields. The animal was forced to work with metal blinders on so it wouldn't walk around the sharp rocks protruding from the mud. Tao said the animal's suffering - its legs were torn and bloody from the rocks - was punishment for what he did in his past life. After contemplating this, she returns her thoughts to the play happening before her. Kumei is giving a monologue about being sold away in an arranged marriage to a man who raped her nightly from the age of five. Joy doesn't quite understand why everyone has such an emotional reaction to Kumei's fictive presentation, particularly because her line delivery isn't very good. Although she knows there's no place for pride in Red China, Joy is pleased with her performance, and it shows on her face. After the performance, Joy sneaks away again with Tao, relishing her secret time alone with him. When she returns, Z.G. is waiting for her, rebuking her for putting not only herself, but everyone else in the house at risk by sneaking off with Tao for romance, which is strictly forbidden. Even though Z.G. does not approve of Joy's relationship with Tao, he believes she is too good for him and he arranges to give them both private painting lessons so they can spend time together without the prying eyes of the commune on them.

Pearl: It has been six weeks since Joy moved back into her childhood home. She does not get along well with the boarders, except for Dun, who are suspicious of Pearl's intents in returning to China. Every morning, she leaves after breakfast to pound the streets of Shanghai collecting paper. Frequently, she comes across one of the old propaganda posters of herself or May, and nostalgia floods her. Whenever she finds these posters, she manages to sneak small pieces - an eye or a smile - into her pocket without anyone noticing. During her long days' work, Pearl can't help noticing all the ways China has changed in the years she's been away, and despite her terrible memories, she finds herself homesick for the Shanghai she once knew. She recognizes many of the streets she works on, and passes the house of her mother's old best friend, a woman known to Pearl as Auntie Hu. She knocks tentatively on the door, and is startled when a servant escorts her to the sitting room where Auntie Hu perches on the edge of the couch. It is as if no time has passed between them. Auntie Hu is still living a life of luxury despite the new governmental controls. She advises Pearl how she can reclaim many of her old belongings in pawn shops, and requests that Pearl visit her again from time to time. When she returns home, Pearl's housemates accuse her of making too much food for one person, being wasteful, and too imperialistic. She



escapes to her bedroom and is greeted by Dun, waiting with two glasses of wine. He tells her that she looks beautiful tonight. Pearl believes that had life treated her a bit more kindly, she would have married someone like Dun, a young, handsome professor. She agrees to give him English lessons.

Joy: Joy's private art lessons continue alongside Tao with Z.G. After each lesson, the young couple always sprints to the Charity Pavilion to spend some romantic time together. After a few weeks of kissing, Tao asks Joy if she will marry him. Joy is taken aback, but in the full throngs of infatuation. Tao says that he wants to get out of the commune more than anything, and he wonders if Z.G. might help him get an internal passport. Joy doesn't have much time to consider Tao's offer because in the morning, Z.G. tells her that their time in the commune has finished. They are moving on to an art festival in Peking. Later, he whispers that they will be very close to Hong Kong, and this is Joy's chance to escape communist China. Joy refuses to leave China, claiming that she has never felt more at home, but she does leave the commune for Peking, promising Tao that she will come back for him. In Peking, the capital city of China, Joy welcomes the perks of being the daughter of a famous artist. She wears the luxurious clothes that once belonged to her mother, and is invited to many fancy banquets and even meets Chairman Mao himself at the Peking art contest. At the contest, Z.G. unveils his newest painting: one of Joy in peasant clothing standing in a field of pink roses. Chairman Mao loves the painting because it shows not just a beautiful woman - a comment that makes Joy blush - but a beautiful woman working in the fields picking flowers. Z.G. wins the competition easily. The poster is reproduced hundreds of thousands of times and hung everywhere in the city.

Pearl: While walking through the streets collecting paper, Pearl is shocked to see none other than Joy walking out of Z.G.'s home wearing her old fur coat. Rather than running toward her daughter on the streets, Pearl slinks behind her, embarrassed to be seen in her paper collecting uniform. Instead of confronting her daughter, Pearl races home, showers, dons her best frock, and pins up her hair. She is going to be reunited with Joy, but she is also going to come face-to-face with Z.G. after nearly twenty years. Z.G.'s servants usher her into the apartment as if they had been waiting for her. When Z.G. enters the room, Pearl bursts out that she has come for her daughter. Z.G. is confused. Joy told him that May was her mother, but not that she had been raised by Pearl her whole life. Z.G. and Pearl engage in an argument about why Z.G. didn't do more to protect May, and why May would have given her child to Pearl to raise. In the end, Pearl discovers that Z.G. had no idea that May was pregnant when she left Shanghai. He would have protected her better had he known. When Joy returns home, she is shocked to see Pearl standing in Z.G.'s living room. She refuses to accept the Christmas present Pearl has brought, and curtly asks Pearl to leave her alone. She wants nothing to do with her old lie since she is Red Chinese now. Within just a few moments of talking to Joy, Pearl realizes that Joy has come to China as a way of punishing herself for Sam's death. She also can tell that Joy is in love with someone in the countryside, but she doesn't pry. Both Z.G. and Pearl try to convince Joy to escape back to America, but Joy's mind is already made up: she is planning to return to the Green Dragon.

Part Two: The Rabbit Dodges: Chapters 7 - 10 Analysis

The water buffalo is an important symbol for the Chinese people under the influence of communism. The peasants work painstakingly long hours in the fields for the benefit of greater China. They aren't fed well, aren't paid, and are treated like slaves. However, most of the peasants happily complete the work because they believe they are benefiting the greater good of Red China and Chairman Mao, whom they believe would never lead them astray. As the novel progresses, Joy transforms from the perfect communist proletariat, believing the same propaganda as the rest of the peasants, to an informed, suspicious, and determined woman who realizes that the peasants, like the water buffalo, only complete the backbreaking work because they are blind to what is truly going on around them. The bloody legs of the water buffalo will also symbolize the painful ways the government harms the people in the name of hard work.

Joy's relationship with Tao continues to pick up steam, with Tao asking Joy to marry him. Although it is clear that Joy is deeply infatuated with Tao, there is no real sense of romance in the Western sense as the couple are not allowed to be seen in public together. Many characters will argue that Tao is using Joy as a way out of China, but Joy herself is blind to it. After feeling uprooted, betrayed, and fooled by her family, it makes sense that Joy would seek love and comfort from a partner. As far as Joy is concerned, Tao, a poor, uneducated peasant, will likely never question why she returned to China, so she will never have to delve into her dark personal past with him. Instead, she can dedicate her new life to Red China with an adoring and affectionate husband. Immediately after asking Joy to marry him, Tao admits that he wants nothing more than to get out of the commune but he needs an internal passport, which Z.G. might be able to secure. On the surface, it appears that Tao truly is in love with Joy as he claims, but his statements after the proposal should raise red flags from many readers who can sense the foreshadowing of Tao's character progression. Once Joy is reunited with Pearl, she has both parents urging her to escape China, but Joy refuses. There is deliberate tension being created with the parents' pleas for the daughter to leave and conflict arises between the parents' desire to protect Joy from the dangers lurking around the corner, and Joy's stubborn insistence that she can manage her own life.

An interesting theme that is introduced in this section is the theme of artwork. Before Chairman Mao's reign, artists were free to paint whatever subject they chose, but most opted to recreate traditional Chinese methods. Careful readers might wonder whether Z.G. created the painting of Joy in the rose fields as a way of challenging Mao's insistence that all artwork praise himself as Chairman, and the new Red China. Despite Z.G.'s nod to the old aesthetic beauty of Chinese painting, Mao declares this painting the winner because it highlights a beautiful woman not simply being beautiful, but being beautiful while serving the greater good of China. It is also revealed later in this section, that Z.G. was sent off to the commune not to teach the peasants to paint, but to serve a sentence of mind-rehabilitation, to shed his thoughts - and therefore his artwork - of imperialistic ways. Now, Z.G. has a black mark on him, which is why he was sent to the

Green Dragon to live amongst other outcasts that have brought shame on the New China. A shocked Joy learns that her friends, Kumei, Yong, and Ta-Ming were outcasts: Kumei was the concubine of the landowner, Yong the last remaining bound-footed wife of the landlord, and Ta-Ming his last living son.

Part Two: The Rabbit Dodges: Chapters 11 - 13

Part Two: The Rabbit Dodges: Chapters 11 - 13 Summary

Pearl: May and Pearl write frequent letters to each other using the illegal contacts they have maintained through Hong Kong. Whenever May writes she includes money sewn inconspicuously into the hems of clothing so that it isn't stolen by the mail censors. The sisters speak in careful code, always hoping that the other can interpret what they truly mean in their letters. After weeks of begging from May, Joy finally admits that she has found Z.G. and that they are taking Joy back to the countryside to live on the commune. China has initiated The Great Leap Forward - a social campaign aimed to transform China into the model communist country capable of overpowering the United States and other "imperialist countries in only a matter of years - and Z.G. is being sent back to the commune to teach the peasants how to reproduce propaganda posters about the movement.

Joy: Joy is thrilled to return to the Green Dragon Village which has now been combined with nearby villages to form Dandelion Number Eight People's Commune. Brigade Leader Lai is the governmental man in charge of ensuring that Dandelion Number Eight reaches its goals as apart of The Great Leap Forward. The woman have all been emancipated from their marriages and are now individually responsible for their work in the commune. All the people are fed three meals a day at the canteen, setting women free from their domestic responsibilities and ensuring that everyone eats the same each day. Joy is thrilled to return to the commune, feeling that she has truly returned home. It appears that fortune is smiling down on the people, and everyone is animatedly excited about The Great Leap Forward. As soon as Joy, Pearl, and Z.G. arrive, they begin teaching the peasants how to mass produce thousands of propaganda posters in only a few days. Although the work is grueling from sunup to sundown, Chairman Mao is anxious to show the world what the Chinese peasants can do if they put their mind to it, and all the peasants are eager to show how Red their blood is, meaning how dedicated they are to Mao's causes. After work one evening, Joy returns home to hear Pearl and Yong gossiping about various people in the commune, including Tao. Joy is embarrassed and disappointed to hear her mother say that Tao is nothing more than "a small radish," meaning he is an insignificant person. She also says that she doesn't think Tao is trustworthy. His zodiac sign is the dog, which means that he can be tricky. A few days later, Joy retaliates against her mother's comments by accepting Tao's marriage proposal. Both Z.G. and Pearl are shocked and demand that she reconsider, arguing that if she marries Tao she won't be able to leave the commune again. Joy is stubborn and insists that she would never leave the commune anyway.



Pearl: Pearl is devastated that Joy has chosen to marry Tao, but she doesn't want to harm her recently repaired relationship with her daughter. She joins Joy for a basic ceremony, as any celebration has been strictly outlawed. Then, she escorts Joy to her new home with Tao's family. Tao lives with his parents and eight siblings in a single-room shack. There is no separate bedroom for the newlyweds. The dank room full of dirty, smelly children sickens Pearl, and memories of her imprisonment and repeated rape flood back to her. Deep down she knows that nothing good will come to Joy here. On the day of the wedding, Joy is clearly overjoyed and in love with her husband. The next morning, however, Pearl visits with her daughter to say goodbye before she and Z.G. return to the city. Joy's eyes are downcast and she tremulously refuses to speak with her mother. Sensing that something is wrong, Pearl whispers for Joy to run to the car, but Joy shakes her head no. She silently walks her parents to the bus stop, turns around, and silently makes her way back to her new life. At the last minute, Pearl decides that she cannot leave Joy alone if she is in danger, and races back, knowing Z.G. will return for them in three months.

Part Two: The Rabbit Dodges: Chapters 11 - 13

Analysis

Most of this section is filled with foreshadowing for the conflicts that will arise due to Joy's decisions to marry Tao and stay on the commune. It is clear that neither Z.G. nor Pearl approve of Joy's choice in husband, and neither feel that he will treat Joy well. Ominously, Pearl asks Joy, "Is he the kind of Dog you can trust and love, or will he bite you?" (Page 178). Joy is certain that Tao can be trusted, but Pearl's question should alert the reader to the possibility that trouble may be ahead. The morning after the wedding night confirms that Joy may have been misled by her now-husband, although it is now too late to do anything about it. Until now, Joy has had two opportunities to flee China; first, when she traveled to the Artists' Association and secondly, on the morning after her wedding when her mother urged her to walk away from the commune then and there, but Joy is too stubborn to heed her parents' advice. The decision to stay on the commune with Tao will ultimately be the most dangerous decision Joy will make in her life, and this is slowly becoming clear to the reader.

Alongside Joy's marriage, the most important plot point in this section is the introduction of The Great Leap Forward. Chairman Mao is determined to fully utilize the peasants in the countryside as workhorses to power China ahead of the West in production, farming, and construction work in only a matter of years. Now, the peasants worry about the long hours of backbreaking work, but at least they have three full meals a day. They give over all their cooking supplies for the benefit of the communal canteen, and send all their metal, including any leftover pots, cutlery, or other cooking supplies to feed the blast furnace, which melts all metal down for the constructional benefit of China. In time, it will become clear that these decisions to overwork the peasants, to control their food intake and to take away their ability to prepare food for themselves will lead to the commune's downfall.

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 14 - 16

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 14 - 16 Summary

Pearl: Pearl awakens to the bang, bang, bang of sounds on the commune and knows that war has broke out against the four evils of sparrows, rats, insects, and flies. The worst of these is allegedly the sparrows, which the government insists devour the most seeds and grains. Because The Great Leap Forward requires every pair of hands working nonstop, even the elderly have been ordered to work. Pearl works alongside Yong and Su-Lee - Tao's mother - stoking the blast furnace. A few weeks later, the commune leader announces a contest with the surrounding communes mandated by the government: which commune can harvest their crops the fastest? They start with the rice stalks, slashing quickly through, leaving many uncut stalks. Then they move onto the corn, tea plants, and sweet potatoes. They quickly learn that speed is valued much higher in this sort of contest than performance, and Pearl feels terrible crashing down on good crops, or leaving them behind altogether, but Joy is determined to prove her place on the commune, and winning this contest could bring some unity for her in her marital family. After the contest, Joy returns to Pearl's room for a bath, allowing her mother to wash the dirt from her skin in a calming show of affection. Soon, this will become their nightly ritual. The next morning, the brigade leader announces that they will be planting wheat for the following year, even though the soil is unfit for the crop. The government has realized that the peasants are eating more food than can be sustained - and they have been eating very well - so they have decided to up harvest production for the next years. The farmers are dubious, but cannot argue with the brigade leader about planting the wrong crop, or planting the seeds to close together, lest they be labeled counter-revolutionary.

In the weeks following her marriage, Joy has begun to adjust to her new life. She isn't as elated as she was before the wedding, but Pearl convinces herself that she is happy. Three months pass, and Z.G. returns to collect Pearl. Pearl knows that her place is not on the commune, and that she must give her daughter space to grow into the woman she is determined to become. It saddens her deeply, but she departs for the art fair in Canton with Z.G. the next morning, promising to keep in touch with Joy. In Canton, Z.G. and Pearl check into their hotel, and have a few drinks in the bar. Afterward, Z.G. pulls Pearl to his bedroom and the two make love, despite the fact that Pearl is a widow and such behavior is deeply frowned upon. When it is over, Pearl knows that she can finally let Z.G. go. She is not in love with him, May is. Her petty games of jealousy with her sister must come to an end, and she knows such a dangerous interaction with Z.G. will never happen again. She and Z.G. separate as friends.

Joy: The brigade leader makes rounds in all the commune houses checking to see how many flies, insects, and sparrows have been killed by each household. Killing the Four Evils is a good way for peasants to show how Red their blood is, although there are



becoming fewer and fewer insects to kill. The brigade leader insists that there must be thousands of sparrows left, because the wheat refuses to grow, and he insists the birds must be stealing the grain. The rest of the peasants assure an increasingly worried Joy that the food rations are always small between crop seasons, but Joy isn't convinced. The meals are getting far smaller, and coupled with the freezing cold of winter, she is miserable. Tao is interested in entering his artwork into national contests with the hopes that success there will allow him to move out of the commune and into a big city. He continually pesters Joy to request travel permits to leave the countryside. In February, Joy begins waking up and going to bed hungry. Families begin sneaking out to the fields at night to collect bits of moldy food ruined in the hasty crop harvesting months ago. Tao's mother is an expert at hiding food from the investigators, but other families are not so lucky. If a peasant is caught hiding food, their house is destroyed, and they are left to suffer the rest of the frigid winter homeless. Joy witnesses her mother-in-law having a miscarriage, and the pregnant women in the commune begin walking on the other side of the street than her. Joy is considered bad luck because she has been married for months and hasn't yet conceived a child.

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 14 - 16 Analysis

The turning point of life on the commune arguably occurs in this section. The government clearly has no idea how to properly plant and maintain field harvests, and they have the peasants so full of fear of being labeled counter-revolutionary that they won't speak up when they hear the terrifying field plans for The Great Leap Forward. Had anyone tried to convince the brigade leader that planting wheat in a cornfield wouldn't work, he would not have listened to their argument anyway. The brigade leader grew up in the city his entire life, is illiterate, but managed to secure a high-ranking position in the new government. He will hold jealously to this title, never questioning Chairman Mao, and in return, he will be given food and monetary benefits from the Chinese government. Although Red China preaches that all men are equal, it is clear in moments like this, that there is a strict hierarchy of power and no one must step out of line: peasants are workers, officials are thinkers. This setup is particularly dangerous for the peasants because should anything go wrong with their wheat crop - and it most certainly will - they will be the ones who suffer. The stage has already been set for the mass starvation that is to come: the government controls all food distribution on the commune. The peasants have destroyed many of their crops with the ridiculous contest to see which commune could harvest them the fastest. Additionally, the government has now requested wheat grown in all communes - even the ones with the wrong soil - and that the seeds be planted so close together they will not possibly have room to grow. The farmers worry about this terrible plan, but no one speaks up. This is a catastrophic tragedy in the making.

Meanwhile, both Joy and Pearl have turning points in their own lives. Joy is struggling to adjust to life under the same roof as her spiteful mother-in-law. When the women in the village fear that Joy's womb will make them all barren, or will miscarry their pregnancies, she is further ostracized. On top of everything, Joy is perpetually hungry and cold, and Tao seems to have lost romantic interest in her. Joy wonders if having a baby will

change her situation. She is young and shortsighted, not realizing that having a baby with Tao will tie him to her forever when what she really wants to do is leave the commune. In Canton, Pearl and Joy finally make love. This plot point has been bubbling under the surface of the story since Pearl first returned to China. After making love with him, which Pearl enjoyed, she realizes that she is not in love with Z.G., but was in love with the power game she and her sister played for his affection. She knows now that she must stop the game forever, or risk losing her sister for good.

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 17 - 20

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 17 - 20 Summary

Joy: Joy's relationship with her husband's parents are improving slightly, but she knows she will never belong with them. She has been feeling nauseous lately, and wonders if it's because of the drinking water. Her thoughts about this are interrupted by the loudspeaker demanding that everyone make their way to the canteen although it is not a mealtime. Joy is terrified by what she sees there: Yong sitting on stage next to the brigade leader. She has a white ribbon pinned to her chest which shows that she has been denounced from the commune. The brigade leader announces that Yong is a parasite to the commune, her "bourgeois" bound feet have prevented her from working in the fields, and yet she still eats the commune food. He repeatedly spouts the communist motto: "Everybody works so everybody eats" (Page 217). Joy watches in sickened horror as the brigade leader orders Yong to unbind her feet in front of everyone, and walk on the broken bones. Kumei and Ta-Ming are allowed to help Yong down from the platform because they also have black marks on them, but tears roll down Yong's face as she is forced to walk on the broken feet that have been wound-up tightly in their lotus position for over forty years. The crazed brigade leader announces that tomorrow, Yong will work in the fields with the rest of the peasants, although everyone knows this is impossible. Angry jeers are hurled at Yong from all around her - some peasants are actually angry, believing Yong to be a true parasite, and others are worried that if they don't join in, they will be harassed by the brigade leader as well. Joy knows that she must do something to help her friend Yong, and she searches frantically for Tao. She is disgusted to see that Tao has joined in the angry jeers, spits, and taunts, and that his treatment of Yong does not appear to be put-on. Joy breaks through the angry mob and slings Yong's arm across her shoulders, helping her walk back to her villa where she collapses in a heap on the floor. Back at the villa, Kumei admits to Joy that she's been sleeping with the brigade leader in exchange for extra food. The previous night, they had a disagreement and she believes this is why he turned against Yong. Yong and Kumei tell Joy the true story of how they got their black marks and how Kumei got the scars across her face and neck.

Pearl: A few months after leaving the commune, Pearl receives a letter from Joy announcing that she is pregnant. Although Pearl is very pleased to become a grandmother, she is devastated because she knows that Joy will never leave the commune now. All her hopes of returning to America with her daughter have been shattered. Still, she wants to be a good mother and grandmother, so she applies for paperwork to visit the countryside. The official seems optimistic that her travel request will be granted, but all hopes of governmental approval are lost when Pearl returns home to find that her housemates have searched her bedroom and found the tiny pieces of paper she had been collecting from the old propaganda posters - the lips, eyes, and noses of herself and May torn from the forgotten posters. The housemates

accuse Pearl of holding onto her decadent past, refusing to accept the New China and report her bourgeois attitude to the superintendent handling her travel request, arguing that they fear she will spread her imperialistic thoughts to the countryside. Of course, Pearl's travel request to visit Joy is denied. Unsure what else to do with the scraps of paper, Pearl and Dun work diligently to fashion the paper into homemade shoes, made with paste from sticky rice water and send them to Joy. They place messages of love for her in-between the sheets of paper, and hope they reach Joy unharmed.

Joy: In the wake of Yong's public humiliation, Joy launches a plan to create a mural in the commune center in the hopes of visiting artists coming to view the work - including, hopefully, her father, Z.G. The peasants have been ordered to build a road to the commune, and are doing so with only their hands as they have sent all their metal tools to the blast furnaces. The work is horrible, and the hours long. With the low food rations, the workers are being fed only two small meals a day. Mustering all her courage, Joy proposes her plan to "Launch a Sputnik" to the brigade leader as he engorges on a lavish ten-course meal. She claims that the proposed mural will bring great recognition to the commune as a whole, and to the brigade leader as a model of leadership. She pitches her idea in the Reddest way possible, and after a long interrogation, is approved. She selects a handful of peasants to be taken off road work to work on the painting instead. The mural is constructed quickly, with each wall reaching completion is under 24-hours. Joy hopes it will attract attention from the dignitaries who will, in turn, realize that the peasants are starving. But the mural attracts no attention, and Joy is forced back into the drudgery of her everyday life.

Pearl: Food shortages are starting to hit the city as well, which makes Pearl wonder if Joy is doing alright. She hasn't heard from her daughter in weeks, but comforts herself with the knowledge that all the food supplies are grown in the country, surely they must have enough food to feed themselves there. She busies herself collecting paper, counting down the days until Joy's baby is due to be born, and visiting Superintendent Wu who is handling her travel case. Despite Pearl's persistence, the government flatly refuses to grant her a travel visa, but she cannot give up trying. She continues to visit Auntie Hu, who confides in her that she's been plotting to leave China for over a year. She urges Pearl and Dun to do the same. Pearl is shocked and offended that Auntie Hu didn't tell her this before. When she returns to her house with Dun, he admits that he is falling in love with her. He doesn't care that Pearl is a widow; he wants to court her. Having been married off into an arranged marriage as a teenager, Pearl admits that she's never been courted before. There is no denying that she also has feelings for Dun, and she accepts his offer.

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 17 - 20 Analysis

The peasants in the commune realize that a terrible starvation will likely soon be upon them, and their fear causes them to turn against each other in the hopes of securing more food for themselves. Their first victim is Yong, an elderly, bound-footed woman who cannot work for her meals. They turn on Yong because her feet are still a symbol of the decadent life she once lived, one so far away from the life of poverty she is living



now. Even if the peasants do not agree with the commune's treatment of Yong, they are powerless to stop it. Only Joy risks a black mark and therefore a cutoff food supply by rushing to Yong's side. She is devastated that the people, especially Tao, could turn against Yong, who was already quite helpless, this way. Back at Yong's villa, Joy learns the truth about how Yong, Kumei, and Ta-Ming have been able to survive the food shortage thus far. They had already received their black marks due to their association with the landowner - who was killed when the commune was put in place - and the bourgeois life he led. The three outcasts were allowed to stay in the villa, but would forever wear black marks. The peasants always believed the three led imperialistic lives before the new government came into power, but for Kumei especially, that was not the case. She was sold to the landowner at the age of five and raped nightly. She produced one son from this arrangement, Ta-Ming. She attempted to commit suicide by drinking poison, but the landowner caught her and knocked the glass from her hand, burning her face in the process. Despite her terrible childhood, Kumei is still thought to be bourgeois, and is an outcast. She has resorted to prostituting herself to the brigade leader for food to keep her son alive. Now that the commune can no longer feed its own, they have turned on the weakest first: the outcasts.

It becomes clear in this section that Joy is continuing to write to Pearl, but Pearl is not receiving her letters. This is likely because the mail censors have stopped correspondence between the countryside and the city. Pearl fears that Joy has turned to her birth mother, May, now that she is pregnant, and perhaps her bond with her daughter is weakening. Joy seems to sense that her letters are not being received and sets about concocting another plan to communicate with her parents about the food shortage. She gets permission to build the mural in the hopes that it will bring artistic dignitaries such as Z.G. to visit the commune. Joy's plan fails, but the mural will later become the most important element in Joy's escape plan. Meanwhile, Auntie Hu quietly discusses her plans to escape China with Dun and Pearl. Auntie Hu's escape does not necessarily impact the plot of the novel, but this discussion lays the groundwork for the reader to understand how one might go about escaping the country. This information will be crucial to the characters' attempted escape later in the novel.

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 21 - 23

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 21 - 23 Summary

Joy: Many months have passed, and everyone worries that this winter will be harder on the peasants than the year before. The family has started scavenging the failed wheat fields for a grain of wheat here and there. When Joy's contractions start, Tao's mother sends her to the birthing house because the government promised extra food rations and cloth to women who gave birth there. Joy gives birth to a girl, much to everyone's disappointment. Tao does not even come to the birthing center to look at his child. Joy names the baby Samantha, after her father, Sam, hoping that her daughter will grow up to be as brave and honorable as her namesake. She is sent home without any of the food or cloth she was promised because the commune has nothing to give. Back home, no one will look her in the eye, as everyone is so disappointed that she gave birth to a girl. Tao won't look at the child, and insults Joy for not having a boy. Greatly weakened by the birth, Joy knows that she is starving, and if she doesn't have food, her baby will die too. That day, a package finally arrives from Pearl. Joy is happy to hear from her mother, but is frustrated that she hasn't come to the village herself. Inside the package are the homemade shoes. Joy is so desperate to eat that she boils the shoes to extract the rice paste, which she will drink. She weeps with Joy as she sees the shoes peel away into the many layers of Pearl's eyes, May's lips, and both sisters' noses. Tiny messages also slip out from between the layers, including one from Pearl that says, "My heart is with you always" (p. 259). Joy knows that her mother has not forgotten about her, and that she has tried to communicate, but the messages have likely been confiscated by the censors. This hidden message and the paintings of her mother's face is all Joy has of her Pearl's love.

Joy's horrible life on the commune continues. The peasants are given half a bowl of rice per day. The family has managed to hide a cupful of uncooked wheat kernels in their home, which they ration out a few seeds per day. The brigade leader continues to expect full days' worth of labor, working them like animals. Joy is reminded of the water buffalo she saw on her first week in the commune. Now, she sees that the people of the commune are just like that buffalo since they are not meant to complete this backbreaking work as punishments for their sins in past lives, they do it because they are blinded to the government's abuse. It appears as if they don't know what is truly going on - the peasants dying from starvation all around them while the government officials grow fatter from their elaborate meals. Joy sees that the best leaders in the Chinese government are the ones that lie the biggest and the best. Even Brigade Leader Lai, the leader of Joy's commune, realizes that doubling wheat production for the next year is impossible, but that doesn't change his demands on the farmers. The peasants are starving so greatly that they have stopped losing weight and have instead started swelling with edema. Huge numbers of people begin dying quickly - starting first with baby girls (whom families refuse to feed), followed by young girls and elderly



women. All food must go to the males first. Many families try to sell their daughters, but no one is interested in buying girls. Feeling desperate by the treatment she and Samantha are receiving from Tao's family, Joy requests a divorce from him in front of the commune, knowing that this may be her only chance to escape life on the commune. The people in the commune, many of whom Joy considered to be her friends, turn against her, accusing her of being a prostitute, and worse, and imperialistic bourgeois American. Tao leads the pack of accusations against his wife, saying that she came onto him when they weren't married, that she plots ways to overthrow Brigade Leader Lai, and that she brags about her money and accomplishments. He claims that Joy is trying to plot a way to escape the commune, listing the details of his own plot but attaching Joy's name to it. Everything Joy has done at the commune, from her paintings, to her small wedding ceremony, to her desire to do well at commune competitions all are thrown back in her face as proof of her imperialistic ways. Joy's divorce request is denied.

Pearl: Pearl continues to visit Superintendent Wu regularly, requesting a travel visa, but she is continually denied. Her romance with Dun continues, and the couple regularly visits with Auntie Hu. Despite the tightly controlled borders, Pearl realizes that people ARE leaving, but she hasn't quite figured out how. There are many checkpoints and border guards, and individuals must acquire the proper paperwork to pass through each one. The Chinese government has been anxious to open trade routes with their sister country, Hong Kong, so Pearl suspects that many merchants and artists have been given travel permits to Hong Kong, and are able to escape to the West from there. On an evening visit to Auntie Hu's, Pearl is shocked when a surly man, a squatter, answers the door. Auntie Hu's house looks exactly the same from both the inside and outside, but she is nowhere to be found. It is clear that she has escaped, although no one knows what happened to her.

Joy: Joy and her surrounding family are nearly crippled by starvation. Everyone around them is dying. They have started eating unnatural things like cloth, paper, and leather belts. Desperate families have taken to swapping infants between hungry families so they don't have to eat their own young. Emotions are dulled by hunger as cannibalism takes over. Craving some reconnection with humanity, Joy leaves Sam with Jie Jie, the only one of Tao's siblings that she trusts, and goes to visit Kumei and Yong. When she arrives, Kumei is greatly weakened by starvation. They speak in clipped sentences to preserve energy. Joy learns that Yong is dead, but Kumei is trying to keep the death hidden so she can receive Yong's meager food ration to split between herself and her dying son, Ta-Ming. When she returns home, Joy is horrified to discover that Sam is missing and another baby lies on the dinner table. Tao has swapped Sam for a neighbor's baby, which he plans to eat. Joy screams from her house to the neighbors and manages to swoop Sam up before it is too late.

With a new resolve to protect her daughter, Joy bundles up what few possessions she has and marches away from the commune even though she has no travel documents. Outside of the Green Dragon Village, Joy sees that the famine spreads all across the countryside with corpses and starving people littering the street, clawing at her for food. She travels for three days before boarding a train to Hong Kong, but she never leaves



the platform. A guard refuses to take Joy's bribe and tells her that her money won't help her anyway. The authorities don't want the people in the city to know how bad things are in the country, so they've blocked all travel. Joy is forced to return to the Green Dragon Village. There, she learns that Tao's family has been buried alive for their participation in "Swap Child, Make Food." Only Tao survives. With a new determination, Joy hatches one last, desperate plot to escape the commune. She rifles through her belongings to find the film camera her mother gave to her on her wedding day. It always seemed to be a worthless item on the commune, but now it could be her last hope. She knows that the brigade leader will never allow her to leave the commune, nor would he ever allow anyone to visit, given its atrocious stated, but she might be able to send her father some photographs. She argues that these photos will bring great accolades to the brigade leader, who honors art even in times of hardship. The brigade leader agrees, so long as no one comes to visit the commune. Joy agrees, desperately hoping that her parents will come for her anyway. The brigade leader insists on taking the photos himself, but Joy manages to sneak into one frame, throwing back her jacket to reveal her skeletal body and starving infant. She also manages to sneak a handful of chicken feathers - a sign of imminent danger - into the package before it is sent. She prays that this will be enough.

Part Three: The Dog Grins: Chapters 21 - 23 Analysis

Joy's life changes dramatically with the birth of her daughter, Sam. While she had hoped the birth would bring her much closer to Tao, it drives them further apart as she did not give birth to a boy. The fact that her child is a girl seems to be the final nail in the coffin of Tao's disdain for his wife. He does not speak or talk to Joy, and refuses to acknowledge their child. This interaction highlights a particular problem that plagued China: sexism. Historically, China has been a patriarchal society, honoring men far above women. Chinese tradition thought bad luck would descend upon families that gave birth to girls rather than boys. This was particularly true in times of hardship, such as the famine present in the novel. It is harsh, but completely historically accurate that the commune would let baby girls die first, followed by the young and elderly females. It was deeply ingrained in society that only men were capable of taking care of a family. Lisa See is clearly setting out to rewrite this sexist history by creating many strong female characters (Pearl, May, Joy, Yong, Auntie Hu, Kumei, and many more) that are more than capable of caring for themselves and their loved ones during tribulation.

When Joy publicly shames Tao by requesting a divorce, Tao's emotion turns venomous and he throws her to the jackals, likely hoping that Joy will be sent to the work camps or, better yet, killed. Although he despises his child, Tao also insists that he should be given primary custody of Sam, and it would be safe to assume that Tao would only want to sell her, or worse. Joy shows her fierce determination and love for her daughter by doing everything she can to protect her from Tao and his family's hatred. She manages to keep Samantha alive on the powdered formula her mother sends only because the Chinese villagers have no idea what the powder is for. Meanwhile, the real depravity of life on the commune comes to light as the peasants must resort to cannibalism to survive, even partaking in the harrowing "Swap Child, Make Food" that Sam almost fell

victim to. Although this is devastating to consider, it is, once again, historically accurate of the time, as are many disturbing images later in the novel. In these chapters, See shows her keen research skills, and her ability to weave historical fact into engaging, dramatic fiction.

Part Four: The Dragon Rises: Chapters 24 - 26

Part Four: The Dragon Rises: Chapters 24 - 26 Summary

Pearl: After returning home from work one evening, Pearl is delighted to learn that a package from Joy has arrived. She is confused by the chicken feathers in the envelope and asks Dun, who immediately recognizes the feathers as an urgent distress call. She and Dun race to find Z.G. knowing that he will find a way to have Joy's film developed that night. In the final photograph on the role, Pearl sees the ghostly skeleton that is her daughter. She barely recognizes Joy, and knows that she must get the commune immediately. It is Z.G. who concocts the plan: in the morning, he will get permission to visit the "model mural" at the Green Dragon Commune. From there, he will sneak Joy and the baby out of the village by hiding them in the trunk of his car. The next morning, Z.G. manages to secure four travel permits: one for himself, a chauffeur to drive his car, Pearl, and two for Feng Tao, the model artist, and his wife to visit Shanghai and give a speech about their impressive mural and their dedication to Red China. As Pearl and Z.G. drive to the countryside, they are astonished by the horrors they see there including skeletal people crawling through the mud in search of food, dead bodies everywhere, and children buried up to their necks so they cannot escape. Their parents likely hoped someone would take pity on the children and rescue them before they starved, but often that was not the case. When they finally reach the Green Dragon, there is almost no one around - everyone has either died or is too weak to leave their homes to work. Pearl rushes straight to Joy's hut and finds that Joy, Tao, and the baby are all still alive, but barely. Z.G. loads the three bodies into a wheelbarrow and pushes them to his car. Before they pull away, Pearl remembers Kumei, Yong, and little Ta-Ming. Yong is nowhere to be found and Kumei is dead. Pearl is about to turn away when she sees Ta-Ming stir on his mat. She scoops him up and carries him to the waiting car. No one attempts to stop them as they speed away. Although there are many roadblocks and checkpoints, with Z.G.'s travel papers, they manage to sneak everyone safely into Shanghai.

Joy: Joy and the others have spent the past seven months recovering from their near starvation. Since Joy was too weak to argue against saving Tao, he is still with them, although it took Joy many months to work up the courage to tell her mother what Tao did to Samantha. Pearl acknowledges that Tao is an evil man, and that they will have to handle him carefully; he could cause more trouble for them, preventing everyone from being able to escape to Hong Kong and then, America. When Joy is strong enough, Pearl confides in her that Dun has proposed marriage, and she has accepted. Pearl has arranged for May to meet them in Hong Kong with enough American money to get them all - Pearl, Z.G., Dun, Joy, Samantha, and Ta-Ming - safely back to America. Only Tao will be left behind, but he cannot catch wind of the plan. Z.G. manages to secure a

handful of travel documents for the group under the ruse of taking staff members to the art fair in Hong Kong. Tao must also attend the fair as the Artist Association believes him to be a communist artist of promise. Pearl and Dun are married in a governmental ceremony that simply involves signing papers, but their hearts swell with love for each other. Joy and Tao paint daily with Z.G. in preparation for the art festival in Hong Kong. Knowing that none of her work will be shown at the gallery, Joy feels free to paint what is in her heart: love for her daughter and her two mothers. She paints a portrait in the old-style of Z.G.'s "imperialistic" posters, highlighting only the beauty of the women and nothing of the government. Were she ever to be caught, she would be persecuted for such a painting, and Tao watches her work with disgust.

Part Four: The Dragon Rises: Chapters 24 - 26 Analysis

This section functions mainly to set-up the closing events of the novel. Joy's plan to alert her parents to the famine works, and she and her family are brought to safety. At the commune, Joy was too weak to protest Z.G. saving Tao's life as well, and now she must deal with him on a daily basis. Having Tao around makes planning an escape to America much more difficult, because if he were to ever find out, he would surely turn them in and reap the rewards. It would be safe for the reader to assume that there will always be conflict and unexpected hurdles for the characters to overcome as long as Tao is in the picture. It is particularly ominous that he watches Joy paint with disgust. Meanwhile, Pearl marries Dun and adopts Ta-Ming. Z.G.'s connections to the art world make it easy for him to secure travel documents for the art festival in Hong Kong. It appears that China's travel documents at the time were not name specific, so when Z.G. secures four travel documents, he could take whomever he chose with him, so long as they passed for artists rather than peasants. After taking full credit for Joy's painted mural, Tao is once again considered an upcoming artist-of-promise in China and he relishes the attention.

Part Four: The Dragon Rises: Chapters 27 & 28

Part Four: The Dragon Rises: Chapters 27 & 28 Summary

Pearl: Pearl and the rest of the crew take an airplane to Canton where the festival is to be held. Dun carries everyone's travel papers with him, as they plan to escape soon after Tao heads on stage to receive his award as a promising new artist - they all fear he would suspect something if they didn't show up for the ceremony. The audience at the festival is international, and the organizer introduces many artists to the guests, encouraging them to invest in Red China and its art. Then, he announces the special exhibition of Tao, Z.G.'s protégé's, work. There are five easels of painting revealed one-by-one to the applauding crowd. Joy watches with shocked interest when the final painting is revealed, and it is her own? "That's mine!" she shouts (p. 331) not realizing that she is incriminating herself. The organizer rushes to the stage, apologizing to the audience for exposing them to such "black art." Tao saunters to the center of the stage and announces that the painting is not his, and he calls for the true artist to come forward and receive criticism. Joy knows that Tao is doing this to prove to the influential artists and organizers how Red he is, hoping to make connections and further his own career. Shockingly, Dun steps forward to announce that he is Z.G., and that he is the true painter of the black art. With Dun sacrificing himself, the rest of the family is able to scramble away to the black taxis waiting outside. Pearl is beyond devastated having to leave her new husband behind, possibly to a lifetime jail sentence or worse, death. In the cars, Pearl orders the driver to take them to Wa Hong Village, the village where she made her contact to help forward mail to and from May.. Once there, Pearl gives the village leader five twenty dollar bills in gratitude for his help, his silence about their visit today, and for peasant clothing to hide her family as they travel by foot to the village of her childhood, Yin Bo. ON the road to Yin Bo, the group is accosted by a group of officers in search of the "troublemaker" Z.G. and his family. Their peasant disguises are good, and Pearl manages to send the officers in the wrong direction, her heart leaping. If they have come in search of Z.G. they will have figured out that Dun is innocent, and he may have been set free.

Once they reach Yin Bo, Pearl pleads with the villagers to hide them overnight. She has not set foot in her village since she was three-years-old, but she hopes her family name will offer her some safety tonight. She is shocked when an old man walks forward, tears streaming down his face. Pearl recognizes him immediately as her father, whom she believed to be long dead. Although Pearl is astonished to see her father, she has harsh feelings toward her father for abandoning the family, and knows there is no time for a family reunion now. Still, her father offers to help smuggle the travelers into Hong Kong on the back of his supply trucks. Pearl's father sells ingredients for traditional Chinese medication in Hong Kong, and these ingredients, in turn, are exported to the West. He

travels into Hong Kong twice a month, and knows that the guards will not search his truck well. Z.G. disguises himself as Baba, Pearl's father's partner, and the rest of the travelers hide in various barrels full of piglets, dead snakes, and dried sea horses. After a few tense minutes at the border, the truck ambles safely across to Hong Kong. The travelers have made it to safety. At the hotel in Hong Kong, Pearl receives a wonderful surprise when Dun knocks on the bedroom door. He managed to save the travel documents and make his way to Hong Kong peacefully. Soon, everyone is reunited with May who was waiting for them outside. In the final image of the novel, Pearl looks around to see her family surrounding her, and she knows that fortune is smiling down on them all.

Part Four: The Dragon Rises: Chapters 27 & 28 Analysis

In the closing of the novel, Pearl's earlier statement that "everything in life comes full circle" draws new meaning, particularly when she is reunited with her father at Yin Bo. At the opening of the novel, Pearl did not know how to feel about returning to China, particularly because she had so many terrible memories there. Although this trip surely did not erase Pearl's terrible memories of China but in fact, it created many more, it also allowed her to heal some of her past wounds. In China, she was reunited with her daughter and her long-lost father. She met a man and fell in love, which was a rite of passage that was taken away from her by her father who sold her into an arranged marriage, and she learned how to make love just out of love for the other, adopted a son, and repaired her lifelong feud with May over Z.G.'s love. Everything returns to the beginning and in leaving China this time, Pearl has a brand new start, a new beginning, in which fate is shining down benevolently upon her.

Characters

Joy

Joy is the main protagonist of the novel. At the beginning of the story, Joy is nineteen years old. She has just found out that her aunt and mother lied to her about her parentage. She always believed Pearl and Sam were her parents, but after Sam's suicide - a tragic act that Joy blames herself for - she finds out that she is in fact May's, the woman she believed to be her aunt, daughter. May became pregnant with Joy before fleeing Shanghai. Joy's biological father is an artist named Z.G. that she has never heard of. When this information is revealed to Joy, she immediately runs away from home and flees to communist China in the hopes of a reunification with her biological father. When she meets Z.G., he is on his way to the countryside to teach peasants how to paint propaganda posters. At the Green Dragon Village, Joy meets Tao, whom she immediately falls in love with. Despite warnings from both her parents that Tao should not be trusted, Joy defiantly marries him and moves into his family home in the commune. Joy is very naïve about communist life, and initially believes all the constraining propaganda set forth by the government. As her life on the commune progresses, however, Joy learns the horrible truth behind complete government control.

Joy is a talented artist, a skill she inherited from her birth father and later had nurtured by him after moving to China. Eventually, Joy uses her artistic talent not only to critique the Chinese government's control over its people, but also as the final way to contact her parents for help. With people dying of starvation all around her, Joy manages to convince the Party Secretary to take photographs of the mural she painted and to send the photographs to the Artist Association where her father works. She manages to get starving her face and the face of her newborn daughter in one of the photos. Pearl and Z.G. immediately run to the commune to save Joy, and they are nearly too late. Both Joy and Samantha are completely emaciated and near death. Through a long and dangerous process, they manage to sneak Joy and the baby back to Shanghai and nurse her back to health. Eventually, Joy is able to escape China with her daughter, mother, father, and a few friends.

Pearl

Pearl is truly Joy's aunt, but she raised Joy from birth and Joy always believed she was her mother. Pearl escaped from Shanghai, China in her late teenage years after being sold into an arranged marriage by her father. Pearl's mother died while trying to get her girls to America, and Pearl was kidnapped, held against her will, and repeatedly raped. She was saved by her level-headed sister, May, who threw Pearl into a wheelbarrow and pushed her to safety. When life was good in Shanghai, both Pearl and May worked as models for Z.G. a nationally famous painter. Both sisters were in love with Z.G., but only May was successful in bedding him. Through all her years in America, neither sister ever stopped thinking about the man they left behind in China.

Pearl lived in America with her husband Sam, a good man who Pearl loved, but was not in love with. When Sam died, Pearl dedicated her life to widowhood and her daughter, but when her daughter ran away, Pearl knew she had no choice but to chase her only child back to the country she had fled over twenty years ago. Immediately upon returning to China, she wonders if it is possible to be reunited with Z.G. Eventually, Pearl's feelings for Z.G. subside, and she dedicates her full focus to getting her daughter back to America. In the meantime, she kindles a relationship with a professor, Dun, whom she gives English lessons to and eventually marries. Pearl never stops worrying about her daughter's safety, even after she marries and moves away. In time, it becomes clear that Pearl was right to worry, and she receives a distressing letter from an emaciated and starving Joy begging for help. After concocting an improbable and dangerous plan, Pearl manages to escape China with her husband, daughter, granddaughter, adopted son, and friend, Z.G. whom she reunites with May.

May

May is Pearl's sister and Joy's true biological mother. While she was living in Shanghai, May fell in love with the artist Z.G. and became pregnant with his child, Joy. She felt that she was unfit to raise Joy properly, so she gave the child to her sister, Pearl. Pearl raised Joy as her own daughter from birth and neither woman ever shared their secret. When Joy found out the truth, she ran away from her family in Los Angeles to China. While Pearl searched the country for her daughter, May remained in Los Angeles sending money and letters to Pearl. At the end of the novel, May is reunited with her long-lost lover, Z.G.

Z.G.

Z.G. is a renowned Chinese artist famous for creating propaganda posters for Chairman Mao. When Joy turns up on his doorstep in China announcing that she is his daughter, Z.G. is dubious, but eventually welcomes Joy into his life and protects her from the true trauma of communism. As a favorite artist of Mao's, Z.G. is given access to wealth and most importantly, food while the rest of the country literally starves to death. Z.G. is becomes integral to Joy's eventual escape from China and he is reunited with his long-lost lover May at the end of the novel.

Kumei

Kumei is Joy's only true friend while she is living in the Green Dragon Commune. Kumei is an outcast who was abused by her first husband. Now she lives as a concubine for the Party Secretary of the commune. She lives with Yong, a fellow outcast, and her young son. Since Kumei's position in the commune is delicate, she is often put in terrible situations, such as being forced to act out her story of abuse for the commune's entertainment, keeping relations with the Party Secretary, and even turning against Joy to keep her place. Eventually, Kumei succumbs to starvation and dies.



Yong

Yong is an older woman from Shanghai who was sent to the Green Dragon Village as an outcast because of her bound feet. Yong manages to keep a sense of respect in the commune until they turn against her, ordering her to painfully unwind her bound feet and walk on them, joining the rest of the village working in the fields. Yong succumbs to starvation and dies.

Tao

Tao is Joy's Chinese husband. Tao and Joy meet while working as artists together in the Green Dragon Village. Joy is immediately taken with Tao despite warnings from both her parents. She defiantly marries Tao out of love, and moves into his family home in the commune. Soon, it becomes clear that Tao is not as wonderful as Joy hoped, as he tries to publicly humiliate Joy, refusing to give her a divorce. He also attempts to trade their infant daughter for a meal, and regularly steals praise, claiming that Joy's artwork is his own.

Samantha

Samantha "Sam" is Joy's infant daughter with Tao. The Green Dragon Village is disappointed that Joy did not give birth to a boy and refuse to acknowledge the child. Samantha is traded by her father in a horrifying infant trade in which starving families swap children and eat them.

Sung-Ling

Sung-Ling is the wife of the Party Secretary. Despite her position of power, she befriends Joy while she is at the commune, particularly when the two women give birth to daughters at the same time.

Sam

Sam is Pearl's first husband, and the man Joy always believed to be her father. Sam commits suicide when he is forced to name his beloved daughter as a communist. Sam's death haunts Joy and is one of the reasons why she runs away to China.

Dun

Dun is Pearl's second husband, whom she is reunited with in China. Dun is a professor interested in the English language, and has been desperately in love with Pearl since he first met her. At the end of the novel, Dun sacrifices himself by claiming to be Z.G. when

the government wants to question him about his anti-communist work. Eventually, Dun is reunited with Pearl and the rest of the family in Hong Kong.

Ta-Ming

Ta-Ming is Kumei's young son. When Kumei dies, Ta-Ming is adopted by Pearl and Dun and taken to America. His prized possession is his birth father's violin.

Auntie Hu

Auntie Hu is the only one of Pearl's remaining family friends in Shanghai. Despite the communist rule, Auntie Hu managed to keep her bound feet, servants, and decadent way of life. Despite being seventy years old, Auntie Hu never stopped fighting her personal freedom and eventually escaped, although no one knew if she ever made it to America as she hoped.

Ping-Li

Ping-Li is a member of the Green Dragon commune who commits suicide by throwing herself in front of a hay cutter after the commune refuses to grant her a divorce from her abusive husband.

Objects/Places

Shanghai

Shanghai is the main setting of the novel outside of the Green Dragon Village. As the novel is narrated from two different perspectives, half of the novel takes place in the city, and half takes place in the country. Shanghai is the city where Pearl grew up. She remembers it fondly, as a city full of life, art, and money. There are some remnants of life in Shanghai through the elderly women, like Yong and Auntie Hu, who have bound feet and manage to continue a life of luxurious dignity even during the communist era. Since the city has far more money than the country, the people in Shanghai aren't aware of the mass starvation and death occurring in the country. Those with money are free to throw banquets, attend government meetings, and generally live a higher quality of life than the peasants.

The Green Dragon Village

Green Dragon Village is the commune where Z.G. is sent for his thought therapy and where he teaches the peasants how to paint propaganda posters. During this project, Joy meets and falls in love with a peasant named Tao, whom she eventually marries. When Joy first joins the commune, it truly is the definition of happy communism, with everyone working together and everyone eating well. Joy loves her first year on the commune and cannot ever imagine leaving. As time progresses, however, the villagers fall victim to the Great Leap Forward, and starve to death. Everyone realizes far too late that complete government control will be the death of them. The group of villagers that were once so close, turn against each other, tattling about minor governmental infractions in the hopes of earning more food, and later, resorting to cannibalism when the starvation reaches its most desperate phase. Since no one on the commune has any money, no one has any chance of escaping their certain death at Green Dragon Village.

The Mural

The mural is Joy's attempt to express her distrust of the Chinese government and their control over the peasants at the Green Dragon Village. Although she knows it will put her in danger, Joy incorporates governmental critique in her painting, such as an image of a winking owl and Jesus Christ hanging on the cross. The mural is also important to Joy's escape plan. After convincing the brigade leader to take photos of the mural for the Artist Association in Shanghai, she sneaks into a photograph, alerting her parents of her starvation.



Propaganda Posters

Propaganda posters are the primary art that Z.G. works on during the communist era. Although he is a talented painter, the government only allows Z.G. to create posters that exhibit the greatness of Chairman Mao, and the success of his ideals. It is through teaching peasants how to recreate propaganda posters in the country that Joy first meets Tao.

Swap Child, Make Food

Swap Child, Make Food is a horrifying plan that desperate and starving Chinese peasants took part in by swapping their infants with other families, allowing the infants to die, and then eating them. This way, no family had to eat their own children.

Chinese Zodiacs

Chinese zodiacs give an important insight into characters for the Chinese people. Most Chinese believe that an individual's zodiac ensures character traits that will affect the individual for the rest of their lives. In the novel, Joy is a tiger, Pearl is a dragon, Z.G. is a rabbit, and Tao is a dog.

The Charity Pavilion

Charity Pavilion is a building on the Green Dragon Commune where Tao and Joy hide out when they want to kiss in private. Since the commune has outlawed romance and courting, the young lovers are forced to hide out in the government building if they want any time alone.

The Great Leap Forward

The Great Leap Forward is a social and political movement set forth by the Chinese government between the years 1958-1962. During this time, the government attempts to create the perfect communist country, surpassing America and the rest of the Western countries in export and production. The government's extreme demands on the people results in the death of over 45 million Chinese.

Chicken Feathers

Chicken feathers are an urgent distress signal in China. Joy uses chicken feathers plucked from the brigade leader's dinner to let her mother know that she is nearing death on the commune, and that she must come immediately to save her.

The Violin

The violin is Ta-Ming's prized possession. It was the only thing left for him after his father died and soldiers invaded the family home, looting everything. One soldier took pity on the small boy and let him keep the violin. For the rest of the novel, Ta-Ming carries the violin with him wherever he goes.

Themes

Blindness

The water buffalo is an important symbol for the Chinese people under the influence of communism. The peasants work painstakingly long hours in the fields for the benefit of greater China. They do not eat well, receive poor pay, and are treated like slaves. However, most of the peasants happily complete the work because they believe they are benefiting the greater good of Red China and Chairman Mao, whom they believe would never lead them astray. As the novel progresses, Joy transforms from the perfect communist proletariat, believing the same propaganda as the rest of the peasants, to an informed, suspicious, and determined woman who realizes that the peasants, like the water buffalo, only complete the backbreaking work because they are blind to what is truly going on around them. The bloody legs of the water buffalo will also symbolize the painful ways the government harms the people in the name of hard work.

The difference between the water buffalo and the Chinese people is that eventually, the people begin to see that their work was causing them great pain, but by that time, many of them are starving and are too afraid to question the government out of fear of persecution. The Great Leap Forward proves to be a disaster as the government demands that the people excessively plant their fields. Many of the farmers know that this act would result in a devastated harvest and mass starvation, but they do not dare to raise their voices. In the beginning of the story, it is arguable that most people are uninformed or wearing blinders about the extent of governmental power over them. However, by the end of *The Great Leap Forward*, no one can argue that the people do not understand what was going on, but by this time they are too weak and hungry to change their own fates.

Art

Art is an important theme in *Dreams of Joy* for many reasons. First, as her birth father is an artist, art greatly impacted many of the events in Joy's life. Her biological parents met when her father painted posters of his mother to hang throughout the city. Z.G.'s punishment for creating "black" art was to be sentenced to thought reform in the countryside. Joy accompanies her father there where she meets Tao, the man she later marries. Joy uses art in the form of the mural to save herself and her young daughter from starvation on the commune. Most importantly however, art is one of the final ways that both Z.G. and Joy can rebel against the all-controlling government. It is clear that Lisa See values art, particularly painting, for the way it gives a unique voice to the people. Even though Joy knows that no one will understand her symbolism of the winking owl on the mural, it gives her a keen sense of power to place it there. In this way, See honors the historic artistic rebels who left their critiquing opinions of the government in their art, even if it is only understood long after their deaths.

A Mother's Love

The driving force of the women in the novel is their love for their children. This is a particularly interesting theme given that the novel is set in communist China during a time of extreme patriarchy. Despite the fact that Pearl was abused, raped, and left for dead in China as a teenager, she returns to the place of her nightmares in the hopes of saving her daughter from the same fate. Likewise, when faced with imminent arrest, imprisonment, and death, Joy risks everything to save her infant daughter Sam from certain death in the commune during the time of mass starvation. It is interesting to see Joy and Pearl work this way, particularly against the backdrop of desperate Chinese women selling their children, or worse, eating them. There is no direct explanation as to why Joy and Pearl have such a steadfast love for their daughters, while other women participate in unspeakable acts to save themselves. There may be clues to this love in the fact that neither Joy nor Pearl have a man attempting to convince them that torturing, neglecting, and starving their daughters is the only way. Tao attempts to sell Samantha, but by this point, Joy has lost all love and respect for her husband. She knows that Samantha is all she has left in the world, which is why she fights so hard to have her daughter returned to her. The women of the Chin family rely on each other, love one another unconditionally, and fully embody the theme of maternal love.

Style

Point of View

Dreams of Joy is written in alternating perspectives of Joy and Pearl. Both sections employ the third-person and omniscient narrative voice recounted from the lens of Joy's and Pearl's individual experiences. The point-of-view thus feels completely reliable. The point-of-view is integral to understanding the novel as a whole because of Joy and Pearl's relationship. As a separated mother and daughter, it is clear that these two women would do anything for the other. Because they have returned to China during the communist era, much of their correspondence is monitored and censored by the mail system, which means that the women often don't know exactly when the other is attempting to communicate with the other. This is reflected in the point-of-view, as the reader fills in the story's gaps by first hearing about an event through one character's perspective, followed by the same event recounted by the other. This point-of-view is also important for the reader's comprehension of the various escape plans. As Pearl and May are separated from each other and have no knowledge of the other's plan, the reader could easily be confused by unexplained journeys of each character, particularly through the heavily guarded borders of communist China.

The novel uses both exposition and dialogue. The descriptive passages in the novel are especially interesting as they often draw from the true history of China during the Great Leap Forward. It is clear that Lisa See has researched her novel well and is comfortable incorporating that information into a successful fiction book.

Setting

The novel is set in the late 1950's in communist China during the reign of Chairman Mao. As the novel is narrated from two different perspectives, half of the novel takes place in the city of Shanghai and the other half takes place in the countryside of Green Dragon Village. Shanghai is the main setting of the novel outside of the Green Dragon Village. Shanghai is the city where Pearl grew up. She remembers it fondly as a city full of life, art, and money. There are some remnants of life in Shanghai through the elderly women, like Yong and Auntie Hu, who have bound feet and manage to continue a life of luxurious dignity even during the communist era. Since the city has far more money than the country, the people in Shanghai are not aware of the mass starvation and death occurring in the country. Those with money are free to throw banquets, attend government meetings, and generally live a higher quality of life than the peasants.

Green Dragon Village is the commune where Z.G. is sent for his thought therapy and where he teaches the peasants how to paint propaganda posters. During this project, Joy meets and falls in love with a peasant named Tao, whom she eventually marries. When Joy first joins the commune, it truly is the definition of happy communism, with everyone working and eating together. The peasants put in long hours tending to the

crops, building roads, and painting propaganda posters. Joy loves her first year on the commune and cannot ever imagine leaving. As time progresses, however, the villagers fall victim to the Great Leap Forward and they starve. Buildings collapse around the villagers due to their shoddy construction and everyone realizes far too late that complete government control will be the death of them. The group of villagers that were once so close, turn against each other, tattling about minor governmental infractions in the hopes of earning more food and later, resorting to cannibalism when the starvation reaches its most desperate phase. Since no one on the commune has any money, no one has any chance of escaping their almost inevitable death at Green Dragon Village.

Language and Meaning

The language of *Dreams of Joy* is relatively straightforward and uncomplicated. It is clear that Lisa See hoped to market this novel to mainstream rather than niche readers and this shows in her language choices throughout. The overall effect of the language is quite conversational and easy to follow, as if the characters are writing about their experiences in a diary. Much of the language is straightforward without a lot of introspection, which leaves the reader to interpret many actions and events based on the history presented in the exposition. At the same time, a lot of the language is used to characterize the people and events in the novel and many of the events are steeped in China's real history, which shows that Lisa See has done a lot of research to ensure accuracy with the story's historical elements. Despite the fact that this novel is set in China and written by a Chinese author, there are relatively few Chinese words included in the narrative. This may be to ensure accessibility for modern American readers.

Structure

The novel is written in 29-medium length chapters alternating between Joy's experiences at the Green Dragon Village and Pearl's experiences in Shanghai. The novel itself is divided into four sections, titled with references to the character's zodiac signs. Each chapter has a name that refers to some action or event within the novel that foreshadows what the reader is about to read. The chapters tend to be long and full of action, often with large spaces of time passing within a single chapter. This pace propels the reader quickly through the novel, anticipating the subsequent events to come.

The plot of the novel is extremely complicated with many interweaving subplots to keep the readers' interest. The main plot points involve Pearl finding Joy in China after she has run away and her plans to leave Communist China with her daughter, back to the safety of the United States. All of this action is set up amidst the backdrop of China's Great Leap Forward, which resulted in the death of over 45 million people. This historic event obviously affects the lives of all of the characters and informs many of the decisions the principal characters make throughout the novel.

Quotes

"Collectivization makes everyone prosperous and content" (p. 35).

"I'm afraid I won't be the strong mother I need to be. Maybe I never was a strong mother. Maybe I've never been good enough to be Joy's mother. Because, of course, I'm not Joy's mother" (p. 44).

"Bad memories make me put on metal blinders. I'm here, but I'll do my best not to see it" (p. 55).

"Seeing something once is better than hearing about it a hundred times. Doing something once is better than seeing it one hundred times" (p. 78).

"If your history isn't good, then you won't be good. A rebel as a five-year-old will be a rebel as a young man and will die a rebel. So what are you...? What is your history and what are you going to be? (p. 100).

"That instruction must come from Chairman Mao. It's up to us to decipher what he wants while keeping him from losing face. If loses face, many people suffer" (p. 129).

"No thrust into the heart is greater or more harmful than that from one who says she loves you the most" (p. 162).

"He puts his hands together and bows. It's old-fashioned, completely out of style these days, but it makes Auntie Hu happy. Even with all the changes, we have to remember our humanity" (p. 253).

"I remember the story Tao told me about the water buffalo and why it wore blinders. He said the animal's suffering in this life was punishment for things it had done in a past life. Now I think of a different reason. To make an ox or water buffalo work so hard, it needs to be blinded and uninformed" (p. 261).

"Few choices are open to those who are struggled against: hold to your morals and risk further punishment; admit guilt and accept punishment; admit guilt, offer thanks for everyone's comradely help, and hope for leniency" (p. 269).

"I thought I could use idealism to solve my inner conflicts, but in healing my inner conflicts I destroyed my idealism" (p. 294).

"When I left for China three years ago, I thought of something my sister once said to me: everything returns to the beginning. I was returning home to my roots, to the place where I'd been so ruined as a woman, but where I once again discovered the person I was meant to be - a Dragon of great strength and forgiveness" (p. 349).

Topics for Discussion

Chinese zodiacs are an important part of the novel both in their section headings and character descriptions. Choose two characters in the novel and explain how their Chinese zodiac characterizes them. In what way do these characters exemplify their zodiac traits? In which ways do they repel these characteristics? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Historically speaking, propaganda was an important element in securing the rift between communist China and imperialist America. How does *Dreams of Joy* work to dispel the popular propaganda of the 1960s? In what ways does the propaganda in the novel alter the Chinese view of America and in what way did the propaganda in the novel alter the American view of China? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

The novel's title, *Dreams of Joy*, has many different meanings in the novel. Choose two different definitions for the word "Joy" and explain how this definition alters the meaning of the novel's title. What does this phrase mean to different characters in the novel at different points in history? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Before Joy arrives in communist China, she is very idealistic about what life on a commune will be like. Where did Joy learn these ideals? What, if anything, do you think could have prepared Joy for the true hardships of commune life? Why do you think Joy stayed on the commune for as long as she did? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Dreams of Joy is clearly a coming-of-age novel for Joy, who morphs from a teenager to a woman throughout the course of the story. But it could also be considered a coming-of-age novel for Pearl. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Dreams of Joy is primarily a novel about mothers and their daughters, but it is also about fathers and daughters. How does Tao treat his daughter Samantha when she is born? How does this treatment compare and contrast with Sam's treatment of Joy when she was a child? How does Joy's feelings toward Sam and Z.G. change over the course of the novel? How does Pearl's attitude towards her father change? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

The Great Leap Forward is one of the darkest blots on Chinese history. Describe the government's intentions in launching such a ambitious project? What were the effects of this project on the Chinese people? Why didn't anyone stop the government from making its grave mistakes? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.