

The Story of the Stone, or The Dream of the Red Chamber; Volume 1: The Golden Days Study Guide

The Story of the Stone, or The Dream of the Red Chamber; Volume 1: The Golden Days by Cao Xueqin

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Plot Summary

"The Story of the Stone" is the first volume of a five volume series that tells the story of the prestigious Chinese Jia family. The main story line follows the growing up years of cousins Bao-yu, Dai-yu, and Bao-chai and charts the developing love triangle between these three main characters. Through his novel, Cao Xueqin also attempts to describe the lifestyle of this wealthy Chinese family. This story is told against the backdrop of a fictional magical stone that has been brought to life in the character of the mischievous boy Bao-yu.

As is mentioned in the first chapter, "The Story of the Stone" is primarily a love story. Although there are various love affairs mentioned throughout the book, the main love story is that between Bao-yu and Dai-yu. Although it is unknown to them the two knew each other in the Land of Illusion before they were transformed into mortal human beings. Bao-yu, the stone, watered Dai-yu, Crimson Pearl Flower, with dew so that she was able to assume the form of a girl. Crimson Pearl Flower, however, is unable to find any way to repay Bao-yu for his act of love. She mentions it would take a whole lifetime of mortal tears to repay his kindness. Therefore, each time Dai-yu cries in the novel, it is symbolic of her repaying Bao-yu for his gift of life.

Once they become mortal humans, however, Bao-yu and Dai-yu's fates become more complicated. They have another cousin, Bao-chai, who is constantly causing grief for Dai-yu. Dai-yu compares herself with Bao-chai and believes she is inferior to Bao-chai's beauty and charms. In fact, it is noted in Bao-yu's dream that he will marry Bao-yu and not Dai-yu. The novel ends with Dai-yu crying outside Bao-yu's house because a misunderstanding has caused her to be left out of a gathering.

While following this main love story, Xueqin also shares the beauty and ease of life for this wealthy family. He describes parties where no expense is spared and funerals that last for months. Descriptions of medical practices of the wealthy Chinese are also included in the narrative as well as the relationships between family members, servants, and children. In addition, the family builds an elaborate separate residence for their daughter who has been chosen as an Imperial Concubine.

Throughout the novel, however, there are hints that all is not well with the Jia family. It seems not only the family's monetary wealth is diminishing, they are also lacking in good male heirs. Since Bao-yu is the next in line after the death of his father, this makes him doubly important to the Jias and their future.



Chapters 1 & 2

Chapters 1 & 2 Summary

"The Story of the Stone" is the first volume of a five volume series that tells the story of the prestigious Chinese Jia family. The main story line follows the growing up years of cousins Bao-yu, Dai-yu, and Bao-chai and charts the developing love triangle between these three main characters. Through his novel, Cao Xueqin attempts to describe the lifestyle of a wealthy family. This story is told against the backdrop of a fictional magical stone that has been brought to life in the character of the mischievous boy Bao-yu.

Chapter one opens with the goddess Nu-wa having made too many stones for her task of repairing the sky. The one remaining stone is left sitting at the foot of Greensickness Peak, feeling rejected and useless. A monk and Taoist happen by, and the monk recognizes the stone's magical abilities. He picks up the stone and promises to cut an inscription into it, then take it on a wonderful trip. The action of the novel then cuts to a time several eons later when another Taoist, named Vanitas, discovers the stone which is now covered with writing.

As the Taoist reads the inscription on the stone, he finds the stone had at one time been transformed into a mortal man. The inscription tells the story of the life of this man from his birth to his attainment of nirvana. The only details left out are the dynasty and dates during which the man lived. Further inspection of the inscription indicates the stone wants someone to copy and publish its story. The Taoist and stone debate whether or not the tale is one worthy of print or if it is just another erotic romance. The stone convinces Vanitas that the story is one of true life and of love. Vanitas copies the story, agrees to look for a publisher, and changes his name to Brother Amor.

At this point, the action switches to the Chinese town of Soochow where Zhen Shi-yin lives with his wife, Feng-shi and daughter Ying-lian. One hot summer afternoon, Zhen Shi-yen falls asleep over his studies and has an unusual dream. In his dream Zhen Shi-yin hears the monk and Taoist discussing the future of a magical stone they have discovered. The monk plans to incarnate the stone as a human and in this way let it have a taste of human life. Before the stone was found by the monk, it had wandered into the land where a fairy named Disenchantment lived. While there, the stone took a fancy to a Crimson Pearl Flower whom he watered with dew each day and in this way gave the flower the gift of life. Because of their special relationship, Disenchantment plans to send Crimson Pearl Flower to earth as a human along with the stone.

Zhen Shi-yin wakes from his dream to find his young daughter in his study. He plays with her awhile indoors, then they go outside to watch the street traffic. While there they see a monk and Taoist in the street behaving like madmen. The pair approaches Zhen Shi-yin and his daughter, and calls the daughter an ill-fated creature. The monk and Taoist then discuss with each other their plans to separate and then meet again in the



Land of Illusion. As Zhen Shi-yin thinks about this encounter, he is called by his neighbor Jia Yu-cun.

Zhen Shi-yin invites Jia Yu-cun to visit, but before they talk long a servant announces another visitor has arrived to whom Zhen Shi-yin must attend. While Jia Yu-cun is waiting for Zhen Shi-yin to come back into the room, he glimpses a servant girl picking flowers in the yard. Although the two do not speak, the girl recognizes a grander nature in Jia Yu-cun than what is displayed by his ragged clothes. Jia Yu-cun takes a liking to the girl's good looks and notices she turns to look at him twice. When Zhen Shi-yin and Yu-cun later speak over a supper; Jia Yu-cun bemoans that in his situation he is unable to carry out his high ambitions for his life. Zhen Shi-yin has already heard some poetry from the boy with which he is impressed and has it in his mind to help Jia Yu-cun fulfill his desires. Zhen Shi-yin promises to pay Jia Yu-cun's expenses to the capitol so that he can take an examination.

During the observance of the Fifteenth Night, Zhen Shi-yin's daughter is left in the care of the servant Calamity. Calamity leaves the girl alone on a doorstep where she is kidnapped. The loss of their daughter causes both Zhen Shi-yin and his wife to become ill. To make matters worse, their house is burned to the ground when a monk carelessly causes a fire in the neighborhood. The couple finds their farm home uninhabitable and sell it in order to move close to Feng Shi's parents. Feng Shi's father, Feng Su is unhappy with this situation from the beginning and becomes even more unhappy when Zhen Shi-yin runs away with a mad Taoist he meets on the street. One of Feng Shi's maids recognizes the new mandarin as their former next door neighbor Jia Yu-cun.

Feng Su is called to the mandarin for questioning. Feng Su learns his son-in-law had been friends with Jia Yu-chun. Yu-chun promises to help look for Ying-lian and gives Feng Su silver and silk for Feng Shi. Yu-cun also asks for Feng Shi's maid Lucky, the one he saw in the garden, as a wife. As a result of his ability to outsmart his superiors, however, Jia Yu-chun is dismissed from his job within a year. He settles his family down, then takes off on a sightseeing trip. During this trip he meets with Lin Ru-hai and is hired as tutor for the man's daughter, Dai-yu. At the death of her mother, Dai-yu becomes ill with grief and is unable to continue her lessons. In this time of idleness, Yu-cun happens to meet with antique dealer Leng Zi-xing. Leng Zi-xing suggests Jia Yu-cun is related to the Jias of the Rong-guo mansion. Leng Zi-xing goes on to tell how the Jias are in a state of decline both financially and in their inability to turn out good male heirs. Jia Yu-cun and Leng Zi-xing continue to gossip about the Jia family and its current state of affairs. They cover topics such as the humors which make a person fundamentally bad or good. Yu-cun is surprised to hear there is good news for him.

Chapters 1 & 2 Analysis

The first two chapters of *The Story of the Stone* are packed with background information needed to understand the remainder of the novel. One of the more important sections is the part in which Leng Zi-xing gives Jia Yu-cun a lesson in the current state of the Jia households. The characters introduced in this lesson will play major roles in the



remainder of the book. Bao-yu is a character of particular interest because he is the mortal version of the magical stone. The story that the monk Vanitas finds carved on the magical stone is the story of Bao-yu's life. Although Vanitas believes at first the story is just another erotic love story, the stone is able to convince Vanitas the story is instead a true love story. The stone adds that if other mortals were to read his story, they might learn to give up vain or useless pursuits. After the second reading of the story, Vanitas is so moved by the story that he agrees to find a publisher for the stone's story. He also renames himself Brother Amor. This name change indicates how deep an effect reading the book has on Vanitas. He believes he has reached truth through the words of the novel.

Zhen Shi-yin's dream and his following encounter with the monk and Taoist are also extremely important to the remainder of the novel. It is through the dream that Zhen Shi-yin meets the Magic Jade and learns of its fate. This jade will be embodied as a mortal human, Bao-yu, and sent to live on earth. Along with the jade, the Crimson Pearl Flower with whom the jade has a special relationship will also be sent to earth as a person. After his strange dream, Zhen Shi-yin has an even stranger encounter with a real life monk and Taoist in which the two foretell the sorrows that Zhen Shi-yin will bring to her family. In a poem, the monk even gives foreshadowing that Ying-lian's name will be changed to Caltrop. In the same poem, the monk warns Zhen Shi-yin to "beware the feast of the fifteenth day;" a warning of when to expect Ying-lian's ill-fated future to begin. As predicted by the monk, the little girl is kidnapped during this festival. After this kidnapping, Zhen Shi-yin and his wife both become ill, then their house is burned to the ground. Zhen Shi-yin winds up running away with a mad Taoist and leaving his wife in the care of her father.

During his dream Zhen Shi-yin asks the monk and Taoist about karma. Although the two will not discuss the topic with him, they indicate that if he will only say he knows the monk and Taoist, he will be saved from hell. This interest in karma, or the idea that if a person does good things he will have a good life and that if he does bad things he will have a bad life, reverberates throughout the novel. The Buddhists' of this time period even believed that karma could survive through generations. Therefore, the bad or good things a parent did could affect their children, and so on. Interestingly, Jia Yu-cun seems to take a different view of this idea of karma. As he talks with Leng Zi-xing, Yu-cun states he believes that a person is either born under a bad humor or a good humor and that this affects the outcome of their lives. There are a few people, he notes, who have both good and evil humors inside them. Their fate is determined by the kind of people and atmosphere that surrounds them.

Note also in this section there are distinct lines being draw between the wealthy and unwealthy people in this novel. For instance, Jia Yu-cun admits that his is related to the wealthy Jias, but does not advertise so because they are so rich. It appears because of their wealth, even though it is in decline, this family will have nothing to do with their poorer relations. Another point of interest is the emphasis placed on Lucky's decision to look back at Jia Yu-cun more than once. Generally higher class did not marry servants. In Lucky's case, however, she not only marries the mandarin, but is also promoted to the position of his first wife.



Chapters 3 & 4

Chapters 3 & 4 Summary

Yu-cun learns there is a possibility of getting his job as mandarin back and asks Lin Ru-hai for his support in becoming re-employed. Lin Ru-hai agrees and sends Yu-cun to the capitol with his daughter Dai-yu. Dai-yu is going to live with her mother's family, the Jias. Yu-cun makes a favorable impression on the Jias and he is re-instated. Meanwhile, Dai-yu is greeted lovingly by her grandmother, Jia Dai-Shan, and is introduced to her cousins. The family takes notice of Dai-yu's weakened state. The girl tells them she has always been sickly. Once a monk wanted to take her and keep her as a nun. The monk told Dai-yu's parents this action was the only way Dai-yu would ever get any better. The parents had ignored the monk's warning and kept Dai-yu at home.

Wang Xi-feng makes a loud entrance. As the group has tea together, Dai-yu notices grandmother Jia asking Wang Xi-feng questions that indicated Xi-feng was in charge of the affairs of the house. Dai-yu is then taken to meet her Uncle She, but because he isn't well, she is sent back to the Rong Mansion. Here she has a brief discussion with Lady Wang about Bao-yu's odd behavior. Lady Wang encourages Dai-yu to ignore Bao-yu's eccentricities and try not to provoke him. Dai-yu learns she will be living with Bao-yu even though it is not customary for girls to live with boys.

At supper Dai-yu is seated at a place of honor. As grandmother Jia settles in to talk to her grandchildren, Bao-yu returns. Dai-yu is struck by Bao-yu's good looks. She also has the feeling she has seen Bao-yu somewhere before. As soon as Bao-yu's attention is drawn to Dai-yu, he states he believes he has seen her before. He asks if Dai-yu also has a jade like his and throws a fit when the answer is no. Grandmother Jia soothes Bao-yu by telling him that Dai-yu allowed her jade to be buried with her mother. As sleeping arrangements are worked out, Bao-yu begs to be allowed to sleep next to Dai-yu's bed. Grandmother Jia consents and all but Dai-yu and her nurse settle in for the night. When Aroma learns Bao-yu's fit about the jade has upset Dai-yu, she comforts the girl and advises her to ignore Bao-yu's tantrums.

Yu-cun was set to rule over a case in which a man had been killed during a dispute about a slave girl. The murdered man's servant tells Yu-cun a brief version of the story. Yu-cun is so angered by it that he is about to call for Xue's arrest when an usher stops him. This usher knows Yu-cun from when they lived together at the Bottle-gourd Temple. The usher warns Yu-cun not to arrest Xue because Xue is from the richest family around. This is why the case has been ignored up to this point. The usher then tells Yu-cun the whole story. The murdered man, Feng Yuan, had fallen in love with the slave girl and decided to wait three days for her so that it would be like a wedding instead of a purchase. The man who owned the slave used these three days to resell the slave girl to Xue. Once the deceit was uncovered, neither party would forfeit their sale. Xue had Feng Yuan beaten so badly that he died from his injuries. Because he had played with



Ying-lian when she was a child, the usher recognized the slave as Ying-lian. The usher tells Yu-cun he knows Xue was rough with the girl while she was in his service.

The usher suggests a complex plan of action to bring a satisfactory end to the whole affair. Yu-cun acts on the usher's idea that the Feng family only wants money out of the suit and settles matters accordingly. Yu-cun lets Xue's family know the matter of the murder has been cleared up. Because the usher knew Yu-cun before he was high-ranking, Yu-cun feels uncomfortable until the usher is arrested and as a result drafted for military service. After the matter of the murder is cleared up, Xue Pan, his mother, and his sister Bao-chi move into the Pear Tree Court located on the Jia's property. Once Xue Pan becomes acquainted with the Jia males, he finds they are similar to him in their desires for easy living and extravagance. As a result, Xue Pan becomes even more wild and useless than before.

Chapters 3 & 4 Analysis

In chapter three, Bao-yu and Dai-yu have their first earthly visit. Note that according to the legend in the beginning of the book, the two knew each other in their former lives. Bao-yu was the magic stone while Dai-yu was Crimson Pearl Flower. Bao-yu feeds the flower with dew and gives it life. As the two stand face to face for the first time, they both have the feeling they have seen one another before. They are also each impressed by the other's beauty. In fact, Bao-yu even makes the comment that he believes Dai-yu should have a jade like he does because of her unearthly beauty.

Also in chapter three, the author makes a note to point out the difference between the slaves and servants of the wealthy and the poor. The slaves of the wealthy are well-dressed and well-fed, unlike those who serve the poorer people. In fact, Dai-yu believes she must even watch herself around the servants of the house. If she does something wrong, she is afraid even the servants will laugh at her.

Through chapter three Dai-yu's personality is developed. She is described as a beautiful and dignified girl. She shrinks from high-esteem and thinks herself rather lowly. Dai-yu is sickly and has been since birth. Perhaps her biggest fault is her tendency to be overly emotional. This tendency is shown by her reaction to Bao-yu's fit about the jade. Even though she'd been warned the boy was easily upset and likely to go off on rants, she is still deeply distressed to think she has been the cause of this fit.

In chapter four, Bao-chi, Xue Pan's sister, comes to live with the Jia's. She is beautiful and graceful like Dai-yu. In future chapters it becomes more and more obvious that Bao-yu has feelings for both of these girls.

Most notable in chapter four is the love story between the servant Ying-lian and Feng Yuan. The usher believes the affair was "fated" as Feng Yuan had before this time been homosexual. It is not until he sees Ying-lian that he swears to no longer be with men and sells everything that he has to dedicate his life to her. Note also in the usher's plan for the way the murder case should be handled, he calls on the forces of karma to help



get Xue out of trouble. The usher tries to convince Yu-cun that the people would believe that "Feng Yuan owed a debt of karma to Xue Pan from a former life." Although Yu-cun chooses not to use this story, that the usher would suggest it signifies how strongly the people of the time believed in the principle of karma.



Chapters 5 & 6

Chapters 5 & 6 Summary

Grandmother Jia and family are invited to a flower viewing party at the Ning Mansion. During the party Bao-yu becomes tired and Jia Qin-shi settles the young boy in her room for a nap. While sleeping in Qin-shi's room, Bao-yu dreams of the fairy Disenchantment. While there Bao-yu is infused with lust. He also visits the Department of the Ill-Fated Fair where he is allowed to look at the three registers of the most beautiful girls in his home town of Jinling. Bao-yu, however, is unable to understand the pictures and riddles in the books and Disenchantment leads him away.

Bao-yu and Disenchantment meet with a host of other fairies. Disenchantment explains to the fairies that although she had intended to bring Dai-yu, she had been asked by the Duke of Ning-guo and the brother of the Duke of Ring-guo if she would take Bao-yu instead. Their intention is for the fairy to introduce Bao-yu to sexual pleasures and in this way overcome his curiosity about these matters. They believe this will cause Bao-yu to be a better student. The fairies take Bao-yu for tea and supper, and then perform Disenchantment's A Dream of Golden Days for him. Although the songs tell the story of his family's life, Bao-yu is bored and does not understand the lyrics.

In order to cure Bao-yu of his lust of the mind, Disenchantment gives him her sister, Ke-qing, to be his bride. Bao-yu is instructed by Disenchantment on how to consummate the marriage. The next morning Bao-yu and his fairy bride take a walk outside together. They reach the Ford of Error where Bao-yu finds himself being pulled into the ford. As he wakes, he cries to Ke-qing to save him. Qin-shi is surprised to hear this name called since it was the name she was called as a little girl.

Bao-yu's maid Aroma realizes he has had a wet dream as she helps him redress after his nap. Later when they are alone, she questions him about the experience. He describes to her what happened in his dream. Knowing she is to fulfill all of Bao-yu's needs, Aroma allows him to "have his way with her."

Grannie Liu visits the Rong Mansion under the cover of seeing Mrs. Zhou, an old friend, but with the real intention of asking for a hand out. Zhou recognizes Grannie Liu's true intentions, but decides to see if a visit will be allowed. Grannie Liu first sees Xi-feng who makes the suggestion these relatives, such as Grannie Liu's family, don't visit because they find the Jias prideful. Grannie states this is not the case and instead insists they haven't visited because they are short on money. Zhou encourages Grannie to tell Xi-feng why they have come and Grannie finally admits they have no food or money at home. Xi-feng feeds Grannie and the boy Ban-er whom she has brought along. To Grannie's delight, Xi-feng sends silver, cash, and cloth for clothes home with her.



Chapters 5 & 6 Analysis

The most important aspect of chapters five and six is Bao-yu's dream where he visits the Land of Illusion. Note this is the same land that Zhen Shi-yin visited in his dream. Although he doesn't realize it, Bao-yu once lived in this land while he was still in the form of a magical stone. This is why he recognizes the peculiar scent he smells there. Through Bao-yu's visit to the Department of the Ill Fated Fair and his viewing of a production of *The Dream of Golden Days*, he is being given hints as to the future of his family as well as his own future. The pictures and riddles of the ill fated maidens all refer to the women of the Jia family. These entries foretell the fortunes of these women. *The Dream of Golden Days* gives a more broad view of the future of the Jia family. For instance, in the first song, the singers sing of the old bond made between the stone, Bao-yu, and the flower, Dai-yu. The song talks of the rejoicing over a marriage between Jade, Bao-yu, and gold, a woman other than Dai-yu. It is assumed the woman whom this song indicates Bao-yu will marry is Bao-chai.

The second song refers to the sadness of Dai-yu over the unfulfilled hope that she would be the one to marry Bao-yu. There is a questioning of fate if the two were not intended to be together, why were they allowed to meet again? The remaining songs tell the futures of the other Jia girls. Overall, the idea is that not only the women will decline; the once powerful and wealthy family is on the decline. It appears Bao-yu is the only one capable of turning around or stopping the decline. He first must be cured of his lack of interest in studying and his frivolous nature.

The main purpose of chapter six appears to be to demonstrate the generous nature of the Jia family. Although they had not heard from Grannie Liu or her family for years, Xi-feng still gives to Grannie's family generously when Grannie describes their need. Note the pains to which Grannie Liu goes to try to pull strings with her distant "relatives." She uses her grandchild as a pawn by trying to get him to call Xi-feng "Auntie." Note also that although Mrs. Zhou doesn't have any problem calling Grannie Liu down for playing on Xi-feng's emotions, Mrs. Zhou doesn't miss the chance to try to impress Grannie Liu with her knowledge of the Jias and their family business.



Chapters 7 & 8

Chapters 7 & 8 Summary

Bao-chai and Zhou Rai's wife discuss Bao-chai's illness and the difficult prescription a monk prescribed for this illness. Aunt Xue gives Zhou Rai's wife a box of artificial flowers to distribute to the girls of the house. Dai-yu is upset she is brought the flowers last and is forced to take the leftovers instead of getting to choose as the others did. Bao-yu asks Mrs. Zhou about Bao-chai's health and sends his regards to the ill girl.

Xi-feng is invited to the Ning Mansion, and Bao-yu begs to go with her. While there, he meets Qin Shi's brother Qin Zhong. The two are immediately attracted to each other and quickly become close friends. The two boys compare stories and learn they are both without a tutor. They compile a plan to encourage their families to let them attend a private school together. As Bao-yu and Xi-feng leave the Ning Mansion, they hear a drunken servant cursing the Jia family. When Bao-yu asks what the servant means by his curses, Xi-feng angrily hushes him.

In chapter eight, Bao-yu takes an opportunity to visit Bao-chai. Bao-chai asks to have a closer look at Bao-yu's magical jade. Bao-chai reads the inscription on the stone out loud. A maid points out the words of the inscription are similar to those engraved on a locket that belongs to Bao-chai. As the two visit, Dai-yu enters. She is upset that Bao-yu has chosen the same time to visit Bao-chai. As the three visit, Bao-yu becomes drunk drinking wine. When Bao-yu returns home, he creates a scene after he learns Nannie Li drank the Fung Loo intended for Bao-yu. He threatens to fire Nannie Li, but Aroma is able to calm him. At the conclusion of the chapter, arrangements are made for Bao-yu and Qin Zhong to attend school together.

Chapters 7 & 8 Analysis

Bao-yu and Bao-chai's visit is probably the most important happening of the seventh and eighth chapters. During this meeting, the Bao-chai takes the opportunity to look closely at Bao-yu's magic jade. Interestingly, Bao-chai wears a locket inscribed with nearly the same inscription as Bao-yu's jade. Bao-chai is hesitant to tell Bao-yu about the locket or the monk who gave her the words of her lucky inscription. Perhaps this is because she realizes these similar sayings given to each of them may indicate some predestined future that involves them both.

Dai-yu's personality is more deeply portrayed during these chapters. First, she becomes upset when she is given the last two flowers when the other girls got to choose. She may feel upset by this because she still considers herself an outsider in the Jia house. By giving her the "leftovers," she feels she is still not as accepted or as important as the other girls. However, Grandmother Jia has chosen Dai-yu specifically to live in the grandmother's private quarters while the other granddaughters have been sent to live



elsewhere. By this action, Grandmother Jia shows that Dai-yu is thought of more highly than the other girls of the house.

Note also Xi-feng's reaction to the drunken servant's curses of the Jia family. When Bao-yu asks her what the servant meant by his words, Xi-feng becomes angry with him. It appears that the servant's curses may refer to the questionable moral status of some members of the family. The statement about the father-in-law poking in the ashes may refer to a high class member of the family sleeping with a servant or servants. The servant also alludes to possible incestuous relationships in the family.

A final important occurrence in chapter seven is the resurfacing of Ying lian, the girl kidnapped from her parents then sold into slavery. Ying lian is now known by the name Caltrop, the name by which the monk indicated she would someday be called. She is serving as a maid in the Jia household.



Chapters 9 & 10

Chapters 9 & 10 Summary

Bao-yu and Qin Zhong start school. Before Bao-yu leaves for school, his father berates him for his lack of study skills in the past. Dao-yu, on the other hand, seems only concerned whether or not Bao-yu will bid farewell to Bao-chai also. Qin Zhong and Bao-yu form deep friendships with Darling and Precious, two other boys who attend the clan school. These four often communicated with each other during studies in a way that they thought the others in the classroom were not aware. One day the school master leaves his grandson in charge of the students while he goes home to attend to business. Because Xue Pan is also not present, the more ill-bred students in the class take the chance to pick on Qin Zhong, Bao-yu, Darling, and Precious.

Qin Zhong and Darling arrange to secretly go outside to talk. They are approached by Jokey Jin, who makes fun of their friendship. Qin Zhong and Darling go inside and complain to Jia Rui that Jokey Jin has been harassing them. Instead of rebuking Jokey Jin, Jia Rui instead gives Qin Zhong a chastisement. Jokey Jin spreads word to the other students he caught Qin Zhong and Darling in homosexual relations. Jia Qiang, a student who wants to revolt against Jokey Jin, thinks it might not be in his best interest to do so. Instead, he angers the servant Tealeaf who confronts Jokey Jin. This action starts a riot in the classroom that leaves Qin Zhong injured. Bao-yu first threatens to tell his family of the matter. After Jia Rui begs him not to, Bao-yu says he will not tell if Jokey Jin will apologize. Jokey Jin apologizes, and even makes a kotow to Bao-yu and Qin Zhong. Jokey Jin's mother hears him muttering to himself out of humiliation. Jokey Jin's mother warns him not to get kicked out of school or else he'd never get accepted to another school. This warning silences Jokey Jin's mutterings.

Although word spreads about the fight at school, attention soon turns to Qin-shi, who is suffering from a mysterious sickness. Although she has not has a period in two months, doctors say she is not pregnant. Qin-shi has become increasingly tired and weak. All have tried everything to help her feel better. Feng Zi-ying suggests a doctor named Zhang You-shi look at the girl. The doctor predicts the girl's symptoms by only feeling her pulses, an ability that greatly impresses the family. Zi-ying believes that if the girl had been diagnosed sooner, her prognosis would be more positive. He writes a prescription that he believes will help. Zi-ying tells Qin-shi's husband that if she lives past the spring equinox, he believes she will have a full recovery.

Chapters 9 & 10 Analysis

Alleged homosexual relationships cause trouble in school for Qin Zhong and Bao-yu. The events surrounding this situation clearly highlight the relations between the different classes of students in the clan school. The students and leaders of the school are jealous of Bao-yu and Qin Zhong's looks, relationships, and high class. Jokey Jin is not



afraid to pick on Qin Zhong because Jokey is also a member of the Jia clan. Jia Rui is slightly more sensible as he directs his anger toward Darling and Precious, non-family members, instead of Qin Zhong. Although Jia Qiang feels Darling and Qin Zhong are being treated badly, he considers his position in the family before forming a plan to help their cause. Although Jia Qiang does not like Jokey Jin, he does not want family relations harmed. He instead stirs the page Tealeaf to anger so that this young man confronts Jokey Jin.

After the fallout from the fight is over, the students and teacher realize Jokey Jin is actually a poor relation of the Jia's. Tealeaf, the page, is also called down for his bragging and his actions which started the fight. It is at this point that Bao-yu exercises his leadership abilities and takes charge of the situation. He promises not to tell about the incident if Jokey Jin would apologize to Qin Zhong. In fact, Bao-yu even insists on a kotow, a bow represent honor and respect for the person for whom it is made. Notice this apology and kotow is addressed only to Qin Zhong and does not include Darling, the non-family member.

In this section of the book, the reader is also given a look at the practice of medicine in China. Information was gleamed from feeling the pulses and most medications were compounds of herbs, roots, and other natural substances. Superstition even found its way into the practice of medicine as the doctor bases his predictions about whether or not Qin-Shi will get better on the phases of the sun and moon.



Chapters 11 & 12

Chapters 11 & 12 Summary

The Jia family throws a spectacular birthday party for Jia Jing even though he refuses to leave the monastery to attend. Much of the conversation centers on Qin-shi's puzzling illness. Bao-yu and Xi-feng pay Qin-shi a visit. On the way back to the party, Xi-feng is approached by Jia Rui who has developed an interest in Xi-feng of a sexual nature. After this day at the party, Xi-feng begins to make regular visits to Qin-shi. During a private conversation, Xi-feng tells You-shi she believes Qin-shi will die from her illness. At this point the family begins to prepare themselves for the death and the funeral. Xi-feng learns that Jia Rui wishes to talk with her about something.

Xi-feng plays on Jia Rui's emotions and makes him believe she is interested in him. She sets up a secret meeting, but instead of attending, Jia Rui is left sitting in the cold all night after he is locked in an outside gallery. After he returns home to his grandfather the next day, Jia Rui is beaten for not coming home and then forced to complete ten days worth of homework while kneeling on the ground. Despite this bad experience, Jia Rui sets up another meeting with Xi-feng. This time Jia Rong enters the dark room instead of Xi-feng and Jia Rui nearly has sex with Jia Rong. Jia Rui pays Jia Rong and Jia Qiang not to tell anyone of the incident.

Jia Qiang instructs Jia Rui to hide under a set of stairs until he can assure Jia Rui a clean getaway. While waiting, Jia Rui is doused with the contents of a slop pail. Allegedly because of his inability to have Xi-feng, Jia Rui develops an illness. No medicine is able to make Jia Rui better. One day, however, a Taoist who visits the house claims that if Jia Rui looks in the double sided mirror that the Taoist will give him every day it will save his life. Jia Rui, however, looks in the side of the mirror he is told not to look into and is killed. The family attempts to burn the mirror but the Taoist calls it back to himself. Grandmother Jia prepares to send Dai-yu to visit her ailing father.

Chapters 11 & 12 Analysis

These chapters teach a lesson about undue lust. Although Xi-feng is married and has made it fairly clear she has no interest in Jia Rui by standing him up on their first secret "meeting" Jia Rui is not able to stay away from her. As a result of his relentless attempts to woo Xi-feng, Jia Rui becomes ill. A Taoist gives Jia Rui a mirror which will cure him if he looks into one side of it. Jia Rui disobeys the Taoist and looks into the forbidden side of the mirror, where he sees Xi-feng beckoning for him. He continues this until two men bearing iron chains take him away. Even at this point of death Jia Rui is not willing to part with the mirror, which has symbolically satisfied desire for Xi-feng.



Chapters 13 & 14

Chapters 13 & 14 Summary

As Xi-feng drops off to sleep, Qin-shi stops in to visit her. Qin-shi shares her concern that, if the family falls on hard times, there will be no provisions made for seasonal offerings or for funds for the clan school. She tells Xi-feng the family should invest in land as a way to finance these two projects. Xi-feng hears the sound of the death chime and wakes. Her conversation with Qin-shi has been a dream. Bao-yu is distraught when he learns of Qin-shi's death. He alarms his maids by spitting up a mouthful of blood, then insists on being allowed to visit Qin-shi's body. Upon learning the news that her mistress had died, one of Qin-shi's maids kills herself. Because of this maid's devotion, she is treated as a granddaughter and plans are made to bury her next to Qin-shi. Another maid, Jewel, offers to stand in as Qin-shi's daughter and carry out the mourning responsibilities of the daughter.

There is concern that Jia Rong is only an Imperial College Student, a low status. Ironically, Jia Rong is offered a spot in the Corps of Officers of the Imperial Guard. In this way Qin-shi's position is advanced to one of higher esteem. Meanwhile, You-shi, mother-in-law of Qin-shi, has become very ill and is no longer able to take care of running her household. For this reason, Cousin Zhen takes Bao-yu's advice and hires Xi-feng to take care of the Ning house while You-shi is ill. Xi-feng agrees to the proposal. She immediately sits down and formulates a list of changes that need to be made in the Ning household.

Xi-feng begins her duties in the Ning house. The servants have already prepared themselves to work with the woman whom they believe to be hard and unkind. Xi-feng meets the servants, divides them, and gives them their daily tasks. Xi-feng's leadership brings order and peace to the house of the bereaved. However, Xi-feng's personality as an overbearing mistress soon comes to light when she severely punishes a servant for being late to work. Bao-yu visits Qin Zhong and Xi-feng in the Ning house. He and Qin-Zhong both question Xi-feng about her habit of using tallies in her business. As the three talk, they learn that Dai-yu's father has passed away. Meanwhile, the family prepares for the day of Qin Shi's funeral. The Prince of Bei-jing is present for the funeral procession. During the course of the procession, he asks to meet Bao-yu.

Chapters 13 & 14 Analysis

The death of Qin-shi deeply affects members of both the Ning and Rong families. Bao-yu spits up a mouthful of blood when he hears of Qin-shi's passing. Remember that it was in Qin-shi's bedroom that Bao-yu had his dream about the fairy Disenchantment. Bao-yu's bride in the dream carried the name Ke-quig, a name which was also Qin-shi's childhood name. Therefore, Bao-yu shares a special connection with Qin-shi.



Before she learns the news of Qin-shi's death, Xi-feng has a dream in which Qin-shi instructs Xi-feng how to care for the family even in the days when they have fallen from their current prosperous position. Interestingly, when Qin-shi's mother-in-law becomes ill Xi-feng is put in charge of the affairs of the Ning house as well as the Rong house. This position puts her in a favorable spot to carry out Xi-feng's wishes.

Note the great ceremony and fanfare with which the Jia family observes Qin-shi's funeral. The funeral did not take place in one day, but instead over a series of seven-day periods in which certain things happened on set days. No expense is spared for Qin-shi's funeral, a circumstance that might have grieved the gentle woman who seemed more interested in the good of her family than her own good. The family even seeks out an increase in rank for Qin-shi's husband so that her funeral banners are more prestigious. In addition to the mourning of the family, there are also mourners and bowers hired to make the funeral more impressive.

Also note in chapter fourteen that Bao-yu is disturbed when he thinks of Dai-yu crying at her father's death. Remember that in chapter one, after Bao-yu gives Crimson Pearl Flower Dai-yu life by watering her with dew, she can think of only one way to repay him. Dai-yu believes that if she were born as a human, she could repay Bao-yu his gift of life with the tears she would shed through her entire lifetime.



Chapters 15 & 16

Chapters 15 & 16 Summary

Shui Rong, the prince of Bei-jing, is impressed with Bao-yu. Shui Rong invites Bao-yu to visit him in his palace for intellectual conversations, and gives the boy a rosary as a meeting gift. The funeral procession then leaves the prince and moves on toward the burial grounds. Xi-feng invites Bao-yu to ride in her carriage so he will stay out of trouble. Xi-feng's carriage makes a brief stop at a farmer's home, where Bao-yu is attracted to one of the farmer's daughters.

The procession finally arrives at the Temple of the Iron Threshold, where Qin-shi will be buried. The actual burial ceremonies are to last several days, so the mourners set themselves up in either the guest rooms at the temple or in pre-arranged lodging in a nearby town. While staying at the temple, Bao-yu picks at Qin Zhong concerning his affection for a servant girl by the name of Sapia, or Sappy. While Xi-feng is talking to the prioress of the temple about a business matter, Qin Zhong takes the opportunity to be alone with Sappy. Bao-yu interrupts their private time, however. Knowing that Qin Zhong and Sappy are in love, Bao-yu begs Xi-feng to allow them to stay longer. Xi-feng agrees.

Bao-yu returns home to find his study is finished. He and Qin Zhong are unable to begin studying together, however, because Qin Zhong has become ill. Meanwhile, during the celebration of Jia Zheng's birthday it is announced that his daughter Yuan-chun has been chosen as an Imperial Concubine. Everyone in the Jia household is overjoyed with this news except Bao-yu. Qin-Zhong has become even sicker. Apparently, the nun Sappy paid Qin-Zhong a visit and Qin-Zhong's father found out about the love affair. As a result, he ran Sappy away and beat Qin-Zhong. The stress from the event caused Qin Zhong's father to die.

Dai-yu and Jia Lian return from Soochow. At the moment of their return, a servant of a woman who owes Xi-feng money stops by to pay interest. Xi-feng's servant, Patience, covers up the matter so that Jia Lian does not learn of Xi-feng's secret stash. While talking with Jia Lian, the family learns that although Yuan-chun will be forced to live in the palace, provisions have just been made to allow the concubines to visit with their families in private if the family builds a separate residence following the Emperor's specifications. The family sets work immediately on such a separate residence.

The Qin Zhong dies. As he dies there is great commotion on the part of the demons when Qin Zhong asks to go back and speak to Bao-yu. Qin Zhong realizes he has left no one in charge of his family's affairs and has also left no word for Sappy. Although the demons allow Qin Zhong to return, he is only able to look at Bao-yu and shake his head. He then dies.



Chapters 15 & 16 Analysis

During Bao-yu's meeting with the prince, Jia Zhen once again makes it obvious he believes his son is worthless. Jia Zhen shares this attitude with the prince even though Shui Rong is obviously impressed with Bao-yu's clear speech and beautiful features. It appears that it doesn't matter what height Bao-yu achieves, his father will never see him as anything but the baby that chose to play with women's things.

It is in these two chapters that the reader sees a different side of Xi-feng's character. Until this point she has been a family friend, strict leader and competent money manager. At the end of chapter fifteen, Xi-feng allows herself to become involved in a dispute affecting another family. Xi-feng uses her power to bring about the desired circumstances however these circumstances result in the suicides of the family's daughter and son. Although Xi-feng makes a point of making it clear she is not "helping" for the money, she is paid quite well for her services. This is an act of greed not expected from such an upright person.

Consider Patience's actions concerning the servant who comes to pay Xi-feng. This action happens the same day that Jia Lian returns from Soochow with Dai-yu. Patience is careful to cover up her mistresses illicit actions and keeps Jia Lian from finding out about the money Xi-feng is tucking away. Patience's actions represent the levels to which a good servant would go to protect their master or mistress.



Chapters 17 & 18

Chapters 17 & 18 Summary

The garden and separate residence for Yuan-chun is finished. Jia Zheng and his literary friends decide to give places and things temporary names as they walk through the garden the first time. This will allow Yuan-chun to give final approval during her visit. Grandmother Jia has sent Bao-yu this day to the new garden to play. Although he tries to get away from his father, Bao-yu is ordered by Jia Zheng to walk the garden with the men and help provide names. Jia Zheng's literary friends are sympathetic toward the boy and try not to be too hard on him. Although his father does his best to belittle Bao-yu through the entire task of naming, many of Bao-yu's names and poems are chosen as the best by the entire party.

After this naming party is finished, Bao-yu is approached by his pages who claim they deserve a prize because they covered for him while he was with his father. They claim their prize by taking away all of the trinkets, including a purse given to him by Dai-yu. When he returns home and Dai-yu finds the purse is gone, she becomes very angry with Bao-yu. In her anger, she cuts up a sachet she had been making for him. Bao-yu takes from his clothes the purse she made for him showing that he kept it safe and did not allow it to be taken. The two make up from their argument and go to visit their grandmother. Once there, they learn twelve child actresses have been purchased for the visit by Yuan-chun along with twenty-four nuns. At the conclusion of the chapter, the family has just invited Adamantina, an unshaven nun, to join these twenty-four nuns.

At the beginning of chapter eighteen, a family visitation is arranged with Yuan-chun. On the day she is to arrive, Yuan-chun is preceded by a great envoy of eunuchs. Yuan-chun is taken into the garden where she is shocked by the extravagance to which her family has gone for her visit. Yuan-chun spends her time catching up with family news. She is overjoyed to see Bao-yu and hear that his is improving in his studies. Yuan-chun requests octets be written for four places she believes are very special. She sets Bao-yu and the girls to work on these poems. Bao-yu is given the task of working on a poem for each location. Bao-chai helps him with one poem while Dai-yu writes another for him.

The family then watches the prepared plays and Yuan-chun distributes gifts to all. As she departs, Yuan-chun reminds her family of all the opportunities they have to visit each other. Even with these visits in mind, the departure is a tearful one.

Chapters 17 & 18 Analysis

As in preparations for Qin-shi's funeral, the Jia family spares no expense in preparing for their daughter's visit. Yuan-chun seems a little overwhelmed that the family has gone to so much expense on her part. She does not seem to consider herself the honored



guest they believe her to be. Note she changes immediately the name "Precinct of the Celestial Visitant" with the term Celestial Visitant referring to Yuan-chun to the name "The House of Reunion."

Workings of relationships and differences in certain characters can be seen quite plainly in these two chapters. First, in chapter seventeen, it is evidenced how fearful Bao-yu is of his disapproving father. Despite his fear and his father's sarcastic and often biting remarks about the boy, Bao-yu continues to stand firm and make intelligent suggestions about the places he sees. Surprisingly, many of the names Bao-yu suggests are kept as permanent names for the places. In a note from the stone it is explained that Jia Zhong allows these names to stay because he wants to show his daughter what good progress Bao-yu has been making in his poetry and writing skills.

Finally, in chapter eighteen, the section in which Bao-chai and Dai-yu help Bao-yu with his poems illustrates the differences in their personalities. Bao-chai is as usual goodnatured but honest in her advice. She teases Bao-yu, saying she must call him sir after he stirs her memory about a line from a story. He instead indicates he sees her as a sister. After Bao-chai leaves, Dai-yu comes to help Bao-yu. She is angry because she feels her talents have not been fully appreciated by Her Grace. Dai-yu easily comes up with a poem in her head and writes it out for Bao-yu. Although Bao-yu believes the poem is the best written, all of Dai-yu's motions are those of self-pity and resentment, a dramatic reversal of the cheerful Bao-chai.



Chapters 19 & 20

Chapters 19 & 20 Summary

After the festivities of Yuan-chun's visit, all of the Jia family except Xi-feng settle down to rest and recuperate. Bao-yu finds himself alone and wanders to his Cousin Zhen's study to look at a painting that he likes. Once near the study he hears moaning, and peeps inside to see Tealeaf having sex with a girl. Bao-yu scolds the two, promises not to tell anyone about their activities, and then asks if Tealeaf wants her for a wife. Tealeaf changes the subject and the two decide to visit Aroma at her parent's home. The family is honored to have Bao-yu as a visitor and treat him royally. Aroma insists he ride home in a cab so that he won't be seen leaving their house.

Meanwhile, Bao-yu's other maids have been having a high time back at the house. Nannie Li comes to visit and scolds the maids for their mess. Nannie finds a bowl of koumiss Bao-yu had been saving for Aroma and drinks it. The maids expect a battle, but Aroma smooths over the episode. When they are alone, Bao-yu questions her about a little girl he saw at her parent's house. Aroma pretends to be angry with Bao-yu because of his questions and tells Bao-yu her family is planning to buy her out of service. In truth, Aroma has told her family she doesn't ever want to leave service with the Jias but is trying to get Bao-yu in the right frame of mind to talk to him about working on correcting a few of his character flaws. Aroma asks Bao-yu to try not to rant and rave, to concentrate more on studying and to stop eating lipstick and other cosmetics. Bao-yu promises.

The next day Aroma is ill, so Bao-yu goes to spend time with Dai-yu. She is trying to take a nap right after lunch. Bao-yu is afraid she will become sick, so he tries to keep her awake by telling her a story. Bao-chai interrupts their conversation and both girls gang up on Bao-yu. The sound of angry voices comes from Bao-yu's rooms.

It is discovered the angry voice belongs to Nannie Li, who is scolding Aroma for not getting up when she entered the room. Xi-feng ends the argument by taking Nannie Li out of the room. Aroma is sick and is angry with Bao-yu for making the disturbance worse by defending her. Bao-yu calms Aroma, helps nurse her, and then leaves her to sleep. Bao-yu then spends the evening with Musk. He is caught by another maid combing Musk's hair. Later Bao-yu offends his visiting cousin Shi Xiang-yun by spending time comforting Dai-yu instead of with Shi Xiang-yun. Dai-yu makes fun of the lisping Xiang-yun. Xiang-yun issues a challenge to Dai-yu to find some fault with the perfect Bao-chai.

Chapters 19 & 20 Analysis

In these chapters much emphasis is put on Bao-yu's relationships with the women around him. One of the relationships that is explored is that of Bao-yu and Aroma.



Aroma and Bao-yu are very close. She has even serviced him as a wife would. Bao-yu's visit with Aroma's family evidences how close the two have become. Aroma is even able to manipulate Bao-yu so that he will try to address some of his character flaws. Bao-yu's relationship with Aroma causes the reader to look at the broader picture of Bao-yu's relationship with all his maids. They are more friends to him than servants. He thinks nothing of helping them with personal grooming or even nursing them when they are sick.

It also become apparent in chapter twenty that Dai-yu has become more jealous of Bao-yu's relationship with Bao-chai. Bao-yu calms her and tries to convince her that he and Dai-yu are much closer than he and Bao-chai. When Xiang-yun appears on the scene, she only adds fuel to the Dai-yu's belief that Bao-chai is better and more loved than Dai-yu.



Chapters 21 & 22

Chapters 21 & 22 Summary

Aroma becomes upset with Bao-yu for spending so much time with the girls. That evening as Bao-yu reads, he comes up with his own altered version of the writer's words in which he calls for an end to feminine nagging and jealousy. After a night's sleep, Bao-yu wakes to find Aroma sleeping next to him. He acts as himself, but Aroma will not forgive him until he promises to be more careful and pay closer attention to her. Dai-yu later finds Bao-yu's addition to the novel he was reading. She adds her own line in which she points out that Bao-yu pays no attention to his own faults, instead concentrating on those of others.

Xi-feng's infant daughter becomes ill with smallpox. The family follows a ritualistic cleansing of the house and worship of the smallpox god to help clear her illness. During this time, Jia Lian used the outer study as his bedroom, sleeping separated from his wife. Despite his daughter's illness, Lian has a fling with a servant known as the Mattress. The servant Patience finds a lock of the Mattress's hair in Jia Lian's things and asks him about it. Xi-feng enters the room about this time. Although she asks Patience if she found any evidence Jia Lian had been with another woman, Patience covers for Lian. With the hair in her possession, Patience believes she has something that she can blackmail her master with. However, he takes the hair away from her. Lian desires Patience but she will not let him have her. Lian is angry, calls Patience a cock teaser and his wife a jealous bitch. Although Patience stands up for her mistress, she becomes angry when Xi-feng suggests Patience is having an affair with Jia Lian.

Xi-feng then talks to her husband about arrangements for Bao-chai's birthday. The party consists of lots of presents, a feast, and plays. Invitees are family members only. Unfortunately, one of the child actors looks like Dai-yu. Although the others remain silent, Xiang-yun points out the similarity. Bao-yu finds himself once again caught in the middle of the feuding females and wonders how he will ever be able to get along with others in the world if he can't get along with the few people he deals with now. In his bitterness, Bao-yu believes he has reached an Enlightenment and writes a poem. Aroma gives this poem to Dai-yu, who shares it with Bao-chai and Xiang-yun. The three bind together and make fun of Bao-yu. Their criticism ends his search for enlightenment and belief in Zen.

Spurred by a riddle sent to the family by Yuan-chun, Grandmother Jia decides to hold a riddle party. Because Jia Zheng is present, the children don't feel able to act freely. Grandmother Jia finally tries to send him to bed so that the children can enjoy themselves. Jia Zheng refuses to be sent away. He guesses a riddle, then brings out presents he has supplied when the grandmother properly answers his riddle. Zheng then moves on to guess the children's riddles. He is moved that all of these riddles evidence tragedy and loss, unusual in children. He wonders if they are foretelling their short and ill-fated futures. At this point, he agrees to leave the party and go to bed.



Chapters 21 & 22 Analysis

Several times in these two chapters, Bao-yu finds himself distraught and helpless as a result of quarrels among his female companions. He wonders how he will ever be able to get along with others as a grown up when he can not get along with the few people he interacts with as a child. This thought is very mature for a young boy and shows developing leadership skills in Bao-yu. The girls, however, are more than happy to gang up on him and point out his shortcomings as they vie for his attention.

The conflict between Jia Lian, Xi-feng, and Patience shows a new facet of the relationship between master and servant. Although Jia Lian desires Patience, she has the right to deny him and does so because of the loyalty she feels for her mistress. When Xi-feng does not acknowledge this loyalty and instead suggests there is something going on between her husband and servant, Patience shows her anger by being disrespectful to Xi-feng. Although other mistresses might have punished Patience for her disrespect, Xi-feng instead only voices her displeasure.

Note Jia Zhen's reaction to the riddles the children write for Grandmother Jia's riddle party. He is surprised that children this young could come up with such dark and foreboding riddles. He sees the tone of these riddles as a form of foreshadowing. The children are foretelling their own short and ill-fated lives.

Also of importance in chapter twenty-one is the amount of superstition and ritual followed when Xi-feng's baby is found to be suffering with smallpox. In addition to giving the child medicine, the Chinese people of the Jia's time period believed other procedures must be followed in order to assure the child would recover completely. These procedures included making offerings to special gods, following ritualistic cleansing routines, in addition to the parents abstaining from sex. Jia Lian's refusal to remain abstinent proves the idea the parents had to refrain from sex in order for their child to get well really had no effect on his daughter's recovery.



Chapters 23 & 24

Chapters 23 & 24 Summary

Yuan-chun orders that the girls of the house and Bao-yu be allowed to live in the Prospect Garden during her absence. Jia Zheng calls for Bao-yu to tell the boy he is to be moved into the garden with the girls. As Jia Zheng notices Bao-yu's intelligence and realizes Bao-yu will likely be his only heir, his dislike for the boy decreases. He tells Bao-yu of the plans to move him to the garden with the girls. It is Yuan-chun's hope that this move will encourage the boy to study more.

Bao-yu is first happy with his new living arrangements in the garden. One day, however, he wakes with a feeling of discontentment that will not go away. One day Tealeaf gives Bao-yu a present of romantic, sexual love stories to read. Bao-yu shares one of these books one day with Dai-yu. She is offended by the book and threatens to tell until Bao-yu distracts her with one of his long speeches. Later Dai-yu is alone in the garden and chances to hear the actresses rehearsing. The words the actresses are rehearsing move Dai-yu to tears and she sits in the garden crying until Caltrop comes looking for her.

Bao-yu meets the servant Crimson. Crimson is trying to better herself and finally finds an opportunity to serve Bao-yu. Crimson is the love interest of Bao-yu's newly adopted "son" Jia Yun. Jia Yun and Crimson meet while Yun is employed planting trees in the Prospect Garden.

Chapters 23 & 24 Analysis

The most important aspect of these two chapters is the children's move into the Prospect Garden. Yuan-chun does not want the garden to be closed up and not used in her absence, so she orders the children be allowed to live there. One day Dai-yu is listening to the actresses rehearse and is struck by phrases that contain the ideas of flowers and flowing water. These ideas, coupled with the memory of Bao-yu floating flower petals in the stream, causes Dai-yu to be overcome with grief. It could be these ideas bring to mind in Dai-yu's unconsciousness her days as a flower in the Land of Illusion. The ideas of a flower found in deep woe and fading as the river runs touches her deeply.



Chapters 25 & 26

Chapters 25 & 26 Summary

Jia Huan, Bao-yu's half brother, is busy doing homework by candlelight when Bao-yu comes in from a party. Seeing that he has been drinking, Lady Wang sends him to lie down on the kang next to his brother. Bao-yu tries to flirt with Jia Huan's servant Sunset, causing Huan to feel jealous. In his jealousy, Huan "accidentally" knocks over his candle, causing hot wax to pour over Bao-yu's face. Lady Wang first berates Huan, then Aunt Zhao for the "accident." At Bao-yu's insistence, the family tells Grandmother Jia that Bao-yu was the one responsible for the accident.

Bao-yu's godmother, Mother Ma, visits to help dispel the evil spirits that caused Bao-yu's burn. While there, she also visits with Aunt Zhao. The two form a plan to get rid of Xi-feng. Later, as Dai-yu is visiting with Bao-yu, he suddenly jumps up and begins acting crazy. By the time the family has come he has tried to kill himself several times. At the same time, Xi-feng begins brandishing a knife and must be locked in her room. Even Jia Zhen, the leader of the family, is distraught and unable to decide what should be done. Bao-yu and Xi-feng are laid together, delirious and incoherent. Pages take shifts and watch over them through the night.

Uncle She looks everywhere for monks who can cure the pair. Jia Zheng tries to convince him to stop but Uncle She will not. Aunt Zhao comments that they should let the two die in peace. At this statement, Grandmother Jia rails on her that if Bao-yu dies the death will be blamed on Aunt Zhao. At this same time, a servant arrives to say the coffins are ready. This statement angers Grandmother Jia even more. As she commands the servant be beaten, the voice of a monk is heard in the street. This monk and his accompanying Taoist are allowed inside to see if they can cure Bao-yu and Xi-feng.

The monk tells Jia Zheng the family already owns the only charm they need to cure the illness. He asks to see Bao-yu's piece of jade. The monk speaks to the stone, addressing it as an old friend. He then cleans the stone and says a few words to it to restore its power. The monk then orders that the stone be hung over the door to the sick room and only the mother and grandmother be allowed inside. If these instructions are followed the monk assures them that the two will be cured in thirty three days. That very night Bao-yu and Xi-feng are better enough they are able to eat.

Bao-yu is well enough to return to the garden. After he visits with Jia Yun, Bao-yu wanders through the garden and finds himself at Dai-yu's house. Dai-yu blushes when she sees Bao-yu and knows he has heard her comment about love. When Bao-yu makes a comment about marriage, Dai-yu is deeply offended. Meanwhile, Aroma comes with a message that Bao-yu's father wants to see him. It turns out it is really Xue Pan who wants to see him. Xue Pan invites Bao-yu to help him eat some food that had been given him for his birthday. Later, Dai-yu goes to visit Bao-yu. She sees Bao-chai



entering his house and knows they are there together. By the time she reaches the house, the gates have been shut for the night. Dai-yu identifies herself and is told that Bao-yu has ordered no one be let in. Dai-yu is deeply hurt by being excluded from Bao-yu's house and begins to cry. As she cries, someone opens the courtyard door and comes out. It is at this point the story ends.

Chapters 25 & 26 Analysis

After Aunt Zhao is rebuked for Bao-yu's accident, she pays Mother Ma to "get rid" of Bao-yu and Xi-feng. It is assumed the two are invaded by evil spirits. Again acting on superstition the family calls for charms and religious persons to try to cure their ailing relatives. It is Bao-yu's jade that comes into play and ultimately cures the two. The monk speaks to the stone, telling it that its time on earth is not over yet. Ironically, the monk and Taoist who cure Bao-yu and Xi-feng are the same monk and Taoist who have appeared to different characters throughout the book.

Note also Xue Pan's sudden interest in Bao-yu. This may be because he caught a glimpse of the beautiful Dai-yu who up to this point he had never seen. Xue Pan is pressing Bao-yu for a birthday gift when they are interrupted by the general's son. Could he have wanted to ask for a meeting with Dai-yu?

Finally, note Dai-yu's heartbreak at being left out of Bao-yu and Bao-chai's meeting. It has become quite obvious by this point in the novel that Dai-yu has affections for Bao-yu. So far Bao-yu has not returned these affections; he has only flirted with her and made her feel as if he is making fun of her. The novel closes with Dai-yu crying in the courtyard. Perhaps these are more tears to cover the debt she owes to Bao-yu for giving her life in the Land of Illusion.



Characters

Bao-yu

Bao-yu is the mortal human that is created by the monk from the rejected stone. It is Bao-yu that the story is about. Before he is turned into a mortal human, Bao-yu lives in the Land of Illusion. It is here that he first encounters his earthly cousin Dai-yu. Dai-yu is Crimson Pearl Flower, a flower that Bao-yu turns into the form of a girl by watering her with dew.

As a human being, Bao-yu is mischievous, well-known for his tantrums and rants. He is disliked by his father because as a baby Bao-yu chose to play with women's things when he was tested to determine his temperament. From that time, Jia Zheng had despised the boy and claimed he would grow up to be useless. Zheng takes every opportunity to degrade and belittle the boy. Another aspect of Bao-yu's personality that irritates his father is Bao-yu's dislike for serious study. Although Bao-yu is a talented poetry writer, his father believes he would be better off with real literature and book learning.

Bao-yu's grandmother, on the other hand, believes Bao-yu can do no wrong. For this reason, Bao-yu lives with his grandmother and other female cousins instead of living with the males of the family. Bao-yu prefers to live with the females and makes them a good companion even though he does have a habit of eating their rouge and lipstick. The only male character in the book that Bao-yu takes an instant liking to is Qin Zhong. Even though the two are from different social classes, they develop a deep friendship.

Despite his father's negative attitude toward him, Bao-yu impresses those around him with his intelligence and beauty. Because he was born with a jade in his mouth, a sign of good luck, Bao-yu is considered by all to be a wonder. Even the prince of Bei-jing requests to meet Bao-yu when he has the opportunity. Bao-yu shows signs of being a peacemaker and often acts with more level headedness than the adults around him.

Dai-yu

Like Bao-yu, Dai-yu also lived in the Land of Illusion before she was turned into a mortal human being. Dai-yu was Crimson Pearl Flower, the flower turned into the form of a girl when Bao-yu watered it with dew. Dai-yu can think of no way to repay Bao-yu for his gift of life other than to say she would have to give him all the tears shed by a mortal human during their lifetime. Perhaps this is why Dai-yu cries so often during the novel. It is through this pain and the resulting tears that she repays Bao-yu for his gift of life.

Unlike Bao-yu, Dai-yu was not born in the Jia house. She instead lived with her father and mother until the time of her mother's death. It is at this point that she is sent to live with her grandmother at the Rong mansion. Because she is not an immediate member of the family Dai-yu always feels left out and ill at ease. However, it is Dai-yu that



Grandmother Jia chooses to live with Bao-yu and herself instead of any of the other cousins. While this action should have helped ease Dai-yu's anxieties, she still does not feel welcome in the Rong house.

Although she is highly emotional and often lets her emotions carry her away, Dai-yu is very intelligent. She is also a very beautiful and graceful young lady. She and Bao-yu spend many hours talking and sharing ideas. Her emotional outbursts often cause stress for Bao-yu, especially when these outbursts are caused by Bao-yu's relationship with Bao-chai, a cousin of both Bao-yu and Dai-yu. It is foreshadowed in the book that although it is obvious Dai-yu has feelings for Bao-yu, he will marry Bao-chai and not Dai-yu.

Bao-chai

Bao-chai is a cousin to both Dai-yu and Bao-yu. At several places in the book it is hinted that Bao-chai and Dai-yu are complements of each other, that if the two were put together, one would have a perfect woman. Bao-chai is described as being beautiful and graceful, almost to the point of outshining Dai-yu's beauty. Like Bao-yu, Bao-chai has a lucky charm that she wears daily. This golden locket bears an inscription similar to the one found on Bao-yu's piece of jade. Although Bao-chai will not say much about the locket, a maid tells Bao-yu that a monk gave the family the lucky inscription and said it must be engraved on something made of gold. In Bao-yu's dream it is mentioned that gold, Bao-chai, and jade, Bao-yu, will be united in a mistaken marriage.

Although she is not as intelligent as Dai-yu, Bao-chai is a much more pleasant person. She does not suffer with the bursts of emotion that Dai-yu does. Bao-chai is described as being pleasant and full of fun. She often makes fun of Dai-yu and calls her the frowner. Bao-chai is not originally from the Jia house but is related to Bao-yu on his mother's side of the family. Bao-chai comes to live in the Rong when her brother Xue Pan gets in trouble for killing another man over the purchase of a servant girl.

The Monk and The Taoist

These disheveled characters are combined because they rarely appear apart from each other. The two appear together when they first find the rejected stone at the foot of Greensickness Peak. The monk and Taoist also appear together when they warn Shi-yin of the grief his young daughter will bring to his family. They try to take the child with them, but Shi-yin will not allow it. The Taoist and monk also appear together at the end of the book when Bao-yu and Xi-feng lay close to death. The monk cleans the jade of its impurities and restores its powers.

The monk is described as a scrabby headed character. He often appears to be crazy. This monk writes the original inscription on Bao-yu's jade and also gives Bao-chai's family the inscription for her locket. The Taoist is described as being lame and filthy. This Taoist is the one who gives Jia Rui the mirror which would cure Jia Rui if he looked only into one side of it. Jia Rui looks into the opposite side of the mirror and is killed.



Xi-feng

At the beginning of the novel, Xi-feng is responsible for watching over the monetary affairs of the Rong mansion. When Qin-chi dies, Xi-feng also takes over the affairs of the Ning house as well. Xi-feng is competent at her job but feels much stress that others may not think she is doing an adequate job. She is almost too strict with the servants, but manages to run both houses in an efficient manner. Xi-feng is a much loved relative and frequent companion for Bao-yu. Although most believe Xi-feng walks the straight and narrow, there is one who believes she is embezzling from the Jia family. As a result, Aunt Zhao pays money to have a curse put on Xi-feng. Fortunately, this curse is removed by Bao-yu's magic jade and Xi-feng survives the incident.

Jia Zheng

Jia Zheng is Bao-yu's father and the head of the Rong household. Zheng is a very upright and straight-laced man with an affection for study. He often surrounds himself with a group of literary friends with whom he discusses the things he has studied and learned. Although Bao-yu is the best choice for his heir, Jia Zheng does not like the boy because he prefers the company of women to that of men. Bao-yu also does not like serious study but prefers poetry. Because of these differences Jia Zheng is cruel to the boy and often berates him cruelly, even in front of others. By the end of the book, however, Jia Zheng's attitude toward Bao-yu has begun to improve somewhat.

Aroma

Aroma is Bao-yu's chief maid. Aroma was sold into slavery in the Jia house so that her family could have money to survive. Aroma began her duties serving Grandmother Jia and was eventually transferred to Bao-yu. Bao-yu's relationship with Aroma is very close. Even though he is only a young boy, perhaps between the ages of ten and fifteen during the time span of the novel, Aroma has served as a wife to Bao-yu. Through her years working with Bao-yu, Aroma has learned how to manipulate the boy so that he does her wishes. She guides him and tries to help him be the best he can be, almost like a mother figure.

Qin Zhong

Qin Zhong is the brother of Qin-shi. He is physically attractive but shy and almost feminine in manner. Although he and Bao-yu are of different social classes, they form a close friendship the first time they meet. Qin Zhong pursues a sexual relationship with a nun while at the Temple of the Iron Threshold while observing Qin-shi's funeral. Qin Zhong dies soon after Qin-shi's death. His death is brought about both by his sickly nature and grief over the loss of his sweetheart and his father.



Ying-lian/Caltrop

Ying-lian is the daughter of Zhen Shi-yen and Feng-shi. While still a small child, Ying-lian is kidnapped from her family as forecast by the monk and Taoist. Her kidnapper sells Ying-lian into slavery. Thinking he will make extra profit from the girl, he sells her to two different parties. One of the men, Xue Pan, arranges to have the other man killed. Therefore, Xue Pan becomes the owner of Caltrop. Caltrop comes to live in the Rong mansion when Xue Pan and his sister Bao-chai move there with their mother.

The Fairy Disenchantment

This fairy is the one who oversees the stone, Bao-yu, and Crimson Pearl Flower, Dai-yu, during their time in the Land of Illusion. Disenchantment arranges for Bao-yu and Dai-yu to be sent to earth of mortal human beings. When Bao-yu visits the Land of Illusion in his dream, it is Disenchantment who leads him on the tour of the land. She allows him to visit the Department of the Ill Fated Fair where he holds and looks at the books that hold the futures of many of the women in his life. Disenchantment also gives Bao-yu her sister as a wife. Disenchantment tells Bao-yu his relations with this girl will help improve his study habits.

Jia Yu-cun

Yu-cun had his beginnings in a temple next door to Zhen Shi-yin. Shi-yin recognizes an intelligence in the boy and pays his way to the capitol to take an exam. After Yu-cun is dismissed from his job as mandarin, he works as tutor for Dai-yu for awhile before her mother dies. Yu-cun later uses his affiliation with the Jias to get his job as mandarin back. He is called upon to rule in the murder case involving Xue Pan, a case which he almost rules hastily before he realizes who Xue Pan is. With the help of an usher, Yu-cun is able to come to a decision that satisfies all parties involved.

Grandmother Jia

Grandmother Jia dotes on all of her grandchildren. She is especially close to Bao-yu and Dai-yu. She allows these two to live together with her in her personal quarters. Although she is advanced in age, Grandmother Jia still enjoys parties and watching plays. She spoils Bao-yu to a fault; almost to the point other relatives believe the boy will never be good for anything. Grandmother Jia believes Bao-yu is special because he was born with the jade in his mouth. It is this reason why she treats him in such a special way.



Yuan-chun

Yuan-chun is Bao-yu's older sister. She is appointed as an Imperial Concubine, a position that brings honor to her family. Although she is forced to live in the palace away from her family, Yuan-chun continues to show deep concern for Bao-yu's development and studies. In order to prove to Yuan-chun how well Bao-yu is doing, Jia Zheng allows Bao-yu to name many of the places located in the Prospect Garden, the separate residence the family was required to build in order to be allowed private visits with their daughter. After her original trip to the garden, Yuan-chun orders the children, including Bao-yu, be allowed to live in the garden.

Jia Huan

Jia Huan is Bao-yu's half brother by a concubine. Jia Huan is jealous of Bao-yu and doesn't understand what he sees as Bao-yu's dislike for him. In reality, Bao-yu dislikes most all men, not just Jia Huan. Out of jealousy, Jia Huan tips a candle over onto Bao-yu, causing his face to be badly burned.

Aunt Zhao

Aunt Zhao is Jia Zheng's concubine. She is mother to Jia Huan. Out of anger she pays Mother Ma to kill Xi-feng and Bao-yu. Grandmother Jia is wise to Aunt Zhao's plan and warns her that if Bao-yu dies, Aunt Zhao will be blamed with his death.

Vanitas or Brother Amor

This Taoist discovers the stone after it has lived its life as a mortal man. Although leery that the stone's story will be seen as only another dirty romance novel, Vanitas eventually sees the story as one about life and agrees to try to have it published. As a result of his meeting with the stone and his work copying the story, Vanitas renames himself Brother Amor.



Objects/Places

Incredible Craggs of the Great Fable Mountains

It is at this location that the Goddess Nu-wa created an extra stone when she was repairing the sky.

The Foot of Greensickness Peak

This area is where the monk and the Taoist find the left over magical stone that becomes Bao-yo's magic jade. It is this same location where Vanitas finds the stone with the Jia's story written on it.

Bottle-gourd Temple

This is the temple where Jia Yu-cun lives. This temple is located next door to Zhen Shi-yin's house.

Land of Illusion

Zhen Shi-yin is about to follow the monk and Taoist into this land in his dream when he is awakened suddenly. It is this land where the fairy Disenchantment lives. It is also to this land that Bao-yu goes in his dream.

A Piece of Jade

Bao-yu wears this magical piece of jade around his neck all the time. It is said Bao-yu was born with this stone in his mouth.

Four Books

Books used for the education of children. Bao-yu's father, Jia Zheng puts great importance on the study of these books.

A Double-Sided Mirror

This mirror causes Jia Rui's death when he looks in the side of the mirror into which he has been ordered by the Taoist not to look.



A Golden Locket

Bao-chai wears this golden locket around her neck at all times. It bears on it a lucky inscription given to her family by a monk. This inscription has great similarity to the inscription on Bao-yu's piece of jade.

A Rosary of Aromatic Seeds

The prince of Bei-jing gives Bao-yu this gift after they meet during Qin-shi's funeral.

The Temple of the Iron Threshold

This temple is the location where Qin-shi is buried.

Prospect Garden

The separate residence built specially so that Yuan-chun can visit her family in a more private fashion.

House of Green Delights

The house is the home in the Prospect Garden where Bao-yu chooses to live.



Themes

Love

The Taoist Vanitas who is first to read *The Story of the Stone* identifies the main theme of this story as love. He is so strongly affected by the love story that he changes his name to Brother Amor. Of course the main love story of this novel is the ill-fated love of Dai-yu for Bao-yu. She spends her life repaying Bao-yu for his gift of life through her tears. Although the two have a special connection and share an unconscious bond because of their previous life together in the Land of Illusion, the two will not be together. In her play that foretells the futures of the members of the Jia family, the fairy Disenchantment hints that Bao-yu will marry Bao-chai instead of Dai-yu.

In addition to the love story between Bao-yu and Dai-yu, there are many other stories of love included in this novel. One of the more notable stories is that of the relationship between Feng Yuan and Ying-lian. Feng Yuan had never been interested in women before he saw Ying-lian. After he sees her, he pays all that he has for her to make her his wife. Unfortunately, Ying-lian has also been sold to another man and Feng Yuan is killed in a dispute over ownership of the girl.

Not all of the love stories contained in this book are as innocent as the one between Feng Yuan and Ying-lian. There are also stories of incest, fornication, and adultery. Masters have sexual relations with their slaves and even with other family members. Although it was an accepted practice in China for men, especially wealthy ones to have more than one wife, incest and sexual relations with someone other than a spouse were not widely accepted.

Class/Gender Relations

Relations between people of different social classes and different genders are themes that appear often in *"The Story of the Stone."* For instance, Bao-yu's closeness with the females of the family is generally looked down upon. In this time period, it was unusual for a boy to spend so much time with girls. Girls were also raised differently from boys. The boys were sent to school, while girls generally weren't educated. It was considered a waste. Girls were instead taught to sew and take care of household duties. Despite the fact that females are generally not educated, notice that it is Xi-feng, a woman, who controls the finances for both the Rong and Ning houses. Also, it was considered socially acceptable for a man to have more than one wife. A woman, however, was expected to remain faithful to her one husband.

Relations between the social classes are also discussed often in the novel. For instance, Qin Zhong believes that he will not be allowed to be friends with Bao-yu because Qin Zhong is from a lower social class. The friendship is accepted, however, and Bao-yu even manages to pull strings so that Qin Zhong can attend the Jia clan



school. Servants are another social class of people included in this novel. Servants, especially those in wealthy homes, often enjoyed a better standard of living than some free people. This is especially true for the servants in the Jia house. Their servants are cared for and treated almost like members of the family. Servants, such as Aroma, often served their masters as spouses. In the case of Lucky, she is fortunate enough to catch the eye of the man who will become a mandarin. After he obtains this position, he asks for Lucky as his wife. In this way, Lucky improves her social status from that of a servant to being the wife of a government official.

Karma

Karma is another idea that is addressed often in this novel. Karma is the idea that one's actions, whether good or bad, will affect the outcome of their life and perhaps even the lives of their children and grandchildren. This idea is seen most clearly in Mother Ma's advice to Grandmother Jia after Bao-yu is burned with the candle wax. Mother Ma tells Grandmother Jia that in order to ward off bad spirits, one needs to do good works. Another example of karma is used when the usher tries to come up for an explanation for Feng Yuan's murder. He makes the suggestion that Yu-cun tell others the death came about as a result of a debt of karma owed to Xue Pan's family by Feng Yuan's family. Yu-cun disposes of this explanation but the fact that the usher suggests it shows how deeply the people of that time period believed in the workings of karma.

Belief in Superstition

Along with their belief in karma, the characters of this story are highly affected by the superstitions they hold. They are particularly fond of looking to the almanac to see which days are lucky days. For instance, when Zhen Shi-yen suggests Yu-cun wait until the nineteenth to travel because the almanac states this day will be a good one on which to travel, Yu-cun shrugs off this advice. In his message to Shi-yen, Yu-cun states learned men should not waste time with the almanacs, but should do what is needed when the circumstances are ripe.

Even the medical practices of the time are based on superstition. For instance, prescriptions must be compounded with ingredients harvested at certain times of the day and specific days of the year. A person's ability to recover from a disease was often determined by the time of year they got sick, if they improved by a certain day, or they lived past another certain time of the year.



Style

Point of View

This story is told through the use of a narrator who is uninvolved in the action of the story. This narrator, however, appears to be familiar with the actions and thoughts of all of the characters. It is almost as if he is watching the family and recording their interactions as they happen. Although the narrator seeks to tell the story in a straightforward manner, there are times when he addresses the reader directly. One example of this direct address of the reader occurs at the very beginning of the novel where the narrator explains the origin of "The Story of the Stone."

There is a good deal of dialogue in this book as well as a good deal of description. Along with telling what the characters are doing, the narrator tries to convey why they are doing what they are doing. For this reason, the third person omniscient point of view works best since no one character and no one character's emotions are given more importance than the others. The narrator does, however, switch the emphasis in the story from character to character. For instance, sometimes he concentrates on what Bao-yu is doing while sometimes he concentrates on what Dai-yu is doing.

Setting

Although the Rong and Ning mansions are the main settings for this story, there are a variety of other settings visited in the book. The action of the novel begins in the Great Fable Mountains where the stone is originally created by the Goddess Nu-wa. Next, the action moves to the area of the Bottle-gourd Temple in the Chinese town of Soochow. It is in this town that Zhen Shi-yin lives with his Feng-shi and their daughter. Jia Yu-cun lives next door in the temple.

One important but imaginary setting in the novel is the Land of Illusion. It is in this Land of Illusion that Bao-yu and Dai-yu live before they are transformed into mortal humans. Shi-yin is on the verge of entering this land in a dream when he is awakened. Bao-yu does visit this Land of Illusion in a dream. It is here that Bao-yu is married the Fairy Disenchantment's younger sister. During his visit, Bao-yu also views a play that tells the future of his family.

During the course of the story, members of the Jia family take a few excursions outside of the ground of their two mansions. One of these excursions takes place during Qin-shi's funeral when the family travels to the Temple of the Iron Threshold. Also, Bao-yu visits his maid Aroma at her family's home during the New Year holiday.



Language and Meaning

When considering the language of this novel it is important to consider that it was first written in Chinese and has been translated into English. Xuequin hopes to portray for his readers the atmosphere of a wealthy Chinese family. There are, however, rituals and objects the names of which are foreign for English readers. For example, the Chinese bow to each other by ritualistically knocking their foreheads on the ground. This custom is unheard of in most English speaking countries. Another term English readers may find bewildering is the kang. It seems that almost every house enters has a kang where the people sit and even sleep. A kang is actually nothing more than a raised platform in a room that can be heated from below, making it more comfortable than the cold floor.

Structure

The Story of the Stone is the first of five volumes that detail the lives of the Jia family members. This first volume is divided into twenty-six chapters with each chapter being about twenty pages long. The individual chapters are notated with both a chapter number and a brief two to four line description of what the chapter is about. These descriptions are written in the form of a poem and sometimes take on the form of a riddle. In addition, each chapter ends with a teaser to keep the reader engrossed and wondering what will happen in the next chapter. Often a mysterious visitor appears or a bit of news is promised just at the end of the chapter. The reader is told they must go on to the following chapter to discover what will happen next.

The plot of the story is quite complex, many of the characters have their own individual dramas going on while the narrator tells the story of Bao-yu, Dai-yu, and Bao-chai. Adding complexity to the novel is the myriad of characters involved in the daily actions of the Jia household. The narrator tells the most important stories and incidents in order to give the reader an idea of what life was like in a prestigious Chinese home.



Quotes

"Now this block of stone, having undergone the melting and moulding of a goddess, possessed magic powers. It could move about at will and could grow or shrink to any size it wanted. Observing that all the other blocks had been used for celestial repairs and that it was the only one to have been rejected as unworthy, it became filled with shame and resentment and passed its days in sorrow and lamentation." Chap. 1, p. 47

"My only wish is that men in the world below may sometimes pick up this tale when they are recovering from sleep or drunkenness, or when they wish to escape from business worries or a fit of the dumps, and in doing so find not only mental refreshment but even perhaps, if they will heed its lesson and abandon their vain and frivolous pursuits, some small arrest in the deterioration of their vital forces." Chap. 1, p. 50

"Although I say they are not as prosperous as they used to be in years past, of course I don't mean to say that there is not still a world of difference between their circumstances and those you would expect to find in a household of your average government official. At the moment the numbers of their establishment and the activities they engage in are, if anything, on the increase. Both masters and servants all lead lives of luxury and magnificence. And they still have plenty of plans and projects under way. But they can't bring themselves to economize or make any adjustment in their accustomed style of living. Consequently, though outwardly they still manage to keep up appearances, inwardly they are beginning to feel the pinch. But that's a small matter. There's something much more seriously wrong with them than that. They are not able to turn out good sons, those stately houses for all their pomp and show. The males in the family get more degenerate from one generation to the next." Chap. 2, p. 74

"Then after an interval of twelve years or more she suddenly had another son. He was even more remarkable, because at the moment of his birth he had a beautiful, clear, coloured jade in his mouth with a lot of writing on it. They gave him the name "Bao-yu" as a consequence." Chap. 2, p. 75

"When she arrived at their house she would have to watch every step she took and weigh every word she said, for if she put a foot wrong they would surely laugh her to scorn." Chap. 3, p. 87

"Yu-cun sighed sympathetically. 'Their meeting cannot have been coincidental. It must have been the working out of some destiny. An atonement. Otherwise, how is one to account for Feng Yuan's sudden affection for that particular girl?'" Chap. 4, p. 114

"And though our descendants are many, not one of them is worthy to carry on the line. The only possible exception, our great-grandson Bao-yu has inherited a perverse, intractable nature and is eccentric and emotionally unstable; and although his natural brightness and intelligence augur well, we fear that owing to the fated eclipse of our family's fortunes there will be no one at hand to give the lad proper guidance and to start him off along the right lines." Chap. 5, p. 137



"Looking at it as it lay on her palm, she saw a stone about the size of a sparrow's egg, glowing with the suppressed, milky radiance of a sunlit cloud and veined with iridescent streaks of color." Chap. 8, p. 188

"Honor and disgrace follow each other in an unending cycle. No human power can arrest that cycle and hold it permanently in one position." Chap. 13, p. 256

"The results were not, of course, what a great writer would have produced in similar circumstances, but at least they were not unworthy of the family's literary traditions, and Jia Zheng resolved that his daughter should see them, so that she might know that the progress made by her beloved younger brother fully came up to the measure of those ardent hopes she had so often expressed in her letters." Chap. 18, p. 358

"Xi-feng's duties and responsibilities were so many that she could not evade them and seek recuperation in rest and quiet as the others did. At the same time, however, the anxiety to be thought well of and the shrinking fear of criticism that were a part of her nature made her take pains, even when she was at her busiest, to appear outwardly as idle and unoccupied as the rest." Chap. 19, p. 375

"I suppose you think every pretty girl you see is just waiting to be bought so that she can be a servant in your household!" Chap. 19, p. 385

"But your family has never gone in for throwing its weight about like that in the past, and I don't believe it is going to start doing so now." Chap. 19, p. 388

"As a result of this upbringing, he had come to the conclusion that the pure essence of humanity was all concentrated in the female of the species and that males were its mere dregs and off-scourings. To him, therefore, all members of his own sex without distinction were brutes who might just as well not have existed." Chap. 20, pp. 407-408

"Enough is enough!" he thought. "What can it be that makes these innocent young creatures all produce language that is so tragic and inauspicious? It is almost as if they were all destined to be unfortunate and short-lived and were unconsciously foretelling their destiny." Chap. 22, p. 450



Topics for Discussion

Consider the quatrain found in the first chapter of the book that describes how the story is written. It says that, "All men call the author fool; None his secret message hears." After reading the story, what do you believe this secret message is to which the quatrain refers? Explain your answer.

Consider the monk and Taoist who appear to different characters throughout the novel. Are these the same monk and Taoist from beginning to end or different people? Explain your answer.

Explore the relationship between Bao-yu, Bao-chai and Dai-yu. How is it that Bao-yu and Dai-yu could know each other in the Land of Illusion, be sent to earth together then not be fated to be together? Do you believe it is Bao-yu's fate to be with Bao-chai? Why or why not?

Consider Qin-shi's funeral. Do you believe Qin-shi would have wanted such a sensational funeral for herself? Why or why not?

Explore the importance of poetry in the novel.

Research the roles of actual Imperial Concubines in China. Why was this designation such an honor for Yuan-chun and her family?

In your opinion, why does Xue Pan suddenly show an interest in Bao-yu at the end of the novel? Explain your answer.

In several places in the novel it is hinted that Bao-chai and Dai-yu are complements of each other. That if they were put together they would be a perfect woman. Do you believe this is the case? Why or why not?