

Gold Boy, Emerald Girl: Stories Study Guide

Gold Boy, Emerald Girl: Stories by Yiyun Li

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Contents

Gold Boy, Emerald Girl: Stories Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Kindness.....	3
A Man Like Him.....	8
Prison.....	11
The Proprietress.....	14
House Fire.....	16
Number Three, Garden Road.....	18
Sweeping Past.....	20
Souvenir.....	22
Gold Boy, Emerald Girl.....	24
Characters.....	26
Objects/Places.....	30
Themes.....	32
Style.....	34
Quotes.....	36
Topics for Discussion.....	38

Kindness

Kindness Summary

Chapter 1. Moyan is a forty-one year old woman who has lived in the same apartment all her life, never married, and taught at a third tier elementary school her entire career. Moyan has recently learned that her lieutenant in the army has died. Moyan wonders why the death announcement was sent to her because she never considered the lieutenant her friend.

Moyan recalls her first day in the army. Moyan registered and met Lieutenant Wei, a beautiful woman only a few years older than Moyan. Moyan withstands the stare of Lieutenant Wei because she has always been an object of fascination for her mother and is used to being scrutinized. As the first arrival of the company, Moyan is alone to check out her new surroundings even as she is expected to mop the floors for the lieutenant. The lieutenant comes back and makes Moyan mop the floor again, warning her that she must develop a strong skin in the army.

Chapter 2. One day, Professor Shan stops Moyan and asks her to come to her apartment. Moyan never knew what caused Professor Shan to seek her out. Professor Shan takes Moyan into her small apartment that is filled with old trunks and books. As Moyan studies Professor Shan's face and notes its beauty, she thinks about her mother's habit of studying the faces of people in their community. This causes Moyan to think of how her mother was quite young when she married her father, causing the older man to grow old quickly. Professor Shan criticizes Moyan for daydreaming.

Moyan recalls hearing Professor Shan's story. Moyan recalls hearing that Professor Shan was once married, but that her husband went to America to live with relatives and now runs a restaurant there with a younger woman. It is also said that Professor Shan's children also live in America. Moyan finds no evidence of this in Professor Shan's apartment, however.

On that first day in Professor Shan's apartment, Professor Shan reads in English to Moyan. Professor Shan tells Moyan that she is not her parents' birth child, but an orphan they picked up somewhere. For this reason, Professor Shan tells Moyan that her parents cannot see to her education properly. This is something Moyan's parents have never, and will never, tell her themselves. Moyan learns that Professor Shan was also an orphan who was adopted by a single woman and well educated, but her status as an orphan caused her to lose a good teaching position later in life.

Chapter 3. Moyan is the only member of her company in the army who does not receive a letter from home by the third week. The other girls notice this lack of communication and question Moyan about it. In time Lieutenant Wei learns about this problem and calls Moyan into her office to question her. Lieutenant Wei finds Moyan's lack of communication from home and failure to take advantage of free time to go into the town



odd. Lieutenant Wei shows concern for Moyan, but Moyan resists it because she knows making friends with an officer could backfire on her. It is for this reason, and the fact that the only phone to which her parents have access is blocked from their apartment and manned by a woman who is unreliable in passing on messages, Moyan refuses the offer to call her parents.

When Lieutenant Wei asks about Moyan's mother, Moyan is not sure what to tell her. No one has ever given Moyan an explanation for her mother's illness so over the years she has made things up to tell those who ask. Professor Shan tells Moyan that her mother suffers from Nymphomania. From Professor Shan, Moyan learns that her mother was once in love with a married man who lived down the street from her parents. When the man denied Moyan's mother publicly, she went into the street and screamed out her love, claiming to have had multiple abortions for the man she loved. In the aftermath, the parents of Moyan's mother were faced with placing their daughter in a mental hospital in order to save their own reputations. Instead, Moyan's father made an offer of marriage that was quickly and quietly accepted.

Chapter 4. During her time in the army, Moyan often thinks about her reading sessions with Professor Shan. It helps Moyan concentrate while learning to fire her weapons. Moyan finds herself fascinated with those around her at the same time, especially her bunk mate Nan. Nan was a member of a child's choir for most of her childhood and she has the voice of an angel. While on the firing range one day Nan sings to the company, causing even the officers to relax and enjoy the afternoon. Moyan finds herself wondering how someone as happy as Nan can sing of such pain as though she has felt it personally. At the same time, Moyan compares herself to Nan and finds herself wanting. Nan makes friends easily and seems happy all the time while Moyan has yet to make a good friend and prefers her own company to that of the other girls.

Moyan thinks about Professor Shan again. For weeks Professor Shan reads to Moyan in English from *David Copperfield*, often stopping to explain the text in Chinese. After a time Moyan begins to understand the English words and Professor stops translating.

Chapter 5. A short time later, another of the girls gives Moyan a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and asks her to mark the sections dealing with sex. Moyan agrees in part because the girl, Jie, accuses Moyan of being overly innocent. Moyan reads the book at night when she is supposed to be asleep. Moyan hides the book under her bunched up clothes that she uses as a pillow. With it is a book by D.H. Lawrence she had taken from Professor Shan. Although Moyan dislikes Lawrence, she often reads it to remind her of Professor Shan. These memories also bring to mind a man Moyan only knew as Nini's Papa when she knew him. He was an unhappy husband who was left with the task of caring for his daughter during the day because his wife's parents refused. On the day Nini's Papa divorced his wife and was forced to leave the community he pulled Moyan aside to say goodbye even though they only had a nodding acquaintance. Moyan can still remember the way he lifted his hand as though to caress her cheek, but backed off. When Moyan arrived at Professor Shan's that night, the older woman seemed to know what had happened. Professor Shan warned Moyan not to let love cloud her view of the future.



Chapter 6. One night Moyan is caught by Lieutenant Wei. Moyan manages to switch the book with the D.H. Lawrence. Lieutenant Wei wants to know what the book is about, but Moyan refuses to give a direct answer. Lieutenant Wei then expresses a desire to learn to read English so that she might read the book. However, Moyan refuses to be her teacher. Lieutenant Wei keeps the book, telling Moyan she will find another way to learn to read it. As Lieutenant Wei asks Moyan about the book, Moyan recalls how she decided one day she must stop seeing Professor Shan. When she told the professor, Moyan stole the book for a reason she cannot fully understand even now.

Chapter 7. The snowfall on that first night is romantic and fascinating, but it soon turns into a blizzard that leaves the company miserable and cold. The girls decide they should sleep with partners to keep from freezing in the unheated barracks. Some of the girls have taken note of Lieutenant Wei taking one of the other female officers as a bed mate, therefore they feel confident she will agree to their plan. However, Moyan refuses to double up. When this proves to be a hindrance to the plan, the other girls pressure her. In the end, Nan agrees to sleep alone as well so the others can pair up equally. A short time later, the Major in charge of the camp sends the company to the nearest town to break up the snow and ice that covers the roads. It is an overwhelming project, but the women finish it with the help of Lieutenant Wei.

Chapter 8. In January Moyan goes home for the holidays and spends a few days with her parents. Moyan's mother has grown thin and weak. She tells Moyan that she is beautiful because she is her daughter. Moyan wonders why she would say this. Moyan's father rides the bus to the train station with her and insists on staying until the train is gone, causing Moyan some discomfort. Moyan's return to camp is a week early. Due to the fact that she is the only non-officer there, Moyan is pretty much on her own. Moyan spends most of her days with the conscripts in the kitchen. They talk to Moyan about the girls with whom they are in love who do not return their affection. Lieutenant Wei pulls Moyan aside one day and tells her not to tease the young men. Moyan finds this puzzling.

Chapter 9. In April the company goes on a month long march across Mount Dabie. It is exciting and a change from the routine. They sing as they march. During one of their nightly stops, Moyan has night guard duty. Moyan shares the duty with Jei. They talk about making memories and Jei expresses the desire to have her boyfriend there to share these memories with her so that they can reminisce for years to come. Moyan wishes the same thing for her friend. They continue their march. Moyan finds solace in walking alone, enjoying her solitude and the natural world around her.

Chapter 10. On the last day of the march they stop for the night in a school. There is a great feast and a single bottle of local beer for everyone. The soldiers are given a little over an hour to themselves. Moyan wanders the fence line and is approached by a male soldier marching with a group that has stopped in another school yard across the street. The boy has slipped away from his company to see Nan. Moyan at first refuses to give his note to Nan, but then relents when he gives her a bottle of liquor. Moyan searches for Nan but does not find her. Moyan sits under a tree and drinks the liquor. Lieutenant Wei finds her and tells her that she missed call for bed. Lieutenant Wei sees



the liquor and instead of confiscating it and getting Moyan into trouble, she asks for a drink. Moyan takes a single last drink and pores the rest out. Moyan then refuses Lieutenant Wei's suggestion of friendship. Moyan thinks about a poem she found on a bookmark among her things once that she thought had been meant for her father, but was really meant for the man her mother once loved. Moyan again refuses Lieutenant Wei's attempt at friendship.

The rainy season begins as they make their way down the mountain. On May Day they stop in a place called Da-Wu—nirvana—where they are to participate in a field exercise before bed. Moyan's group does well at the exercise and are done quickly. As they stop to admire some fireflies, Lieutenant Wei asks the company to sing. However, instead of urging Nan to take the lead, Lieutenant Wei makes Moyan sing. Unfortunately Moyan does not know any songs and Lieutenant Wei insists they must wait until she learns one and sings. Moyan sings an inappropriate song.

Chapter 11. When they return to camp, Moyan finds a Jeep waiting for her. Her mother has died and she is to return home quickly. When Moyan returns home, she learns her mother committed suicide. Now Moyan realizes she must care for her father since he has grown too old to work. Moyan and her father take the ashes of Moyan's mother home to wait for her father's death so that they might be buried together.

Chapter 12. Although there are two more months of training, Moyan decides not to return to the army. While on the street one day, Moyan runs into Professor Shan. Professor Shan asks about Moyan's father and then uses the story of Moyan's parents as an example of how love can ruin a person's life. Professor Shan urges Moyan to reject love. For this reason, Moyan never marries, but she becomes a great fan of the romance novels her mother spent her life reading. Moyan becomes a companion to Professor Shan for the next dozen years, pushed from her upon her death when her children come and accuse Moyan of wanting Professor Shan's money. Moyan only takes from the friendship Professor Shan's great collection of books.

Kindness Analysis

This story, the longest of the stories in the collection, is of a woman reminiscing on the two women who made the largest impact on her life. The woman, Moyan, is an orphan who was adopted by an older man and his young bride, a couple with a sad tale of their own to influence the Moyan's choices in life. Moyan watches her mother wither and die from a broken heart, a heart broken by a lover, imagined or otherwise, in her youth before she was forced into marriage to keep from ruining her own and her family's reputation. Moyan is not aware of any of this until she meets Professor Shan, an eccentric woman in her neighborhood who has had her own heart broken in love. Professor Shan teaches Moyan that love only leads to heart break and that she should avoid it at all costs.

Moyan enters the army and meets Lieutenant Wei. Lieutenant Wei is Moyan's commander, a woman whose position forces her to sometimes be unkind to the women



she is training. However, Lieutenant has an affection for Moyan. Lieutenant Wei sees a deep sadness in Moyan that she wants to repair. Unfortunately, Moyan does not trust her attempts at friendship and pushes her away at every attempt. In the end, Moyan's fears of retribution from Lieutenant Wei appear to come to fruition. The reader suspects, however, that Lieutenant Wei was in love with Moyan and only retaliated when it became clear she would never be able to break through Moyan's outer shell.

In the end, Moyan comes to see the kindness inherent in both Lieutenant Wei and Professor Shan's attentions to and lessons for Moyan. Moyan only has her memories to comfort her and she has become what Professor Shan was before her and even a little of what her mother was, a depressed woman who could not get past the pain of heart break. Even though Moyan avoided a relationship with a lover, she is still heart broken by the people who touched her life and she pushed away. It is Moyan's own actions that leave her heart broken, not the actions of another such as was the case with Professor Shan, her mother, and Lieutenant Wei. In the end, Moyan has not avoided pain and is in fact living in the same pain due to her attempts to avoid pain.



A Man Like Him

A Man Like Him Summary

Teacher Fei becomes obsessed with a young woman he has read about in a magazine. The girl has started a blog discussing her father's infidelity against the girl's mother and his choice to leave the family. The girl previously filed a lawsuit against her father to punish him for abandoning his father and for engaging in the immoral act of infidelity. When the lawsuit failed, the girl started the blog in hopes of ruining her father's ability to make a living, to cause him to be arrested, and to cause his mistress to leave him. Teacher Fei is shocked by the malice in the article on the girl's part.

Teacher Fei cares for his elderly mother. Over the past few years, Teacher Fei's mother has slowly lost her mobility, finally becoming totally dependent on her son for her day to day care. Teacher Fei checks on his mother and then returns to his father's study, a room filled with great books that only Teacher Fei cares for now. Among them are the cheap magazines that are Teacher Fei's only vice. Teacher Fei paints a scorpion on the picture of the young girl, amused that this might be his first free will painting in forty years.

Teacher Fei's neighbor comes by to sit with his mother so that he can go out for a few hours. This has become an arrangement in recent months since Mrs. Luo lost her job and needed the money. Teacher Fei goes to an Internet café and looks up the young girl's blog so that he might leave a message there. It is an unkind, if polite, message. Teacher Fei also writes down the information about the father that is presented there.

That night, Teacher Fei helps his mother bathe. Teacher Fei thinks about his mother and how she came to adopt him from his father's large family when he was still an infant. Teacher Fei often felt lucky to have been rescued from that group of uneducated children, but he also felt a sense of pressure placed on his shoulders to be better than those children. Teacher Fei's father was a philosopher who worked at the local university. The government stole the position from Teacher Fei's father, forcing him to clean toilets for twenty years. His wife cleaned beside him all those years, proud of her husband despite his demotion. The government would reinstate the old man but only a short time before his death.

Teacher Fei returns to the Internet café the following day and discovers that his message has been deleted. Teacher Fei leaves another, increasingly rude, message. As Teacher Fei works at the computer he notices a couple of teenagers making out across from him. The boy threatens Teacher Fei, but as he leaves he winks at the boy. Teacher Fei, who has never been intimate with a woman, wishes for a second he could take the boy's place. Teacher Fei pushes the thought away, blaming the girl with the blog for his sudden anger.



The next day, Teacher Fei discovers the girl has again erased his message. He leaves another, very rude message. When Teacher Fei leaves the Internet café, he calls the place where the girl's father works and asks for him. However, his phone call is not received well. The man hangs up on him, clearly accustomed to getting odd phone calls from readers of his daughter's blog.

The following day, Teacher Fei goes to the father's place of business and asks the guard to bring him out. Teacher Fei quickly explains to the man that he only wants to speak to him for a few minutes. The man asks Teacher Fei if he is looking for a lover, but Teacher Fei quickly puts those thoughts to rest. The father agrees to have tea with Teacher Fei when he gets off of work. Teacher Fei takes the man to a nearby café and orders tea and cold cuts. Neither of them touch their food, however.

Teacher Fei asks questions about the father and his relationship with his daughter. Teacher Fei quickly assesses the situation and guesses the father never had an affair. Teacher Fei then tells the man that he understands what he is going through because he was once falsely accused as well. Teacher Fei taught art in an elementary school when he became fascinated with the face of a young female student. Teacher Fei would often stare at the girl, studying her features. This was noticed by another girl who told the principal. Soon Teacher Fei was accused of an inappropriate relationship with the girl and branded a pedophile even though nothing ever came of the accusations. The only thing that kept Teacher Fei from losing his job was a mural of Chairman Mao he painted. However, the rumors were still there, still haunting him throughout the rest of his life. Teacher Fei could not get married because matchmakers would not take his case. The father tells him that at least he could not be called a bad husband or father.

The father tells Teacher Fei that his daughter swore to see him imprisoned, ruined, and dead. The father says that the first two have been attempted and he waits for her to make good on the third. The two men part and Teacher Fei knows that nothing will have changed from the meeting. However, Teacher Fei wonders which man has the worse of things. Teacher Fei has his mother to go home to, the father has nothing.

A Man Like Him Analysis

This story is about Teacher Fei, a man who is the son of a philosopher who was forced to clean toilets because the government was threatened by his opinions. Teacher Fei grew up watching his father take this punishment with dignity only to die at his own hand shortly after being restored to the honor of a professor. This has greatly impacted Teacher Fei's own thoughts and feelings, leaving him ashamed of his own life and his own obscurity.

Teacher Fei becomes obsessed with a young girl accusing her father of infidelity and doing all she can to ruin her father. Teacher Fei is offended by this and the reader later learns that it is because Teacher Fei was once accused of having sexual relations with a young student. Teacher Fei feels a connection to the girl's father because of the false

accusations that are also being made against him. Teacher Fei feels a connection to the father that seems to help him find some consolation in his own sadness.

Teacher Fei is a lonely man whose mother has become senile. Teacher Fei refuses to see her senility and tells himself that she hides her intelligence from everyone except him. Teacher Fei is a terribly lonely man whose life was ruined by false accusations despite the fact that he retained his job. Teacher Fei is much luckier than the other man, but somehow he does not see it that way. In Teacher Fei's mind, at least the man once had a woman, a family, a life. Teacher Fei has nothing and he is saddened by that.



Prison

Prison Summary

Yilan's daughter died in a car accident after the family made the move to America to make a better life for her. Yilan feels without purpose with her daughter gone. One night Yilan asks her husband what he thinks about them adopting a child. Yilan's husband, Luo, shoots this idea down completely. However, a short time later she asks Yilan how she would feel if they have a child of their own. Yilan suggests that Luo take a new, younger wife to give him a new child. Luo says that he wants to remain with her and have a child that is theirs through a surrogate. Luo tells her that they can go to China where he has friends who can help. Luo was a doctor in China and still has a great many friends there. Surrogacy is illegal in China, but many people do it anyway.

Yilan and Luo contact Yilan's aunt for help. The aunt goes to a matchmaker and asks for profiles of women who fit their needs. Luo insists they need a woman who has given birth at least once before, but Yilan worries they will not be able to find a woman willing to leave a young child for a year as would be required. Luo wants the mother with Yilan during the entire pregnancy so that someone does not have the opportunity to switch out their child with another for one reason or another. It worries Yilan a great deal even after she has arrived in China. Luo assures her they are buying a service and no woman will agree to it without understanding the sacrifice. Yilan's aunt tells her that they are doing these families a great service by offering twenty thousand yuan.

Yilan interviews the best five candidates in a local teahouse, but does not like any of them for one reason or another. As she and her aunt are leaving the teahouse, Yilan is approached by a young woman who has heard about her search for a surrogate. The woman is young and attractive. She reminds Yilan of her daughter. Yilan begins to dismiss the woman because she looks too young to have had a child, but the woman shows her both a household register card and a birth certificate for a young boy. The woman, Fusang, tells them that her husband is mentally disabled and that her son is gone. Yilan asks the woman to come back the next day and even gives her some money to make the trip.

Yilan finds out that Fusang had been sold to her in-laws at the price of two thousand yuan so that she might marry their mentally disabled son. The parents kept Fusang imprisoned for a year to ensure that she would not run away and then began letting her have small liberties when it appeared she had no interest in running. Then when Fusang's child was two she went with him to play and came back without him. Fusang claimed the child wandered away but she did not seem terribly upset. The parents beat her and would have killed her if her husband had not come between them. Since then the parents have died and Fusang manages their small farm alone with her husband. Yilan's aunt is against Fusang as a surrogate, but Yilan feels she would be perfect.



Yilan has Fusang sign a short contract that says they will pay all her medical and living expenses during the pregnancy and that she will be given twenty-thousand yuan at the end of the pregnancy when she hands the child over to Yilan and Luo. Fusang signs the paper without qualms. Luo arrives in China a short time later and the procedure is done. Before Luo leaves they learn that Fusang is pregnant. Luo insists that Yilan watch over Fusang every second for the next nine months, then returns to America. Yilan and Fusang move into a small apartment Yilan has rented in the provincial capital. Yilan gives Fusang art books to look at so that the baby might gain some insight through it. Yilan also monitors everything Fusang eats and drinks, but is concerned by Fusang's morning sickness. Yilan worries that Fusang dislikes the baby and it is this that is causing the terrible sickness.

One night Yilan asks Fusang what she plans to do with her future. Fusang tells her that she does not intend to go back to her husband, that she will take the money and make a new life for herself. Yilan thinks that Fusang would gain a great deal by going to America. It even occurs to her that Fusang would make a good wife for one of her divorced friends.

Yilan and Fusang fall into a routine. In time Yilan finds herself relaxing around Fusang. After ten weeks of pregnancy, Yilan and Fusang learn that Fusang is to have twins. They are both very happy with this news. On the way home they stop at a restaurant for dinner. Over dinner Yilan thinks of Fusang as a daughter and realizes she will miss helping her own daughter through a pregnancy. She begins to wonder if what she is doing is fair to these children since she will most likely not live to see them grown. When Fusang asks why she wants the babies, Yilan tells her about Jade. Fusang advises her to forget about her child, as she has done with her own. As Yilan listens to Fusang, she thinks that she might make a good wife for Luo. Fusang balks at the idea of moving to America however because she does not believe she could easily learn English.

Later, as Yilan and Fusang are walking home they run into a small beggar boy. Yilan gives him money and gestures for him to move on. Fusang, however, grabs the boy and stares at a scar on his forehead. Fusang begins asking the child questions. When the boy's father comes to see what the commotion is, Fusang claims that the boy is hers. The man insists this is impossible, but he has no papers to claim the child as his own. Yilan takes Fusang back to their apartment and tries to calm her down. Fusang, however, is intent on getting the child back. Fusang tells Yilan that she sold her child with the hope that he would go to a better place. Now that she sees he is a beggar, she wants him back. Fusang asks for half of the twenty thousand yuan she will get at the end of the pregnancy. Fusang points out that while the babies are in her womb she can harm them if she likes. This causes Yilan a great deal of stress and she agrees, aware that as long as Fusang is pregnant with her children they are each other's prisoner.

Prison Analysis

Yilan lost her sixteen year old daughter first to American culture and then to a car accident. Yilan misses her child deeply and wants another to fill her days. However, her



husband does not want to replace his child with an orphan, he wants one of his own. Yilan's husband decides they should use a surrogate in China to have another child of their own. This is a difficult thing for Yilan who cannot help but see how this will disrupt another woman's life and steal her away from her own children. For this reason, Yilan is happy when she finds Fusang, a woman who was sold into her marriage and whose only child has gone missing, leaving her free to leave her family and act as surrogate.

At first everything seems simple. Fusang is an uneducated girl who seems willing to do anything Yilan asks of her. Yilan even comes to think of her as her own daughter or perhaps as a second wife to her beloved husband. However, all this changes when Fusang finds her son, a child she sold in hopes of sparing him the bleak life she faced, and wants to buy him back. Yilan discovers that Fusang is not nearly as innocent as she claimed and that as long as she is pregnant with Yilan's children she can do anything she likes. Fusang in essence holds the babies for ransom. Yilan knows she must play along, that she is now a prisoner to Fusang's whims.

This story is one of motherly love, but it is also one of desperation. Fusang is a woman who was sold to become the wife of a man who can never be a complete husband to her. Not only this, but Fusang sees her future as bleak and because of this she sells her only child. At the same time, Yilan has lost her daughter, her sole purpose in life, and she finds herself seeking a new source of happiness outside of her life in America. Yilan often fantasizes about finding a younger wife for her husband, showing the reader how much guilt she carries and how she thinks that she can no longer give her husband what he needs. It is a sad life that has caused Yilan to become a prisoner not only to her guilt but literally to the woman who carries her future.



The Proprietress

The Proprietress Summary

A woman comes to interview Mrs. Jin, the proprietress of a small store across the street from the county jail. The woman had originally come to interview Susu, a young woman whose husband has been convicted of causing the death of his female boss after she made sexual advances toward him. Susu has asked the judge to allow her to have a baby with her husband before his execution, but he refused her. The reporter is so impressed with Mrs. Jin, however, that she decides to do the article about her.

Mrs. Jin is a clearheaded business woman who bought the store years ago with her husband. Mrs. Jin has always run the store, charging out of town strangers more than others, often giving things to the women who come to the prison to visit their husbands and lovers a lower price to show her compassion. It was after the death of her husband that Mrs. Jin had begun taking in women at her home, women who come to see their men and have nowhere else to go.

Mrs. Jin has lived in this town all her life and she knows that memories of her youth will soon be gone with the older folks in town who are quickly reaching the ends of their lives. This saddens Mrs. Jin. For this reason Mrs. Jin is happy to be interviewed. They speak of Susu for a time and Mrs. Jin reveals the idea that she has control over whether or not this reporter meets Susu. After a time, Mrs. Jin decides she likes the reporter and decides to take her home with her.

At the house, Mrs. Jin introduces the reporter to two children who belong to a woman whose husband is imprisoned in town. Mrs. Jin has gotten the woman a job in another town and she cares for the children during the week while the mother is gone. Mrs. Jin does not particularly like the children and fears they will grow to be petty criminals like their father unless they begin listening to her very soon. Mrs. Jin then tells the reporter about two older girls who live on the top floor. What Mrs. Jin does not tell the reporter is that the two girls had taken off weeks ago and are not likely to return. Mrs. Jin then takes the reporter into Granny's room. Granny is telling stories of her husband to a young woman when they enter. Mrs. Jin sends the young woman to the kitchen to help with dinner.

Mrs. Jin tells the reporter that Granny is the wife of the man who once owned the estate that now houses the prison. The man was executed by the river at the start of the revolution. Granny is the fifth of the man's wives and all the wives had banded together after his death, but they have all died except Granny. Mrs. Jin does not tell the reporter that she had been obsessed with Granny as a child after seeing her wedding. Mrs. Jin had always wanted to be her friend and this is why she accepted Granny into her house even though she normally reserves her rooms for young women who could benefit from her advice.



They go into the kitchen where the reporter asks Susu a few questions. Susu is not happy with the questions and does not understand the turmoil her request to have her husband's child has caused. Mrs. Jin has seen Susu as her daughter from the first time they met and wishes that Susu had not made the strange request she made of the judge. Susu and the reporter discuss her situation, but Susu has no interest in the national fervor her request has caused and only misses her husband, making Mrs. Jin wonder if she will become like Granny, spending the next fifty years telling stories about him.

The reporter takes Mrs. Jin and her girls outside to take their picture in front of the house. Mrs. Jin dresses them all up to make sure they all look nice. Mrs. Jin imagines these women years from now and the legacy they will be for her.

The Proprietress Analysis

This story is about a woman who has made it her mission in life to make the lives of women impacted by their husband's incarceration better. However, as the story continues the reader can see the superiority this woman gains from having these people around, how it inflates her ego to think that she is better than these women and can teach them something.

Mrs. Jin grew up as a servant to one of the women whom she has taken into her home and was very poor, but the revolution had changed her family's fortunes and she had been able to make a good marriage that led to a good business and standing in the community. Mrs. Jin uses this to give her power over the poor women who come to town to visit their husbands and lovers.

Mrs. Jin sees the women she takes in as her legacy and hopes that they will one day be strong citizens who will escape the fates of their husbands and fathers. It is an ego thing that drives Mrs. Jin to help these people and it is overshadowed by the actions of one of her girls, Susu. Susu's husband killed his boss when the woman made sexual advances on him. Susu made the case notorious by asking to have the man's baby. It is clear to the reader that this was an act of love, but the reporter and Mrs. Jin see other motives in it that shows their own characters clearly in an unflattering light.

House Fire

House Fire Summary

There are six women who met two years ago in a park. The women bond over their concerns for their children, hoping they will marry soon and give them grandchildren. Some of the six women have tried to match their children together but it has not worked. Still they remain friends. Then one afternoon one of the women learns her husband has been cheating on her and her friends get together to find the mistress for her. It does not save the woman's marriage, but it begins a new business for the women. They begin taking cases of women who want to find their lovers' mistresses. In time the success of their business becomes public knowledge and a documentary is made of them.

The women watch the documentary and enjoy it. However, they stop getting calls for their services. The women realize that the documentary has taken away their anonymity and made it impossible for women to turn to them for help. For weeks they do not get any calls. The women continue to meet and discuss their situation, content that they have brought attention to infidelity and that is truly what their main purpose had been anyway. Then one afternoon they get a call from a man looking for help.

As the women listen to this man's troubles, they think of their own secrets. The man believes his father, who encouraged his son to marry his current wife, is having an affair with the woman. The man's father had moved into their home shortly after their wedding when his wife died. The man wants the women to find out if his wife and father are having an affair, if his only child is really his own. Most of the women are unhappy with the case and think they should turn it down. Mrs. Mo, whose husband died in a bus accident shortly after she learned he was homosexual, thinks they should take it. Mrs. Fan, whose husband cheated on her, does not. Mrs. Lu, who had been a dorm mother at a university where a young girl committed suicide after being thrown out of school for having a boy in her room, does not have much sympathy for the man. Mrs. Tang is married to a military officer who has begun to go senile and thinks her husband would go after the father with an ax to get the truth. Mrs. Cheng and Mrs. Guan both want to take the case, but can see the others do not.

House Fire Analysis

The title of this story, House Fire, is a metaphor for the idea that a marriage in trouble is a house on fire. The six women in this story are trying to put out this fire by giving the wives involved the information they need to expose their husbands' infidelity. Each of these women, however, has a secret from their past that has drawn them to the other women and to the idea of running such a business. One woman was cheated on by her own husband, but the others have secrets that are deeper but just as troubling as infidelity.



The women are exposed by a documentary about their work and this causes them to lose work. The women think this is okay because they have shined a light on infidelity in marriage. However, when they get their first male client they find it hard to be sympathetic to the man. These women come to the case with their own experiences behind them and react because of their experiences. It is a difficult case and only half are sympathetic to the poor man. In this, the reader can see how a person's experiences can impact their thoughts and emotions and how a house on fire can really change a person.



Number Three, Garden Road

Number Three, Garden Road Summary

Meilan moved into Number Three Garden Road forty-five years ago when it was a new construction in a relatively undeveloped area. At the time it had been government housing and all the tenants had been given government furniture with which to furnish it. On the day they moved in, Meilan remembers her baby sister calling a neighbor, Mr. Chang, Uncle Fatty. Meilan has always thought the name to be unfortunate because the man was not fat. Meilan also remembers the man's wife, a beautiful woman who had been deeply sympathetic to her husband. Meilan and her family live just below the Changs and she can also remember listening to him play his musical instruments from her windows below him or from the staircase outside his apartment.

Much has changed in forty-five years. There are now two high rises, each on either side of Number Three. The government has always allowed private citizens to own their own homes. Meilan had purchased her parents' apartment for them and has more than doubled her investment because of the housing boom in the area.

Meilan has returned to Number Three Garden Road after her second divorce. Aware that Mr. Chang still lives upstairs, Meilan has rekindled her crush on him. Meilan follows Mr. Chang one night to the bus stop where he picks up a female friend and takes her to a local dance club. Meilan becomes a member of the same dance club and becomes a favorite of all the men there, even the ones who bring their wives along. Meilan is the youngest member of the club and is therefore quite popular as a dance partner.

When Mr. Chang's wife had become ill with cancer, he had promised her that he would find a new wife. Mr. Chang had posted his name with the local matchmakers and has been dating those women since before his wife's death. However, they only last a few weeks each before Mr. Chang loses interest and moves on. Mr. Chang has no intention of ever marrying again. However, recently the matchmakers have begun to run out of women to send him because realization that he never plans to marry again has gotten around.

One night after Mr. Chang has failed to come to the dance club several nights in a row, Meilan goes to his apartment for a visit. Meilan talks to him about the past, asks about his wife, and expresses delight in the music she once heard him play on a banjo. Although Mr. Chang is not interested in Meilan sexually, he is intrigued when she suggests they sell one of their apartments and move in together to live off of the proceeds.

Number Three, Garden Road Analysis

This story is about a young woman who has been in love with her upstairs neighbor since she was a child. The woman has grown and had two marriages, but both ended



when her husbands cheated on her. For this reason, the woman has grown content to live in her parents' old apartment where she grew up. This brings her into contact with her old crush once again and now he is a single man, his wife having died of cancer.

The woman tries to get her old crush's attention, but fails. Finally she goes to him directly and invokes the past, reminding him of better times. The girl then suggests that a widower could only hope to find a substitute for what he has lost and she offers herself as this substitute to the man. The man finds himself content with this idea. This story is basically about two lonely people who try to find some peace in one another. For Meilan it means fulfilling a childhood wish. For Mr. Chang, it means finding a companion who will not be demanding, but who shares some of his memories of the past. It is a fitting situation in which both find contentment.



Sweeping Past

Sweeping Past Summary

Three girls have sworn sisterhood to one another in the old fashioned way. Afterwards they go to a photographer and have their picture taken together. The photographer writes a caption on the picture that says something about time sweeping past when you are not looking. Nine years later, two of the girls marry and become pregnant with their first child. Feeling pressured by her friends, the third marries. Ailin recalls this caption on her wedding day as her friends prepare her for the ceremony.

Many years later, Ailin's granddaughter Ying finds the photograph. She asks about the girls in it. Ailin tells her the girls had been best friends. Ying wants to use the photograph as decoration in her father's restaurant in Lisbon. Ailin, although unhappy with her son's decision to relocate to Lisbon, is supportive of his choices and spends as much time with Ying during the summer as she can. Ying is very involved in the restaurant and spends much of her time visiting her grandmother buying authentic napkins and other decorations for the restaurant.

When Ying brings home the poster sized picture she has had made of the original photo of Ailin with her blood sister, Ailin is impressed. Ying asks if the other women might be offended by the use of the picture. Ailin tells her she no longer speaks to her friends. Ailin tells Ying that Mei and Lan each had their babies a day apart, one a boy and one a girl. It had been Ailin who suggested the children should be pledged in marriage to one another. The men had thought it a funny, quaint ceremony, but allowed their wives to indulge. Then when the children were sixteen, the boy had attempted to force the girl into having sex with him, killing her in the process. The boy had been executed for murder. Afterward Mei and Lan blamed Ailin, suggesting that if they had not been pledged to one another the boy might not have acted as he did. Ailin tells Ying that both women blamed her. Ying suggests that she is exaggerating, but Ailin had written to Mei years ago and received a reply that said just that. Mei and Lan continue to be friends, but they want nothing to do with Ailin.

Sweeping Past Analysis

This story is about friendship. Ailin pledged herself to two of her closest friends, declaring them in an ancient ceremony as blood sisters. This was supposed to unite them for life. However, a tragedy separates them many years later, leaving Ailin pushed out of the friendship she helped to unite.

Ailin shares the story with her young granddaughter and exposes a mistake made in jest that became serious and led to tragedy. Ailin never meant to hurt her friends, but her friends need someone to blame in tragedy. For this reason, they blame Ailin for the deaths of their children. Ailin has her son still where her friends do not have their



children, but her son has deserted her and moved to a foreign country. Ailin is alone while her friends have one another, so in the end Ailin is the larger loser even though her suggestion of uniting the children in marriage had been made in jest.

The story is also one of time. Ailin is told that time passes when you are not looking when a photographer writes this on a photo of her and her friends. Time does indeed pass quickly in youth, but as a grown woman Ailin finds herself stuck in the past, regretting mistakes she did not even realize she had made until it was too late. Ailin tells this story to Ying in hopes of making it better for her, to help her see how little things can lead to tragedy.



Souvenir

Souvenir Summary

A young girl is walking down the street when a man notices her and thinks she looks like his dead wife. He approaches the girl and tells her this. The girl has heard this many times before and she is kind. However, when the man follows her into the drug store she wishes he would leave. The girl wants to buy condoms for use with her boyfriend, a young man who came home from war damaged and is no longer eligible for a marriage license. The girl does not care about marriage and wants to give herself to the man she loves.

The girl moves from counter to counter hoping the man will grow bored and leave. The man asks her to have wonton soup with him and she guesses that had been his wife's favorite. The girl tries to extricate herself from the man politely, but he continues to push. Finally he becomes rude and it allows the girl to return his rudeness. The girl goes to buy the condoms as the store is getting ready to close. The man follows and thinks that the girl should be forced to show her marriage papers in order to buy the condoms. The man's wife had refused to ask for condoms for them when they ran out one month of the supply he was given at work. The whole incident causes the man to see that this woman is nothing like his wife.

The man steps on the package of condoms when they fall to the floor. The girl begs him to move, afraid she will have to cause a scene to get what she has already paid for. The girl is desperate, convinced she can save the man she loves from the emotional torment he has been in since his torture in the military. The man hands the girl her condoms, disgusted by her and hopeful that any daughter he might have had with his wife would not have turned out like her. The girl leaves, wondering if anyone in the store understands love despite the fatality of humankind.

Souvenir Analysis

This short story is about two different views of love. One is an older man who deeply loved his wife and sees her in a stranger in the street. This man has a specific picture of his wife in his head and he imagines this girl to be the same. The girl, however, is a desperate young woman whose boyfriend was emotionally traumatized by torture and is no longer able to get a marriage license. The girl believes that her love can save him by drawing him out of his emotional torment and return him to sanity before his family is forced to commit him to a mental hospital.

Although the two have differing opinions on love, they are both basically the same. The man is blind to his wife's faults, but the girl is also blind to the trauma her boyfriend has withstood and his ability to respond to her love. They are both ignorant to the realities of the world in which they live and how it impacts their own opinions of love. It is a sad

story that leaves the reader wondering if either will be able to find any love or contentment in their current lives.



Gold Boy, Emerald Girl

Gold Boy, Emerald Girl Summary

Siyu is a woman in her late thirties who has never been married. Siyu has been raised by her father who remarried only after his daughter had been old enough to leave for college. Siyu goes on a date with Hanfeng, the only son of her favorite college professor who has recently returned to China from America. Neither has ever been married and it is clear to both that the professor wants them to marry one another. However, their first date does not go well. Hanfeng is not interested in ever marrying and Siyu is only on the date to please her professor.

They speak of Professor Dai throughout the date. Hanfeng is annoyed by his mother and her desire to learn to play the piano so that she can play with him. Hanfeng feels as though he has suddenly become the parent and his mother the child. Siyu thinks of Professor Dai often. Professor Dai had been a distant, sometimes cruel, teacher when Siyu had been a student. However, Siyu had found herself drawn to Professor Dai and when the professor had invited her to stay one New Year's when she had come to deliver a present from the entire class, a change took place in their relationship.

Hanfeng is a homosexual who had had a lover in America before he decided to move back to China. Hanfeng resents his mother's interference in his life and does not want to marry. However, Professor Dai instructs him to invite Siyu to dinner at their home, implying his intention in marrying her. Hanfeng is unhappy with this. Professor Dai explains to Hanfeng that they are both alone and should take solace from one another. Siyu jumps at the chance to live with her beloved Professor Dai and Hanfeng bends to his mother's will, suddenly aware that loneliness might be less so with company.

Gold Boy, Emerald Girl Analysis

This story is about two people who discover early in life that they are homosexual and do not want to marry someone of the opposite sex. Despite pressure from family, both have avoided marriage successfully for many years. However, Hanfeng's mother has lived a lonely life and she does not want this for the two people she loves the most. For this reason, Hanfeng's mother, Professor Dai, pushes her son to marry one of her young students, a woman who has been in love with her for many years.

The writer of this story comes right out and talks about Hanfeng's homosexual life in America where he had been allowed the freedom to be with his lover as he pleased. However, the writer talks about Siyu and Professor Dai's relationship in metaphor and symbolism, never coming right out and saying that they are homosexual. However, the reader can see the pain in Siyu whenever she speaks of Professor Dai and in her excitement when she realizes she will be allowed to move into Professor Dai's apartment without being scrutinized by her family or friends.



Professor Dai has come up with the perfect solution for all three of them. They will be together for life, none of them left alone because they are different. It is an ideal solution in a country where homosexuality is not only frowned upon, but openly discouraged. It is a sad story, but one with a small amount of optimism.



Characters

Moyan appears in Kindness

Moyan is a deeply confused and lonely girl when she enters the army. Moyan has been told by a neighbor that she is adopted and that her parents have lied to her about her heritage. The fact that her parents married for convenience so that her mother would not have to be sent to a mental hospital is also kept from Moyan. When she learns all this, Moyan becomes confused. Moyan turns to the only person she believes she can trust, Professor Shan, the same neighbor who told her these rumors.

In the army Moyan isolates herself, telling herself that she prefers her own company and the company of nature to that of the other girls. However, Moyan becomes obsessed with the other girls, particularly a girl named Nan. Nan is a singer with the voice of an angel that everyone really likes. Moyan finds herself wondering where the pain comes from that Nan is able to inject into her music. Moyan is fascinated with Nan but at the same time is jealous of her easy ability to befriend everyone around her.

In the army, Moyan's teacher, Lieutenant Wei, makes multiple attempts at befriending Moyan. The reader is aware, even though Moyan is not, that Lieutenant Wei has homosexual tendencies that appear to be aimed at Moyan. Moyan rejects each of Lieutenant Wei's attempts at friendship, even ignoring letters from Lieutenant Wei after she leaves the army.

Moyan learned from her mother that love can lead to heartbreak. From her father as well, Moyan can see what loving someone who does not return the sentiment can do. Therefore when Professor Shan tells Moyan to avoid love at all costs, she takes her advice. In the end, however, Moyan ends up alone and miserable without a husband, children, or anyone to care what happens to her, not unlike Professor Shan.

Lieutenant Wei appears in Kindness

Lieutenant Wei is a military training officer at the army camp where Moyan goes after she graduates high school. Lieutenant Wei takes a special interest in Moyan and tries to befriend her, but on several occasions Moyan pushes her away. Later in life Moyan will think of Lieutenant Wei with what she wants the reader to believe is fear and disdain, but the reader eventually comes to realize that Lieutenant Wei only wanted to help Moyan and was hurt by her final rejection.

Over the years Lieutenant Wei sent Moyan two letters, a wedding announcement, and a death announcement. Moyan is unsure why she receives these items, but the reader can see clearly that Lieutenant Wei loved Moyan in a way that Moyan could not understand because of her difficulties with her parents.



Professor Shan appears in Kindness

Professor Shan is a lonely teacher who lives in Moyan's community when she is a child. Professor Shan seeks Moyan out and brings her to her home, teaching her English and reading great literature with her. Professor Shan also tells Moyan the truth about her parents' past. From Professor Shan, Moyan learns that she is adopted and from that begins to suspect her parents have never been truthful with her. Therefore when Professor Shan tells Moyan she should resist love and not let it interfere with her life, Moyan takes her word and rejects love.

Professor Shan is a lonely woman. It is rumored that her husband moved to America and began a restaurant there with a younger woman. Professor Shan also has two children that live in America as well. Professor has been abandoned and has nothing but her books to keep her company. However, the difference between Professor Shan and Moyan is that Professor Shan's children come home to bury her, but Moyan has no children.

Mother and Father appears in Kindness

From her earliest memories, Moyan's mother has been sick. Moyan has never been given a clear reason for her mother's illness, therefore she often made up illnesses for her mother as a child. When she befriends Professor Shan, Moyan learns that her mother had once fancied herself in love with a married man who claimed it was all in the young woman's mind. The family, embarrassed by the scandal, married their daughter to a much older man to protect their own reputation. For this reason, Moyan's mother lives her life in her romance novels, refusing to interact with the real world because of her broken heart.

At the same time, Moyan's father is a strong, responsible man who works as a janitor for a local store. Moyan's father is in love with his wife and he fights to keep her alive and healthy despite her disinterest in life. When Moyan's mother dies, her father is devastated by it. The man knows that his wife never loved him and he is heartbroken that in twenty years he had never been able to make her fall in love with him. He dies within a year of his wife.

Teacher Fei appears in A Man Like Him

Teacher Fei had been a young man when he was accused of sexually molesting a female student in his art class. After living with the humiliation of his philosopher father being forced to clean toilets for a living, Teacher Fei is devastated by this unfair accusation. Although a mural Teacher Fei painted saves his career, he lives with this rumor for the rest of his life, leaving him unable to marry or to ever take a lover.

When Teacher Fei learns about a young girl who has accused her father of infidelity and started a blog with the intention of ending his career and reputation, he becomes



fascinated. When the girl refuses to leave his negative comments on her blog, Teacher Fei reaches out to the father. Teacher Fei tells the man his own story and they find a common thread to their experiences. However, it changes nothing.

Yilan appears in Prison

Yilan is a middle aged woman who uprooted her life in order to give her daughter a better start in life. This sacrifice proves to be for nothing when her daughter is killed in a car accident. Yilan feels as though her purpose in life is gone and decides to have another child. Yilan's husband does not want to adopt, but wants to hire a surrogate to give them a child of their own. Yilan agrees, but soon finds herself unable to choose the woman who will give birth to her child because it requires the woman to abandon her own child, something Yilan cannot imagine.

Yilan eventually picks a woman who has lost her own child and who reminds her of her daughter. It seems like the ideal situation. However, this woman figures out that she holds all the cards as long as she carries Yilan's children in her belly and in this way keeps Yilan a prisoner until the day of the births.

Fusang appears in Prison

Fusang is an uneducated young woman who has been sold to the parents of her husband to force her to marry a mentally disabled man. When the woman gives birth to a son, she is afraid for the future of that son, therefore she sells him to some traders. The woman believes she has done what is best for her child. However, when Fusang finds her son in the city after becoming a surrogate for Yilan, she blackmails Yilan into helping her get her son back.

Fusang has been a prisoner of circumstances all her life. When she meets Yilan, she sees her as a means to get out of her current prison, marriage to a mentally disabled man. Fusang becomes the jailer to Yilan, holding her unborn babies prisoner to force Yilan to bend to her will.

Mrs. Mo appears in House Fire

Mrs. Mo has been a widow for many years. Mrs. Mo's husband died when he stepped in front of a bus. Mrs. Mo's friends think she should remarry, but Mrs. Mo enjoys her freedom to do as she pleases. Toward the end of House Fire, the reader learns the reason Mrs. Mo is so happy in her single life is because the man to whom she was married, the man she loved for so long, was a homosexual. Mrs. Mo's husband carried on a decades long affair with another man throughout their marriage and his death was a carefully orchestrated suicide. It was a difficult situation and Mrs. Mo is content to never go through something similar again.



Meilan appears in Number Three, Garden Road

Meilan is a middle aged woman who has been married twice only to divorce twice because of infidelity. Meilan returns home to her parents' old apartment only to discover the man she had a crush on throughout her childhood remains there. Meilan tries to seduce the man but he rarely takes notice of her. Finally Meilan corners him in his own home and talks to him of the past, reminding him of a better time. Meilan suggests that he might find a substitute in her for his loss. In the end, they find some kind of contentment in one another's company.

Siyu appears in Gold Boy, Emerald Girl

Siyu is a gentle woman who was raised by her father. Siyu has been in love with her college zoology professor since she began college. When her professor asks Siyu to go out with her son, she goes willingly with the hopes of pleasing her professor. In the end, Siyu learns that her professor wants her to marry the son so that the three of them might live together in quiet peace. Siyu is excited by this idea, no longer content to be kept from the woman she loves.



Objects/Places

Bar of Soap appears in Kindness

Professor Shan gives Moyan a bar of soap when she decides to stop seeing her. Moyan keeps this soap for years, often smelling it to remind her of Professor Shan.

Romance Books appears in Kindness

Moyan's mother is obsessed with romance books.

Photograph appears in Sweeping Past

Ailin and her girlfriends have their picture taken after vowing to be sisters for life. Ailin's granddaughter finds the photograph later and makes it into a poster to use as decoration in her parents' restaurant in Lisbon.

Lady Chatterley's Lover appears in Kindness

Jej, one of the other girls in the army company with Moyan, asks her to mark all the sections of Lady Chatterley's Lover that include sex.

D.H. Lawrence Book appears in Kindness

Moyan steals a book of D.H. Lawrence short stories from Professor Shan when she decides to stop visiting her.

Piano appears in Gold Boy, Emerald Girl

Professor Dai learns to play the piano so that she might be able to play a duet with her son.

Internet Cafe appears in A Man Like Him

Teacher Fei often goes to the Internet café to search the Internet and to escape the care of his mother. It is here that Teacher Fei researches the blog of the young woman attempting to ruin her father for alleged infidelity.



Twilight Club appears in Number Three, Garden Road

The Twilight Club is the local dance club where Meilan and Mr. Chang go separately to dance in their neighborhood.

Store appears in The Proprietress

The Proprietress, Mrs. Jin, owns a small store across the street from the county jail. It is here that she meets many of the women who come to visit their loved ones and takes them into her home in hopes of helping them.

Teahouse appears in Gold Boy, Emerald Girl

Hengfan and Siyu meet for their first date in a teahouse.

Documentary appears in House Fire

The ladies who search for mistresses are featured in a documentary that effectively ruins their business by revealing their identities.

Number Three, Garden Road appears in Number Three, Garden Road

Number Three Garden Road is the address of a government housing apartment house where Meilan lives with her family throughout her childhood and then returns to live after her divorces.



Themes

Love

Many of the stories in this collection share the theme of love. Love first makes an appearance in *Kindness* as Moyan struggles to find love from her parents, her friends, and a lover. However, Moyan often finds herself lacking in whatever it takes to make people love her. In the end, Moyan rejects love and decides she is better off without it, only to look back on her life and all the people who touched it with sadness. Love again appears as a theme in *Prison*. Yilan has lost her daughter and is heartbroken over the loss. This loss drives her to search for a way to have another baby. Yilan soon finds herself taken prisoner by the woman she has chosen to give her a child to replace the one she lost. It is love for her daughter and love for her unborn infants that causes her to become a prisoner to this woman.

Love appears again in *Number Three, Garden Road*. Meilan has been in love with Mr. Chang since she was a small child. Mr. Chang has rarely noticed her and is annoyed by her crush. Mr. Chang loved his wife deeply and is crushed by her death. However, these two find some common ground and come together despite their differences.

In *Souvenir*, the young woman believes that love can save her damaged young man while an older man sees in the young woman his dead wife and searches in her for some sign of the love he once felt with her. They both come to a bitter realization at the end of the story, but the young woman continues to struggle in the hopes that love will overcome all while the older man realizes that it cannot.

Finally in *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl*, love seems to have no part in the marriage of convenience Professor Dai has set up for her son. However, when the reader looks closer they can see that Professor Dai is attempting to keep her only child and her student to keep from suffering the loneliness she has suffered all her life. In the end, it is love that causes this woman to force her son into marriage. For this reason, and others, love plays a large role in these stories.

Infidelity

Several of the stories in this collection discuss infidelity. This is noted most clearly in *House Fire* in which six old women work together to learn the names and addresses of mistresses for cuckolded women. In the end, the reader sees that these women, who claim to have wanted to expose the epidemic of infidelity in their area, all have their own secrets that have caused them the same heartache that infidelity has caused their clients.

Infidelity also plays a large role in *A Man Like Him*. A man is accused of infidelity by his wife and daughter. The daughter is so angry she files a lawsuit against him and then



later starts a blog that tells her story. However, the reader will learn that these accusations are based on rumor, not fact.

Infidelity is something that is deeply frowned upon in China even though many men indulge in it. For this reason it proves to be a scandalous theme for these stories, bringing about two short stories that are powerful in their theme and their overall moral.

Homosexuality

The author mentions homosexuality in several of his stories. In *Kindness* it is implied several times that Lieutenant Wei might have partaken in sexual relations with another female officer. In *A Man Like Him*, Teacher Fei is accused of having homosexual intentions toward the young blog woman's father. In *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl*, the boy, Hanfeng, is openly homosexual. It is also implied that the girl, Siyu, is also homosexual and this is the reason for their marriage of convenience.

Homosexuality is not something that is promoted widely in China, making it an interesting theme in these stories. Homosexuality sets a person apart from those around him, making him different. The author of these stories plays with that idea in *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl* in an interesting plot that takes the characters into a situation that is intended to make their differences better. In *Kindness*, the use of homosexuality is used as a kind of comfort for the main character to whom she turns her back. In *A Man Like Him*, homosexuality is used to brand a man, to add insult to injury. The author uses this theme in varying ways, but he uses it to enhance his characters making it a working theme in these stories.



Style

Point of View

The point of view varies in each of these stories. Kindness is written in the first person point of view, allowing the reader a close connection to the main character, but eliminating mind hopping. The other stories are told in the third person point of view. Some of these stories remain with a single character throughout the story, but others tend to hop from character to character in order to allow the reader to know the thoughts of other characters.

The points of views in these stories are varied, but each one fits with the story it is telling. Kindness is the story of a woman looking back on her life and realizing that she has been touched by the kindnesses of all the people she has met in her life. This story is best told from the first person point of view because it is such an intimate story. However, the other stories are told from the third person point of view. Each of these stories is intimate to the characters involved, but each benefits from the distance of the third person point of view because they allow the reader to see things not only from a single character's view point, but through the eyes of other characters as well. The author of these stories uses his point of view characters well and tells strong stories that embrace his themes and gets his message across.

Setting

Each short story is set in some part of China. Kindness takes place mostly in a small community in Beijing. Some of the others take place in the provincial capitol, while still others take place in or around Shanghai. Some of the towns in which the stories are set are never mentioned by name, but the impression that they are small towns outside of the big cities is made clear to the reader.

The important connection in the setting of all these stories is that they all take place in China. All the characters are Chinese, though they all grow up in or live in different provinces of the country. One story even begins in America. It is the culture of the setting that is most important to the overall themes or settings of the stories, connecting them all with a common thread.

Language and Meaning

The language of the stories is basic English. All the stories were originally written in another language, but the translation has been made to such an extent that a reader might not be aware that it was not originally written in English. There are few foreign words in any of the stories and those that do appear are commonly known or used in such a way that the reader has little difficulty understanding its meaning.



The language of these stories is clear and simple for a reader to understand. However, there are some grammatical differences and reference to political attitudes or practice that might seem foreign to the reader. The language can at times be somewhat formal, causing the reader to pause, but not detracting from the overall comprehension of the stories. The language fits a collection of stories that were written in another language and are filled with the culture of that language. Therefore the language of the stories fits the overall intention well.

Structure

The book is divided into nine short stories. Each story begins with its own title, keeping it separate from the other stories. The first story in the book, Kindness, is a long story that is divided into twelve chapters. Each story is told in a linear fashion and includes both exposition and dialogue.

The stories each have a single plot, with some including subplots. The main plots are varying in their intention, but all include several characters and varying themes. At the end of each story the plots all come to a logical conclusion that leaves the reader satisfied with the stories they have just finished reading.



Quotes

"I am a forty-one-year-old woman living by myself in the same one-bedroom flat where I have always lived, in a derelict building on the outskirts of Beijing that is threatened to be demolished by government-backed real estate developers." Kindness: Chapter 1, pg. 6

"I wondered if other girls, for different misdemeanors, were kept hostage at odd hours in this room and informed of the love history of Lieutenant Wei." Kindness: Chapter 6, pg. 34

"The girl, unlike most people photographed for fashion magazines, was not beautiful." A Man Like Him, pg. 59

"Nor am I who you think I am, he thought of protesting, but why should he, when he had long ago made the decision not to defend himself against this ridiculous world?" A Man Like Him, pg. 70

"Yilan found it hard to argue against the plan, because she had never disagreed with Luo in their marriage." Prison, pg. 77

"Even as she was trying to find reconciling words to convince Fusang that she would do whatever she requested, Yilan knew that the world of trust and love they had built together was crushed, and they would remain each other's prisoner for as long as they stayed under the same roof." Prison, pg. 94

"The only truth for Dao to know, Mrs. Fan thought, was that he would be locked in his unhappiness forever, as she herself would be." House Fire, pg. 121

"They had moved into number three, Garden Road forty-five years earlier, he with his new wife, she with her parents and three younger siblings." Number Three, Garden Road, pg. 122

"Wait until this very night to discover what you haven't known about life, said Mei, always the most outspoken one, without lowering her voice; Lan blushed but then agreed with a coy smile, and for a moment Ailin was intimidated by a looming void of which her two sworn sisters seemed unaware." Sweeping Past, pg. 137

"And they could smile on the wall into the indifferent eyes of foreign strangers, as if time had stopped at the photographer's cramped studio fifty years ago, Ailin thought, and turned away from the poster before her sworn sisters caught a glimpse of her moist eyes." Sweeping Past, pg. 144

"She wondered how much they understood love, and love despite the fatality of humankind." Souvenir, pg. 149

"They were lonely and sad people, all three of them, and they would not make one another less sad, but they could, with great care, make a world that would accommodate their loneliness." Gold Boy, Emerald Girl, pg. 163



Topics for Discussion

Who is Moyan? What illness does her mother suffer? Why does Professor Shan tell her to ignore love? What is Professor Shan attempting to keep Moyan from suffering? Why does Lieutenant Wei try to befriend Moyan? Why does Moyan reject her? Why does Lieutenant Wei send a wedding invitation to Moyan? Why does Moyan receive a death notice for Lieutenant Wei? How does Moyan feel about this?

Who is Nini's Papa? How does Moyan feel about him? Why does she continue to think about him? Why does Moyan think Nini's Papa would not like to remember her? What impact did this brief relationship have on Moyan? What did Professor Shan know about it? What does she tell Moyan to do about it? How could Moyan's life have been different if Nini's Papa had not walked away from her that day?

What was Teacher Fei accused of? What impact did this accusation have on Teacher Fei? Why does Teacher Fei mention his father's demotion and difficulties in Teacher Fei's childhood? Why did Teacher Fei's father commit suicide? How did that impact Teacher Fei? Why does Teacher Fei become so obsessed with the girl running the blog against her father? Why does he reach out to the other man? Does this change anything?

How did Yilan's daughter die? Why does she decide she wants another child? Why does her husband not want to adopt a child from China? What do they do instead? How are Yilan and Fusang alike? How are they different? Why does Yilan come to the conclusion that she is Fusang's prisoner until the babies come? What does Fusang hold over Yilan? How does this turn the tables of what Yilan thought was her control?

What do the six women in House Fire consider a house fire? What secrets do these women keep from one another? Why do they begin searching for mistresses of cheating men? How does the documentary change their business? Why do they meet with a man at the end of the story? What does the man want? What is unusual about his gender in the women's business? Why do some of the women chose not to take the man's case? Is this a double standard?

Who is Ailin? Why does her granddaughter want the photo of her and her two friends? Why are those women no longer friends? Why do the other two blame Ailin? Is Ailin truly to blame? What went wrong? How could Ailin be held responsible? How does Ailin feel about her loss? Does her granddaughter understand what has happened? Explain.

Why does Professor Dai want her son to marry Siyu? What explanation does she give to her son? What explanation does she give to Siyu? How does Siyu feel about the situation? Is it an ideal situation? What will happen when Professor Dai dies? How does Professor Dai's son feel about the entire situation? Why does he agree to it? Why does he not return to America instead?