

The Valley of Amazement Study Guide

The Valley of Amazement by Amy Tan

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Plot Summary

Fate, identity, love, and belonging are themes that wind through the lives of three generations of women in *The Valley of Amazement* by Amy Tan. The novel details the turbulent lives that the three women have led and the circumstances that have caused them to be separated from each other. The women find their way back to one another. Their healing begins as they see and understand their own lives through the eyes of one another. *The Valley of Amazement* is a beautiful story of separation, hope, and love between a mother and daughter.

Although she believes she is a full-blooded American, Violet Miniturn's life is turned upside down when she learns she is actually half-Chinese. Her father, whom Violet never knew, visits her mother's courtesan house in Shanghai to tell her she is now free to meet her son Teddy. Violet is hurt when her mother makes plans to uproot their lives in Shanghai and move back to San Francisco where she can have a life with her son. Violet's anger turns to betrayal when Fairweather, a friend of her mother's, sells Violet to a courtesan house to pay his debt to the Chinese Green Gang.

During her life as a courtesan, Violet becomes reacquainted with Loyalty Fang. As a boy, Loyalty had visited the courtesan house in which Violet lived with her mother. He was badly scratched by Violet's cat. Loyalty buys Violet's virginity, and Violet fantasizes he'll marry her. Loyalty tells her he won't propose, Violet is too suspicious and nagging, but he does promise to be her lifelong friend. Through Loyalty, Violet meets Edward. The two have a daughter named Flora. Edward cannot legally marry Violet because he is already married to a woman who tricked him into believing she was pregnant with his baby. Shortly after Flora's birth, Edward's wife is able to legally take Flora away from Violet because the birth certificate lists her, Minerva Ivory, as Flora's mother. It is at this point that Violet makes a promise to herself that she will find Flora and get her back.

Through her experience of losing Flora, Violet gains understanding of her mother's actions leading up to their separation. She contacts her mother, who had been told Violet was dead, and enlists her help in finding Flora. Violet gets her opportunity to introduce herself to her daughter when Flora finds the gifts her Uncle Loyalty, who is now Violet's husband, has been sending her through the years. It is through a reunion in Shanghai that Flora begins to remember her years with her mother before Minerva took her away. At the end of the novel, Violet is finally able to say goodbye to the possibilities of what her life might have been if she had not been kidnapped. She embraces the good that has come in her life even from the cruel twist of fate.



Chapter 1: Hidden Jade Path

Summary

In the first chapter of *The Valley of Amazement* by Amy Tan, the main character Violet is confident of her identity as an American. At school, a girl accuses Violet of being Chinese because she speaks in a combination of Chinese, English, and the Shanghainese dialect. When Violet's mother tells her that her Chinese is beautiful, Violet is troubled she has been able to learn the language so easily. She soon regains her belief she is American because of her fair skin, green eyes, and disbelief in the Chinese superstitions.

Violet grows up in a Shanghai courtesan house. The house Violet's mother has turned into Hidden Jade Path formerly belonged to a poet, Pan Ku Xiang. Legend says that one of the poet's mistresses set fire to the house, killing Xiang's wife and burning his work. Lucia was able to buy the house cheaply because it was believed to be inhabited by the poet's ghost. Before the house opened, she threw a party where a feng shui master persuaded the ghost to leave.

Violet details her memories of growing up in Hidden Jade Path including her habit of spying on the Cloud Beauties when they were working with their suitors. Violet additionally describes Magic Cloud, whom she loves more than any of the other Cloud Beauties. Magic Cloud is forced to leave Hidden Jade Path because she claims to be having a relationship with the Poet Ghost. Violet tries to convince her mother to let Magic Cloud come back but her mother tells her that Magic Cloud betrayed her, almost causing the ruin of her business. Violet warns her mother that she, too, will betray her even though she doesn't know what she is saying.

Violet feels her mother is becoming more and more distant. Then, one day she learns her mother has gotten a letter telling her that Violet's father is dead. Violet confronts her mother, angry that she has been lied to all of these years. Her mother comforts her but later Violet wakes to hear her mother arguing with herself, telling the letter she holds that she wished he were really dead. Violet tries to find the letter so she can read for herself what it says but is unable to do so.

Later, a new courtesan accuses Violet of being a half-breed, which angers the child. When Violet presses her mother for assurance she is not part Chinese, her mother will tell her only that her father is dead. Violet studies herself in the mirror. Her green eyes and brown hair indicate she's American. She notices nothing alarming until she smiles at herself and the corners of her eyes tilt upward. Violet believes her rounded forehead, layer of fat under her eyebrows and rounded cheeks, lips and nose, which are Chinese traits, are the reasons that her mother will have less and less to do with her. Violet decides that her mother does not love her because she is half-Chinese. She tries to rid herself of any signs that she is not fully American.



Analysis

Identity is a major theme in this chapter as Violet realizes that she is half-Chinese. The knowledge is a shock to her although others had known her lineage all along. Although Violet has been raised in Shanghai, she has absorbed the opinion that the Chinese are second-class citizens to the Americans, hence her horror at discovering she is not completely American. She is angered by the child who makes fun of her ability to speak Chinese as well as a courtesan who calls her a half-breed. Violet associates her realization that she is part Chinese to her mother's relationship with her which is becoming more and more distant. She assumes her mother doesn't love her because it is becoming more and more apparent her father is a Chinese man.

The differences in Western and Eastern culture are a significant theme in this section of the novel as Violet's mother makes her living playing off the differences in those from the West and those from the East. She has additionally benefited from taking advantage of the fears of the Chinese by buying a house believed to be haunted by a Poet Ghost. Chinese at the time were very superstitious so Lucia has the house cleansed according to Chinese customs to assure her customers they won't be bothered by this ghost.

Life in a courtesan house is described from Violet's viewpoint as she spies on the Cloud Beauties and wonders about the relationships between the grown ups. Violet does not fully understand the relations between the Beauties and their suitors but she is very curious about their rituals and relationships. One Beauty in particular, Magic Cloud, is special to Violet. Violet gets angry with her mother and threatens to betray her when Lucia forces Magic Cloud to leave the house because of a rumor about Magic Cloud having a relationship with the Poet Ghost.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it so devastating for Violet to learn that she is half-Chinese? Why does she associate her identity with being unloved?

Discussion Question 2

How does Lulu Mimi play on the fears of the Chinese people in order to make money from them?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Violet's mother is not as attentive to her as Violet feels she should be?



Vocabulary

Courtesans, boudoir, taboo, pummeled, rigorous, conjured, nimbus, lyrical, inscribed, accolades, maladies, palanquin, purveyors, fabrication, laments, protocols, amenities, austere, engorged, cavorted, bestiality, balustrades, palatial, pugnacious, wend, prohibition, banish, duplicity, harangue, titillating, repulsed, accouterments, echelons, retaliate, maligned.



Chapter 2: The New Republic

Summary

Violet details the atmosphere as the Ching dynasty is taken over by the New Republic of China. Fairweather makes Violet angry with a comment about the Chinese and for a moment she feels pride in being half-Chinese. With the revolution, foreigners are treated badly. Violet's mother calls her to stay near her. Violet asks if the changes will cause their house to close down. Her mother tries to comfort her, telling her the Chinese will calm down soon.

On the day that she and her mother are supposed to have a belated birthday lunch, Violet's mother gets another letter. Violet manages to find this letter and learns it is from a man named Lu Shing, who writes he will visit on the twenty-third. Violet eavesdrops on the two. She is shocked to learn her mother also has a son. Lu Shing pulls out a picture of the boy. He and Lucia begin to smile and talk about it. Violet believes she has been displaced and is loved by neither her mother nor her father.

The following day Violet's mother instructs her to pick out clothes for a trip to America. She lies to Violet and tells her they are going to visit her parents. Violet confronts her mother with the truth that Lu Shing is her father and that they have a son. Lucia tells her she didn't tell Violet the truth because she didn't want her to know they'd been abandoned. Violet's mother gets angry when she tells her she won't go to America if she can't take Carlotta with her.

Fairweather is the man who arranged to get steamer tickets for Lucia and Violet. Although her mother and the servants of the house like Fairweather, Violet has always had a deep dislike of him. Fairweather tells Lucia he only needs passports for the two of them. Lucia says Violet does not have a passport and she cannot find her birth certificate. Fairweather offers to get a copy. He says that he will take Violet to the consulate with him while Lucia boards the steamer. He will return with Violet and her passport before the ship leaves. Violet does not trust his plan, thinking Fairweather only wants the money. Although Violet shares her distress with her mother and begs her not to let Fairweather take her, her mother follows through with the man's plan.

Analysis

Things change in Shanghai when the Ching dynasty is overtaken by the New Republic. The Chinese celebrate and riot in the streets, treating anyone whom they consider foreigners with disrespect. It is not safe for Violet or her mother to be in the streets. The Chinese servants are lazy and not attentive to their jobs. Neither the Chinese nor the Westerners visit Hidden Jade Path. When they do begin to return, they do not co-mingle as before. It is against this backdrop of unrest that Lucia receives another letter from Lu Shing, the man who is Violet's father. The letter indicates he plans to visit. During his



visit he tells Lucia of their son, Teddy, who is living in America. He promised since his father is dead, Lucia can now be part of the boy's life. It is with the promise of seeing her son plus the uncertainty of her business' future that Lucia allows herself to be talked by Lu Shing into returning to America.

Through the Chinese uprising, Violet continues to struggle with the idea that she is half-Chinese. In a way she is proud that she is one of the foreigners that the Chinese now dislike, but she is also angered by a comment that Fairweather makes about the new Chinese leader. While Fairweather shows disrespect to the man and the Chinese people as a whole, Violet believes Dr. Sun is a good man. She briefly considers the idea she'd be proud if her were her father. It is in this chapter that Violet determines that she is indeed half-Chinese. As she eavesdrops on her mother and Lu Shing, she realizes that Lu Shing is her father. She sees similar features in her face and his face.

Through much of this chapter, Violet is testing her mother, trying to determine if she really loves her. She is still stung by the way her mother used her to break off conversation with another man and go to Fairweather. She additionally remembers the promise her mother made to her several years prior to take her to lunch for her birthday. That lunch never happened leading Violet to believe that she is not important to her mother. Things follow a similar pattern on Violet's fourteenth birthday. Lucia receives a letter from Lu Shing which makes her delay their celebration. Later, Violet learns that her mother also has a son for whom she decides to sail to America to visit though she hurts Violet by making her leave Carlotta behind. Violet is deeply dismayed when her mother agrees to a plan by Fairweather to get Violet a passport. In this plan, Fairweather says he will pretend to be Violet's father. The two of them will join Lucia on the boat before it sails. Violet begs her mother not to follow Fairweather's plan but Lucia will not listen.

Discussion Question 1

Are there any clues given in the novel that Fairweather's plan for Violet may no be entirely honest?

Discussion Question 2

How do Violet's views of her mixed bloodlines change in this chapter?

Discussion Question 3

How does the political environment spur Lucia's decision to go back to America? How much of her decision do you believe is cemented by the promise she will finally be reunited with her son?

Vocabulary

Abdication, mutiny, cronies, levied, provisional, smarmy, frivolity, bellwether, groused, indemnity, extolling, elocution, abscond.



Chapter 3: The Hall of Tranquility

Summary

Instead of taking Violet to the consulate, Fairweather drops her off at a courtesan house, the Hall of Tranquility. Violet knows she has been tricked when she turns to see the dust from Fairweather's carriage as it drives away. Violet is angry and acts rudely to the woman who is the madam of the house. The woman forces her to drink wine, then hits and slaps her. Violet wakes in a strange bed. Magic Cloud, the courtesan who was a friend to her as a child, is in the room with her. Magic Cloud, who is now called Magic Gourd, explains to Violet what has happened. The Green Gang has threatened the staff at Hidden Jade Path to keep the secret that Fairweather sold Violet to Mother Ma to settle his gambling debts.

Violet looks in her chest, believing when she finds her mother's things among her own that it means that her mother was tricked. Violet is disturbed by a painting of her mother, that she finds stowed in the chest and confused by another painting "The Valley of Amazement." She's not quite sure what to think of it, but believes that it is an omen of coming difficulty in her life. Magic Gourd tells Violet it will be one year before Madam schedules Violet's defloration and begs her to cooperate until either her mother can come back to get her, or Violet can escape. Magic Gourd takes a few of Violet's mother's things, including the paintings, telling her that it will keep Madam from getting them. When Magic Gourd takes Violet to breakfast the next morning, Violet is well behaved and Mother Ma is pleased.

A month after Violet joins the Hall of Tranquility, Magic Gourd tells Violet she will be moving into Magic Gourd's room and she will be going away. Magic Gourd leaves but comes back three hours later with Carlotta. Magic Gourd had let rats loose in the Madam's room, making her demand Violet's cat. She also brings news of Fairweather. He told Violet's mother that Violet was killed in an accident. Meanwhile, Magic Gourd works out a deal with Mother Ma to be Violet's mentor and teacher until Mother Ma has recovered from the black hand disease from which the courtesan mother seems to be suffering.

One day as Violet and Magic Gourd are talking about the differences between Magic Gourd, whom Violet believes has chosen to be a courtesan, and Violet, who believes she has been forced to become a courtesan, Magic Gourd tells Violet how she came to be a courtesan. Magic Gourd was five when she was sold into slavery. When she was nine, the merchant for whose wife Magic Gourd served as a servant raped Magic Gourd. When she was eleven, the merchant got Magic Gourd pregnant. She gets an infection from the abortion the merchant's wife gives her. After she recovered, Magic Gourd was sold to a brothel. A rich scholar paid for her virginity but he discovered the horsehair used to tie her closed. He felt sorry for her after she told her story and gave her a dollar as an extra gift.



After Mother Ma dies, Golden Dove comes to visit. Violet forgives her and hugs her. Golden Dove is going to Soochow. She tells Violet that Fairweather and Puffy Cloud had run away to Hong Kong but had soon run out of money. Fairweather tried to swindle another businessman but had instead slept with the man's daughter. The businessman had stuffed Fairweather into a bag and drowned him.

Madam Li takes over the house, bringing with her the courtesan Vermillion. The name of the place is changed to House of Vermillion. With Magic Gourd's tutelage, Violet is allowed to stay but all the other courtesans are replaced. Madam Li tells Violet she is being kept because of a promise she made to Golden Dove but that Violet must earn her keep.

Analysis

Violet's life is turned upside down when she becomes the victim of Fairweather's plot to get out of debt. He uses both Violet and her mother in an attempt to run away with Puffy Cloud, one of the courtesans from Hidden Jade Path. Violet learns later his happiness doesn't last with Puffy Cloud and he meets a tragic death when he steals the virginity of a man whom he was trying to swindle.

Violet's life, meanwhile, has become that of a courtesan. The Green Gang, which appears to be some sort of Chinese mob, has threatened everyone who could be of any help to Violet. Golden Dove, Cracked Egg and Magic Gourd are all too scared to try to send a message to Violet's mother that she is still alive. Golden Dove has been forced to write Lucia telling her that her daughter was killed in a traffic accident. Lucia seems to believe her, sending back a letter mourning the idea that Violet's last thoughts of her were that she had betrayed her.

Even as Violet is tormented by her new place in life, she is additionally tormented with the idea that her mother loved Teddy more than she. She wonders how long her mother waited at the back of the ship before she realized Violet wasn't coming. She wonders if her mother tried to get off the ship before it sailed or if she left willingly. She wonders if her mother ever considered coming back and looking for her.

The novel indicates that Violet never really accepted the idea she was a courtesan, she just stopped fighting it. Magic Gourd seems to help Violet's transition by telling Violet her own story. Violet had always assumed that Magic Gourd had chosen her way of life. Magic Gourd explains to her she was sold as a slave, and was on her way to being the wife of one of the sons of her mistress before her mistress' husband began having sex with her and got her pregnant. Magic Gourd almost died of a home abortion. After she recovered, she was sold to a courtesan house, a profession in which she has made her living ever since.

Magic Gourd is an important friend for Violet to have as the woman obviously cares for Violet and wants to see her in a good position. Magic Gourd makes it possible for Violet to get her cat back and also hides a few of her mother's things so that Mother Ma won't



take them for her own. Magic Gourd makes a deal with the Mother that she will be allowed to stay in the house and teach Violet the ropes of being a courtesan. Not only does this secure Magic Gourd's future, it also keeps her close to Violet so she can make sure the girl is being treated properly.

Violet continues to fight with the idea that as an American, she is entitled to certain rights. Magic Gourd tries to help her understand her American ties don't really mean anything in China. In fact, her status as a half-breed makes her even less desirable than a full breed Chinese woman in the courtesan business. When Mother Li takes over the Hall of Tranquility, they go to great lengths to devise a family tree for Violet that will be both believable and impressive to possible suitors. This family tree indicates Violet is of full-Chinese lineage, with no American ties.

Discussion Question 1

Why is no one able to get a message to Violet's mother that her daughter is still alive?

Discussion Question 2

What is Magic Gourd's role in this chapter of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

How does Violet initially react to the idea she has been sold as a courtesan? Does her view change? How does it change?

Vocabulary

Impertinent, beribboned, contradictory, pragmatism, audacity, bustard, copious, baubles, conniver, tirade, karma, palanquin, Taipan, tutelage, sumptuously, waif, reputedly.



Chapter 4: Etiquette for Beauties of the Boudoir

Summary

In this chapter, Magic Gourd teaches Violet the basics of being a courtesan. In developing Violet's reputation, Magic Gourd tells her she will learn a larger number of songs and poems than other courtesans. She is to learn to be on her best behavior in public and attentive to men. The first party she will attend is for a rich man named Loyalty Fang.

In dealing with the men, Magic Gourd tells Violet she should seek jewelry, furniture, a contract with a stipend and a retirement, but not love as that emotion doesn't last. While it is Violet's job to be popular and well-liked, it is Magic Gourd's job to try to entice gifts from men in exchange for Violet's favors. Magic Gourd hopes they will be able to pay off Violet's debt within three years so they can start their own house. She also tells Violet she plans for the man who wins the bid to deflower Violet to provide her with a full set of jewelry for the occasion, a large gift.

Magic Gourd then tells Violet there are certain illusions that she will be required to help her suitors create in order to fill their desires. She also warns Violet to keep herself in good condition, neither letting herself get too thin or too fat. Highly fashionable clothes, tailored specifically for Violet will help create the impression that Magic Gourd hopes her pupil will display. Clothing that allows men to get a peek of what Violet has to offer are also in her future, Magic Gourd tells Violet as she describes the way courtesans have "accidents" with clothes in order to entice their suitors. She additionally gives Violet a list of four things that can ruin her career. These include the monthly period which can both be embarrassing or helpful if a man wants to role play a deflowering complete with blood. Magic Gourd warns Violet she can lose business if she gets pregnant and describes the ritual Violet should follow after each sexual encounter to ensure she doesn't have a baby. Getting sick is another way to lose business. She tells Violet that if she believes there is anything wrong with a man who wants to have sexual relations with her, she should call Magic Gourd in order to avoid getting infected. She also warns Violet not to lose her mind by getting addicted to opium or staying drunk on liquor.

In her lessons Magic Gourd explains to Violet the proper way in which she is to prepare her sexual parts for her encounters with the men. Violet will also practice sexual positions with a homosexual man. This man will arouse himself so Violet won't be surprised at the changes in a man once the sexual process begins. He will also wear a fake penis so that Violet will learn how things fit together. She will be shown how to arouse a man with difficulty in getting an erection. Magic Gourd tells Violet to practice arousing herself with a pearl polisher. If she is not able to achieve an orgasm with this piece of equipment, Magic Gourd says the man will instruct Violet on what facial expressions to make to indicate sexual pleasure.



Analysis

In this section of the novel *Magic Gourd* lines out to Violet the things she must learn in order to be a desired courtesan. What is most interesting to note is that these courtesans were not merely prostitutes. The men are required to woo the beauties and give them gifts. It is most ideal for a man to pay a woman to stay with her as his “mistress” for a certain amount of time. Apparently the defloration of a woman is the event for which she will be paid the most. From this point, her career will only progress downward.

Magic Gourd works as a “broker” for Violet, sharing in her earnings, but also keeping her safe and bartering good deals with the men who vie for her attention. She shares what she has learned in the business so the Violet will be able to succeed and pay off her debts quickly. *Magic Gourd*’s goal is for the two of them to be able to leave the House of Vermillion and open their own courtesan house, just as Violet’s mother ran a house with the help of Golden Dove.

Note that while *Magic Gourd* warns Violet against getting a disease, getting pregnant and wearing herself out, the main thing that she tells Violet to guard against is falling in love. *Magic Gourd* tells Violet falling in love can be detrimental to her career as it will keep her from being with other men as she will want to devote herself to one with hopes of marriage and true love. If Violet happens to fall in love, *Magic Gourd* says it will be her responsibility to bring Violet back to reality.

Discussion Question 1

Why would falling in love be so dangerous for a Chinese courtesan?

Discussion Question 2

How does Violet react to her image after *Magic Gourd* has made her up as a Chinese courtesan?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways is Violet lucky that she has *Magic Gourd* to be her teacher?

Vocabulary

Enticement, reticence, repertoire, herald, virile, grotto, insatiability, nostalgia, lurid, contradict, frugal, odious, connivers, magnate, demure, pudenda, impeccable, adulation, ruse, bawdy, lurid, paroxysms, weft, coupling, engaged, demise, lewdness, titillation, batiste, ruse, florid, conjure.



Chapter 5: The Memory of Desire

Summary

Six months after Violet is kidnapped, she attends Loyalty Fang's party. Although it was intended for Violet only to stand in the background and observe, she and Magic Gourd both are pushed forward to wait on a man when two courtesans begin fighting over him and are thrown out. Magic Gourd pinches Violet as a way to entice her to be attentive to the man. Violet gets tired of the punishment and finally returns a pinch getting anger from Vermillion and Mother Li, but positive attention from Loyalty Fang. He asks Violet to sing a song. Although Magic Gourd mutters afterward the song is a disgrace, Loyalty Fang asks Violet to sit next to him.

As she sits there, Loyalty reminds Violet they have met before in her mother's house. He is the boy who was scratched by Carlotta. Violet has reminded Loyalty of the promise he made to himself as a seventeen-year-old boy that he would make himself into the kind of man who could have any flower her wanted. At the end of the evening, after Violet has even been encouraged by Loyalty to share some business advice, he gives Magic Gourd a large tip, money to replace the ruined jacket and the promise that he will be the first to throw a party in honor of Violet.

After an agonizing wait, Loyalty wins the bid for Violet's defloration. The event is celebrated with a Western wedding. Loyalty gives Violet furniture to refurnish her entire room along with a good deal of cash. After Violet loses her virginity, she feels Loyalty has lost some respect for her. She additionally gets the sense that she has lost some of her hold over him. He recognizes that she is hurt by his actions and is not ready for the type relationship that a courtesan must have with her patrons. Violet wants Loyalty to love her only, an unreasonable expectation. Although they have pleasant times, near the end of his one-year contract with Violet, Loyalty says that the spirit in her that he once loved has been killed by her jealousy. He continues to pay the stipend for the rest of the contract, but chooses not to see her again.

Eminent Tang is the next man who woos Violet. Violet is in the process of wooing him when she attends a party at which Loyalty is present with one of his courtesans. After their first evening together, Eminent signs a contract for two seasons. In the following three years, Violet develops a knack for knowing how to please each man. She becomes popular as a courtesan. She also loses the naiveté that ruined her relationship with Loyalty. At the close of these three years she gets a request from Loyalty wanting to see her. He asks if he can sign a contract with her for a season. She is about to say yes when he tells her that he has a wife. She agrees after he tells her the wife is a homosexual. At the end of this contract, he pledges to be her lifelong friend.



Analysis

Although Violet's introduction as a courtesan gets off to a rough and unexpected start, she becomes very popular, bringing in even more than Vermillion at the celebration of her defloration. Both Violet's embarrassment and her success are brought about at the hands of Loyalty Fang, the man who was the boy Violet believed was killed by Carlotta. Loyalty recognizes her as the naughty girl who owned the cat but Violet does not recognize him at all until he reminds her of their background. He tells Violet that she has reawakened in him his memory that there was once something that he desired in life. She becomes a representation of this desire for him.

Madame Li and Magic Gourd are pleased when it is Loyalty who wins the bid for Violet's defloration but after the event, Violet feels let down and betrayed by Loyalty. Despite Magic Gourd's warning, Violet had let herself believe that Loyalty would make their relationship permanent. Though Loyalty does care for Violet, he makes it clear to her that he will not marry her, especially the way she acts. Remember although Violet has learned the sexual prowess that some adult women never achieve, she is only 15 when loses her virginity to Loyalty, still a child by modern standards. In the next three years, Violet matures in her job position. When Loyalty spends another season with her, he pledges lifetime friendship with her. This pledge is a sign of Loyalty's affection for Violet as well as his recognition of her developing maturity.

What is most interesting is that it is Violet's qualities that Madame Li felt might make Violet unpopular that seem to seal her popularity. The men call her Eurasian, an exotic term for her mixed blood. They are drawn to her Chinese face combined with the unusual green eyes of the Western world. The men are additionally wooed by Violet's ability to speak Chinese perfectly. Although they had hoped it would not be mentioned, almost all of the rumor mills of Chinese society indicate that Violet got her green eyes from her mother, Lulu Mimi.

Notice along with Magic Gourd's careful teaching of Violet, she encourages the girl with stories of her own life. She tells Violet about an instance where she felt she had achieved true love with suitor. She saved up her money to buy the man a gold watch. Later, when the man is killed by men for the watch, Magic Gourd feels as if she were responsible for his death. Magic Gourd tells this story to help Violet understand even while Magic Gourd is a tough teacher, she has fallen prey to some of the shortcomings about which she warns Violet.

Discussion Question 1

Does it seem strange Loyalty takes a trip to San Francisco, the same place Violet's mother went, just before her defloration? Did you ever suspect he might have been looking for her mother? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

What does Loyalty want from Violet? What does she demand from him?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean when three years after their initial falling out, Loyalty pledges unfailing friendship to Violet?

Vocabulary

Aura, demeanor, charismatic, glibness, portly, demurred, congealed, elicited, tersely, complacent, unconsummated, archaic, consortium, vivacious, abdication, auspicious, pristine, cognizant, rescind, elongated, fidelity, delude, stigma, besotted, ardent, eccentric, titillate, fetish.



Chapter 6: A Singing Sparrow

Summary

The courtesan business seems to fall as Westerners demand more activity for less payment. Madame Li stresses over the decision to accept foreign suitors. Loyalty suggests to Violet an American who wants to learn to speak Chinese. He wants a woman who also speaks English so they can have interesting conversation.

When Edward visits the first time, he is late and wears rumpled clothing, making Violet believe he is disrespectful. He tells Violet and the other courtesans that he is writing a diary of his travels in China. He recites a poem by Walt Whitman that reminds Violet of the painting "The Valley of Amazement." Edward makes a comment about the youth of two of the courtesans at which Violet is offended. She stands, indicating to Edward it is time for his visit to be over. Before he leaves, he gives Violet an envelope containing twenty American silver dollars. When Violet realizes he thinks they are cheap whores, she tells him to leave as Magic Gourd and Madame Li curse and the other courtesans leave the room.

When Loyalty learns what Edward has done, he tells Violet the misunderstanding came from differences in translation between languages. Loyalty brings with him gifts from Edward. These include a book of Walt Whitman's poetry and a gold bracelet with rubies and diamonds. Loyalty hosts a dinner at which Edward is a guest. He is quiet and polite. He gives the maids and Magic Gourd tips and additionally gives Violet the gift of an emerald and diamond bracelet.

The next time Edward contacts Violet, he offers to take her to a race club where she might meet the governor. She is surprised when the governor recognizes her but soon realizes he was a suitor at her mother's house. After this trip Edward asks Violet to be his companion. Violet learns Edward is married but his marriage is unhappy. His wife, Minerva, lied about being pregnant, forcing Edward to marry her. He was proud of himself at first for standing up to his father, who wanted to pay the girl and her family money to be rid of her. After they are married, Minerva tells Edward she had a miscarriage, but then later admits she was never pregnant. At this admission, Edward leaves, telling Minerva he will never love her.

About two months after they first meet, Edward and Violet hike up part of Heavenly Horse Mountain. During lunch Edward lets Violet read part of his travel diary. He leads her through a cave to a forest where they two make love for the first time. Days later Edward admits to Violet he was responsible for the death of another boy, a mistake for which he was never punished because his father took care of the problem. Violet can not force him to leave as she feels damaged and victimized herself. The two begin to talk and deepen their friendship.



One day, Violet notices she cannot close the fasteners on one of her dresses. It has been nearly two months since she's had her period. Violet realizes she is pregnant. She wants to keep the baby, hoping it will be the woman she had been intended to be. Although Magic Gourd is not pleased with the news, Edward is. Mr. Shing, Edward's host, offers to allow the two to live in his house. Edward proposes to Violet, saying he intends to push Minerva to give him a divorce.

Magic Gourd accuses Violet of abandoning her. She resists when Edward suggests she move in with them but Violet knows that she must push Magic Gourd to accept because of all the things the older woman has done for her. She realizes that Magic Gourd has loved her like a mother and tells her so. Magic Gourd agrees to go with Violet and Edward.

Violet is overcome with bad omens the day they move to Mr. Shing's house. The final comes when Violet sees a copy of the painting "The Valley of Amazement" in the room that is to be her private bedroom. She realizes the man who owns the house is her father, Lu Shing. When Edward learns of Violet's distress, he agrees they must leave but they do not because Magic Gourd becomes sick with Spanish Influenza.

Analysis

Violet's life undergoes another major change as she gets pregnant with Edward's baby. She leaves the House of Vermillion to live with Edward in the house of his host. It is not until Violet sees a copy of the painting "The Valley of Amazement" that she realizes the man who is Edward's host is also her father. She wonders for a moment if Edward's affection for her has all been a trick, but realizes that he has made the same mistake many Westerners make in assuming Chinese names follow the same order as Western names. Edward agrees with Violet they must leave her father's house, but before they can leave, they discover that Magic Gourd is sick.

One important aspect of this chapter is the bond that Edward and Violet feel as they are instigator and victim of terrible crimes. Edward has carried the guilt in his heart about the boy whom his actions killed. Violet harbors resentment against her mother, feeling herself a victim of her mother's selfishness. While there is nothing Edward can do to bring the boy back to life or make atonement for what he has done, there is also nothing that will make Violet feel better about what has happened to her. Although Edward had thought his confession to Violet would make her leave him, it actually draws the two together as they share stories of their own cases of victimization.

Another important realization made by Violet is how important Magic Gourd has been to her through out the course of her life. Violet briefly seems to consider it is time for her and Magic Gourd to part ways. When Magic Gourd insists she will not live with them, Violet suddenly realizes that Magic Gourd has been like a mother to her all of the years. She has taken care of her, seen to it that she was not hurt and looked out for her best interests. It is this realization that helps Violet to know that she has no other option but



to ask Magic Gourd to come and join their family. Although Magic Gourd pretends to be offended, she eventually concedes to stay with Violet and Edward.

Discussion Question 1

What makes Violet want to keep Edward's baby?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the courtesans in the House of Vermillion not want Western suitors? In what ways does Edward's behavior confirm their worst suspicions?

Discussion Question 3

What does Violet realize about Magic Gourd's role in her life? Is she truly appreciative of what the woman has done for her?

Vocabulary

Sojourners, salacious, defile, atrocious, vixen, credenza, onus, foist, tirade, imperiled, malaise, assuage, subterfuge, indelible, trepidation, tawdry, vagabond, listed, arboreal, vile, ramparts, plummet, despicable, solace, elocution.



Chapter 7: A Blue Disease

Summary

Violet becomes sick with the same illness as Magic Gourd. When she begins to get better, Edward tells her he's sent Lu Shing a letter chiding him for not saying who he really was. Lu Shing writes back saying he wants Violet to inherit the house but that she must admit he is her father. Violet is torn but admits they must stay there so they will have a roof over their heads if Edward's family were to ever disown him. After Magic Gourd and Violet recover completely from their illness, a new wave of influenza breaks out. Edward is sick for a day and the family believes they are all now out of danger of further sickness. The baby is born in February. Edward chooses the name Flora. Violet doesn't care for it as it reminds her of the courtesans being called flowers. The name, however, sticks. When Flora is two months old, Edward gets sick. Violet realizes that Edward finally has the flu and had probably only a cold earlier. Despite Violet's care Edward dies. They bury him quickly so the American Consulate cannot take away the body to a mass grave.

Analysis

Violet again suffers a great blow when Edward dies of Spanish influenza. The three of them had felt they were safe from the disease and had lessened their safety routines. When Edward gets sick, Violet realizes his prior sickness was probably a cold. Not only did Edward really love Violet, he was also her first opportunity to break away from the life of the courtesan. Things become more difficult for Violet when she tells the men from the American Consulate that she is Minerva Lamp Ivory, the woman whose name appears on Edward's passport.

Discussion Question 1

How does Violet's father figure into her new life with Edward?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Violet and Edward believe that Edward is no longer susceptible to the flu?

Discussion Question 3

How does Magic Gourd and Violet's relationship change during this chapter of the novel?

Vocabulary

Officious, eccentric, avaricious, bequest.



Chapter 8: The Two Mrs. Ivorys

Summary

In Chapter 8, four days after Edward's death a lawyer comes to Violet with papers saying that she and her daughter Flora are the legal recipients of his fortune. She relies on Lu Shing to tell Edward's parents about his death.

Two and one half years later the real Minerva Lamp Ivory comes with a lawyer and takes Flora away from Violet. They can charge her with impersonation, embezzlement, fraud and theft but will drop the charges if she agrees to give them Flora. Violet has no proof of her Flora being her daughter as it is Minerva's name that appears on the birth certificate. She additionally has no proof she is Lu Shing's daughter with rights to stay in his house. Although Violet tries to run from them, the Ivorys, with the help of the police, take Flora from her. She and Magic Gourd are evicted from the house. Violet believes she has options for her future, but learns these are few as she is a woman and a former courtesan. Magic Gourd reminds her of Loyalty's promise he would help her if needed. She goes to him and he persuades the House of Vermillion to take her back. He pays her to give him lessons in English, but the two soon return to their old relationship of fighting over misunderstandings. At the end of the chapter Violet finally finds a sense of freedom when she tells Loyalty she is tired of their fighting. She wants to stop trying at a relationship, as all they do is make one another unhappy.

Analysis

This chapter tells perhaps the biggest tragedy in Violet's life. For legal reasons, Edward's wife is able to take Flora away from her. In all his dealing with the shipping company lawyer, Edward has made the ruse that Violet was Minerva. When the lawyer draws up the documents Edward requested, he puts them in Minerva's name. Flora's birth certificate additionally lists Minerva as her legal mother. The family even manages to have Lu Shing's house taken away from Violet as his name does not appear on her birth certificate. She has no proof she is his daughter as she doesn't know where Edward hid the letters from Lu Shing. The Ivorys tried to contact Lu Shing but learned his company was sold and he has filed for bankruptcy.

Although Violet believes she finally has freedom to choose her own life at this point, she soon learns she has no choice but to return to life as a courtesan. She relies on Loyalty's promise to help her get a place back in the House of Vermillion. He pays her to teach him English but the two soon begin fighting again. Violet finally finds a certain freedom when she tells Loyalty she is tired of the fighting.

Significant in this section of the novel is Lu Shing's letter to Violet. Edward had written the man requesting answers to Violet's questions but at the time Violet hadn't wanted to know the answers. She finds the letter tucked into Edward's leather journal. It tells of his



unwillingness to stand up to his family and love her and her mother completely. The man also admits that he was at the first party that Violet attended as a courtesan, the one in which Loyalty paid her so much attention. He had not pulled her away from that life because he claims he thought Loyalty might make her his wife, a situation she seemed to like. He regrets this decision as well. He additionally tells Violet that her mother was tricked and knew nothing of Fairweather's plans to kidnap her. He says she never met with him to meet their son, saying that she had realized she had only one child that mattered — Violet — and that she would mourn her the remainder of her life. Not much of Violet's reaction to this letter is recorded, as she is already so distraught over the death of Edward and loss of Flora. She seems most angry that at the time she needs him most, the man has again, disappeared and cannot be located to help her.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it so easy for the Ivorys to take Flora away from Violet? What, if anything, could have been done differently?

Discussion Question 2

How is Violet's life becoming more and more like her mothers?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it so difficult for Violet, as a woman, to find a job in China?

Vocabulary

Chagrined, feign, fastidious, cortege, pallid, acrimony.



Chapter 9: Quicksand Years

Summary

In Chapter 9, Violet meets Perpetual. He presents himself as a scholar and recites a poem he claims to have authored that brings Violet to tears. He tells her his wife, Azure, died five years ago. When Violet sings Perpetual's poem, she gets more gifts and invitations to more parties than she has in years. Violet tries to get him to give her more poems but he recites nothing on the level of the first poem. Meanwhile, Violet is stooping to less wooing time and more banal role-play, decisions she believes are signaling the end of her career.

Rioters hit the city and Perpetual seems angry with Violet after one attack she is not more relieved he is still alive. When he returns, he comes with another poem that Violet thinks is good but Magic Gourd believes is pretentious. She voices her opinion the first poem Perpetual gave her was not his. Violet resents the comment. Magic Gourd begs Violet not to consider marrying the man as he has given her nothing but the one good poem. However, when Perpetual proposes marriage to her, she accepts.

Analysis

A portion of this chapter of the novel depicts the riots in China as the Chinese police open fire on protesters near the house in which Violet and Magic Gourd are living. The riots affect business, as men are more afraid to visit the courtesan houses. There is additionally less money available for courting and wooing the courtesans. For this reason, Violet believes that she is making a good decision when she agrees to marry Perpetual. He can provide her with a future and she believes the stories that he has told her. Magic Gourd tries to convince Violet that Perpetual is not what he seems but Violet will not listen.

Discussion Question 1

How do the riots in China affect Violet's decision to marry Perpetual?

Discussion Question 2

Do you see signs that Perpetual may not be what he advertises?

Discussion Question 3

What of the one good poem that Perpetual produced? Why is he unable to write in that way again?

Vocabulary

Banal, aplomb, altruism, pragmatic, epithets, reprisal, pompous.



Chapter 10: Moon Pond Village

Summary

In Chapter 10, Violet and Magic Gourd travel alone to Moon Pond Village as Perpetual says he has been called away on business. Magic Gourd had argued with Violet up until the day before their trip trying to convince her not to go. She appears also not to want to go as well until she tells Violet the day before she is set to leave that she heard a rumor of a mother-in-law who beat her son's wife to death. Although Violet recognizes the story as one she told Magic Gourd, she insists the older woman come with her as protection. Near the end of their journey, Violet finds herself looking at a valley similar to the one in Lu Shing's painting of *The Valley of Amazement*. Violet wonders if this place were her destiny all along.

When they finally come to the village, it is not at all what Violet had in mind. The houses are poor and the pond murky. They stop at the decaying front gates of the house but no one comes to greet them. There are no greeting firecrackers or banners. Six women and six children stand in the courtyard. The men are ordered to put Violet's things in the north wing of the house. One of the older women tells Violet and Magic Gourd this isn't the first time Perpetual has brought back "a whore as a concubine." A woman who talks to them as they have tea introduces herself as Second Wife. She tells Violet she will be Third Wife. When Magic Gourd questions why they should believe her, she tells them she was once known as Luscious Peach. Violet recognizes her as a courtesan that once visited her mother's house. Now called Pomelo, Perpetual told her the same lies he told Violet to convince her to be his wife. She additionally claims the wife Perpetual told them was dead is still alive. Pomelo tells them the woman they spoke to when they first arrived was Azure, Perpetual's first wife. Violet begins to feel angry. Pomelo tells them they should meet her in her courtyard the next day to hear more.

The next day Pomelo says when she first came to Perpetual's home, Azure really was sick. One day while in her room, Pomelo hears the woman calling to her to leave before she suffers from Perpetual's cruelty. Pomelo says it is the woman's son who gives Azure the reason to get well again as she does not want her child to become like his father. By the time Perpetual finally arrives at the house, Violet is so angry she won't even hear his excuses. But he gets through to her with his lies and she believes him because she wants to do so.

Analysis

After a long, uncomfortable and dangerous ride to Moon Pond, Violet realizes all Magic Gourd's warnings have come true. Perpetual has lied to her about himself, his family and his circumstances. She is put in the dilapidated north wing of the house. She learns from another former courtesan that she is not First Wife, but Third Wife. The courtesan is the Second Wife. Azure, whom Perpetual had told Violet had died many years ago, is



still alive. She greets Violet by calling her a whore and Magic Gourd a maid. When Perpetual does finally return home, a month after Violet arrives, he is able to sweet-talk her into accepting his lies.

This may be one of the worst positions in which Violet has found herself thus far. She is far away from society with little hope of being able to return to a large city where she might be able to find a job. Perpetual has told some rather large lies to her, indicating he is probably not to be trusted. If Magic Gourd were not with Violet, she would have no one she could trust. Azure has already indicated Violet should not plan to look at her for companionship or sympathy as Violet is not the first woman that Perpetual has brought home. The only hope of companionship that Violet has beside Magic Gourd is the former courtesan known as Pomelo. Because courtesans have a reputation of searching out information about each other they can use against the others, Magic Gourd and Violet wonder if they can trust Pomelo and if they should spend their time with her.

Discussion Question 1

Does Violet's work in a courtesan house make her immoral?

Discussion Question 2

Did you see signs of Perpetual's dishonesty? If so, what were they?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it against emperor's rule for Violet to be First Wife? Research to learn about the rules of polygamy at this time for China.

Vocabulary

Simpering, pious, rapeseed, brigands, penance.



Chapter 11: Heaven Mountain

Summary

In Chapter 11, Violet learns that Perpetual's family of scholars is also a ruse. A tailor discovers the more difficult portions of the Five Classics copied on the sleeves of a ceremonial robe worn by each generation of that family's scholars. Perpetual's father is beheaded per imperial edict. The family's scared possessions are set on fire in front of him. At home, villagers set their house on fire, steal furniture and break what they didn't take. Perpetual claims that he will rebuild the family name.

Violet realizes like his father, Perpetual has told lies to cover the first ones. She vows to leave but can find no way to do so. She has tried to find where Perpetual has hidden her jewelry but cannot convince him to show her where it is. In a dream a concubine who reportedly died of smoke inhalation comes to Violet in a dream telling her that others did not have such a lucky death. Violet is afraid some of Perpetual's wives have been killed as there are two concubines who disappeared with no record of what happened to them. Thinking of Flora keeps Violet strong and looking for ways to leave. She decides even though she is angry with her mother, she will find her one day and have her look for Flora.

One day when Perpetual is away, Pomelo insists that Violet and Magic Gourd come to visit her again. Pomelo promises not to hurt them if they do the same for her. She tells them how she has repaired the furniture and furnishings from her room or used her own things to make suitable furnishings. Pomelo asks Violet if Perpetual had taken her up the path to the place that inspired his poems. She says he did. Pomelo shares with her and Magic Gourd the villagers' belief that Heaven Mountain is cursed. She tells of a rock in the shape of a curved hand called Buddha's Hand. A monk builds a temple there which becomes a holy site. After two hundred years, a greedy man who does not have his wish fulfilled cuts off the Buddha's thumb and the place becomes cursed. One of Perpetual's relatives told him words that allowed him to go to Buddha's hand without being cursed, The words were passed down from generation to generation except to Perpetual whose father died before he could tell Perpetual the secret words. Perpetual claims he wouldn't go up to the mountain without the secret words. Pomelo, however, notes many of Perpetual's poems are about drunken hermits on the mountain. She believes there is something up on the mountain that holds Perpetual's interest. She asks Magic Gourd and Violet to make guesses what it is and share their guesses the following day.

Violet begins to sense changes in Perpetual. He gets angry with her when she asks too many questions, he forces her to have rough sex with him, and he tries to make her admit she misses some part of her old life. It is when Perpetual tries to abuse her memory of Edward that Violet fights against him telling him she loved Edward and Flora more than he. Perpetual beats her. He hits Magic Gourd when she tries to stop him.



Pomelo and Magic Gourd tend to her injuries. From that point on, Perpetual beats Violet nearly once a week.

During one of their visits with Pomelo she tells them of another wife, Verdant, who responded to Perpetual as Violet is. She says the woman ran away one night and was found drowned in the river. Perpetual was not blamed for her death because she had run away. Magic Gourd also tells them about Charm, the woman who had lived in Violet's room. Charm had drugged Perpetual one night after he returned from the lumber mills and found directions in his pocket leading to Buddha's hand. Charm copied the directions and left. Two days prior, Pomelo had gotten a message from Charm from a shoe vendor proving that Charm was alive. Charm gives her directions to the village where she now lives. Pomelo tells Violet to go without her but both Violet and Magic Gourd insist she must go with them.

They wait until a night when it is Azure's turn with Perpetual. They meet to play mahjog with Pomelo until they are sure Azure's maid has gone to her lover. They set out effigies they have made to look like them, turn over the table and spread the mahjog tiles around, then douse the bed and curtains with oil. Magic Gourd knocks over the oil lamp and sets the fire then the three leave quickly. They follow the directions Charm left them, helping Pomelo over rocks and boulders that block their way. Violet is afraid Perpetual is following them but Magic Gourd claims that isn't possible.

As the three get closer to the grotto, they do see a person walking up the mountain behind them. They know it must be Perpetual, as all others believe the mountain is haunted. They hurry forward but come to a rock slide. They know Pomelo cannot get over it quickly. She begs them to leave her and save themselves. Magic Gourd and Violet climb only an hour before they decide to go back for Pomelo. When they reach a point where they can see her, Perpetual is yelling at her. She is pushing down rocks that are falling down on the man. Finally, one of the rocks she kicks down hits Perpetual in the head, killing him. The women reach the grotto and find their jewelry hidden in a small cave along with money. It is night when they reach Buddha's Hand, look down from the ridge and see the town.

Analysis

Things go from bad to worse for Violet as Perpetual begins treating her badly and even beating her. Pomelo tells her of a former wife of Perpetual who tried to run from him and ended up drowning in the river. She tells Violet that if Violet does not become more cooperative and pliant with Perpetual, she will meet the same end. Although Violet has always prided herself in not believing in Chinese superstitions, she begins to dream of the ghosts of other women who she believes may have died in her quarters. She asks Magic Gourd to tell her if she senses any ghosts in the area. Both women are unhappy with their rooms, which are cold, dark and too close to the street for any privacy.

Violet and Magic Gourd are enterprising, however, and with Pomelo's help devise a way to leave Perpetual's house. One day under the cover of a game of mahjong, Pomelo



shows them a map that Charm, another of Perpetual's wives, had sent her. Pomelo said Charm had escaped the house but until Pomelo received a letter from Charm hidden in a pair of shoes, Pomelo did not believe her friend had actually succeeded in her escape attempt. The three come up with a plan to set the house on fire as a cover while they disappear into the mountains. Because Pomelo has bound feet, she worries she will be a hindrance to Magic Gourd and Violet because they will have to assist her during the hard climb up the mountain. However, it is Magic Gourd and her bound feet that wind up saving them all from Perpetual. He figures out the ruse and comes after the women. Pomelo orders Magic Gourd and Violet to go on ahead of her but the two women return for Pomelo after only a short while. When they see the woman, she is kicking rocks at Perpetual, hoping to slow his climb. One of these rocks hits Perpetual in the head, killing him. Even using their combined strength, the three women probably would not have been able to kill or even subdue Perpetual, yet a rock not even intended to kill him took care of the man they all hated so much.

This chapter ends with the women desperately searching for the town that Charm told them they'd be able to see once they reached Buddha's Hand. So far, they have been successful in their escape. They have even located their jewelry and enough money to take care of themselves once they reach the town. After much searching and some worry that the town doesn't really exist, the women spot lights.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Perpetual should have been held responsible for Verdant's death? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Perpetual's attitude toward Violet changes? Why is he so angry when she admits that she still loves Edward?

Discussion Question 3

What characteristics do Violet, Magic Gourd and Pomelo show when they devise their plan to leave Perpetual and then follow through with it? How does their escape and the death of Perpetual bond them together?

Vocabulary

Obeisance, tedious, dredge, grotto, lurid, contrite, berated, effigies, nocturnal, carrion.



Chapter 12: The Valley of Amazement

Summary

In Chapter 12, the time frame of the novel jets back 28 years to the time before Violet's birth. Lucia Miniturn is now the narrator. She says she was sixteen when she first met Lu Shing. At the time, she says he looked like a Chinese emperor. She believes he is her spiritual twin. She plans on getting to know him completely.

Lucia has spent much of her young life pursuing her "Pure Self-Being." She was born to free-thinking and eccentric parents. She believes her mother intended her to become a woman's rights activist as she is named after Lucretia Mott. Her father has a collection of fetish object with which Lucia was even allowed to play with as a small child. Along with a book depicting different sexual positions, Lucia also finds a box of love letters to her father from his various lovers. Lucia has her first sexual encounter when she invites a college boy to her room at home. She's unfulfilled by that experience, along with the experience provided by six other college boys. She quickly decides these teens are too inexperienced, and she begins looking for someone with experience.

It is during a dinner party with Lu Shing that Lucia first sees the painting "The Valley of Amazement." She feels as if she had lived there before. Although she thinks the painting is beautiful, Lu Shing says the name, which he took from a book without knowing to what it referred, actually refers to a place of doubt. Lucia suggests Lu Shing stay with them, since he tells them he has a room in a boarding house. Lucia arranges for Lu Shing to stay in the turret, above her room. She puts the pictorial book of sexual positions in a place where she believes he will see it. Later, in her mother's study Lucia suggests he look through the bookcase for a particular book. Lu Shing suggests the similarity of their names indicates they have been brought together by fate.

Analysis

Just as Pomelo, Violet, and Magic Gourd are about to start a new life, the direction of the novel suddenly changes and the reader is taken back in time in this chapter. Not only does the action of Chapter 12 take place at least eight years prior to the rest of the novel, it is also written from the viewpoint of Lucia, Violet's mother, who is a teenager living in San Francisco.

One of the most interesting aspects of Lucia's personality is her determination to be true to her own self. She searches for her pure self. She is disturbed that her parents had her extra fingers amputated. It is as if she feels they took away a part of her that they had no right doing. Also interesting is Lucia's early exposure to sex and the lurid directions it can take. This experience may not only have made her more promiscuous at a young age but also may have helped her in the courtesan business in which she later excelled.



Note also the high degree of respect with which Lu Shing treats his family. When he first tells his name, he explains that in China, a man's family name is listed first. Lu Shing is on the Lu family with the given name of Shing. He says the order represents the way it should be in both duty and respect. Even though he has come to America against his family's wishes, he still holds them in high regard and respect.

The idea of fate is first touched on in this chapter of the novel as Lu Shing indicates to Lucia that the similarity of their names indicated it was fated that they meet. Because Lucia had been trying to get the man's attention, this was all that it took for her to believe that he was as interested in her as she was in him.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the importance of fate in this chapter.

Discussion Question 2

Research the importance of family for the Chinese. Is Lu Shing typical in his respect for his family?

Discussion Question 3

How has Lucia's upbringing contributed to her promiscuity? How does this help her in her future profession?

Vocabulary

Embellished, promiscuous, diaphanous, malady, deriding, suffragette, pendulous, purportedly.



Chapter 13: Fata Morgana

Summary

In Chapter 13, when Lu Shing's teacher is called back to New York, Lu Shing tells the Miniturn family he plans to go back to Shanghai in about a week. Lucia goes to his room and lies in bed with him. She tells him she's not a virgin. They have sex. She goes back the following three nights. When she asks on the third night if he will miss her and feels his tears, she decides she will go back to China with him. During a boat outing to see birds, Lu Shing tells her that he is already betrothed and will be married when he returns to China. During the same trip, Lu Shing breaks his ankle, delaying his trip back to China.

During Lu Shing's three months convalescence, Lucia says nothing else about her plans to go to China but begins pawning her valuables for money for the trip. She gets her passport and visa. She even talks to Lu Shing about a fictitious lover and makes up plans to go to a college back east. Two weeks before he is to leave, Lucia discovers she is pregnant. When she tells Lu Shing, he will say only that he cannot marry her and that his family would not accept her or the baby. When she asks him to tell her he doesn't love her, he tells her he has never loved anyone more, but doesn't know what he can do.

Lucia tells her parents she's pregnant. Lu Shing voices his remorse but Lucia's mother believes he is insincere. She berates Lucia for being stupid and promiscuous. Lucia is angered, telling her mother she loved her dead bugs more than her daughter. When Lucia's grandmother criticizes her daughter's child rearing techniques, Lucia yells at her, too, telling her she is a wicked woman whom everyone hates. Lucia's father tries to calm her but she turns on him telling her mother about the lover letters she's found from men and women alike. It is not until her father looks up at her that Lucia realizes how cruel she has been to her family. She and Lu Shing leave to stay in a boarding house that day. No one sees them off.

Because of their different races, Lu Shing and Lucia must stay on different decks of the ship. He has already written to his parents who will be waiting when they reach shore. During the voyage Lucia gathers information about the horrors that American women pregnant by a Chinese man have faced in China. She is assured the relationships never turn out well for the woman. Lucia refuses to believe that her situation will be this bad.

When they get off the boat, Lu Shing's family is waiting for them. He warns her the family is not there to welcome them, but to shame Lu Shing into fulfilling his responsibility. Lu Shing's father seems to curse his son, then Lu Shing turns to Lucia, gives her some money and tells her to wait for him there. A coolie arranges Lucia's bags under a tree and brings her food. She realizes Lu Shing must have hired him to take care of her. She fights sleep in the heat as long as she can, but soon falls asleep.



Analysis

Even before Lucia actually arrives in Shanghai, Lu Shing has already told her that he cannot marry her and that his family will not accept her or the baby. It is between Lu Shing and Lucia that the major clash of Western and Chinese cultures takes place. Raised in America, even in the late 1800s, couples were allowed to married for love. Arranged marriages were not heard of. For this reason, Lucia does not understand the culture from which Lu Shing comes. In Lu Shing's family, he is bound to marry the girl his parents have chosen for him. As the oldest son of his family, Lu Shing has even more pressure on him to follow the proper protocol.

In this chapter of the novel, it is learned why Lucia might have acted as she did when Violet threatened to betray her. Even though Violet did not know the meaning of betrayal or the way that her mother had openly aired her parents' most intimate secrets, Violet's threat to betray her mother must have cut deeply.

Once Lucia is in Shanghai, she notices that Lu Shing treats her differently. Despite the warning of the women she met on the ship, Lucia is still determined that she and Lu Shing will be different from the other Chinese and American couples who have tried to live together. Lu Shing's entire family, including his intended bride, have come to meet the boat. Lucia still seems to expect some sort of welcome from them. She is angry when Lu Shing asks her to wait while he goes to talk to his family. She is offended and starts toward the group but Lu Shing begs her to wait. He approaches a man Lucia assumes is his father. She watches as the man yells angrily at Lu Shing and hits him. She is both surprised and angered that Lu Shing does not attempt to talk back to the man or defend himself. Note the differences in Lu Shing and Lucia demonstrated in the way they handle themselves around their parents. While Lu Shing is too docile and eager to please his parents, Lucia goes over the top in letting her parents know she does not care what they think of her.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Lucia's break with her family. How does her emotional outbreak hurt each member of the family? What do you think the spyglass and wasps in amber tucked into her suitcase by her parents mean?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Lu Shing's parents not approve of Lucia? How do you think Lu Shing should handle the situation? Why can he not do as Lucia wants him to?



Discussion Question 3

What does it mean that Lu Shing does see to Lucia's needs by hiring a coolie to watch over her until he can return?

Vocabulary

Migratory, carnal, malaise, convalescence, precocious, libidinous, dalliances, contrite.



Chapter 14: Shanghailanders

Summary

In Chapter 14, Lucia wishes Lu Shing had forced her to stay in San Francisco instead of coming to China. When he finally comes to get her 18 hours later, he tells her his father has spent the time yelling at him about ancestors and family honor. Even his younger brothers have rebuked him. Lu Shing takes Lucia to stay temporarily in a guesthouse owned by a friend in the International Settlement. He tells her he won't abandon her, but also that he can't live with her.

Lucia stays in the house with Philo Danner. On their first meeting, Danner offers Lucia opium, which she takes because Lu Shing tells her not to. She asks Lu Shing to take her to bed. The next day, Lucia is thickheaded and feels heavy. At dinner, Danner tells her he will not say anything about her situation unless she wants to talk. He does tell her that she cannot change Chinese custom. It is from Danner that Lucia learns Lu Shing's paintings are copies of other artists' work. Lu Shing and Danner got acquainted when Lu Shing visited Danner's art gallery as a child. Lu Shing decided he wanted to go to America to study painting so Danner set him up with the Ivorys, a family in America.

He tells Lucia she will meet Golden Dove, a woman who lives in the house and provides companionship to two different men. Lucia feels uncomfortable because her circumstances have become so similar to this "lady of the night" as she is being kept by a man who is not her husband. Meanwhile, Lu Shing gives Lucia hope that his family might accept her if the baby were a boy. While she waits for the baby to be born, Lucia learns Chinese from Golden Dove and tours Shanghai with Danner.

One day, Lu Shing brings his paints to do a portrait of Lucia. He tells her he wants to capture the woman whom he loves. Lu Shing presents her the painting as a seventeenth birthday gift. Lucia feels that Lu Shing did not capture her spirit but instead what was left after he took her spirit away. She tries to hide her disappointment in the portrait. She asks for his painting "The Valley of Amazement" which he brings her just a few days later.

Before the baby is born, Lucia notices a change in Lu Shing and he admits to her he has gotten married. He tells Lucia she could still be Second Wife if she provides him with a son. Golden Dove is with Lucia when the baby is born. Lu Shing is not there as he says he must attend his aunt's sixtieth birthday party. Lucia cries at first when she is told her baby is a girl, but once she looks into Violet's eyes, she falls in love with her. Lu Shing seems to see Violet's sex as a disappointment. Lu Shing hires an amah for Violet and seems to delight in her when she laughs but Lucia is disturbed because Lu Shing will not allow his name to be put on Violet's birth certificate. Danner takes care of Lucia's desire for Violet to be legitimate by getting them a wedding certificate, and Violet a birth certificate listing Danner as Violet's father.



Lu Shing continues to visit and Lucia is soon pregnant again. Lu Shing is again not present when the baby is born, but comes three hours later when he learns it is a boy. On his second visit Lu Shing comes with gifts for the baby. When Lucia considers the idea that she might be accepted by Lu Shing's family, she decides she'd rather stay with Danner. She wants only both Violet and the baby to be treated equally. In honor of Danner, Lucia names the baby Teddy Miniturn Danner. Lu Shing comes to visit Lucia again, telling her that his mother wants to see the baby. He takes the baby with the promise to return the following day. Lu Shing sends several notes telling Lucia that his family is taken with the baby but does not return him as promised. Lucia becomes overwhelmed with the idea that Lu Shing won't bring Teddy back at all. In response to Lucia's concern she gets a letter from Lu Shing telling her his parents have taken the baby away and he doesn't know where. They will not allow Lucia to be part of the family but will keep the baby. Although Danner claims the act a kidnapping, they can do nothing because they did not have a birth certificate prepared for Teddy.

A month after Teddy is taken, Danner dies. As his widow, Lucia inherits Danner's house. She and Golden Dove live there until they run out of money and things to sell. Lucia decides to open a pub at the suggestion of an American man. Lucia plays the piano at the pub and gradually gets to know the favorite songs and drinks of each man who visits the pub. She and Golden Dove open another pub and then a simple sophisticated club. They spy on their customers to learn what businesses would do well in Shanghai. Two years after Danner's death, the women open Hidden Jade Path. Although Violet has been the one person to whom Lucia has given herself completely, there is one man who tempts her. Fairweather is one of the first men who visits Hidden Jade Path. He talks her into telling her inner secrets by telling her that she deserves to be loved. These words steal her secrets and Violet, her most precious possession.

The story moves forward to 1912 as Lucia searches the ship, already on its way to San Francisco, for Violet and Fairweather. Fairweather had sent her a note telling her that he and Violet were already on board the boat but as she searches with no luck, she realizes he sent the note so she would be sure to be on the boat when it left. As she considers the possibilities, she becomes convinced that Fairweather has sold Violet to a courtesan house. She tries to get the captain to turn the ship around, send a message or even let her row a lifeboat back. The doctor gives her medicine in her food that makes her sleep two days. In San Francisco, she is met at the dock by a man who gives her a letter telling her that Violet was killed in an accident. Golden Dove verifies the news. Lucia is destroyed not only because she believes Violet is dead but because she believes the last thought her daughter had of her was that she was being abandoned.

Lucia goes back home to her parents. After she has been there for several months, she finally tells them she was married to Danner and had a daughter, both of whom she lost. She continues to get letters from Lu Shing telling her he still wants to introduce her to her son. In one of this last letters, Lu Shing tells Lucia that he was never who she thought he was, he had an impoverished heart. She responds by telling him she has finally realized that Teddy is his child, while Violet was her child. Violet is the only one for whom she will spend time grieving.



Analysis

Lu Shing sets Lucia up in the best place he could have, considering her situation. This is probably an unintentional act on his part. Danner and Golden Dove accept Lucia as a member of their family. Even though Lu Shing's support is unpredictable, both Danner and Golden Dove provide Lucia with the support system that she needs. Danner is an unsung hero in Violet's life. It is sad that Lucia did not tell Violet about the man who accepted her as his own child. Because he did not want Violet to go through her life as an illegitimate child, Danner has a marriage certificate created for himself and Lucia even though he is homosexual. He also puts his name on Violet's birth certificate. While Lu Shing is only lukewarm in his love for his daughter, Danner adores Violet and treats her as a father should.

Also sad in this section is that Lucia has to lose Violet to realize what the girl means to her. In her excitement to get to meet her son, Lucia never considers that they boy will not know her or accept her as his mother. She doesn't even consider the years that have passed since she last saw him. Like she put her faith in Fairweather to bring Violet to the boat as he promised, Lucia put her faith in Lu Shing to bring her baby back to her. Both of these men tricked Lucia and used her children from their own purposes. It is not until Lucia realizes her folly has caused her to lose her daughter as well that she knows how much she really loved Violet and how she loved only the memory of the baby she lost. In a way, it is almost as if she is punishing herself by not going to meet Teddy. She tells Lu Shing that she has realized she had only one real child. She lost that child when she lost Violet.

Discussion Question 1

Does knowing the background of Lucia's life give you more compassion for her? Does it help to understand why she acted as she did?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast the way Lucia lost Violet and the way she lost Teddy. What might she have done to protect herself from both these losses?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lucia and Danner's inability to report Teddy as kidnapped as well as Violet's loss of Flora underscore the importance of a birth certificate? Do you think Lucia would have been able to get Teddy back even if she'd had a birth certificate? How might life have been different for Flora and Violet had Flora's birth certificate shown the correct mother's name?

Vocabulary

Debauchery, filial, bastion, cacophony, flaccid, nebulous, prerogative, insatiably, purling.



Chapter 15: The City at the End of the Sea

Summary

In Mountain View Violet, Pomelo and Magic Gourd are greeted and cared for by Charm. Pomelo decides to stay in Mountain View while Violet and Magic Gourd go back to Shanghai. Magic Gourd wants to open a courtesan house once they return to Shanghai but Violet plans to ask Loyalty for a job as a translator. She tells him she is putting her old way of life behind her. Two weeks after he hires her, Loyalty tells her she is accurate and indispensable. After she settles into her job, Violet asks Loyalty to assist her in contacting her mother and finding Flora. Violet and her mother begin a relationship through shared letters. Her mother has rented a house in Croton-on-Hudson where Flora and her family live. She has wheedled her way into a position as a volunteer at Flora's school so she can keep an eye on the girl. She writes Flora shows no affection for Minerva and seems almost apathetic.

Violet and Loyalty have returned to their old relationship. Loyalty continues to visit courtesan houses, which angers her. One day when Violet sees a gift in his pocket on a night he plans to go to a courtesan house, she realizes she no longer loves him, that she can end their relationship for good. Loyalty is devastated by the fact his thoughtlessness has finally caused him to lose Violet. He tells her he has always loved her, that when they are apart, he feels as if something is missing. He tells her he feels like a boy with her. She takes him back and moves into his house. He stops going to courtesan houses. They finally admit they love one another. After they have lived together about three years, Loyalty learns he has prostate cancer. In the middle of his battle, Violet accepts his marriage proposal. He overcomes the cancer, her says, because it can't stand her nagging and medicines.

Magic Gourd, meanwhile, marries her old patron Harmony Chen. She comments to Violet when she learns that Lulu might be coming to visit in Shanghai that Violet will be glad to have her real mother back. Magic Gourd is touched when she learns how much Violet cares for her and worried for her when she was sick. It is in 1929 that Violet and her mother finally agree to meet face to face. Loyalty and Lulu take an instant liking to one another. Magic Gourd is not unfriendly, but reminds Lulu of their past together. She tells her she has decided to no longer think about the past and shares memories of her time with Violet. She concludes that working together, they have the power to reunite Violet and Flora.

When Lulu returns home, she continues to visit Flora's town. She buys a dog of the same breed as Flora's hoping to have an interest in common. She additionally joins the church Flora and her family attend. When Flora turns 16, she notices the girl is becoming reckless and hangs around with an unsavory boy.



In 1937 Flora goes to college and Lulu gets little information about her. A year later, Loyalty gets a letter addressed to Uncle Loyalty. It is from Flora. She tells him that she never got the letters he sent her in the past. She has also been relieved to learn through letters she has found written by her father that Minerva is not her real mother. Violet responds to Flora's letter, telling her that her grandmother lives in the same town. Flora telegrams that she wants to meet her.

Flora is not surprised to discover Lulu is her grandmother. She tells her how she found out the truth about Minerva not being her mother, then asks for the truth about her real mother. Lulu tells her and Flora says she wants to meet her mother. Lulu and Flora spend a week in San Francisco before boarding a boat for Shanghai. They visit Lu Shing at his art gallery where Flora quickly sees the truth about him. She recognizes he is a fake artist who makes only copies of others' work. She describes him as being dangerous. Lulu pities him.

Violet immediately recognizes Edward in Flora. She is concerned when she sees not emotion or tears in Flora's eyes. Flora is amused to learn she used to speak Chinese as a young girl. In the car, Violet is uncomfortable with Flora's coolness. She notices the girl is wearing the locket she gave her. Flora said she'd bitten Minerva when she tried to take it away from her. She had never tried to open it until she saw the letters from her father. Violet explains she had the locket soldered shut because Flora had chewed on it as a baby. Flora said the heart had always been special to her, though she'd never known why. Flora agrees with Lulu that she looks like Violet though Violet believes she looks more like Edward.

It is several days into their visit before Flora asks about her father. Flora confesses to Violet that she does not know who she is. She says she was always aware that Minerva didn't love her, though she never knew why. She rebelled against the Ivorys' ideas that anything she did was all right by not doing her homework and stealing. The Ivorys found ways to cover those offenses. She got pregnant by her boyfriend whom she didn't love and didn't want to marry. She says it took Minerva two months to realize something was wrong with her. When she tells her she is pregnant, Minerva lectures her. Flora finds herself unable to stop laughing. When Minerva tells Flora she'll inherit no money, Flora reminds her that it is Minerva who will inherit nothing. At this point, Minerva changes her tune, becoming friendly. She calls for a doctor who gives Flora a shot that knocks her out and pills to take three times daily for "nausea." When Flora realizes Minerva has forced the doctor do an abortion, she is angry. She tries to rebel by running away, then attempting to kill herself. She studies and gets into college from which she has returned only twice. Once for her grandmother's funeral and once when she found Loyalty's gift. She shares her brief memories of the day she was taken from Violet, sparked by her mother's chin.

A few days before Lulu and Flora are to leave, Violet's mother asks her to come to America to see them. She won't go and leave Loyalty, Violet says. When they go to the dock, Violet wonders what might happen to them all until they see each other. Violet panics at first, believing that she hasn't had enough time with Flora but then Flora comes to her telling her that her mother had come back from her memory and that Flora



had come back as well. She tells Violet that she loves her. As Violet waves goodbye to her mother and Flora, she imagines herself waving goodbye to the girl in the sailor dress who should have gone to San Francisco.

Analysis

This section of the novel features the reunion of mother, daughter and granddaughter. Because Violet finally understands the pain involved in losing a child from a mother's point of view, she is ready to let her mother know she is still alive. She also hopes that her mother can use her skills in helping her to find Flora. As Lucia and Violet write letters back and forth, their relationship begins to mend and grow. It is several years before they are ready to meet face to face but they do manage to do this as well.

Central to this part of the novel is Flora's story. As she tells her mother later, she never felt loved by Minerva, even as a young child. She felt as if she didn't belong and didn't know who she was. These feelings made Flora act out by getting bad grades and stealing. Even as Flora tried to make an identity for herself through her bad behavior, her "family" paid off her teachers to give her good grades and set up accounts with the stores from which she stole so that Flora never got into trouble for her actions. Flora begins dating a boy that her family doesn't like and eventually gets pregnant. Because Minerva is so out of touch with the girl, she doesn't notice anything wrong with her for two months. Then Flora has to flat out tell Minerva that she is pregnant. Minerva threatens to have the girl disinherited, a step she'd probably been wanting to take for years, because of the pregnancy. When Flora reminds her that Edward's money is set to come to Flora and not Minerva when Flora turns eighteen, Minerva changes her position. She gets a doctor, pretending to care for the girl but instead has the baby aborted.

It is not until Flora comes home from college to find a gift from her Uncle Loyalty in the mail that she realizes her mother has been hiding these gifts from her all along. Flora finds the gifts as well as her father's letters to Minerva and realizes she isn't Minerva's child at all. She reaches out to Loyalty to reunite her with her mother. Although Flora is distant at first, she eventually begins to remember the time she spent with her mother before she was taken away. Even though she didn't know its history, she still wears the gold locket that her mother gave her as a baby. This locket, along with the memory of her mother's chin, helps Flora to remember how loved she was. Before she leaves Shanghai, Flora tells Violet that little Flora has come back.

At the end of the novel, Violet is finally able to let go of the past and the possibilities that going to America had held. As the versions of the person that Violet became wave goodbye to the girl in the sailor dress who was supposed to go to San Francisco, Violet accepts her life and the difficulties it has brought her. Standing with the people whom she would not have met had she not gone through the hardships she did Violet realizes that the hurts of her life are behind her, just as Magic Gourd has said. Her intelligence and perseverance has brought to her all that she hoped for. She has



married Loyalty, the first man whom she dreamed about, and she has gotten her daughter back.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the appropriateness of Loyalty's name. In what ways is he loyal to Violet?

Discussion Question 2

Consider Violet's plan to stay in touch with her daughter through Loyalty. In what ways was the plan ingenious? Did you see the ways in which it was destined to fail?

Discussion Question 3

Describe your emotions at the conclusion of the book. Would you call this a happy ending? What feelings does the ending tableau with Violet waving goodbye to the various versions of herself elicit? What does the tableau symbolize?

Vocabulary

Yokel, trepidation, odious, disavowed, avuncular, philander, conceded, decadence, emporium, lewdly, extrication, erstwhile, disparaging, reciprocated, purported.



Characters

Violet Miniturn Danner Fang

Violet is the central character in the novel. She narrates most of the novel. Violet is the daughter of Lucia and Lu Shing. She is the mother of Flora. Although she believed that she was a full-blooded American for most of her childhood, she is devastated to learn she is actually half-Chinese. She believes this makes her unlovable in her mother's eyes as she sees how much her father, who she does not know, seems to be so hated by her mother. As an older child and young teen, Lucia tries to hide the Chinese parts of herself by speaking only in English and trying to learn to smile so that the corners of her eyes do not turn up.

When Violet is 14, her biological father gets back in touch with her mother. He says that she can finally see her son again. Violet is shocked to learn that her mother has a son and convinces herself that her mother loves that son more than she loves her. A man named Fairweather tricks Violet's mother into letting him take Violet to get her passport while she boards the boat. Fairweather sells Violet to a courtesan house to pay his debts and arranges for Lucia to be told that Violet is dead. Magic Gourd, a courtesan whom Violet had known at her mother's house as Magic Cloud, takes Violet under her wing. She teaches Violet how to be a successful courtesan.

Loyalty Fang, who Violet had met as a child in her mother's courtesan house, becomes Violet's main suitor. He buys her defloration for a good deal of money. Violet dreams that he will ask her to marry him but the two fight constantly, an aspect of their relationship that Loyalty can't stand. He does, however, tell her that he will be her loyal friend. If she ever needs help, she is to come to him. Violet works in the courtesan profession more than a decade when Loyalty arranges for her to meet an American named Edward. Edward is looking for someone to teach him how to speak Chinese. Although the two get off to a rough start, Edward and Violet fall in love. She becomes pregnant and the two move into a house owned by Edward's sponsor. When Violet learns the house is owned by her father, Lu Shing, she insists they move out immediately but Magic Gourd becomes very ill and they are forced to stay. A few months after Flora is born, Edward becomes sick as well. He dies, leaving Violet and Magic Gourd alone. They live in Lu Shing's house with Flora for nearly four years. At this time, Edward's parents and American wife learn Violet has Edward's child. They take Flora away from her and have her evicted from the house.

Violet and Magic Gourd return to the House of Vermillion for several years until a man named Perpetual asks Violet to marry him. He claims to be from a well-to-do family of scholars. When Violet arrives at Perpetual's house, she realizes he lied to her concerning much of what he told her about himself. Additionally, she is forced to live in decrepit, cold quarters. Perpetual becomes violent and rough, beating her often. She, Magic Gourd and Pomelo, another of Perpetual's wives, escape from Perpetual's home.



When Magic Gourd and Violet arrive in Shanghai, Violet is determined to get an honest job and find Flora. She asks Loyalty for a job as a translator in his company. Though he is hesitant, he agrees and soon realizes how valuable her expertise is. She contacts her mother, who has believed Violet was dead all these years, and asks for her help in finding Flora. She also employs Loyalty to help her in the hunt for her daughter as Loyalty was a friend of the Ivorys. They soon locate where Flora and Minerva live. Violet's mother moves close to the family, volunteering at the girl's school and getting a dog similar to hers so the two will have things in common. Meanwhile, one of Violet's dreams from her days as a courtesan comes true when Loyalty asks her to marry him.

It is not until Flora is in college that Violet finally gets to meet her daughter in person. Although she had been afraid Flora would remember only Violet letting go of her when Minerva and the men took her, Flora soon remembers her mother's love. Before Flora gets on the boat to go back to America she tells her mother that little Flora has returned. It is at this point that Violet is finally able to let go of all the bad that has happened in her life to embrace the good.

Magic Cloud aka Magic Gourd aka Happy Chen

Violet first meets Magic Cloud when she is a courtesan at Hidden Jade Path. Magic Cloud is Violet's favorite of the courtesans. She is angry with her mother when she orders Magic Cloud to leave when a rumor begins to circulate that Magic Cloud believes she is having some sort of relationship with the Poet Ghost. Magic Cloud resurfaces when Violet arrives at the Hall of Tranquility. She is a courtesan at the Hall of Tranquility and is now named Magic Gourd. Magic Gourd takes charge of Violet, her care and training as a courtesan despite the way Violet's mother treated her. Magic Gourd additionally arranges for Violet to get Carlotta, her cat, back.

Magic Gourd dedicates herself to Violet, helping her to learn to be a successful courtesan. It is not until Violet considers parting ways with Magic Gourd when she marries Edward that she realizes how much Magic Gourd has done for her. Magic Gourd has cared for Violet as a mother would care for her child. It seems she has taken Violet as her project in life, going with her to live with Edward, caring for Flora and mourning with Violet when she loses first Edward, then Flora. Magic Gourd even travels with Violet when she marries Perpetual even though she believes the marriage is a bad idea. She cares for Violet when Perpetual beats her and even tries to keep the man from hitting Violet. She helps Violet and Pomelo escape from Perpetual.

Although she could have been resentful of Violet's mother, Magic Gourd behaves well when Lucia comes back into Violet's life. Violet explains to her that even though she and her mother are in communication again, it was Magic Gourd who took care of her for all of those years. Magic Gourd reminds Lucia of how badly she treated her but then does not hold the slight against her. After Violet has been reunited with both her mother and her daughter, it is Magic Gourd who suggests that although Violet has been through some terrible things in her life, she would not have had any of the good that has also come in her life.



Loyalty Fang

Loyalty Fang is the boy who first meets Violet when Carlotta scratches his arm when he tries to catch her. Violet had believed the boy had died from the scratch but she later becomes acquainted with him when she begins her life as a courtesan. Violet makes her debut as a courtesan at a party hosted by Loyalty. Loyalty is an important figure in Violet's life as he buys her defloration for a significant amount of money. He admits he considers Violet as an embodiment of the desire he felt when he first went to the House of Lulu Mimi. Although Loyalty and Violet often fight when they are together, mostly because of Loyalty's insistence on having other courtesan's, he once leaves her with the promise that he will always be her friend.

Violet goes to Loyalty after Edward's death. He helps her to return to her position in the House of Vermillion after she loses Flora and Lu Shing's house. She goes to him again after she and Magic Gourd escape from Perpetual's house in Moon Pond Village. This time Violet asks Loyalty for a job as a translator. Although he is not sure about the arrangement, he agrees and soon realizes her services are indispensable. The two return to their old arrangement of having sexual relations and fighting because Loyalty insists on going to the courtesan houses. It is not until Loyalty realizes he has probably lost Violet for good that he dedicates himself to her. A short time later, Loyalty is diagnosed with cancer. During his struggle with the disease, he asks Violet, who has sought out every avenue to help him recover including Chinese superstition, to marry him. It is he who Violet employs to help her get back in contact with Flora. Loyalty sends Flora gifts and Christmas cards each year under the guise of being "Uncle Loyalty." The two are together when Violet sees her mother for the first time since Violet was sold as a teenager and also when Violet meets her daughter again. Loyalty acts as a support for Violet and an intercessor to keep things from getting too tense and emotional between the women.

Lucretia Miniturn aka Lulu Mimi aka Lucia

Lucia is Violet's mother. She is an American who grew up in San Francisco. As a teenager she believed her parents did not love her. She seduces Lu Shing, a Chinese man who caught her fancy with his educated speech and appearance of a Chinese emperor. Lucia is soon pregnant. She insists on going back to China with Lu Shing even though he tells her that his family will not accept her and will probably not accept the baby. Lucia's baby is a girl. Although Lu Shing still comes to visit her, he does not attempt to introduce her to his family. Lucia gets pregnant again and this time has a boy. When the baby is only a few days old, Lu Shing takes the baby to his parents. He claims to Lucia that they have decided to keep the baby and have hidden him from Lu Shing. Lucia never hears about the baby, whom she named Teddy, until 14 years later when Lu Shing writes her a letter telling her his father is dead. He visits her to tell her she can now meet her son.



Because of the overthrow of the Ching dynasty, Lucia's business has been going badly, so she decides to take the opportunity to go back to America. Because she is unable to find Violet's birth certificate, she allows Fairweather, a man with whom she has been close, to take Violet to the American Consulate so that he can get her a new birth certificate and passport. Lucia gets a note telling her Fairweather and Violet are already on the boat so Lucia boards, unaware that Fairweather has sold her daughter to a courtesan house in order to pay his gambling debts. When Lucia arrives in America, she is told Violet was killed in a traffic accident in China. Several years later, Violet writes her mother, letting her know she is still alive. Violet employs her mother's resourcefulness in helping her find and get in contact with Flora.

Bosson Edward Ivory III

Bosson Edward Ivory III, most often called Edward, is an American from a rich family. He would have married Violet if his American wife had granted him a divorce. He hates Minerva, his wife, because she tricked him into marrying her by pretending to be pregnant. Later, she confessed her lie, but she refuses getting a divorce. Ivory is a friend of Loyalty and asks Loyalty for the name of a friend who can teach him to talk in Chinese. Loyalty suggests Violet but a confusion in translation leads Edward to offer Violet twenty silver dollars. When Edward learns how deeply he offended Violet, he gives her several expensive gifts to atone for his mistake. The two eventually strike up a friendship, then fall in love with one another. They move into Lu Shing's house together when they learn that Violet is pregnant with Edward's baby. Although Magic Gourd has a distaste for foreigners, she likes Edward. Unfortunately, Edward dies of Spanish influenza just a few months after Flora is born. Edward had tried to see to Violet's and Flora's needs by leaving his estate to them. However, in the will, he referred to Violet as Flora's mother. He didn't identify her by name. Since Minerva was listed on the birth certificate as Flora's mother, she is later able to take the child away from Violet.

Lu Shing

Lu Shing is Violet's father. He is the first-born male from a prominent Chinese family. He meets Lucia when he comes to America to study painting. He accepts the Miniturn family's invitation to stay with them. Lucia seduces Lu Shing and is soon pregnant with his child. Lu Shing tells Lucia that his father will not accept her or the baby but will not insist that she stay in San Francisco. Once they are in Shanghai, Lu Shing provides Lucia with a place to live and continues to visit her for sex. Lu Shing is disappointed when Lucia's first baby turns out to be a girl. When the second baby is a boy, Lu Shing brings gifts. He takes to baby on a visit to his parents, then never returns the child to Lucia.

More than ten years later, Lu Shing resurfaces to tell Lucia that his father is dead and she is now free to meet her son. Lu Shing comes into Violet's life again when she learns she is living in his house with Edward. Lu Shing tells her that he wants her to inherit his house, but that she must accept that he is her father. In one of his last letters to Lucia,



Lu Shing admits to her that she showed him who he truly was. Because of Lucia, he has learned that he simply did not have the love that she wanted from him. He apologizes to her for having an impoverished heart.

Flora Violet Ivory

Flora Violet Ivory is the daughter of Violet and Edward Ivory. She was taken from Violet by Minerva Ivory, Edward's legal wife, after his death. Although Flora was only about three years old when she was taken from her mother, her memories of their time together begin to return after she meets her mother again. Flora is described as being intelligent, but emotionally distant. She grew up believing there was something wrong with her because her mother didn't seem to love her. When Flora discovered Minerva was not really her mother, but that she was a child of Edward's by Violet, Flora understood Minerva couldn't love her because she always saw Flora's father's mistress in her. Flora discovers the truth about her family when she comes home from college to find a package that Loyalty had sent her. The way he has worded the note in the package, she realizes he's sent her packages before so she searches for them until she finds the gifts that Loyalty has been sending her for nearly ten years. She also finds letters that Edward has sent to Minerva begging for a divorce. When she learns that Minerva is not her real mother, she tells Loyalty she wants to meet her grandmother and her real mother.

Arthur Fairweather

Arthur Fairweather is a man who has earned Lucia's trust and love despite the fact that he is a sleaze. He uses his relationship with Lucia as a way to get her to tell him her deepest secrets. He later uses these secrets against her. As a peace offering, he manages to get three steamer tickets to America for Lucia, Violet and himself. There is a problem when Fairweather says Violet must have a passport. Lucia plans to give him the girl's birth certificate so he can get the passport, but it is not in the place where she has always kept it. It is suspected that Fairweather stole the birth certificate so that he could arrange to get Violet out of the house with him. He tells Lucia he will take Violet to get a birth certificate and passport, listing him as the father, while Lucia gets settled on the boat. They make arrangements to meet but Fairweather and Violet never show. Fairweather has actually made a deal with the owner of a courtesan house to sell Violet in order to cover his debts with the Green Gang. He and his girlfriend run to Hong Kong where Fairweather is killed after he has sex with the virgin daughter of a man with who he is trying to make a business deal.

Perpetual

Perpetual is a man who lies to courtesans, telling them his is a widower from a family with a lineage of ten generations of scholars, to get them to marry him. In reality, Perpetual's first wife, Azure, is still alive. While his family had been known as scholars,



they lost their reputation when notes were discovered by a tailor on the sleeve of the family's ceremonial gown. Perpetual's father is beheaded as a result. Perpetual claims to be a poet, but his best poem is one he stole from Azure. He uses it to tempt courtesans into the belief they can make money singing and performing the poems he writes but then, as he did Violet, taking their sexual favors without paying. Perpetual turns out to be cruel and abusive, beating Violet severely when he learns she still misses and loves Edward. Perpetual is killed by a falling rock, kicked at him by Pomelo, when he tries to capture Pomelo, Violet and Magic Gourd when they run from him.

Luscious Peach aka Pomelo

Luscious Peach is a famous courtesan who had visited the house of Lulu Mimi in her heyday. This same courtesan resurfaces as Pomelo at Perpetual's house where she, too, has been drawn in by Perpetual's lies. Although Violet and Magic Gourd are suspicious of Pomelo at first, she is the one who gives them instructions sent to her in secret by Charm that show how to escape from Moon Pond Village. It is Pomelo who kicks the rock at Perpetual that hits him in the face, killing him when he tries to chase them down. Although Pomelo is handicapped by her bound feet, she is helped by Violet and Magic Gourd to complete her escape. Pomelo chooses to stay with Charm and buy into her courtesan business.

John and Harriet Miniturn

John and Harriet Miniturn are Lucia's parents. Lucia believes her parents don't love her because they are neglectful. She describes her parents as odd. Her father collects sexual objects and has a variety of girlfriends and boyfriends. Her mother is moody and spends much of her time examining dead bugs. Lucia is angry and hurt by her parents' reaction when she tells them she is pregnant. She unloads all of her anger on her parents, airing some of their most private and embarrassing secrets. They do not see her off when she leaves with Lu Shing to go to China. When Lucia returns from China 14 years later, her parents are different. She is able to develop a relationship of sorts with them before their deaths.

Golden Dove

Golden Dove is living with Danner when Lucia joins their family. At this time, Golden Dove is still accepting suitors. Lucia employs her to help her learn to speak Chinese. When Danner dies, Golden Dove and Lucia go into business together. They first open a couple of pubs, then finally Hidden Jade Path. After Lucia goes to America and Violet is kidnapped, Golden Dove is forced to lie to Lucia and tell her that Violet is dead. Although she is unable to let Lucia know what has really happened to Violet, she does call in a favor with Madame Li to ensure that Violet will be allowed to stay at her house where she will be treated well.



Carlotta

Carlotta is Violet's golden fox cat. Because Violet does not do to school, she feels that Carlotta is her best friend. It is Carlotta who is responsible for scratching Loyalty during his first visit to Hidden Jade Path. Violet is most upset that she has to leave her cat behind when she and her mother make plans to go to San Francisco. Violet is reunited with Carlotta when Magic Gourd pays a visit to Hidden Jade Path. She had secretly let rats loose in Mother Ma's room. She arranges for Mother Ma to learn that Violet has a cat that is still at Hidden Jade Path. Mother Ma insists that the cat come to live with Violet to take care of the rat problem.

Minerva Ivory

Minerva Ivory is the wife of Bosson Edward Ivory III. She tricked him into marrying her by pretending to be pregnant. When she admits to him she was never pregnant he becomes angry, telling her that he will never love her. Minerva visits Shanghai with her lawyer and takes Flora away from Violet. According to Flora, Minerva never loved her. She made Flora feel as if she were unlovable. Although Loyalty sends Flora Christmas gifts each year, Minerva does not let Flora have these gifts, instead hiding them and writing thank you notes as if they were from Flora.

Teddy Miniturn Danner aka Lu Shen

Teddy Miniturn Danner is the name that Lucia gives the baby boy that she and Lu Shing have together. Lu Shing gives him the Chinese name Lu Shen. Teddy is only a few days old when Lu Shing takes the baby from her with the promise to return him but Teddy is never returned. Lu Shing later tempts Lucia to go to America with the promise she can finally meet her son. When Lucia learns that Fairweather has used the opportunity to kidnap Violet and sell her, she decides not to meet Teddy at all, realizing that Violet is her real child.

Philo Danner

Philo Danner is the man with whom Lucia lives when she first arrives in Shanghai with Lu Shing. Danner takes Lucia under his wing and takes care of her for nearly three years. He is homosexual, still grieving from the loss of his partner, Teddy, but when Lucia grieves because Violet is illegitimate, he secures a marriage certificate for them. He additionally gets Violet's birth certificate, naming him as her father. He loves Violet as his own daughter, crying when she calls him "Daddy" for the first time.



Pan Ku Xiang or The Ghost Poet

Pan Ku Xiang is the poet who lived in the house that Lucia buys to house Hidden Jade Path. Prior to Lucia having the house cleansed, it was believed the ghost of the poet haunted the building. According to legend, the poet's wife set fire to part of the house burning much of her husband's poetry and killing him. Magic Gourd, known then as Magic Cloud, is forced to leave the house because it is rumored that she believes she is having an affair with this ghost.

Mother Ma

Mother Ma is the woman who is originally in charge of the courtesan house to which Violet is sold. She becomes sick with what Magic Gourd calls black hand disease. By the way it is described in the novel, the disease appears to be diabetes. Her hands and feet have to be amputated. Mother Ma goes crazy and dies soon after. Before she became very sick, however, Mother Ma gave Magic Gourd permission to be Violet's teacher, allowing her to stay with and watch over the younger girl.

Charm

Charm is Pomelo's friend and one of Perpetual's many wives. Charm escapes from Perpetual's house across Heaven Mountain. She sends Pomelo a letter of instructions telling her the way across the mountain, hidden in the lining of a shoe. Pomelo shows these instructions to Violet and Magic Gourd. The three women follow them across the mountain where they are welcomed by Charm at the courtesan house she has opened.

Madame Li

Madame Li is the mother who takes over the Hall of Tranquility after Mother Ma dies. She brings with her a star courtesan, Vermillion and renames the business the House of Vermillion. She gets rid of all the courtesans who had worked in the house prior to her coming. The only one allowed to stay is Violet because of a promise that Madame Li has made to Golden Dove.

Vermillion

Vermillion is the star courtesan who comes to the Hall of Tranquility with Madame Li when Mother Ma dies. Madame Li renames the business the House of Vermillion. Vermillion is horrified when Madame Li suggests that they begin taking foreigners as suitors for the women. When Edward comes to visit with the ladies of the house, Vermillion refuses to attend the discussion.



Azure

Azure is the wife whom Perpetual told all of his courtesan wives was dead. He makes up the story that he loved her dearly and has mourned her death for years. Azure, however, is alive and well. She greets Violet by calling her a prostitute. Azure is the one responsible for writing the good poems that Perpetual gives the courtesan girls whom he woos.

Verdant

Verdant is another of Perpetual's wives. She continued to love Perpetual even after she learned he lied to her. When he brings Pomelo as his wife as well, Verdant goes crazy. She tries to escape and winds up drowning in the river. Although some thought Perpetual was responsible for her death, he was never charged.

Endeavor Yan

Endeavor Yan asks Violet to publicly read from a pornographic novel for him. She agrees to read to him in private, then enacts scenes from the book with him after only a few courting sessions. Violet believes that her agreement to cooperate with Endeavor's demands signals the rapid descent of her career.



Symbols and Symbolism

Green Gang

The Green Gang seems to be a sort of Chinese mafia. Fairweather sells Violet to the Hall of Tranquility in order to pay off his debt to the Green Gang.

Violet's Valise

When Violet sees her suitcase, she believes that if her mother's things are still inside. That means her mother knew nothing of Violet's abduction.

"The Valley of Amazement"

"The Valley of Amazement" is a painting that is among Violet's mother's things when she unpacks the valise in the Hall of Tranquility. The painting appears again and again throughout the novel as it was painted by Lu Shing, Violet's father. Violet believes the painting is an omen of danger. Flora is the only one of the three women who sees it for what it is, a bad replica of another artist's work.

Black Hand Disease

Magic Gourd at first believes that Mother Ma, the woman who owns the Hall of Tranquility has the black hand disease, it turns out, however, the woman has diabetes.

Phoenix Eyes

Magic Gourd tells Violet that she has phoenix eyes, the most desirable shape.

Four Necessities

The four necessities for a courtesan are jewelry, furniture, a seasonal contract with a stipend, and a comfortable retirement.

Li Shangyin's "Advice to Men Visiting Flower Houses"

This booklet is given to cheap men who visit courtesan houses but don't seem to know the proper way to behave at these houses.



February 13, 1912

This is the date of Violet's fifteenth birthday and her deflowering.

A Gold Watch

A gold watch is a gift that Magic Gourd gave to a man whom she believed really loved her. The man is killed for the watch. Magic Gourd admits to Violet that she always felt somehow responsible for the man's death as she had given him the watch.

A Copy of the Book "Leaves of Grass"

This book of poetry by Walt Whitman is one of the gifts that Edward gives Violet after he offends her.

Twenty American Silver Dollars

Edward believes incorrectly that he will get a courtesan's services for this amount of money.

An Emerald and Diamond Bracelet

Edward gives Violet this quite expensive bracelet as an apology gift after he offends her and the other courtesans.

Spanish Influenza

The Spanish influenza is the disease of which Edward dies. Magic Gourd and Violet were also sick with the disease but survived the illness.

Edward's Leather Diary

This leather bound diary is the one item of Edward's that Violet wants most. After searching for it, she finds it hidden in a copy of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass."

Instructions and a Letter from Charm

Pomelo gets these instructions and a letter from Charm, one of Perpetual's wives who successfully ran from Moon Pond Village, hidden in a pair of shoes.



“The Colloquy of the Birds”

It is from the poem “The Colloquy of the Birds” that Lu Shing takes the name for his painting “The Valley of Amazement.” Although the members of Lucia’s family think the title is appropriate, Lu Shing tells them he chose the name before he realized what it meant. It is actually a place of doubt that Lu Shing indicates is dangerous for an artist.

Golden Phoenix Trading

Golden Phoenix Trading is the American name that Violet suggests that Loyalty use for his business.

Edward’s Cuff Links

A pair of Edward’s cuff links is the first gift that Uncle Loyalty gives to Flora when he begins communication with her.

A Heart Shaped Gold Locket

Flora wears a heart shaped locket that she always has an idea is special but isn’t sure why. She remembers biting Minerva when she tried to take it away from her. It is not until Flora finds and reads Edward’s letters to Minerva begging for a divorce that Flora pries the locket open and finds the pictures of herself, Violet and Edward.

An Emerald and Diamond Bracelet

Edward gives Violet this quite expensive bracelet as an apology gift after he offends her and the other courtesans.



Settings

San Francisco

San Francisco is the town in which Violet's mother grew up. It is in her family home in this town that Lucia meets Lu Shing and seduces him. Flora stays with Lucia in the house in San Francisco for a week before they go to China. During this time, Lucia says she might sell the house but Flora asks her not to, saying she might come to live there.

Shanghai

Shanghai is the Chinese city where Lulu Mimi's courtesan house is located. It is in this place that most of the action of the novel takes place. Lucia travels to Shanghai with Lu Shing where Violet is born. Lucia returns to Shanghai to visit her daughter, whom she'd thought was dead, then again to take Flora back to Violet.

Hidden Jade Path

Hidden Jade Path is the name of Lulu Mimi's courtesan house where Violet spends most of her growing up years before she is kidnapped by Fairweather. It is while living in this house that Violet learns she is half-Chinese and that Lu Shing is her father. It is also here that she meets Loyalty for the first time when Carlotta scratches him when he tries to catch her.

Hall of Tranquility

The Hall of Tranquility is the house to which Violet is sold by Fairweather as a virgin courtesan. It is in this house that her close relationship with Magic Gourd begins. It is also here that she meets Loyalty again and he buys her defloration.

House of Vermillion

The Hall of Tranquility is renamed the House of Vermillion after the original mother of the house dies and another mother, with a star courtesan by the name of Vermillion, takes her place.

Heavenly Horse Mountain

Heavenly Horse Mountain is one of the destinations that Violet and Edward visit during their courtship days.



Inspiration Point

It is at Inspiration Point on Heavenly Horse Mountain that Edward and Violet make love for the first time.

House on Bubbling Well Road

After Violet discovers she is pregnant, Edward makes arrangements for them to move into a house on Bubbling Well Road owned by his host. It is not until Violet sees the painting "The Valley of Amazement" in the house that she realizes the house belongs to her father. After Edward dies of the Spanish influenza in this house and is buried in the garden. Flora, Violet and Lucia visit this house, which has become a school, to see a plaque that has been erected in honor of Edward under the tree under which Violet and Flora used to sit when they lived in the house.

Moon Pond

Moon Pond is the name of the village to which Perpetual takes Violet and Magic Gourd when he marries Violet. Violet finds this town is not as attractive in person as Perpetual described it to be.

Heaven Mountain

Heaven Mountain is the mountain up which Violet, Magic Gourd, and Pomelo climb to get away from Perpetual. It is on this mountain that Pomelo kills Perpetual when she kicks a rock that hits him in the head.

Buddha's Hand

On the way to reach Buddha's Hand, Pomelo, Magic Gourd, and Violet find the grotto that Perpetual writes about so often in his poems. In a cave in the grotto they locate their jewelry as well as money.

Mountain View

Mountain View is the town in which Charm has set up her own courtesan house. Pomelo chooses to stay in this town instead of going on to Shanghai with Magic Gourd and Violet.



Themes and Motifs

Life in a Courtesan House

Although a prostitute's life is risky and unlawful in current American society, women in China often made good livings as courtesans. The novel indicates people looked at these ladies in much the same way as modern Americans view movie stars. The courtesans would take rides in sedans around the city showing off their fashionable clothes and the jewelry they had been given as gifts. As Magic Gourd tells Violet, many of the women would copy their fashions from those of the courtesans.

Growing up in a courtesan house, Violet sees from the inside how this type of business is run. She watches the way the courtesans fight and sometimes spread rumors about one another in order to gain favor with men. She sees first hand the hurt sometimes caused by the rumors when her favorite courtesan, Magic Cloud, is made to leave her mother's house because of a rumor. Violet is curious about what goes on in the courtesan relationships and sometimes spies on the ladies as they "entertain" their guests.

When Violet is sold to the Hall of Tranquility and she becomes a courtesan herself, she is taught the ropes of this profession by Magic Gourd. A courtesan's worth is determined by how much money a man pays for a woman's defloration, or her loss of virginity. The courtesans additionally ply the men with requests for gifts of expensive jewelry and furniture. It appears that jewelry is most important to the women as these pieces not only mark their standing as a courtesan, but also ensure they will be able to support themselves when they are past the years they can work as a courtesan.

Because there was no such thing as condoms or birth control pills, the women took the chance of getting pregnant or getting diseases when they spent time with different men. Magic Gourd schools Violet in what can be done to prevent pregnancy. This mostly involved sponges and herbal mixes intended to keep a woman from getting pregnant. Magic Gourd additionally teaches Violet to look over the men and get an idea of their health before having relations with them. If there was anything Violet didn't like about them, rashes, lumps or any other signs of disease, she was to call for Magic Gourd. The rules of the courtesan houses were different from modern day prostitution. The women had more freedom in accepting or rejecting a man's offer of money for services. Women had to be careful not to reject an offer too often as this would result in a diminished income.

Fate

One who holds a belief in fate believes that life will follow a particular course, regardless of what a person does to avoid or adhere to this course. Fate appears to be a strong belief among the Chinese as both Lu Shing and Magic Gourd refer to fate at different



times in the novel. When Lucia is trying to seduce Lu Shing, he encourages her with a reference to fate. He says the similarity of their names, as well as their attraction to the same painting “The Valley of Amazement” is proof they were fated to meet one another. Later he admits his shallowness in his belief. For Magic Gourd, however, fate seems to be a much stronger belief. After Violet has been reunited with both her mother and her daughter, Magic Gourd comments that the path of Violet’s life was predetermined. Not only does this idea that no one had any control over what happened to Violet take away any guilt, it makes it seem as if no matter what anyone had done, Violet’s circumstances would have turned out the same. Magic Gourd does point out, however, that while fate had some bad things in store for Violet, there were also good things she would have missed had she not followed the course she did. These good things in Violet’s life included her time with Edward, the birth of Flora and Violet’s new life with Loyalty.

The Valley of Amazement

One item that keeps turning up in the novel is Lu Shing’s painting of “The Valley of Amazement.” The painting is interesting not only in what it tells about Lu Shing as a person and an artist, but also because of the differing reactions that Lucia, Violet and Flora all have to it. The painting is seen as a promise of the future, a bad omen and a bad copy of another’s work by each woman in turn.

Although Lucia believes that Lu Shing’s painting is an original when she first sees it, she later learns it is actually a copy of another artist’s work. In his versions of “The Valley of Amazement,” Lu Shing adds different features to make each painting unique, but still a copy. Lu Shing admits to the Miniturn family that he took the title of the painting from a book before he actually understood the meaning of the phrase as it was used in the book. Though one might think the valley of amazement was a good place to be, the valley of amazement in the book is actually a place of doubt. Lu Shing now realizes this valley is not the pleasant place he tried to turn it into.

When Lucia first sees the painting, she is enamored with it, just as she is enamored with its creator. By the time she asks Lu Shing for a copy of the painting after she has moved to Shanghai, she knows enough to realize the painting was not an original, but a copy. She is not surprised when Lu Shing is able to provide her with her own version of the painting, to her specifications, in just a few days.

Violet has a different reaction to the painting than that of her mother. She sees the painting for the first time when she has just been sold to the courtesan house and is going through the things her mother stowed in Violet’s trunk. Violet believes the painting is a bad omen. It is this same painting that lets Violet know that the house she plans to live in with Edward actually belongs to Lu Shing. Later, when Violet believes she sees the same mountains and vale as depicted in the painting as she is traveling to Perpetual’s home, she sees it as a sign that she was fated to come to that spot in her life all along.



Flora's reaction to the painting is the most unbiased of all three of the women. She sees her grandfather's work for what it is, a cheap imitation. As she is describing the effect his work has on her she compares it to a whitewashed happiness. Flora believes the impact he makes with his work is actually bordering on dangerous.



Styles

Point of View

The Valley of Amazement is written from the first person point of view of two main characters. The first narrator in the story is Violet Miniturn. She narrates the first eleven chapters of the novel. The next three chapters are narrated by Lucia, Violet's mother. The last chapter returns to Violet's voice as she narrates the conclusion. Violet's point of view is important to the novel as her life is central to the story. The only reason that the viewpoint of the novel switches to that of Lucia for three chapters as these cover details of Lucia's life that would not have been known to Violet. These details are important as they help the reader understand Lucia as a person.

The story is told with a greater emphasis on exposition than on dialogue. Dialogue is used in certain situations like when Minerva comes to take Flora away as well as the discussion between Loyalty and Violet when Violet asks Loyalty for a job. Some communication even takes place in the form of letters as Lu Shing communicates with Violet after she learns that she and Edward are living in Lu Shing's home. It is also through a letter that Violet lets her mother know that she is still alive. The two communicate through letters for several years before they decide to meet in person.

Language and Meaning

Language is significant in this novel because it crosses two different cultures. Some characters speak Chinese, some English and some both. Language first becomes an issue for Violet when a girl at her school accuses her of being Chinese because she is able to speak the language so well. After this encounter, which Violet took as an offense, she refuses to speak Chinese any more than she has to. She believes that her ability to speak Chinese somehow indicates she is a person of less worth.

These dual languages cause trouble for the characters as words in Chinese do not always translate easily to English. Loyalty attempts to arrange a meeting between Edward and Violet. When Loyalty tries to use a Chinese to English dictionary to explain to Edward the type of business in which Violet is involved, he leaves Edward with the impression that he can buy Violet's services for \$20.

Structure

This long novel is divided into fifteen chapters ranging in length from 30 to 60 pages in length. The first several chapters of the novel cover a 20-year period of Violet Miniturn's life. This part of her life is covered in a linear fashion beginning in 1905 when she was a child in her mother's courtesan house including the time when she is sold to the Hall of Tranquility in 1912. Violet then goes to live with Edward in 1918 where she stays in Lu Shing's house on Bubbling Well Road for just more than four years. In 1922 Violet is



evicted from that house and Flora taken from her by the real Minerva Lamp Ivory. She passes time at the House of Vermillion until 1925 when she moves to Moon Pond Village when Perpetual proposes to her. Less than a year later, Violet, Magic Gourd, and Pomelo escape from Perpetual.

In Chapter 12, the novel moves from Shanghai in the early 1900s to San Francisco in the late 1800s. The focus of the novel also switches from Violet to her mother, Lucia. It is in 1897 that Lucia first meets Lu Shing in her parents' home in San Francisco. Chapters 12, 13 and 14 detail the time from Lucia's first meeting with Lu Shing, her trip to Shanghai, her life with Danner and her business endeavors after Danner's death the led to her opening Hidden Jade Path. Chapter 15 picks up Violet's story when she returns to Shanghai in 1926. She lets her mother know she is still alive and the two meet in person for the first time in 1929. Ten years later, Violet is finally reunited with her daughter, Flora.



Quotes

When I was seven, I knew exactly who I was: a thoroughly American girl in race, manners, and speech, whose mother, Lulu Minturn, was the only white woman who owned a first-class courtesan house in Shanghai.

-- Violet (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: Although Violet had believed that she was a pure American, her world begins to crumble when she realizes her mother has not told her that she is actually half-Chinese.

Mother had been lying all this time when he was alive. He may have loved me, and by not telling me that he was alive, she had stolen him from me. Now he was truly dead and it was too late.

-- Violet (chapter 1 paragraph 162)

Importance: Violet is angry because her mother has robbed her of the chance to get to know her father by pretending that he was dead. She must face the feeling of being robbed of her father again when he actually dies.

Fairweather made a deal with them in exchange for settling his gambling debt. He got your mother to leave so they could take over her house without interference from the American Consulate.

-- Magic Gourd (chapter 3 paragraph 43)

Importance: When Violet wakes from the drug the Mother Ma had given her, Magic Gourd tries to explain to Violet how she has come to be a courtesan.

The painting gave me a queasy feeling. It was an omen, like the worn slippers. I was meant to find it. What happened next was salvation or doom.

-- Violet (chapter 3 paragraph 74)

Importance: Violet's reaction to the painting "The Valley of Amazement" is the feeling that the scene is a bad omen.

Mother Ma, it just occurred to me that I might help you keep this rumor from starting. Until you correct the balance in the liver, let me serve as Violet's teacher and attendant.

-- Magic Gourd (chapter 3 paragraph 159)

Importance: Magic Gourd uses Mother Ma's illness to give herself the opportunity to present herself as a willing teacher and broker for Violet.

How could any girl think that was a lucky life? And yet, if I were Chinese and compared this life with all the possibilities, I, too, might believe over time that I was lucky to be here. But I was only half-Chinese, and I still held tight to the American half that believed I had other choices.



-- Violet (chapter 3 paragraph 200)

Importance: Even after Magic Gourd tells Violet the story of how she became a courtesan, Violet still believes she is somehow different because she is part Chinese. She refuses to believe she is lucky to be in her position. Instead, she clings to the idea she has the ability to choose her own future.

Look at those who are the top Ten Beauties each year. Are they the most beautiful? No. They are the ones who understand human nature, that of men and women both. They know how to attract attention and envy and bend it to their advantage.

-- Magic Gourd (chapter 4 paragraph 73)

Importance: Magic Gourd explains to Violet it is not necessarily beauty that makes a courtesan popular but her ability to understand and manipulate human nature.

All that I wished became an illusion the moment he deflowered me and I saw victory in his face. He had instantly satisfied his own dream as a seventeen-year-old boy — to have any of the flowers he desired at Hidden Jade Path.

-- Violet (chapter 5 paragraph 113)

Importance: Violet feels as if there has been a change in Loyalty's attitude toward her once he takes her virginity.

I will always be your loyal friend. If you are ever in trouble, you can come to me.

-- Loyalty Fang (chapter 5 paragraph 296)

Importance: Although Loyalty and Violet have determined they have their differences, he pays her for one more season. At the conclusion of this season, Loyalty gives Violet an expensive ring with the promise that she can call on him if she ever needs him.

Look at my life. I could not go back to being that girl I once was any more than that girl with the doll could. I would always feel betrayed. Edward would always carry guilt, and that was how it should be. We understood that, as victim, as culprit.

-- Violet (chapter 6 paragraph 162)

Importance: Violet describes the differing emotions that help to bind her and Edward together. As victim and culprit, they both understand the differing sides of the same coin. Both suffer, one with what happened to her and one with what he caused.

She had been more than an attendant, more than a friend, more than a sister. She had been a mother to me. She had worried, sought to protect me from danger, guided me toward the best. She had looked out for my future, assessed the worthiness of everyone to be in my life. And in that way, she had taken me as her purpose in life, the one who gave her meaning.

-- Violet (chapter 6 paragraph 223)

Importance: It is when Violet prepares to start her new life with Edward and Magic



Gourd insists she doesn't want to come along that Violet realizes how much Magic Gourd has meant to her, and in turn, how much she has meant to Magic Gourd.

No matter how American I was — or wanted to be — China was, in my heart, my homeland. In my opinion, what the Allies had done to China was wrong. That meant I was not a patriotic American.

-- Violet (chapter 8 paragraph 50)

Importance: When Japan seems to intend to refuse to give the Shandong Province back to China, Violet feels a surprising loyalty to China as her home country.

I was traveling three hundred miles to pretend to be someone I was not, to live with a man I had had to convince myself to love. I was chasing after happiness, that false salvation, all the way to a desolate place. I might not find it.

-- Violet (chapter 10 paragraph 44)

Importance: Violet realizes that her marriage to Perpetual may not bring her the happiness she wants, but she still makes the move.

I had seen a valley like this many times, the one in the paintings Lu Shing had given to my mother and to Edward. I was looking at the Valley of Amazement.

-- Violet (chapter 10 paragraph 73)

Importance: Violet doesn't know if her sighting of a valley just like the one in Lu Shing's painting is a good or bad omen, but she believes that is was her fate to come to that place.

I knew what they were: Lu Shing's paintings, the portrait of my mother, the other of the valley. Every time I had thrown these paintings away, Magic Gourd had retrieved them.

-- Violet (chapter 7 paragraph 257)

Importance: It is Lu Shing's paintings that Magic Gourd carries along on their attempt to escape from Perpetual that will be their proof that Violet is a painter if the two women are stopped and asked what they are doing on the mountain.

Someone once told me: When you save a person, even unwillingly, you feel bound to each other for life. That's how we felt toward Pomelo.

-- Violet (chapter 11 paragraph 65)

Importance: Violet explains why she and Magic Gourd feel they need to take such tender care of Pomelo who limps along and slows their progress with her bound feet. Even though they could make better progress without her, they feel they cannot leave her behind.

I recognized the place in the painting. I had lived there. Yet I knew that was impossible.

-- Lucia (chapter 12 paragraph 50)



Importance: When Lucia first sees Lu Shing's painting of "The Valley of Amazement" she believes that she has been there before.

I thought so, too,' Lu Shing said, 'when I came across its mention in a Chinese translation of a Sufi poem, 'The Colloquy of the Birds.' I took the title without knowing what it actually referred to and discovered later that the Valley of Amazement is not a pleasant way station. It's a place of doubt, and doubt is dangerous to a painter.

-- Lu Shing (chapter 12 paragraph 57)

Importance: Lu Shing admits that the title to his poem is not exactly ideal as it describes a place of doubt, not a good place for an artist to be.

The expectations are more onerous in China than in America, and there are other complications you cannot begin to comprehend. I know that is not the answer you wanted to hear. I'm sorry.

-- Lu Shing (chapter 13 paragraph 84)

Importance: When Lu Shing learns Lucia is pregnant, she becomes upset with him because she fought against her family for his honor. He, on the other hand, does not seem willing to try to convince his parents that he loves her.

I will never trust love. I will feel only self-hatred because I let a weakling destroy my heart.

-- Lucia (chapter 13 paragraph 87)

Importance: Lucia tells Lu Shing that he has made her hate herself because she has devoted herself to him but he is not willing to go against his family tradition for her. She believes he does not really love her and lied to her to win her affection.

Earlier, when I had realized we would be separated by race, I had dismissed the rules as ridiculous. We could sneak into each other's room, just as we had in the house.

-- Lucia (chapter 13 paragraph 113)

Importance: It is on the boat headed to China that Lucia first begins to realize how strict the rules separating Americans and Chinese really are. He can be arrested and she put off the ship if they are caught in the other person's room.

The American women were scorned. They had no legal status and were never accepted into Chinese families as wives because of the importance of lineage and the family's generations of ancestor worship.

-- American women on the ship to Shanghai (chapter 13 paragraph 129)

Importance: Lucia listens as the women on the ship to Shanghai tell stories of how American women are treated terribly in Shanghai by the Chinese families they try to join.



I will not speak about your situation,' Danner said, 'unless you care to. I will, however, tell you what you need to know about the Chinese, and that is this: You cannot change thousands of years of Chinese custom about shame in the family.

-- Danner (chapter 14 paragraph 39)

Importance: Even Danner warns Lucia that she will not be able to change Lu Shing's loyalty to his family.

Teddy once told me that it's natural that we feel alone, and that's because our hearts are different from others and we don't even know how. When we're in love, as if by magic, our different hearts come together perfectly toward the same desire. Eventually, the differences return, and then comes heartache and mending, and, in between, much loneliness and fear. If love remains despite the pain of those differences, it must be guarded as rare.

-- Danner (chapter 14 paragraph 78)

Importance: When Lucia confesses to Danner that she feels lonely, he shares with her these words that his partner Teddy told him about the nature of love.

This was not my spirit but what remained after losing it. Lu Shing did not know me.

-- Lucia (chapter 14 paragraph 86)

Importance: It is when Lucia first sees the portrait that Lu Shing painted of her that she realizes that he did not really know her. When she looks at the portrait, all she sees is emptiness, none of her spirit is there.

When the baby wailed, I wailed with her. I cried for the pain she would share with me. I cried that my hopes had evaporated. And then, while looking at me, she stopped crying, and I fell in love.

-- Lucia (chapter 14 paragraph 106)

Importance: Although Lucia is first unhappy because her baby is a girl, it does not take her long to fall in love with her new daughter, despite what her sex means for Lucia's relationship with Lu Shing and his family.

For those counterfeit words, I was a spendthrift with my secrets, and he later stole all that was most precious to me.

-- Lucia (chapter 14 paragraph 200)

Importance: Lucia recounts how Fairweather gave her fake promises of love. She believed these promises and told Fairweather her secrets, which she feels he used against her to steal Violet, her most precious possession.

If I had lost only Violet, I would have grieved a lifetime. But I knew also that before she died I had shattered her belief that she had ever been loved by me. I knew those terrible truths because I had felt the same when love abandoned me.

-- Lucia (chapter 14 paragraph 112)



Importance: Lucia is haunted not only by Violet's "death" but the idea that Violet died believing that her mother did not love her and had abandoned her to the wiles of a man Violet didn't trust.

I had always viewed her leaving me from only the perspective of an aggrieved child. She never should have left. She never should have believed I was dead. But my grief over losing Flora had gradually changed me.

-- Violet (chapter 15 paragraph 48)

Importance: It is when Violet considers her mother's actions from the perspective of a mother who has lost a daughter, she realizes she needs to let her mother know that she was not killed in Shanghai.

In one very important way, she was the same mother I knew in Shanghai, and that was the persistence and resourcefulness she had applied in making Hidden Jade Path a success. She applied the same qualities to finding Flora.

-- Violet (chapter 15 paragraph 79)

Importance: Although she sees differences in her mother, Violet knows that her mother still has the resourcefulness she put into action to make her courtesan house successful. She plans for her mother to use this resourcefulness to help her find Flora.

When I was fourteen, I had dreamed of marrying him. When I was twenty-five, I lost Flora because I was not married. I had married Perpetual out of desperation and fear for my future. And now I had married Loyalty for love.

-- Violet (chapter 15 paragraph 123)

Importance: Violet tracks the process of her life, a trail that has led her to marry Loyalty, her first love.

Magic Gourd said to her, 'You know what I think? It wasn't just luck. It was fate that you were on that boat. If you had stayed, Violet wouldn't have met Edward. She wouldn't have had Little Flora. She would not be here with Loyalty. What happened to Violet was terrible, and I'm not saying fate happens without blame. But when fate turns out well, everyone should forget the bad road that got us here.

-- Magic Gourd (chapter 15 paragraph 161)

Importance: Although Violet doesn't necessarily believe in the idea of fate, Magic Gourd points out to her, and Lucia, that if Lucia had not left on the ship Violet would never have met Edward, they would not have Flora, and she would not have married Loyalty. Although what happened was bad, Magic Gourd points out that good did come from what happened. It is that good upon which they should focus.