

# **Where the Mountain Meets the Moon Study Guide**

**Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin**

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# Plot Summary

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon is a young adult fiction book written by Grace Lin, the result of Lin's re-conception of Chinese stories she knew as a child in Asian-American form. The book has a unique structure since it places small stories within the storyline as a whole and draws complex connections between these sub-stories and the story generally. The main character of the book is Minli, a young Chinese girl from the Village of the Fruitless Mountain. Her family is very poor and Minli very much wishes she could change her family's fortune. Her parents, Ba and Ma, are left in the dust when Minli leaves them to go on a quest to fix her family's fortune after hearing tales of the Old Man of the Moon, who knows the future and has the power to change fortunes.

Minli encounters many surprises and challenges on her way to see the Old Man of the Moon. She first meets Dragon, a dragon caught in ropes in the forest and who was born out of a painting one hundred years ago commissioned for the evil Magistrate Tiger, who is in some ways the villain of the book. Dragon cannot fly and Minli invites Dragon to come with her to see the Old Man of the Moon to see if he can fix Dragon's problem. To find the Old Man of the Moon, Minli and Dragon must find the Never-Ending Mountain, but there are other landmarks along the way. Their first stop is the City of the Bright Moonlight which is divided into inner and outer halves. The King of the city lives within the inner city and a local buffalo boy tells Minli that the King can be found in the outer city of the market in the day. Minli is able to meet him and he gives her a borrowed line which is written on a piece of apage that Magistrate Tiger had torn out of the Old Man of the Moon's Book of Fortune. Outside of the City, Dragon is given a string of destiny which is another borrowed line by the Guardians of the City, living stone tigers.

On their way towards the mountain, Dragon and Minli encounter the evil Green Tiger, the reincarnated spirit of Magistrate Tiger, who claws Dragon and poisons him as a result. Minli goes to find a cure and encounters two twins, A-Fu and Da-Fu, who trick Green Tiger into falling in a well. Along with their grandfather, A-Gong, they treat Dragon with their local Dragon Well Tea, made from leaves of trees whose seeds fell from the sky. When Dragon is healed, Minli and Dragon follow A-Fu and Da-Fu to Never-Ending Mountain. They find they cannot climb it, so they combine their borrowed lines to make a kite to fly up to the moon. The string turns into a bridge and Minli is able to travel up to the Moon and visit the Old Man of the Moon. The Old Man of the Moon then presents Minli with a stark moral choice: she may ask only one question of him. She is torn. On the one hand, Minli can ask him how to help Dragon fly and on the other she can ask how to fix her family's fortune.

In that moment, Minli realizes that her fortune is not so bad and that she can be content with her life. She then asks Dragon's question. The Old Man of the Moon has her remove a rock on Dragon's head. He can then fly and flies her back to her village. It turns out that the rock on Dragon's head is a Dragon Pearl which makes her village fabulously wealthy, changing her family's fortune. Dragon also meets his mother, Jade Dragon, who then changes Fruitless Mountain into Fruitful Mountain, allowing it to grow again. Minli, Ba and Ma live happily ever after.



# Chapters 1-12

## Chapters 1-12 Summary

Chapter 1: Our story opens on the Jade River near the Fruitless Mountain in a small village which contains an even smaller home. A young girl named Minli lives there with her parents, Ba and Ma. Minli asks Ba why nothing grows on Fruitless Mountain and Ba tells her a story. In the story, Jade Dragon made the rain across the land until she heard the people complain about the rain. Angry, she refused to give any rain to the people and they began to die. Jade Dragon's children, Pearl, Yellow, Long and Black, decided to help the people and turned themselves into four rivers. Jade Dragon was heart-broken and turned herself into the Jade River. Fruitless Mountain, says Ba, is fruitless because it is the place where Jade Dragon's soul is trapped. The Mountain will only grow green when her spirit is reunited with her children. Minli wishes to know how to do so, and Ba mentions that only the Old Man of the Moon knows how to do so.

Chapters 2-3: It is the morning of the next day and Minli regrets the poor fortune of her family. She wishes that she could change it, so when she hears a man selling goldfish and promising that they bring good fortune, she buys one. Ba and Ma are angry with Minli for wasting her money, but Minli protests. She then asks to hear the story of the Old Man of the Moon. Ba explains that there was once a powerful and ruthless magistrate named Magistrate Tiger. He demanded respect and wished to have royal blood. One day he met a man sitting on the side of the road who refused to bow to him. He was reading what he called the Book of Fortune and he was the Old Man of the Moon. He explained to Magistrate Tiger that his son would marry a grocer's daughter. The Magistrate was furious and sent a servant to stab the little girl, who was two years old at the time. He believed that he had changed his fortune and on his son's wedding day, Magistrate Tiger was happy that his son was marrying royalty. But it turned out that she had a scar on her head where the magistrate's servant had stabbed her. It turned out that her family had died and the royal family had adopted her. And so, Ba concludes, the Old Man of the Moon was right. He then tells Minli that the Old Man of the Moon can only be found on Never-Ending Mountain.

Chapters 4-6: Minli cannot sleep through the night. She feels guilty for buying the goldfish and dumps it in the river. But it then speaks to her and tells her how to get to Never-Ending Mountain. Minli leaves a note for her parents telling them where she is going and takes a small number of items with her. When she leaves the village, she follows the goldfish's instructions and makes a device with her items. This device can tell her where the mountain is. She then travels deep into the forest and goes to sleep.

Chapters 7-10: When Ma and Ba find that Minli has left, they are upset. Ba blames himself for filling Minli's mind with stories. Ma and Ba then go after Minli. When Minli awakes, she runs into a salty river. She then hears a call for help and finds a dragon caught under ropes. At the same time, Ma and Ba are stumbling through the forest. Ma is angry with Ba for telling Minli the stories, but then they run into the goldfish seller. In



the meanwhile, Minli speaks with the dragon, who tells her that monkeys trapped him under the ropes to prevent him from going deeper into the forest. They were eager to protect their peach trees. When Minli asks him why we cannot fly over them, he explains that he cannot fly. Minli then invites the dragon to go see the Old Man of the Moon with him, as he may be able to help the dragon fly.

Chapter 11: Minli releases the dragon. He says he has no name and then tells his story. The dragon first came to consciousness as a painting by a painter who wished to free his village from the taxes imposed by Magistrate Tiger. When the Magistrate saw the painting, he declared the painter's village free from taxes for a year. The dragon could not protest and he was then hidden away for a long time. He could see nothing and had no eyes. When the magistrate realized this, he had dots placed on the face of the dragon. All of a sudden the dragon could see and strength came to him. He came alive and flew away. They called him Dragon and so he explains to Minli that Dragon is his name.

Chapter 12: The goldfish man is small and slender and explains to Ma and Ba that Minli could succeed. He then tells a story of Lao Lao, his fortuneteller grandmother. When she was nineteen, it was foretold that she would die soon. She was advised to take sweets and wine to an old man reading a book, who happened to be the Old Man of the Moon. By taking her sweets and wine, the Old Man of the Moon committed to changing her fortune and extending her life from nineteen years to ninety-nine. Ba protested, but the goldfish man insisted that fortunes can change and that Ba and Ma should trust that Minli will return to them even if she is unsuccessful. He then gives Ma and Ba a silver goldfish.

## Chapters 1-12 Analysis

The book, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, is structured in two levels. The first level is the story of Minli and her parents, Ba and Ma. Minli is a small village girl whose family is very poor. She wants to change their fortune and to do so she follows the direction implied by her father's elaborate stories of the Jade Dragon and the Old Man of the Moon. After buying a goldfish and throwing it back into the river, Minli finds that the goldfish can talk and listens to its advice on how to find the Old Man of the Moon. She then sets out to find him at his home on Never-Ending Mountain. Ba and Ma find themselves in fast pursuit. On Minli's way, she runs into a dragon whom she invites to accompany her. At the same time, Ba and Ma run into a goldfish seller who tells them to have faith in Minli.

The second level of the book is the series of stories told by different characters in the first level of the book. The first story is the story Ba tells Minli about the reason that Fruitless Mountain is barren, that is, why nothing grows there. In this story, Ba introduces Minli to the Jade Dragon and her four children who give their lives to provide water to the people. He also tells her a second story, the story of the Old Man of the Moon and how he determined the fortune of Magistrate Tiger's family. The third story explains Dragon's story to Minli, about how he was once a painting created for



Magistrate Tiger but who flew away when he was given his sight. The fourth story is told by the goldfish man to Ma and Ba. It explains how the Old Man of the Moon can change fortunes if he wishes. It is clear that the stories intersect in various ways and this opens the possibility that Minli can succeed in convincing the Old Man of the Moon to change her family's fortune. In this way, the plot is set.



# Chapters 13-24

## Chapters 13-24 Summary

Chapters 13-14: In Chapter 13, Minli cuts Dragon free and he carries her on his back through the river. On the way, Minli discovers that Dragon is over one hundred years old. But their passage is blocked by the monkeys. In Chapter 14, Dragon and Minli make camp and Dragon notes that the monkeys are greedy with their peaches since there are enough for everyone. Minli decides to use their greed against them, so she cooks rice and puts it in a fishnet. When the monkeys reach for the rice they become stuck in the net. Minli and Dragon can now pass through.

Chapter 15: Ma and Ba are walking in the forest with their goldfish. They wonder whether they can trust Minli. As part of working out the problem, the goldfish asks Ba to tell The Story of the Paper of Happiness. In it, an unusually happy household made the young Magistrate Tiger curious about their secret to happiness. He sent an official to demand that they place the secret in a box or else he would burn down the house. On the way back, the official and his men encountered wind that blew open the box and caused the paper to fly away. When Magistrate Tiger learned of this, he was furious. The soldier who had gotten a glimpse of it saw only one character and the Magistrate thought he had been tricked. He then took his men to the household, but the people and the house had vanished. The moral of the story is that the secret of happiness is not meant to be found. Ba and Ma conclude from the story that they should trust Minli rather than capturing her and forcing her to be happy.

Chapter 16: Dragon and Minli feast on peaches as they walk through the woods. Dragon tells Minli of further landmarks they must pass through. One thing that they must do is speak with the Guardian of the City of Bright Moonlight. At this time, a fish appears and asks whether Dragon is Aunt Jin. When Dragon denies this, the fish explains that Aunt Jin is supposed to help fish find the dragon gate. He then tells the Story of the Dragon Gate. It is a waterfall that when passed through leads to an entryway into the sky. The gate is very old and has the power to turn fish into dragons. Aunt Jin had been determined to find it and so that is why the fish had thought the Dragon was Aunt Jin, herself a fish. Eventually Dragon and Minli arrive at the City of Bright Moonlight. They decide that Minli should go in alone and Dragon waits outside.

Chapters 17-19: When Minli reaches the city, she finds that it is very busy. The City is divided into inner and outer parts. One needs permission to enter the Inner City where the King and his palace can be found. But Minli feels that she must get to the king to receive the items she needs to move forward in her journey. Just as she despairs, a boy with a buffalo greets her and tells her that the Inner City only opens once a year and that she has missed it. He also notes that the royal family wears golden dragon pins and that these pins are required for entry. The boy then invites Minli home with him. The boy's hut is small and far from the city. Minli tells him that she needs to find the borrowed line and he thinks that his beautiful young female friend might know



something about it. In *The Story of the Buffalo Boy's Friend*, the boy meets the girl bathing in a river. She becomes his good friend but she can only visit him from time to time because she is kept busy. Minli wants to meet her but the buffalo boy says that the girl is quiet. When the girl comes, Minli sees that she is beautiful. She watches as the boy and the girl talk. It turns out that the King will be in the Market of Green Abundance on the next day. Minli wonders how the girl knows this and speculates that she might be royalty.

Chapter 20: Ma and Ba carry their fish back into their village. They tell the villagers that they have tried to find Minli but could not and that now they would trust her to come home.

Chapters 21-22: Minli and the buffalo boy go to the market and push through the crowd. The boy leaves and Minli encounters a dirty old beggar begging for food. Minli gives him her copper coin to buy food. He thanks her and eats the peach. He then buries the peach pit and it magically grows into a peach tree. The people then feast on the peaches. It turns out that the beggar isn't old, but some sort of magician. When Minli grabs his coat sleeve, she briefly sees a dragon pin. It is the king who then runs. Minli chases him and follows him through a secret door into the Inner City. The King had run to avoid being exposed. He then tells Minli to speak with him in the Moon Pavilion.

Chapter 23: Minli and the King talk. Minli mentions the Guardian of the City and the borrowed line to him. The King then tells Minli that his great-great-grandfather named the city. It used to be called the City of the Far Remote. He explains that Magistrate Tiger and the Old Man of the Moon's interaction was real. He then tells the Unknown Part of the Story of the Old Man of the Moon. It turns out that Magistrate Tiger had torn a page from the Old Man of the Moon's Book of Fortune but he could not read the page. So the page was passed down through the ages. Over time, the family figured out that the words could only be read in the bright moonlight and so this is how the city had been renamed. The King then suggests that the borrowed line might be on the page. It turns out that the words change according to the situation and time and the instructions are often mysterious. At present, the page says, "You only lose what you cling to." The King interprets this to mean that his family had clung to tightly to the page and so he gives it to Minli to guide her on her way.

Chapter 24: Dragon is waiting eagerly outside of the City. He is glad to have a friend like Minli. He then notices lion statues surrounding the city and sees a little lion cub statue come to life and laugh at him. The cub is named Xiao Mao. Dragon is surprised that the statues are alive. They are very old. The cub, for instance, is eight-hundred and sixty-eight years old. Dragon then tells his story and the lions think that the Dragon must be evil to have come from Magistrate Tiger. They then explain that they are the Guardians of the City and tell Dragon the Story of the String of Destiny. One day, when the king's father came to the city from his village, the ground cracked due to the man's wickedness. The Guardians were afraid and asked the Old Man of the Moon for help. He opened his book and gave them a red thread, the String of Destiny, which would help the city avoid the breaking of the ground. But the crack did not grow and was eventually filled in when the King renounced his father. Harmony returned to the city and





the Guardians gave Dragon the string unused. Dragon thought that the red string must be the String of Destiny.

## Chapters 13-24 Analysis

Chapters 13-24 build up the main story line by developing some of the main characters and showing them resolving minor plot lines, such as the acquisition of key tools on the way to completing Minli's quest to change her family's fortune by visiting the Old Man of the Moon. Chapters 13 and 14 show Minli and Dragon cooperating not only to free Dragon but to get Minli to her destination. Chapters 15 and 20 wrap up the minor plot line of Ma and Ba, Minli's parents who are searching for her. They decide to trust that she will return. In these chapters, we find that the story of Magistrate Tiger's encounter with the Old Man of the Moon is true and that the Book of Fortune that the Old Man of the Moon possesses had had a page torn out of it by Magistrate Tiger. The piece of paper contains different messages depending on the time and place and person. It tells the King of the City of Bright Moonlight that he should give it to Minli on her request.

Chapters 13-24 introduce the complex idea of a borrowed line. The borrowed line is a required item for Minli to meet the Old Man in the Moon. Dragon and Minli are not sure what it is. And when they are separated, they come to two different conclusions. Many of these chapters focus on how Minli has come to own the piece of paper from the Book of Fortune. Minli believes that the borrowed line is a line from the piece of paper from the Book of Fortune. However, while Minli is visiting with the King, Dragon runs into the Guardians of the City, living stone lion statues that have protected the city for centuries. They tell him about the string of destiny that has a power of keeping the earth from cracking. When they explain to Dragon that they do not need the string anymore, they happily give it to him. Dragon now has a red string that he believes is the borrowed line.

Thus there is a kind of tension. Minli and Dragon are on their way to meet the Old Man of the Moon, but they are still separated and have come to believe that they both have the borrowed line. Who is correct? Could it be both? Thus the minor plot lines of acquiring the page and the string are resolved but they combine to advance the main plot line of Minli and Dragon tracking down the Old Man of the Moon. It is clear that they are getting closer, but their story gets more complex as time progresses.



# Chapters 25-36

## Chapters 25-36 Summary

Chapter 25: Ba and Ma are sad that Minli is gone. Ma seems to grow older and paler each day and Ba loses the twinkle in his eyes. They try to comfort one another and have faith that Minli will return.

Chapter 26: Minli sneaks out of the Imperial Palace after waking up. She goes to meet Dragon who is sleeping near the Guardian lions. Dragon and Minli then exchange stories about their respective borrowed lines and cannot figure out which borrowed line is the real one.

Chapter 27: Minli and Dragon continue their journey as the land becomes rockier. Eventually they spy a village up ahead and decide to spend the night in a nearby cave. They are growing colder as they increase in elevation and Minli hopes to find warm clothes in the village. But Minli cannot sleep because she is worried about, Ba, Ma and the buffalo boy. When she hears a sound outside of the cave, she exits and finds a giant tiger that leaps out at her.

Chapter 28: Ma and Ba feel a gust of wind from a storm and worry that Minli is out there. Ma then says a prayer to the moon to watch over Minli.

Chapter 29: The Tiger leaps at Minli only to be stopped by Dragon. The Tiger is much larger than ordinary tigers, but Dragon is larger still and is able to stop him. Minli is scared and bursts into tears. Dragon comforts her, and Minli notices slashes on Dragon's arm from the Tiger. She treats Dragon's wounds, but he gets increasingly worse and eventually cannot respond to Minli. Minli runs to the nearby village for help.

Chapter 30: Minli quickly runs up the rocks where she again encounters the Tiger, but before it can jump at her a plump little girl runs at the Tiger and offers herself as a sacrifice. She calls him Great Green Tiger and worships him as the spirit of the magistrate of her worthless ancestors. Her brother had also been sent as a sacrifice but he has been captured by another beast. She then tells The Story the Girl Told the Green Tiger. In the story, she explains that her grandfather told them that the Great Green Tiger demanded sacrifice in order for him not to attack their family. But as they rushed down, a smaller, black Tiger stole the girl's brother away and mocked the Green Tiger, saying that he was an old weakling. He then dragged her brother into a cave. It turns out that the Black Tiger is the son of the Green Tiger and left the girl out of pity. She then offers to lead the Green Tiger to the Black Tiger's cave and the tiger follows. Minli follows silently.

Chapter 31: The boy is hidden as well and is now with Minli, with the two of them following from a distance. The girl leads the Green Tiger up to a stone house with a well and tells him that the Black Tiger took the boy into that cave. The Tiger looks in the well



and sees his reflection but since it is dark he thinks it is the Black Tiger. When he roars, a roar echoes back, which enrages the Green Tiger. He eventually jumps into the well and disappears.

Chapter 32: The boy and girl (Da-Fu and A-Fu) are happy to have foiled the Green Tiger. It turns out they are twins and are happy to be together. Then their grandfather, A-Gong, calls them. Their plan has worked. They have used the Tiger's anger against him. Minli meets with them and tells A-Gong about Dragon. A-Gong explains that the Green Tiger's teeth and claws are poison. Without A-Gong's medicine, Dragon will die before the night is out. They rush back to Dragon.

Chapter 33: When they reach Dragon, A-Gong applies the medicine to his wound and the pain lifts. Dragon is still asleep and when he wakes up A-Gong will have to give him more medicine. A-Gong tells Minli that Dragon will be fine but that Minli should go with Da-Fu and A-Fu to sleep for the night.

Chapter 34: A-Fu and Da-Fu take Minli to their village, the Village of the Moon Rain. They then tell Minli the Story of the Village of Moon Rain to explain its history. One hundred years ago, the ancestors of the village came to settle the area but the ground was hard and rocky. No matter how hard they worked, the grounds would yield no life. But then one day a rain came but the rain was full of what appeared to be pearls. In fact, it was raining seeds that, when planted, would create beautiful silver trees with golden flowers. The villagers planted these seeds every day and night and they hoped that in one hundred years, the whole stony land would be covered with trees. This is why the village is called The Village of the Moon Rain.

Chapter 35: The story returns to Ba and Ma whose village has weathered a powerful storm. It seems to be mostly in ruins in the morning. They clean up and worry about Minli. Ba questions their fish but it says nothing.

Chapter 36: Minli sleeps through the night and most of the day, she is so tired. A-Fu, Da-Fu and their grandmother, Amah, greet her when she wakes up. They give her Green Tea made from the leaves of the silver trees. The Tea cures the Tiger's poison. Minli then asks them how they know that the Tea cures the poison. They then tell her The Story of the Green Tiger and the Tea. In the story, the villagers had been happy until the Green Tiger came to them four years before. It turns out that Magistrate Tiger had so much rage and anger pent up in his spirit that when his body died, his spirit transformed itself into the Green Tiger. He then started to attack village livestock and kill them, not to eat, just to kill. The villagers tried to resist but when the men returned, they had been defeated and hurt by the Green Tiger. A-Gong was among the wounded and Amah tended to him. She ran out of water eventually and used tea made from the leaves to wash his wounds. The wounds were healed by the tea, and this was how they discovered the power of the tea. A-Gong realized that the Tiger could not be fought with anger, but his anger could be used against him. A-Gong then interprets a message left by the Tiger as demanding two children every month to leave the village in peace. A-Gong refused to consider the Green Tiger's demand. In the meanwhile, A-Fu and Da-Fu hatched their plan and executed it, despite the protests of A-Gong and Amah. Next Minli



tells her story to them. They are awestruck. Minli learns from them that Never-Ending Mountain is only a day away. Minli is happy. Da-A-Fu will take Minli and Dragon there as soon as Dragon is better.

## Chapters 25-36 Analysis

Chapters 25-36 begin their own minor plot lines. All the while, Dragon and Minli are traveling higher in altitude towards Never-Ending Mountain but there are many challenges along the way. The first challenge comes when Minli encounters Green Tiger. Dragon protects her from Green Tiger but gets hurt in the process. It turns out that Green Tiger's claws are poisonous and the poison threatens to kill Dragon, so Minli rushes to a nearby village to try to find help. On the way, she encounters two young twins tricking the Tiger into jumping into a well. Their plan works and they then meet up with Minli and introduce her to their grandfather, A-Gong, who has medicine that can cure Dragon. He then tends to Dragon's wounds. While in their village, two stories are told, first a story about how the village came to be called the Village of the Moon Rain and a second story about how they discovered the Tea made from the leaves of the Moon Trees could be used to cure the poison that came from Green Tiger's teeth and claws. The two stories help to complete the minor plot line of encountering the Green Tiger, who is in fact the angry spirit of Magistrate Tiger, a recurring character in the story.

There is a smaller minor plot line as well. Ma and Ba are still worried about Minli, and they are becoming physically and psychologically affected by not having her around. Ma grows more pale and ages, while Ba has lost the twinkle in his eyes. One night a storm comes and they worry about Minli's safety. In the morning, much of their village is in ruins and they are very worried about Minli's safety. They do the very best that they can to remain hopeful and to have faith that Minli will be taken care of.

The major effect of Chapters 25-36 is to build towards the climax of the book. There are minor plot lines that develop the main characters, introduce new minor characters, develop details of the main storyline and increase the tension related to the plot. Overall, it is simply a slowly building tension decorated with minor plot lines.



# Chapters 37-48

## Chapters 37-48 Summary

Chapter 37: Minli is awakened by Da-A-Fu and the village greets the healed Dragon in awe. They then prepare Minli and Dragon for their journey with food and coats. Da-A-Fu leads them out and on the way to Never-Ending Mountain.

Chapter 38: On the way, Da-A-Fu tells them that no one has seen the Old Man of the Moon but that he had brought their ancestors to the village. They then tell The Story of Da-A-Fu's Ancestors. It turns out their ancestors are the truly happy family that had angered Magistrate Tiger so many years before. They decided that they would not run from the Magistrate's soldiers, who were sure to kill them. Ye Ye, the family patriarch, led his family up the mountain to eat good food and fly kites to enjoy their last happiness together before they were killed. When night came, the children cut their kites and let them fly away. As the family walked down the mountain they discovered that they seemed to be on a different mountain but that their house appeared, just as it had been before, in this new area. They attributed this change to the Old Man of the Moon. Da-A-Fu's ancestors have been there for one hundred years.

Chapter 39: Minli, Dragon and Da-A-Fu reach Never-Ending Mountain and start to climb it, but they can only go so far. They then decide that they should try to send the Old Man of the Moon a message asking for his help getting up the mountain. Minli comes up with the idea to make a kite like Da-A-Fu's ancestors did, to carry a message up to the Old Man of the Moon. She also has the idea to make a kite out of the two borrowed lines—the string and the book page. So they do and Minli flies the kite up high. The string seems to unwind endless and eventually the kite catches on something. Da-A-Fu wishes them goodbye and leave as Minli and Dragon pull on the string. It becomes thicker and thicker as they pull it down until it becomes frayed. It then becomes clear to Minli that the string has formed a bridge.

Chapter 40: Ba and Ma continue to worry about Minli. Ba then tells Ma the Story of the Dragon's Pearl. In the story, a dragon found a large white stone and decided to craft it into a beautiful pearl. After years of work without sleep, he finished and fell asleep. While he was sleeping, the Queen Mother of the Heavens stole the pearl and then had a banquet where she invited all the Immortals of Heaven to see the pearl. When she revealed it, the dragon flew up to the heavens to demand that the Queen Mother return his pearl. She refused and ran from him, claiming that she owned all things in heaven and earth. But Heavenly Grandfather, her father, chased her down and told both the dragon and the Queen Mother that the pearl—which had fallen into the river between the heavens and the earth—was owned by all people and that it should stay where it had fallen. Thus the moon was born. Ba then recalls that he had once seen a similar, small version, a dragon pearl carried by the Emperor. Ma remembers hearing about it as well. Thoughts of it help lift their spirits.



Chapter 41: Minli begins to cross the bridge, but Dragon is too large to cross. He promises to wait for her while she sees the Old Man of the Moon. Minli promises to ask him to give Dragon the power to fly.

Chapter 42: Minli climbs the bridge up to a massive white pearl wall on a side of the moon. She enters with the help of a rabbit guarding the gate. He is expecting her. When Minli enters, she comes into a beautiful courtyard and sees a man, Wu Kang, trying to cut down the one tree in the courtyard. The rabbit then tells Minli the Story of Wu Kang. Wu Kang was a successful farmer with a happy home but he was never satisfied. He moved through life taking up new pursuits and quickly tiring of them. Eventually his son suggested that he try to become an Immortal and so Wu Kang sought out one to train under. He eventually found the Old Man of the Moon who taught him many incredible things. And yet he was not satisfied. The Old Man of the Moon then showed him the tree Minli sees him cutting down. He told Wu Kang that he now only needed to learn patience and contentment and that when he cut down the tree, the Old Man of the Moon would know that Wu Kang had learned the lesson. However, the tree grows back whenever Wu Kang chops it, so he has been chopping it every night. A string of destiny ties him to the tree. Either he chops forever or learns his lesson. Minli then sees that as Wu Kang chops the tree, seeds fall from it to the earth. They are the seeds that fall to Moon Rain Village. But just as she realizes this, the rabbit points her to the Old Man of the Moon.

Chapter 43: When Minli enters the Old Man of the Moon's walled courtyard, she sees many clay figures tied by red strings of destiny. More string is sitting in a bag that is identical to the one that the girl who had been friends with the buffalo boy had held. Minli then surmises that the girl is the Goddess of Weaving, the daughter of the Old Man of the Moon. The Old Man of the Moon welcomes her and tells her that every ninety-nine years a person comes to him and is allowed to ask only one question. Minli must choose carefully but she realizes that she can either ask about her family's fortune or ask for Dragon to be able to fly. She is divided but eventually asks the Old Man of the Moon why Dragon cannot fly.

Chapter 44: Ma and Ba wait for Minli and believe she will return. Ma finally decides to tell Ba a story herself, so she tells The Story That Ma Told. In her story, Ma tells the story of herself and how she had been discontented with her lot in life. She then realizes she had given that discontent to her daughter and that now her daughter is gone, leaving her with less than she had before. Then Ma tells Ba that it is her fault that Minli left. Ba is speechless and the fish says that if you make people near you happy, those who are far away will come. Ma is surprised that the fish speaks.

Chapter 45: After three days, Dragon sees Minli return from the moon. She tells him that there is a stone on his head that is weighing him down. The Old Man of the Moon has told her that if she removes it, Dragon could fly. So Minli removes the rock and Dragon can finally fly. He is sad that Minli did not get to ask her question and so he starts to fly up to the moon again, but Minli tells him not to because she realizes that she didn't need to ask her question, that she should already be content with what she has.



Chapter 46: Dragon flies Minli home. On the way, she sees all the places she has passed on her journey. Dragon seems to be on a mission. Even when they see a beautiful orange female dragon, they only stop to exchange glances. When Dragon reaches Fruitless Mountain he feels that he has reached his home and lets Minli go home alone. Minli takes the rock from Dragon's head with her and runs home. The goldfish greets her, but her parents are asleep. Minli puts down her bag and follows suit.

Chapter 47: Ma and Ba are delighted to find Minli in her bed. They spend a joyous morning together. Ba points out that the rock Minli has brought home is a dragon's pearl, worth the Emperor's entire fortune. Minli is stunned only for a moment before they all discover that Fruitless Mountain has turned green and that the Jade River is clear and fresh. Jade Dragon seems to have been reunited with one of her dragon children. Apparently, Dragon is one of her children but this seems in tension with him coming from a painting. However, Minli remembers that Ma had said that the artist who had painted him had taken the mountain rock to carve into inking stones. Dragon may have come from a rock which was from Jade Dragon's heart. Good fortune has come to the village in many ways. The Old Man of the Moon had answered all her questions.

Chapter 48: After a few years, the goldfish man returns to Fruitless Mountain but recognizes neither the mountain nor the village. He thinks he sees dragons crossing the sky. The children in the village seem beautiful and dressed in beautiful colors. He has heard that Minli's family had given the King of the City of Bright Moonlight the Dragon Pearl and refused payment. But in gratitude, the King has given the village seeds and farming equipment that have made them very rich. The goldfish man then is told the story of Minli by a child. The village has been renamed The Village of Fruitful Mountain. Minli's family now has a nice, beautiful home. He visits Minli's family and finds that Ma's eyes are no longer angry. Ba is entertaining children and shares with them Dragon Well Tea. The goldfish man is very welcomed. The children and the goldfish man sit down to hear Ba tell the final story of the book, Minli's Story.

## Chapters 37-48 Analysis

Chapters 37-48 wrap up several minor plot lines, connect many of the Stories within the text and bring the book to its climax and denouement. In Chapter 37, Dragon is healed and Da-A-Fu leads Minli and Dragon towards Never-Ending Mountain. During their travel to the mountain and their travel up to the moon, Ba and Ma remain worried back in the Village of Fruitless Mountain. But Minli's adventure begins as she climbs up the mountain. There are no more major villains to encounter. Instead, Minli and Dragon combine their borrowed lines to fly up the mountain to the Old Man of the Moon.

Minli discovers that the string of destiny thickens, lengthens and eventually turns into a bridge which she is then able to climb. When she reaches the top, she is able to enter the moon. Within she meets Wu Kang, who may well spend eternity trying to chop down a tree that grows back when it is struck. Wu Kang illustrates to Minli that if she cannot find contentment where she is presently in her life that she will never find it. In the



meanwhile, Ma realizes that same thing for herself and feels guilty for passing this discontentment down to her daughter.

The book climaxes as Minli meets the Old Man of the Moon. He offers to answer one and only one of her questions and she then faces a choice. Will she ask how to change her family's fortune? Or will she be self-sacrificial and ask how to help Dragon fly? The main theme of the book comes to a head here. Minli can be satisfied with her place in life, sacrifice her discontent, and be kind and loving to a good friend and companion, or she can press forward in her quest. In making her decision, Minli finds contentment in her life after looking back on her adventure. She no longer feels a need to ask the Old Man of the Moon her question and instead asks about Dragon. With her answer, she removes a Dragon Pearl from Dragon's head and he can fly.

From there, all the great things of the book open up. Jade Dragon is satisfied to be reunited with Dragon, who turns out to be one of her children. As a result, Fruitless Mountain blooms. When Minli returns home, her parents are happy to see her. Without realizing it, she has brought home a Dragon Pearl which is incredibly valuable. Her family then gives it to the King of the City of Bright Moonlight who returns the favor with gratitude, giving the village many seeds and tools, worth much more to them than the Dragon Pearl. As a result, their village grows rich and Minli's family's fortune is changed anyway. The book ends with all the minor plot lines resolved. It is only when Minli accepts contentment that her family's fortune can truly be changed.





# Characters

## Minli

Minli is a strong-willed, young Chinese girl who lives in the Village of Fruitless Mountain. She grows up on tales of magical people and places from Ba, her father. Minli is restless and never content with her lot in life. Eventually she decides to run off on a quest to change her family's fortune. Minli upsets her parents, who are frightened about what will happen to her. But her ingenuity helps her to survive as she meets and befriends a dragon, sees through the tricks of the King of the City of Bright Moonlight, finds a cure for Dragon's poison, and figures out how to communicate with the Old Man of the Moon.

Minli's restlessness is her central conflicted character trait. Minli wishes to change her family's fortune but realizes over time that her discontent is the major factor causing her to lament her family's fortune. As the book builds, Minli comes to miss her community and family and friends and realizes that they make her life valuable. When the Old Man of the Moon presents her with a stark moral choice between helping Dragon and helping her family, she engages in the self-sacrificial act of using her one question to help Dragon, not her family. She does so because she realizes it had been her discontent that has caused so many problems and so she no longer needs to ask her question to the Old Man of the Moon. When Minli lets go of her discontent, she is eventually rewarded by the events that follow Dragon acquiring the ability to fly.

## Dragon

One hundred years before the main storyline of the book, Magistrate Tiger had a painting commissioned in exchange for releasing a local village from a heavy tax burden. But it turns out that the painting had been created with magic ink and the dragon that was painted came to life once its eyes were painted in. This dragon then flew away but was eventually trapped for many years by evil monkeys. When Minli meets the dragon, she names him Dragon (he had no name before) and releases him. From there on out, Dragon is unswervingly loyal to her and often waits for days while she completes small sub-quests on their way to see the Old Man of the Moon. Dragon often sacrifices for Minli, such as when he fights Green Tiger rather than letting her be hurt by it. Dragon also trusts Minli enough to allow her to go see the Old Man of the Moon alone. Dragon displays his own ingenuity at several points, such as when he acquires the String of Destiny.

Dragon does not appear to have major character development save that of gradually discovering and constructing his true identity. At first, he feels like a nameless, pointless painting but his friendship with Minli gives him an identity as a caring friend. When Minli releases the rock from Dragon's head, he is automatically drawn to his home and



eventually connects with his mother, Jade Dragon. He also flies with Aunt Lin, a fish who is converted into a Dragon after Minli and Dragon complete their quest.

## **The Old Man of the Moon**

The god character in the book that knows the future and permits Minli to ask him a single question is called The Old Man of the Moon. He lives in the moon but periodically visits the earth. He features prominently both in the main story and the sub-stories.

## **Magistrate Tiger/Green Tiger**

Magistrate Tiger was a ruler of the land in which all the main landmarks (save the moon) were located over a century ago. He was a cruel ruler who often carried out ruthless threats and punishments on those who did not deserve it. It was he who had the painting commissioned that created Dragon and it was he who tore a page out of the Old Man of the Moon's Book of Fortune. Further, it was Magistrate Tiger's angry spirit that was reincarnated into Green Tiger.

## **Ma and Ba**

Ma and Ba are Minli's parents who have their own complex pattern of development. Ma realizes, for instance, that she has sowed the seeds of discontent in Minli's heart due to her own discontentment. They both miss Minli terribly but when she returns they have had character awakenings that ensure their future happiness.

## **Goldfish**

Goldfish is a talking goldfish that helps Minli and Dragon along their way early in the story. Eventually the goldfish seems to become a dragon.

## **The Goldfish Man**

The Goldfish Man sells goldfish. He visits the Village of the Fruitless Mountain early in the book and at the very end.

## **Da-A-Fu**

Twins, A-Fu and Da-Fu, who trick Green Tiger into falling into a well and help heal Dragon and take Minli and Dragon to Never-Ending Mountain.



## **A-Gong and Amah**

A-Gong and Amah are Da-A-Fu's grandparents who heal Dragon and help Minli and Dragon prepare for their journey.

## **The Buffalo Boy**

An impoverished orphan who helps Minli find the King of the City of the Bright Moonlight is called The Buffalo Boy.

## **Wu Kang**

Wu Kang is an immortal who was once a man who could never be content. He remains in a discontented state, chopping down a tree that always grows back, until he realizes that he must let go of his desire to have increasingly more in his life.

## **The Goddess of Weaving**

The daughter of the Old Man of the Moon who creates strings of destiny and who regularly visits the buffalo boy is named The Goddess of Weaving. It is she who knows the location of the King of the City of Bright Moonlight.

## **The King of the City of Bright Moonlight**

The King of the City of Bright Moonlight gives Minli a page of the Book of Fortune that helps her create the kite that flies to the Old Man of the Moon.

## **Jade Dragon and Her Children**

Jade Dragon is a powerful goddess dragon who has four children. As a result of the loss of her four children, Jade Dragon's mourning causes Fruitless Mountain to be fruitless.



## **Objects/Places**

### **The Village of Fruitless/Fruitful Mountain**

Minli's impoverished village that comes into great wealth as a result of Minli's quest is the Village of Fruitless/Fruitful Mountain.

### **The City of Bright Moonlight**

The City of Bright Moonlight has inner and outer halves where Minli meets the buffalo boy and the King of the city.

### **The Village of the Moon Rain**

The Village of the Moon Rain is a small village harassed by Green Tiger. It is the home of Da-A-Fu, A-Gong and Amah and each night seeds rain down upon the village from the moon. The seeds grow into beautiful trees whose leaves make healing tea.

### **Never-Ending Mountain**

Never-Ending Mountain is where the Old Man of the Moon can be found.

### **Fruitless Mountain**

Fruitless Mountain is the lifeless mountain where Minli's village is located. It comes to life when Dragon is reunited with Jade Dragon.

### **The Moon**

The body of rock that orbits that earth, the Moon is the home of the Old Man of the Moon.

### **The Book of Fortune**

The Old Man of the Moon's Book of Fortune tells the future.

### **The String of Destiny**

A red string that eventually forms a bridge by which Minli can reach the moon is referred to as The String of Destiny.



## **The Borrowed Lines**

The Borrowed Lines are a page ripped out of the Book of Fortune that when combined with a string of destiny form a kite that reaches the Old Man of the Moon.

## **The Dragon Pearl**

A stone of incredible value that is pulled from Dragon's head is called The Dragon Pearl. Without the pearl, Dragon can fly and with the pearl Minli makes her village rich.

## **Fortune**

The benefits brought to an individual by fate and luck are called one's fortune. Minli believes her family's fortune is poor and she embarks on her quest in order to change it.

## **Dragon Well Tea**

Dragon Well Tea is made from the leaves of the moon trees in the Village of the Moon Rain and it heals Dragon from the wounds of the Green Tiger.

## **Moon Rain Seeds**

Moon Rain Seeds fall from the moon as a result of Wu Kang trying to chop down a tree in the Moon's pavilion. The seeds grow into trees and can make healing tea as well as replenish the rocky land where the Village of the Moon Rain is located.



# Themes

## Fortune and Fate

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon begins by introducing Minli, Ba and Ma, a family that is poor even within a poor village like The Village of the Fruitless Mountain. Minli sees her parents working hard every day and nothing coming of it. She is naturally restless and resents her family's fortune. When she hears enough stories from Ba, she heads off on her own to fix her family's fortune however she can. For a time, she believed that the Old Man of the Moon could not or would not change the fortunes of those whose future he beheld in his Book of Fortune. However, when Ba explained to her that change was indeed possible, Minli was convinced.

The first theme of the book is fortune and fate because fortune is what Minli aims to achieve and all of her quest is premised on the possibility that her family's fate can be altered. As she struggles through her quest on her way to Never-Ending Mountain, Minli often thinks of her parents and while she is sad to be separated from them, she thinks often about the opportunity to change her fortune. What is perhaps most significant for Minli is not that her family's fortune is eventually changed but that she comes to be satisfied with her family's fortune and fate before anything good happens to her. Thus, Minli's fortune is changed but only when she gives up on the possibility in favor of sacrificing for Dragon, her friend.

## Friendship and Loyalty

Following the first theme, the second theme concerns friendship and loyalty. Prior to her meeting Dragon, Minli did not seem to have any close friends. But when she releases Dragon from the ropes that bind him, he becomes a fast and true friend almost immediately. Dragon himself has never had a friend, not in the decades that he has lived, and he is glad to finally be connected to someone. From there on out, Minli and Dragon are the best of friends. Minli promises to help Dragon figure out how to fly and Dragon promises to protect Minli. Dragon in particular displays the virtues of friendship. He waits for Minli outside of the City of the Bright Moonlight and risks his life to protect her from Green Tiger. He even waits for her outside of the moon, always trusting Minli to do the right thing.

But Minli returns the favor in the end. The Old Man of the Moon puts a choice to Minli by permitting her to ask only one question: either she can ask about how to change her family's fortune or about how to help Dragon fly. For various reasons, she chooses to ask the question for Dragon and learns that Dragon will be able to fly when she removes a pearl from his head. After that, Dragon is very happy and carries her safely back to Fruitless Mountain.



## Contentment

The most important of the book's main three themes is that of contentment. In the beginning of the story, Minli is described as restless and as not being able to be satisfied with her stead in life. It is later revealed that she acquired this trait from her mother, who was deeply dissatisfied with her fortune. Minli thus has a kind of longing for a better life for her family that drives her on her quest all the way to the end. However, Minli's experiences teach her the value of the life she has lived.

This learning pays off when Minli comes upon Wu Kang. Wu Kang was an ordinary mortal who possessed a similar sort of discontent but he spent his whole life pursuing more and more goods until finally the Old Man of the Moon taught him to be immortal and set him to chopping down a tree in his pavilion. The trick was that the Old Man of the Moon had made the tree so that it could not be cut down. It would only be when Wu Kang understood that he had to let himself be content with his present lot in life that he would be able to stop.

Minli realizes that she is in the same situation due to her own discontent. This allows her to have her crucial character development. When the Old Man of the Moon gives her a choice between asking about Dragon and asking about her family, she chooses Dragon because she has let herself become content with her lot in life and no longer feels the need to ask her original question.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is always third-person but the narrator changes frequently, which makes the book rather unique. The main narrator is, in every case, the author, Grace Lin. She tells the story chronologically and is almost but not fully omniscient. For instance, she will on occasion enter the characters' minds and explain their emotional states from the inside out; however, she never reveals future events. She only discusses the past and the present. Her story has the feel of the simple plot of a children's story. As a result, her point of view remains a simple third-person point of view.

However, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is unique due to its sub-stories. In many chapters, some character will often tell a story on his or her own. These stories all have their own titles and each is narrated by a character at the present moment within the story. Minli is almost always present, though not in every case (such as the stories exchanged between Ma and Ba). These stories are distinguished from the main storyline with different, more elaborate prose. In these stories, there is sometimes more apparent information about the past than in the story itself. For instance, many of those who tell stories tell tales of events long ago that, while later turning out to be real, may well be mythical.

## Setting

*Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is set somewhere in China in a rural area. There is no date, but it seems to be a relatively ancient time period. Minli, the main character, lives in the Village of the Fruitless Mountain, a small, poor village in which Minli's family is near the poorest. The village is built near Fruitless Mountain, a mountain that neither yields any kind of fruit nor is covered by any sort of tree. The story begins in the village but Minli makes her way from her village across a number of different landmarks. The first landmark is in the forest past Fruitless Mountain. She finds Dragon in the Jade River and frees him from the monkeys who live there.

The second stop is the City of the Bright Moonlight, a relatively large town that is divided into an Inner and Outer City. On the outskirts of the city lies the small home of the buffalo boy, where Minli stays the night and within the Inner City is the Palace of the King of the City where Minli briefly goes to receive the borrowed line. Beyond this lies the clearing and cave where Dragon and Minli encounter the Green Tiger and beyond there is the Village of the Moon Rain, where Da-A-Fu, A-Gong and Amah live. From there, Minli and Dragon travel to Never-Ending Mountain, near the home of the Old Man of the Moon. And when Minli climbs up the mountain on the bridge made of the string of destiny, she enters the Old Man of the Moon's home on the moon. All of these areas are included in the setting.



## Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of the text of *Where the Mountain meets the Moon* is relatively diverse for a children's book. Most of the story is written in ordinary prose, though the prose is kept relatively simple for author Grace Lin's young adult audience. The text contains a good bit of dialogue and some description of territory, feelings and events. The language's pace and tone remain relatively stable throughout the text despite describing a variety of different scenes and events.

What makes the story unique is that it contains a large number of short sub-stories which describe regional legends and legendary characters. These stories are given special titles. They are also written in a different font, similar to Gothic lettering. The stories are largely taken to be fictional but it turns out that each of the stories is true and ties to the main storyline in complex ways. So much of the meaning of the text is built within these stories, which frequently have morals. They also introduce characters who will be introduced into the main storyline elsewhere. The text does not contain complex meanings, though the sub-stories create a complex web of character associations and ties between stories that give the text a more intricate feel. This is especially true of stories that contain either the Old Man of the Moon, Magistrate Tiger or both. In some cases, stories are meant to teach morals about, say, the fleetingness of happiness or the unhappiness brought by discontent.

## Structure

The structure of *Where the Mountain meets the Moon* is that of a young adult's book, though it is divided into very small chunks. There are forty-eight small chapters, some only a few pages long. Each of the chapters contains a minor event and usually several chapters are strung together in order to develop a minor plot line. Within plot lines are placed a number of features. For instance, in most of Minli's plot lines, the author takes a break to examine how Ma and Ba are handling Minli's absence in the meanwhile. Further, and more importantly, many chapters are interrupted by the book's many sub-stories. These sub-stories are often as long as whole chapters and will give a few chapters a long length. The book as a whole proceeds in chronological order save for these stories, which typically flash back in time, usually around a century or so to the days of Magistrate Tiger, the ancestors of the people of the Village of the Moon Rain and so on.

None of the forty-eight chapters have names. However, they are all illustrated with a small painting that depicts an event or character in the chapter. Together, one can glean the meaning of the events or characters after understanding the plot of the book. The book climaxes relatively late in the text, when Minli meets the Old Man of the Moon. The denouement wraps the story up relatively quickly.



## Quotes

"So how will Fruitless Mountain ever grow green again?" (Chapter 1, 9)

"What a poor fortune we have. Every day, Ba and Ma work and work and we still have nothing. I wish I could change our fortune." (Chapter 2, 12)

"So the Old Man of the Moon was right!" (Chapter 3, 24)

"I am going to Never-Ending Mountain to ask the Old Man of the Moon how I can change our fortune." (Chapter 5, 31)

"Dragon! It has come alive! Dragon!" (Chapter 11, 57)

"He is very old." (Chapter 13, 71)

"If there is a secret to happiness, I should have it." (Chapter 15, 82)

"You must be the king!" (Chapter 21, 125)

"You only lose what you cling to." (Chapter 23, 140)

"So which is the real borrowed line?" (Chapter 26, 156)

"He's getting weaker. Something is very wrong. I have to do something. Dragon needs help." (Chapter 29, 165)

"His anger is his strength, but it can also be his weakness." (Chapter 36, 198)

"Send a message, send a message." (Chapter 39, 218)

"In there is the Old Man of the Moon." (Chapter 42, 244)

"Every ninety-nine years, someone comes here with their questions. But I will answer only one. So choose your question carefully." (Chapter 43, 248)

"There is a dragon waiting at the bridge. Why can he not fly?" (Chapter 43, 250)

"Ahh, good. If you make happy those that are near, those that are far will come." (Chapter 44, 255)

"I didn't ask the question because I don't need to know the answer." (Chapter 45, 259)

"Strangely, I feel like I am home." (Chapter 46, 264)

"This is a dragon's pearl." (Chapter 47, 268)



"It's true, it's true! Fruitless Mountain is no longer fruitless! And the Jade River is clear and fresh too!" (Chapter 47, 268)

"For even in the misty light, the goldfish man could see her smiling a secret smile up to the sky to where the mountain meets the moon." (Chapter 48, 278)



## Topics for Discussion

What is Minli's original quest? What prompts her to set out on it?

List and discuss three minor challenges Minli faces on her way to see the Old Man of the Moon.

What is the borrowed line? Why is it significant? How does it play a role in the book?

What is the relationship between the plot of the book and the stories told within the book? How are they connected? Explain in detail.

What is the ultimate moral lesson of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*?

Explain Minli's moral choice at the climax of the book. What was her choice? Why did she choose as she did? What was the consequence of her choice?

Select one of the major mystical figures in the book (Jade Dragon, the Old Man of the Moon, Magistrate Tiger, or another) and explain what value or ideal it represents.