

Overview

The 80 chapters of *The Story of the Stone* that we will read has about 30 major characters and several hundred minor characters. This level of detail can be difficult for the first-time (or even second-, third-time) reader to sort out. One reason for this, beyond the obvious information deluge, is the similar emphasis placed on both minor and major characters and events. Another reason is that characters are referred to by more than one name, and the names themselves are similar. (Some of the sameness in names is wordplay, to bond certain characters together.) These notes are meant to help identify characters and events close to the main narrative lines.

In my opinion the three strongest storylines in this novel are:

The changes that the tempestuous but empathetic Jia Bao-yu undergoes over the course of his life, beginning at about age 12.

The romantic triangle of Jia Bao-yu and two women: the tearful, brilliant Lin Dai-yu and the charming, proper Xue Bao-chai.

Wang Xi-feng's charismatic personality, capable management skills, corruption and fate.

All of these events occur in the context of a powerful house of declining fortunes, Confucian values that are definitely frayed around the edges, and a Buddhist (-Daoist) perspective that problematizes what should be taken as the Real.

There is definitely reading pleasure in keeping these three stories in mind. However, just enjoying the small sub-stories, the many detailed descriptions, the wordplay, and so on, is without a doubt a major pleasure in reading this story. It is better to read and enjoy than worry over losing track of the story.

Highlights

Chpts 10-18

The Qin Shi storyline: the nature of her affair (Chpt 10), her illness (Chpt 10), her appearance to WANG Xi-feng for important advice (Chpt 13), and her death (Chpt 13).

Xi-feng's appointment as supervisor of the Ning-guo estate (Chpt 13), her harsh management style (Chpt 14) and her readiness for corrupt activity (Chpt 15).

Xi-feng's cruel treatment of the licentious Jia Rui (Chpt 11-12)

The Bao-yu / Qin Zhong storyline, with his interest in a nun and his death. (Chpt 15, 16)

JIA Yuan-chun becomes an Imperial Concubine and Prospect Garden is built for her Visitation. Poetry has an enormous roll in all of these chapters. (Chpt 16-18)

Chpts 19-26

Bao-yu's 15th-year birthday celebrations (Chpt 22)

Bao-yu's face is burned (Chpt 25)

Spell cast over Bao-yu and Xi-feng by necromancer (Chpt 25)

Chpts 27-35

- Bao-yu begins to notice Bao-chai's beauty (Chpt 28)
- Bao-yu declaration of his love for Dai-yu but she is not present (Chpt 32)
- Golden commits suicide (Chpt 32)
- Bao-yu is severely beaten by his father (Chpt 33)
- Lady Wang seeks Aroma's help in managing Bao-yu (Chpt 34)
- Bao-chai begins to appear as a possible partner in marriage for Bao-yu (Chpt 35)

Chpts 36-43

- Bao-chai overhears Bao-yu's secret predisposition towards Dai-yu, not her. (Chpt 36)
- The formation of the poetry writing club "Crab-flower Club" and extended comments on poetry. (Chpt 37 & 38)
- Grannie Liu's visit with the partying and teasing that is involved. (Chpts 39-42)
- Xi-feng's birthday party (Chpt 43)

Chapter-by-chapter comments

Chapters 1-5, general comment

The first five chapters build the framework of the story both in its metaphysical shape, earthy settings, and primary character relationships. They take our very young protagonist Bao-yu, about age 12, up through his loss of sexual innocence. While Jia Yu-cun is a frequent name in these chapters, in the larger scheme of things, he functions primarily to bring the main characters together. (His name can also mean "false words exists".)

Chapter 01

The chapter creates the Daoist-Buddhist, supernatural framework of the novel: Jia Bao-yu and Lin Dai-yu have a karmic relationship on the spiritual plane and are sent to earth, the Land of Illusion, to live out this fate. On the heavenly plane, Dai-yu was a flower brought to live by a magic stone (Bao-yu), who over-watered her. She must now repay the debt through a life of tears.

In my opinion, the love interest between Yu-cun and the maid introduces the story's attitude towards how easily love can spring up between two people, and change their fates.

The various disasters foreshadow the fate of the Jia family.

The phrase at the gate to the Land of Illusion states clearly the author's interest in pondering the status of reality and art's ability to render it truthfully (or not): "Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true; Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real."

Chpt 1	
basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
JIA Bao-yu	"odd unused block"

	"Divine Luminescent Stone-in-Waiting in the Court of Sunset Glow"
LIN Dai-yu	"Crimson Pearl Flower"
Caltrop	ZHEN Yin-Lian

Chapter 02

The story brings on stage our Lin Dai-yu and the sad circumstances of her family. Dai-yu lives her fate with debilitating loneliness.

It then introduces to us our Jia Bao-yu, currently age 12 or so. Bao-yu has a predilection for things feminine and a strong orientation towards women in general. It is in this chapter that he says his famous line, "Girls are made of water and boys are made of mud. When I am with girls I feel fresh and clean, but when I am with boys I feel stupid and nasty." Bao-yu is worried over constantly by his authoritative, very Confucian, father who wants him to study and be manly and his doting grandmother, who spoils him.

The wealth and status of the Jia family in general is described. Nearly all the action in our narrative has to do with members of the Jia clan and occurs within the houses and gardens of their estates. There are two connected Jia estates: Rong-guo and Ning-guo. Though there are differences between the two, and getting some of the geography of the estates into one's head is helpful, tracking Rong and Ning family members is only moderately useful in sorting out events. They are located in a fictional city Jinling, and it is this location that provides one of the alternate possible titles of this story as discussed in the first chapter: *The Twelve Beauties of Jinling*.

It is probably more helpful to notice how "essence" is used to explain character and events than to try to sort out the family histories. The genealogies in the back do this work for us.

Chpt 2 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
JIA Bao-yu	"Bao-yu"
LIN Dai-yu	"Dai-yu" "Yu-cun's pupil"
JIA Zheng	"Sir Zheng" (Bao-yu's father)

Chapter 03

This chapter brings us into the elaborate and luxurious Jia estate and we meet many of its main inhabitants for the first time. It also brings Dai-yu there where Grandmother Jia is delighted to see her and wants her to feel at home. Dai-yu and Bao-yu meet for the first time.

Chpt 3 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
LIN Ru-hai	"Ru-hai" (Dai-yu's father)
LIN Dai-yu	"Dai-yu" "Miss Lin"
Grandmother JIA neé SHI	"Lady Jia" / "old Lady Jia" "Granny" (head of Rong-guo house; grandmother who dotes on

	Bao-yu, and welcomes in Dai-yu warmly)
JIA Zheng	"Uncle Zheng" (Bao-yu's father)
WANG Xi-feng	"Peppercorn Feng" "Cousin Lian's wife" "Xi-feng"
Lady WANG	(Bao-yu's mother)
Aroma	"Pearl" "Aroma" (primary maid to Bao-yu originally in the employ of Grandmother Jia)
XUE Pan	"Xue Pan" (bully brother of the sweet Xue Bao-chai)

Chapter 04

This chapter is a sharp commentary on corruption in the legal system. It gives a rich description, as well, of Xue Pan, whom we will encounter regularly in the story. It introduces us to his much much nicer, 2-years younger sister, Xue Bao-chai, who will be a primary love interest of Bao-yu. It is because of Xue Pan's ill deeds that he and his sister come to live at the Jia estate.

Caltrop (still known as Ying-lian), the girl who went missing in Chapter 2, reappears here as the unfortunate slave to Xue Pan.

Chpt 4 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
Caltrop	"Bottle-gourd [Temple] girl" "slave girl" "[ZHEN] Ying-lian"
Lady WANG	(Bao-yu's mother)
XUE Pan	"Xue" / "Young Xue" "Xue Pan" "Oaf King" (bully brother of the sweet Xue Bao-chai)

Chapter 05

The prone-to-argue chemistry between Bao-yu and Dai-yu begins to become evident, as they get to know each other better.

The heart of this chapter is Bao-yu's dream which occurs when he falls asleep in the sweet-smelling chamber of his nephew Jia Rong's wife, Qin-shi, who has seduced him to come to sleep there. In the dream, the fairy Disenchantment allows him to see riddles that indicate the fate (many of them bad) of the women of the Jia estates. Note the appendix on these poems, in particular Xi-feng's poem and how Dai-yu and Bao-chai seem to share a single poem.

Disenchantment also introduces Bao-yu to sex by giving him secret instructions in the art of love and encouraging him to sleep with her little sister Qin Ke-qing (a word play on *qing ke qing* which can mean to under-regard passion and also mean that passion can overturn one's

life). Disenchantment also asserts that he is “the most lustful person I have ever known in the whole world.”

The title of this volume derives from this important chapter.

Chpt 5 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
JIA Bao-yu	“Bao-yu” “dream-soul of our darling Crimson Pearl”
LIN Dai-yu	“Dai-yu” “Crimson Pearl”
Qin-shi	“Qin-shi” “Qin Ke-qing” (childhood name of Qin-shi and also her name within Bao-yu’s dream) “Two-in-One” (since Bao-yu thinks this fairy reminds him both of Dai-yu and Bao-chai) (Qin-shi is married to Jia Rong, but, as we will learn, is having an affair with her father-in-law, Cousin Zhen)

Chapter 06

Bao-yu’s maid Aroma, 2 years his senior, notices Bao-yu’s wet dream, and they make love. Aroma will remain a loyal and sensible advisor-companion to Bao-yu for a long time.

There is a comic interlude in the main story with the arrival of Granny Liu who wants to receive some financial benevolence from her wealthy relatives. The story does serve, however, to develop Wang Xi-feng’s character, and hint at the declining fortunes of the Jia household.

Chpt 6 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
WANG Xi-feng	“Xi-feng” “Mrs Lian” “Auntie”
Grandmother JIA	“Her Old Ladyship”
JIA Rong	“Jia Rong” “Master Rong” (husband of Qin-shi, the sweet-smelling girl/fairy with whom Bao-yu slept in the previous chapter)

Chapter 07

The personalities and relationships on the main amorous triangle are developed: Bao-chai is not well, and takes for her illness “Cold Fragrance Pills”. Bao-yu is concerned about her. Dai-yu plays with metal puzzles. (The element metal is associated with Bao-chai.)

The tragic story line that begins with Qin-shi continues: Bao-yu meets, and becomes close friends with, Qin-shi’s brother Qin Zhong, while an elderly and very argumentative, difficult servant, Big Jiao, hints (“poking in the ashes”) publically of the affair between Qin-shi and her father-in-law Jia Zhen (Cousin Zhen).

Chpt 7	
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basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
QIN Zhong	"Qin-shi's brother"
WANG Xi-feng	"Mrs Lian"
LIN Dai-yu	"Miss Lin"
Grandmother JIA	"Her Old Ladyship"
JIA Zhen	"Cousin Zhen" (Jia Rong's father and lover of Rong's wife)
JIA Bao-yu	"Uncle Bao"

Chapter 08

Qin Zhong will attend Bao-yu's school.

Grandmother Jia and Wang Xi-feng attend the first of many plays that will occur in the narrative.

Bao-yu and Bao-chai learn, based on the inscriptions on their pendants, that they have an affinity to each other.

Relationships between Dai-yu, Bao-yu and Bao-chai continue to develop, including hints of jealousy between Dai-yu and Bao-chai.

Chpt 8 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
WANG Xi-feng	"Mrs Lian"
JIA Bao-yu	"Cousin Bao"
LIN Dai-yu	"Miss Lin"
JIA Zhen	"Cousin Zhen" (Jia Rong's father and lover of Rong's wife)
JIA Zheng	"Sir Zheng" (Bao-yu's father)
XUE Pan	"Cousin Pan" "Pan" (Bao-chai's difficult and dangerous brother)
Lady WANG	(Bao-yu's mother)

Chapter 09

Bao-yu, Qin Zhong, Xue Pan are all at school together. A fight breaks out over accusations of a homoerotic relationship between Qin Zhong and a boy named "Darling." The spineless Jia Rui, who is more interested in currying favor with people, has been in temporary charge of the school and cannot manage this trouble. Jia Rui is here introduced. He is soon to meet a tragic fate at the hands of Wang Xi-feng. This chapter is well known for its homoerotic overtones.

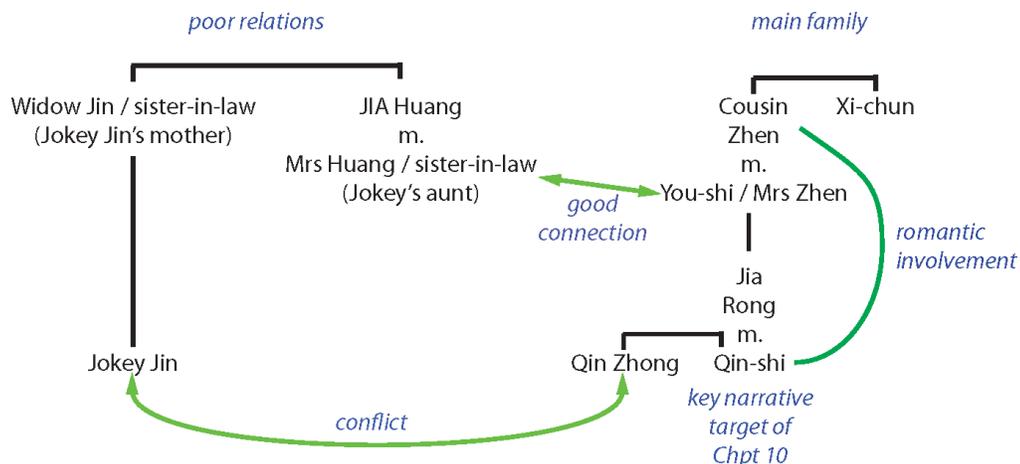
Chpt 9 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
JIA Zhen	"Cousin Zhen" (Jia Rong's father and lover of Rong's wife)
JIA Rong	"Jia Rong" (husband of Qin-shi)
JIA Zheng	"Sir Zheng" (Bao-yu's father)
WANG Xi-feng	"Mrs Lian"

Chapter 10

General comments: The Qin-shi story is developed.

The story resumes with Jia Rui urging Jokey Jin to kowtow before Qin Zhong. As Jokey Jin returns home, he ponders on the incident and feels more incensed. He argues that Qin Zhong has no other footing besides that of Bao-yu's friendship. When his mother's sister-in-law, Mrs. Huang learns about the scandalous behavior of the boys at school, she vows to visit You-shi and complain. (She has a good connection with You-shi, and You-shi is mother-in-law to Qin-shi, who is Qin Zhong's older sister.) On her arrival at the Ning-guo Mansion, however, she learns about Qin-shi's unusual and alarming illness and never mentions the original reasons for her visit.

You-shi and Cousin (JIA) Zhen (who is secretly sleeping with Qin-shi, his daughter-in-law) continue their conversation after Mrs. Huang departs. Cousin Zhen explains how none of the doctors are able to diagnose and cure Qin-shi's ailment. He then recalls Mr. Feng's eminent recommendation of a doctor with the surname of Zhang, who is proficient in the principles of medicine, and immediately sends a servant to invite him to come. Dr. Zhang arrives to treat Qin-shi, and his diagnosis and prescription are uncanny. In detail, Dr. Zhang implies in his explanations that Qin-shi's failing health is a result of her lustful desires and her unclean relationship with her father-in-law.



Chpt 10 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
XUE Pan	"Mr Xue" (bully brother of Bao-chai)
WANG Xi-feng	"Mrs Lian"

Chapter 11

General comments: This chapter shows an amorous private side JIA Rui, who will meet a tragic fate at the hands of WANG Xi-feng. This chapter continues the story of the ailing Qin-shi. Thus we have two story lines that illustrate how illicit affairs can destroy someone.

Jia Jing (Cousin Zhen's father and head of the Ning-guo house)'s birthday is celebrated at the Ning-guo house without him.

When the ladies of the Rong-guo house arrive, they inquire about Qin-shi's illness. You-shi tells them that she refuses to eat and that she hasn't had a period for two months, but the doctor says Qin-shi is not pregnant.

After dinner, Xi-feng, who is close to Qin-shi, visits her with Bao-yu. At her bed, Qin-shi tells Xi-feng how happy she is to have married into this family and how much she has tried to be worthy of this family, but laments that she cannot repay their kindness now that her life is expiring.

After Xi-feng leaves Qin-shi, Xi-feng is suddenly approached by her cousin Jia Rui (the schoolmaster's grandson) in the garden. Jia Rui is infatuated with her and makes his intentions clear. Instead of telling Jia Rui that his attentions are unwelcome, Xi-feng mischievously provokes him by complimenting him and pretending to welcome a future private visit from him. She actually despises Jia Rui and thinks he is an odious creature. Xi-feng then rejoins the party.

Back at the Rong Mansion, Grandma Jia is worried about Qin-shi and tells Xi-feng to go see her again. Xi-feng chats with Qin-shi and urges her to take a more optimistic view of her illness, but Qin-shi doesn't seem to have any desire to stay alive. She also talks to You-shi about preparing for the end.

After reporting Qin-shi's conditions to Grandmother Jia, Patience (Xi-feng's primary maid) informs Xi-feng of Jia Rui's visit during her absence, which angers Xi-feng and she plans to teach him a lesson.

Chpt 11 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
JIA Jing	"grandfather" "Uncle" (head of Ning-guo household, and the object of the birthday celebration in this chapter)
JIA Zhen	"Cousin Zhen" (Jia Rong's father, Jia Jing's son)
JIA Rong	"Rong" (Jia Zhen's son, Jia Jing's grandson)
Grandmother JIA	"Lady Jia" "grandmother"
QIN-shi	"Rong's wife"
JIA She, JIA Zheng	"Sir She" "Sir Zheng" "Great Uncle" (Rong's perspective) (both son's of Grandmother Jia and of the same generation as birthday-man Jia Jing)
WANG Xi-feng	"Auntie" (Qin-shi's perspective) "Mrs Lian"
JIA Rui	"Cousin Rui" "Mr Rui" (grandson of schoolmaster, becomes tragic plaything of Xi-feng)

Chapter 12

General comment: The JIA Rui / WANG Xi-feng storyline comes to a conclusion. A mirror is an important element in this story; mirrors are often important in this story. This is, I believe, one of the only two times that semen is clearly mentioned in the many volumes. (The first was JIA Bao-yu's wet dream.) We learn a great deal about Xi-feng's character from this storyline, as well as have a clear view of the hidden dark side of the Jia estate.

Jia Rui visits Xi-feng. When Xi-feng complains that men "have only to set eyes on a woman to begin another affair," Jia Rui denies himself as being such a man. She compliments him and flirts with him and he believes her. Jia Rui offers to be her friend when Xi-feng complains that she is always lonely inside the Rong mansion.

Xi-feng then instructs him to wait at the mansion's gallery for her at night. Jia Rui waits for Xi-feng all night in severe coldness, but she does not show up.

When Jia Rui returns home, he is punished by his strict grandfather, Dai-ru, for staying out all night. He is whacked thirty, forty times, banned from eating and is to kneel on the courtyard preparing ten day's homework. All of this weakens his health greatly.

He visits Xi-feng again two days later, and Xi-feng decides that he hasn't learned his lesson yet so she instructs him to wait for her in an empty room again. When Jia Rui hears somebody approaching the place he grabs her and starts kissing her, only to discover that the person he is holding is not Xi-feng but Jia Rong, followed by Rong's dear friend Jia Qiang. Jia Qiang and Jia Rong blackmail Jia Rui for money in exchange for their silence.

Jia Rui escapes the Rong-guo mansion in disgrace and covered in excrement. Even though Xi-feng has tricked him twice, he still longs for her, but he doesn't dare return to the Rong-guo mansion. Jia Rui fears that his grandfather Jia Dai-ru will find out about the IOUs as Jia Rong and Jia Qiang come around frequently to ask for payment.

Jia Rui falls sick and within a year his condition is dire. Jia Dai-ru asks Lady Wang (wife of the ineffective head of the family Jia Zheng—Xi-feng is closer to running things) for help with medicine, but Xi-feng interferes with the acquisition of medicine. The medicine fails to heal Jia Rui.

One day a Daoist monk stops by the mansion and claims to have a cure for Jia Rui's illness. He gives him "A Mirror for the Romantic," which was made in the Land of Illusion and has the ability to cure young men plagued with "impure mental activities". He instructs Jia Rui to only look at the back of the mirror and not the front, but as soon as Jia Rui sees an unpleasant skull in the back, he turns the mirror around. On the other side, Xi-feng is beckoning him in; his soul enters and they make love. He does this several times before two figures shackle his soul as he is about to return from the mirror and he dies. A big pool of semen is found underneath his body.

At year's end Lin Ru-hai (Dai-yu's father) becomes seriously ill and asks Grandmother Jia to send Dai-yu to see him again. Bao-yu is distressed by Dai-yu's departure.

Chpt 12 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
JIA Lian	"Cousin Lian" (Xi-feng's husband)
JIA Rong	"Rong" (he would be part of the next younger generation than Xi-feng, as is Jia Rui, but not that much younger)
JIA Rui	"Cousin Rui" "Uncle Rui" (parentless, raised by his grandfather, Schoolmaster Dai-ru)
WANG Xi-feng	"Auntie Lian"

Chapter 13

General comments: Qin-shi dies in this chapter, but not before sharing important advice with Xi-feng. The eventual downfall of Xi-feng is presented in this chapter; what Qin-shi recommends Xi-feng fails to carry through.

Qin-shi's spirit visits Xi-feng to express her two final concerns just before her death from a lingering and mysterious illness. One concerns expenses for seasonal offerings at the ancestral burial ground, the other on funding for the clan school.

Upon Qin-shi's death, Bao-yu, who has been going to bed early ever since Dai-yu left for her father, experiences a sudden stabbing pain and spits out a mouthful of blood. However, Bao-yu disregards Aroma's concerns for his health and insists on going to Ning-guo mansion immediately.

Qin-shi's sudden death is a blow to everyone in the family. You-shi falls ill. Gen, Qin-shi's young maid Gem takes her own life by bashing her head against a pillar.

Cousin Zhen (her father-in-law and lover) insists on making her funeral as respectable and as sumptuous as possible. He also spends 1200 taels of silver to buy a position for Jia Rong (her husband) as an officer of the fifth rank in the Imperial Guard. Her burial takes place forty-nine days later with proper Buddhist rites.

Although Cousin Zhen, for the most part, feels satisfied with the funeral arrangements, he realizes that You-shi's illness due to Qin-shi's death would prevent her from carrying out her household duties. Bao-yu, who by chance is next to him as he dwells on the problem, whispers the person he deems perfect for solving Cousin Zhen's predicament. Overjoyed, Cousin Zhen approaches Lady Xing, Lady Wang, and Wang Xi-feng to ask if Xi-feng could help in managing the social obligations for a month.

Eager to demonstrate her administrative abilities Xi-feng accepts Cousin Zhen's offer. He points out that she should neither worry about saving him money nor hold back from working and disciplining his servants. Declining Cousin Zhen's offer of a room to stay in, Xi-feng agrees to come everyday in order to carry out both her own duties as well as those of the Ning-guo household. Xi-feng goes off alone to formulate what her job would entail and focuses on five major flawed business practices in the Ning-guo establishment.

Chapter 14

Story Summary: WANG Xi-feng's cold but capable administrative abilities are showcased in this chapter, which therefore also gives a good sense for how a wealthy household manages its affairs. Qin-shi remains a beloved memory and her funeral is the occasion for the Prince of Bei-jing to meet Bao-yu. They will become friends. Also, since Dai-yu's father has now passed away, she will be returning to the Jia estates.

As Xi-feng takes over the management of the Ning-guo mansion as a competent but harsh mistress. The structured system she installs contrasts with the prior informal practices. When one maid arrives late to roll call, Xi-feng makes an example of the maid by having her publicly flogged and ordering her wages stopped for a month.

Despite Xi-feng's preoccupation with the mansion's management, she still checks in on You-shi and Cousin Zhen by sending them food, and she still openly mourns Qin-shi's death whenever she is reminded of her friend.

Bao-yu and Qin Zhong visit Xi-feng in her office in the Ning-guo mansion, designated for her to take care of matters regarding Qin-shi's funeral. While there, Xi-feng learns that Mr Lin (Dai-yu's father) has passed away.

With Qin-shi's funeral nearing, Xi-feng finds herself terribly busy, but somehow manages to keep herself together. On the day of the funeral, many guests arrive, notably the Prince of Bei-jing.

The Prince of Bei-jing requests Jia Zheng to introduce Bao-yu to him. Upon meeting the Prince of Bei-jing, Bao-yu is pleased with the stories he was told regarding the Prince's beauty.

Chpt 14 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
WANG Xi-feng	"Mrs Lian"
LIN Ru-hai	"Mr Lin" (Dai-yu's father)
LIN Dai-yu	"Miss Lin" "Cousin Lin"

Chapter 15

General comments: This chapter affords an opportunity to see Xi-feng taking advantage of her power position, and also returns to exploring the playful relationship between Bao-yu and his dear friend QIN Zhong.

Qin-shi's body is transported to the burial grounds owned by the Jia estates as the Temple of the Iron Threshold. Xi-feng takes Bao-yu with her. Qin Zhong also walks quickly alongside Bao-yu. It is the first time for Bao-yu to visit the countryside and he is therefore very excited.

However, though there are accommodations for visitors at Iron Threshold, the nearby Water-moon Priory is selected as their stay-over location. Xi-feng comes from a wealthy family and the Iron Threshold is "too inconvenient".

Once at the Water-moon Priory, Euergesia brings her two disciples Benevolentia and Sapientia to meet them, and Sapientia falls in love with Qin Zhong.

Euergesia talks to Xi-feng about Zhang's daughter who is betrothed to the son of a captain, when Mr. Li proposes to her. Jin-ge does not want to marry the son of a captain but he is insistent and therefore Euergesia asks Xi-feng to write a letter to the captain to solve the issue, which she agrees for 3000 taels of silver.

As Xi-feng and Euergesia talk, Qin Zhong takes the advantage of the dark and makes love to Sapientia when they are interrupted by Bao-yu. They stay at the Water-moon Priory for one more day, after which Qin Zhong and Sapientia have to say goodbye. Bao-yu teases Qin Zhong and adds, "Wait until we are both in bed and I'll settle accounts with you then." The intimacy of Bao-yu and Qin Zhong is thus made clear.

Chpt 15 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
Sapientia	"Sappy" (Water-moon Priory novice, romantic interest of QIN Zhong)

Chapter 16

General comments: In this chapter we have the beginnings of Prospect Garden, the space which will become the primary setting for most of the novels events. It is being built because one of the Jia girls, Yuan-chun, a full, elder sister of Bao-yu and very close to him over the years, has been designated as an Imperial Concubine. This chapter includes depressing collateral damage in Xi-feng's way of accomplishing things. Finally, we have yet another case of an illicit affair leading to illness (and death) in the story of Sapiaientia and Qin Zhong.

After Qin-shi's funeral, Xi-feng, Bao-yu and Qin Zhong return to the city.

Qin Zhong falls sick and is unable to study.

Xi-feng settles the betrothal issue but Mr. Li and Jin-ge commit suicide. She hangs herself when her first betrothed is sent away and her father drowns himself when he hears of her death.

Jia Zheng is summoned to the palace by the Emperor where his daughter Yuan-chun (Bao-yu's sister) is promoted to become the Secretary to the Empress and Imperial Concubine.

We learn, in a side story, that Caltrop has been given to XUE Pan as a chamber wife and that Xi-feng's wayward husband JIA Lian has noticed her.

Nun Sapiaientia secretly visits Qin Zhong but is found out. Zhong is beaten by his father Bang-ye; this makes Zhong even more ill than he was and Bang-ye dies from the emotional shock of the total event.

Bao-yu is deeply troubled but cheers up somewhat with the return of Dai-yu who is more beautiful than before and who has brought many books with her.

Ning-guo and Rong-guo are seen making enormously elaborate preparations for the visitation of the Yuan-chun, including major new construction. (Yuan-chun, now an imperial concubine, now occupies a higher social status. Her previous home is socially unsuitable for her and a new home has to be constructed.) Jia Zheng and Nannie Zhou's two sons also go to Suzhou to purchase instruments and female musicians as well as costumes for the visitation.

As they prepare for the visitation, Bao-yu worries about Qin Zhong who is still ill. The chapter concludes with Bao-yu, notified by Tealeaf, rushing to Qin Zhong only to see him temporarily regain consciousness before dying.

Chpt 16 basic name of some characters	some variations seen in this chapter
XUE Pan	"Mr Xue" "Cousin Xue" (bully brother of Bao-chai)
Caltrop	our "Bottle-gourd [Temple] girl" "slave girl" "[ZHEN] Ying-lian" from Chapter 4 and earlier. The little Zhen girl that became lost.

Chapter 17

General comments: Prospect Garden is built; it is now time to name its many locations. This chapter spends loving time with poetry, and develops the relationship between Jia Zheng and his son Bao-yu. Zheng is a stern Confucian father to his son, but secretly understands that his son has talent. In the final pages of the chapter, a typical fight breaks out between Bao-yu and Dai-yu. Generally speaking, it is Dai-yu's excitability that sets off these events.

Jia Zheng goes to the garden that has been newly built for the visit of his daughter-turned-Imperial-Concubine, Yuan-chun. He is accompanied by his group of literary gentlemen with the goal of writing inscriptions for the different special areas in the garden. Zheng and the gentleman run into Bao-yu who has been sent into the garden by Grandmother Jia to cheer him up—Bao-yu is still upset over the death of his best friend Qin Zhong.

Jia Zheng had been told by Bao-yu's teacher, Jia Dai-ru, that Bao-yu had a talent for writing couplets. He decides to test Bao-yu's talent by having him come up with couplets for the garden. Jia Zheng belittles Bao-yu's attempts and scolds him for his criticisms of the suggestions given by the gentleman. However, Jia Zheng and the gentleman continue to be pleased with Bao-yu's talent for composing couplets and appropriate names for the garden.

Throughout the chapter there are descriptions of the beauty and luxury of the garden, and of course the poetry of Bao-yu.

Jia Zheng and Bao-yu continue to walk around the garden naming different areas and creating poems for them. Bao-yu is constantly bullied by his father with every contribution. His father is not completely displeased but refuses to show he is pleased in any way.

Bao-yu is finally dismissed by his father but is immediately confronted by his father's pages. They demand reward for not disturbing him with his grandmother's worries and thus providing this valuable opportunity for him to prove his literary skills to his father. The pages take his purse and all the trinkets that he was wearing.

When Bao-yu gets back to his room, Aroma notices that the trinkets and purse are gone and Dai-yu overhears. Dai-yu thinks Bao-yu gave away the purse she gave him and throws a fit, cutting up the perfume sachet that she was making for him. Bao-yu shows Dai-yu that he was wearing the purse she gave him around his neck hidden by his clothes so that it could never be taken. After that, he comforts and calms Dai-yu down.

The two go to Bao-chai's room and notice that everyone there is excited because Jia Qiang has brought back the child actresses, costumes, instructors, and all else needed for the plays.

Lin Zhi-xiao's wife comes in as well announcing that she has successfully purchased twenty four little nuns and also tells them of an 'unshaved nun' by the name of Adamantina. Lady Wang is very interested in Adamantina and orders Lin Zhi-xiao's wife to send a formal written invitation to Adamantina.

Chapter 18

General comments: The central event of this chapter is Yuan-chun's return to her house as an Imperial Concubine, with her visitation of Prospect Garden, the great deal of poetry written on this occasion and her later private confession of her loneliness as a concubine. This chapter allows us to see the literary skill of Dai-yu, who is proving to be a woman of exceptional intelligence.

The Jia family prepares for a brief family reunion with Yuan-chun—the Imperial Concubine, and Bao-yu's older sister—and they spend many hours preparing. From descriptions, we learn the party is well decorated, extravagant, and very lively with the many in attendance. Bao-yu's inscriptions displayed throughout several buildings please Yuan-chun.

However, when she and her family break from the party, Yuan-chun's reunion with her family reveals her unhappiness in court. She digresses from her public composure and breaks down in front of her grandma and other women, asking what the point of luxury is when she is separated from those she loves, revealing the hollow glory as the Imperial Consort must endure painful homesickness for her family. After venting and crying some, Yuan-chun summons Bao-yu, whom she greets with a loving embrace.

Last part of this chapter portrays Yuan-chun's visit to her family, as she enjoys all the beautiful scenery around the house and garden as much as she can, while reminiscing about the joys of being back home. She commends everyone to complete sets of inscription and couplets dedicated to the garden. Bao-yu is having trouble completing all four poems. His last one "The Hopeful Sign" was his best because Dai-yu had tossed him a scratch of her idea. Later Yuan-chun comments that it was the best out of four he had composed. Later on Yuan-chun distributes the gifts from the emperor individually. At Yuan-chun's parting, she is sad to leave her family and forces herself to smile, without letting her family worry and grieve for her.

Chapter 19

Story summary: Everyone except Xi-feng is idle after Bao-yu's sister Yuan-chun, the Imperial Concubine, returns to the palace after her visit home. The very idle Bao-yu was over at Cousin Zhen's house to see their New Year lanterns and to watch some plays when, having had enough of the noisy plays, he decides to take a break and revisit a painting. Instead he catches his servant Tealeaf having sex with a girl. Later Bao-yu and Tealeaf pay a secret visit to Aroma, who returned home for a New Year's party. Meanwhile, Bao-yu's maids back home entertain themselves and Nannie Li comes by to inquire about Bao-yu, drinking the koumiss milk Bao-yu saved for Aroma. Bao-yu and Tealeaf return home, with Aroma arriving later. Bao-yu discovers that Nannie Li drank the koumiss, but Aroma diverts the subject to prevent unpleasantness. They talk and Aroma tells Bao-yu that she heard that her family is trying to buy her out of service, which startles Bao-yu.

However, although Aroma's mother and brother had in fact discussed purchasing her out of service, Aroma had adamantly argued that there is no need for her at home. Her mother and brother had acquiesced to her remaining in Bao-yu's service. When Aroma, untruthfully, mentions that she has to (and wants to) rejoin her family, Bao-yu becomes upset and asserts that he won't let her go. Aroma retorts that he does not have the authority to keep her and tells him that she is just his maid. Convinced that Aroma's departure is certain, Bao-yu goes to bed "in a thoroughly bad humor." Aroma rouses Bao-yu from his sleep and provides him with a three-part ultimatum if she is to stay. Aroma's three conditions demand Bao-yu: (1) to stop ranting away without thinking first, (2) to pretend to like studying and not to make sarcastic remarks about it, (3) to stop talking about people's appearances and playing with their make-up. Bao-yu enthusiastically agrees and Aroma affirms that she will never leave him. The next morning, Bao-yu discovers Aroma sick in bed with the chills, and after providing her with medicine and a quilt, departs for Dai-yu's room. Dai-yu, in the middle of her midday nap, is awoken by Bao-yu's voice and he tells her that napping after a meal is unhealthy. Bao-yu attempts to share a pillow with Dai-yu and discovers an irresistible and intoxicating fragrance coming from Dai-yu's sleeve. Bao-yu threatens to tickle her in order to smell her sleeve and Dai-yu agrees. He takes long sniffs of her sleeve until Dai-yu pulls

her arm away. Bao-yu then tells the story of hungry cave mice in search of food and alludes to Dai-yu, calling her the “sweetest sweet potato of them all.” Dai-yu pinches his lips together for making fun of her and Bao-chai enters and reprimands him as well.

Chapter 20

Story summary

Nannie Li is very upset at a sick Aroma and is yelling at her because she feels she is not getting the proper respect she deserves. Due to her illness, Aroma doesn't notice Nannie Li's entrance, and consequently doesn't get up and welcome her. Nannie Li also accuses Aroma of trying to win Bao-yu over and making him ignore her commands. Bao-yu gently defends Aroma, and he, Bao-chai and Dai-yu all try to placate Nannie Li. Xi-feng overhears and intervenes and takes Nannie Li away for food and drink. The sick Aroma gently chastises Bao-yu for offending many people on her behalf and falls asleep. Bao-yu and Musk have some time together, and he combs her hair.

The next day, many people partake in a game of Racing Go. Because this chapter takes place during the New Year's holiday, everyone, including masters and servants, are taking a break from work for a few days. Among the players are Jia Huan, Bao-chai, Caltrop, and Oriole. Jia Huan, a master, is the son of one of Bao-yu's father's concubines. He cheats at the game so that he would not lose to Oriole, a servant. He then tries to defend himself, and to justify his “cheating a maid out of a few coppers”, by using the excuse that he is only a concubine's son. Thus, Jia Huan reveals his insecurity of his place in the household. Bao-yu appears soon thereafter, and tells Jia Huan to just leave, if he's so unhappy. Jia Huan does leave, and back at his place, Jia Huan's mother, Aunt Zhao, scolds him for playing with Bao-chai and “their lot”, who are “above” him. When Xi-feng walks by and hears the scolding, she takes Jia Huan out of the apartment and tells him that he *is* one of the masters, that he needn't fuss over money, and that he should have more self-respect. She gives him some money and he goes off to play.

Shi Xiang-yun, a cousin of Bao-yu, Dai-yu, and Bao-chai's, comes to visit. At Grandmother Jia's place, Dai-yu sees Bao-yu entering with Bao-chai and learns that he has been playing with her. Dai-yu becomes jealous and upset and starts an argument with Bao-yu. When Bao-chai pulls Bao-yu away, Dai-yu breaks into tears. Seeing this, Bao-yu changes his attitude. He comforts her with smooth talk and promises that she is the closest to him in terms of friendship and familial relations.

Chapter 21

Dai-yu and Xiang-yun continue their argument, which Bao-yu gets in the middle of. Dai-yu victimizes herself and complains that everyone is against her. Bao-chai comes into the scene and advises the two girls to forget their differences. The argument is only dropped when a servant calls them to dinner. Following dinner, Bao-yu continues to spend time with his cousins despite repeated warnings by Aroma. He stays in the girls' room late into the night and is back in their room early the next morning. Bao-yu even does his morning washings in the girls' room and convinces Xiang-yun to do his hair. Back in Bao-yu's room, Aroma is doing her own morning washing routine alone. Bao-chai stops by to ask about Bao-yu's whereabouts. Upon hearing Aroma's irritated

response that he no longer has time to spend in his own room, Bao-chai realizes how perceptive this servant is and stops to chat for a bit. When Bao-yu returns, Bao-chai promptly leaves and he wonders why. When he asks Aroma, she answers rudely. It is clear that she is upset so he attempts to apologize. When she ignores him, he asks Musk what is going on. Confronted by hostility from Musk as well, Bao-yu becomes angered himself. In his state of bitterness, Bao-yu reads part of the *Zhuang-zi* and adds his own commentary against women, specifically Aroma, Musk, Dai-yu and Bao-chai, in the margin. Finally, he goes to sleep. When he wakes the next morning, he finds Aroma, lying in bed next to him. He treats her as if nothing had happened the day before but because she was trying to teach him a lesson the previous day, she continues to ignore him.

Aroma finally breaks her silence and talks to Bao-yu again, letting him know that he should not spend so much of his time with his girl cousins. Bao-yu feels touched by her anger and promises to listen to her. Meanwhile, Xi-feng and Jia Lian's baby daughter contracts smallpox and as part of the healing ritual, Jia Lian must sleep separated from his wife while she worships the Smallpox Goddess. Jia Lian is a man who cannot abstain from sex and now separated from Xi-feng, he is taken over by his unfulfilled desires. He sets up a rendezvous with the cook's wife, "the Mattress," and the two form a secret understanding. After the smallpox seems to pass, Jia Lian is allowed back to Xi-feng's side. While tidying up his things, the maid, Patience, finds a woman's hair and knowing what it means, she confronts Jia Lian. He begs her to keep it a secret from Xi-feng and she does so when Xi-feng enters the room, asking pointed questions about her husband's behavior. Overcome by gratitude, Jia Lian tries to sleep with Patience, but she rejects him. He begins to rant about the day that he will show Xi-feng who is master and the unfairness of her being able to speak to men while she becomes suspicious if he is seen with women. Patience rebukes him and leaves, but is met by Xi-feng, who insinuates a lewd relationship between Patience and Jia Lian. Patience storms off in a huff, to Jia Lian's glee, but when he tries to leave himself, he is stopped by Xi-feng.

Chapter 22

In celebration of Bao-chai's fifteenth birthday, a feast and some opera performances are arranged by the capable Xi-feng. Grandmother Jia, in preparation for Bao-chai's birthday, asks Bao-chai what sort of plays she prefers and what her most liked dishes were. Since Grandmother Jia likes lively shows, Bao-chai says that she prefers "lively shows" in order to please her. Later, at the feast, after everyone has chosen a favorite play, Bao-chai says that she would like to hear the opera *Zhi-shen* at the Monastery Gate. She is criticized by Bao-yu, who says he can't stand these noisy plays, but Bao-chai recites some of her favorite lines to Bao-yu to defend her choice and show the opera's excellent melodies. The lines she recites depict how the character is feeling as he leaves the monastery and how he is to roam about the world by himself. When Bao-chai was done reciting, Bao-yu agreed enthusiastically about the excellence of the lines, to which Dai-yu responds by shushing Bao-yu and telling him to pay attention to the play.

Bao-yu gives Xiang-yun a warning look when she tactlessly comments on the resemblance of Dai-yu to the eleven-year-old actress. That night, Xiang-yun starts

packing to go home and is just about to leave as Bao-yu comes to apologize and tell her that he had been worried for her sake and had not wanted her to offend Dai-yu. Xiang-yun is not appeased, and Dai-yu, after overhearing the conversation, is also now angry with him. In a bad mood, Bao-yu returns to his room where Aroma tries unsuccessfully to cheer him up. In his sadness, Bao-yu writes a few lines similar to the theme of nothingness that he had heard from the lines Bao-chai had recited, and then falls asleep. Dai-yu comes by to visit, and Aroma hands her the lines he has written.

Bao-yu has just written an imitation of a Buddhist *gâthâ* and a “Clinging Vine” poem. After he feels it’s perfect, he goes to bed. Dai-yu, curious as to what Bao-yu is doing, goes to his quarters. Aroma says that he is sleeping but hands her the *gâthâ* and poem. Dai-yu assures Aroma that the poem is only a joke. She then shows it to Xiang-yun and Bao-chai. Bao-chai laughs and says it’s her fault that Bao-yu believes he has found enlightenment. After she tears up the poem, Dai-yu asks her not to be hasty and says she has a plan that will knock sense into Bao-yu. The girls go to Bao-yu’s room and, through a series of *kôans* and additions to his poem, show him his ignorance regarding Buddhism. Bao-yu realizes his error and states that the poem is only a joke.

Meanwhile, Yuan-chun sends a riddle to the family and asks them to send riddles back. Grandmother Jia, inspired by Yuan-chun, throws a riddle party. Jia Zheng, her son and Bao-yu’s father, decides to join the party and makes it awkward for the others. He attempts to lighten the mood by guessing the others’ riddles. He instead discovers that the girls’ riddles are in some way morbid and becomes troubled. The group forces him to leave, and they continue on partying.

Chapter 23

Some time after Yuan-chun, the Imperial Concubine, came to visit her family, she commissions to have a copy made of all the poems about Prospect Garden that were written during her visit. The poems are to be rearranged in what she thinks is their order of merit, as well as engraved on stone in the Prospect Garden itself as a monument to her family’s literary talent. Jia Zheng takes full responsibility of her request, and work on the memorial proceeds.

Once the twenty-four little Buddhist and Daoist nuns have been moved out of the garden, Jia Zheng considers sending them to various temples and convents in the city. Zhou-shi, the widow of a poor relation of the Rong-guo Jias, hears of this and goes to Xi-feng in an attempt to get her son Jia Qin a job. Xi-feng asks her husband Jia Lian to talk to Jia Zheng about it, who agrees. Hence Jia Qin lands the job of taking the nuns to the Temple of the Iron Threshold outside the city.

Yuan-chun, the Imperial Concubine, sends word to allow Bao-chai, the other young ladies, and Bao-yu to live in Prospect Garden (that was built for her visit) to broaden and stir their creativity. Jia Zheng calls for his son and instructs him that his sister has sent him and his cousins to the garden to focus on their books, not play. If Bao-yu resorts to any unruliness he’ll be severely punished.

Bao-yu goes back to his apartments and later his grandmother’s where he finds Dai-yu pondering over where in the garden she should live. Bao-yu and Dai-yu come to live

next to each when they finally move in. Spending his time with his maids and cousins, Bao-yu's life becomes blissful. During this period they produce four *Garden Nights* poems, which reflect the carefree mood.

After moving into the Garden with the girls, Bao-yu is very content and happy with his life. Everything seems more carefree and relaxing in the Garden than when he was living at home. His happiness is thoroughly evident in the four poems he produces while there which quickly become popular among people around him, who from their enjoyment of them, urge him to write even more poems. After a while, his happiness subsides into boredom and Tealeaf, one of Bao-yu's servants, entertains Bao-yu's boredom by bringing him forbidden books about love. Though Bao-yu is warned by Tealeaf not to bring those books into the Garden, Bao-yu does so anyway and takes one of them called *Western Chamber* to read under a tree one day. As he reads, flower petals fall from a gust of wind. He collects them and drops them in the water beside the tree for fear that the petals would be trodden on if they were left on the ground. Dai-yu enters and tells Bao-yu that it is a better idea if the petals are buried because they can then become one with the earth instead of polluting the murky water when they flow downstream. Dai-yu sees Bao-yu's book and asks what he is reading. He tries to lie at first but Dai-yu catches him and eventually makes him tell her the truth. He reveals the book and allows her to read it. She is enraptured by it until she thinks that Bao-yu is trying to take advantage of her. Bao-yu protests leaving Dai-yu again satisfied and in the end, both of them enjoy a good laugh over the whole ordeal. They continue on with burying the flowers until Aroma comes to get Bao-yu for family matters. On her way back to her room, Dai-yu hears a play rehearsal where the actors are reciting beautiful thoughts about love. Their rehearsal reminds Dai-yu of what she just read with Bao-yu and it makes her so distressed she cries until someone interrupts her with a tap on her shoulder.

Chapter 24

The first half of the chapter deals with the business of Jia Yun's search for a job within the Rong-Guo mansion. As a rather distant relative, Jia Yun tends to his search with a bit of difficulty, as the Jia household is not obliged towards such a distant and unfamiliar relative. In attempt to win the favor of the Jias (particularly Xi-feng), Jia Yun visits his perfumery specialist uncle Bu Shi-ren and asks for a supply of Barus camphor and musk on credit to present to the Jias. His uncle is reluctant to the plea, and as a result Jia Yun, in a sour mood, gets up to leave. However, on the way back home Jia Yun luckily finds himself running into the Ni Er, his unruly neighbor dubbed "The Drunken Diamond". The drunken Ni Er favorably offers Jia Yun a sum of money, which Jia Yun then takes to purchase the camphor and musk offering for Xi-feng, hoping that she will place him with a favorable job.

On his way to visit Bao-yu, Jia Yun is able to convince Xi-feng to offer him a tree-planting job for the new garden at the Rong-guo mansion. Bao-yu is in his room waiting for a cup of tea; nobody comes to his calls. Crimson is the only maid who hears him and rushes to pour him a cup of tea. The other two maids, Ripple and Emerald, become overwhelmed with jealousy because they believe Crimson was trying to climb her way up. She sees Jia Yun again who has found her handkerchief.

Chapter 25

While Crimson is taking a nap, she dreams about Jia Yun. Her beauty also leaves a deep impression in Bao-yu's mind. Bao-yu tries to look for her and is interrupted when he is about to walk towards her. Jia Huan, Bao-yu's half-brother by the concubine Lady Zhao, has always been jealous of Bao-yu, and gets mad when he sees Bao-yu flirting with a maid named Sunset. Hoping to hurt Bao-yu, he deliberately knocks over a candlestick splashing some hot wax on Bao-yu's face. His face is burned and when Dai-yu comes to visit, he doesn't let her see his face, and on the next day tells Grandmother Jia that it was only an accident, taking the blame for the burn.

Jia Huan and his concubine mother Lady Zhao desperately want to inherit the Jia family properties. When Bao-yu's Buddhist godmother, Mother Ma comes to visit, Lady Zhao expresses how she dislikes Xi-feng because of her power, along with her hatred towards Bao-yu. Being a son of a concubine, Jia Huan knows that his future will be bleak unless he kills or maims Bao-yu. Lady Zhao, who is also greedy and ambitious, bribes Mother Ma to use sorcery to invoke evil spirits on both Bao-yu and Xi-feng in order to kill them, so that Lady Zhao and Jia Huan can take over their rights as the legal inheritors.

Xi-feng makes fun of Dai-yu suggesting a marriage between her and Bao-yu, and Dai-yu is very embarrassed. Suddenly, Bao-yu and Xi-feng become violently insane from Mother Ma's sorcery and incantations. They lose consciousness and seem to be near death. A scabby-headed Buddhist priest and a lame Taoist arrive and restore the magical powers of Bao-yu's Jade of Spiritual Understanding, saying that Bao-yu and Xi-feng will be recovered in 33 days.

Chapter 26

Bao-yu recovers his strength and the burns on his face heal after 33 days. Some servants and maids are rewarded for taking care of Bao-yu, but excluding those lowly ranked including Crimson. During Bao-yu's recovery, Jia Yun, who is dumbfounded at Bao-yu's extravagant wealth, often stays in the house and gets to know half of the people's names. Crimson meets Jia Yun one day at the garden and blushed when he looks back at her. Jia Yun comes to visit Bao-yu and when he is on his way out of the garden, he meets Trinket and gives her Crimson's handkerchief, with her promise to tell Jia Yun what Crimson rewards her later.

Meanwhile, Bao-yu wanders aimlessly and arrives at Dai-yu's place when he hears her quoting from *The Western Chamber*. Dai-yu blushes and pretends to be asleep, but gets even more embarrassed when Bao-yu quotes back a part about marriage. She thinks he is making fun of her and cries after being teased for her fondness for Bao-yu. As Bao-yu apologizes, Aroma tells him that "the master" has sent for him. He runs off to answer the summons and realizes that Xue Pan has sent for him for his birthday, which is on the next day, and asks Bao-yu for gifts. When Bao-yu returns, he sees Bao-chai waiting for him and they go into Bao-yu's place. Dai-yu is worried and also comes to visit but is refused admittance by two maids who cannot recognize her voice. She notices that Bao-yu and Bao-chai are inside and gets upset because she thought Bao-yu is mad at her. She begins to weep and retreats to a place beneath a flowering fruit tree.

Chapter 27

General comments:

This short chapter shows off the different personalities of Bao-chai, who doesn't worry too much over things and Dai-yu, who worries a great deal. Bao-yu's tenderness towards Bai-yu is very evident in this chapter. The storyline of the maid Crimson advances with a developing relationship with the poor Jia relative Jia Yun, who works for Xi-feng in the garden, and, in addition, Xi-feng's discovery of her and desire to take her from Bao-yu to become her own maid. The long poem expounding Dai-yu's melancholic disposition is quite lovely.

Some basic notes:

2:27—"Frowner" (颦儿) is a nickname for Dai-yu

2:24—Grain in Ear / Grain in Beard: 芒种 / 芒種

2:33—Green Delights is Bao-yu's residence in Prospect Garden

Story summary:

Dai-yu, once again depressed, avoids Bao-yu, Bao-chai and the maids with them, and spends a long, tearful night alone.

On the Day of the Grain in Ear, all the women are decorating the garden except Dai-yu. Bao-chai goes to get her but sees Bao-yu entering Dai-yu's residence (Naiad's House) and thinks better of it.

She turns away and, in the process of chasing butterflies overhears a conversation between two maids: Crimson (红玉, Hong-yu, one of Bao-yu's maids) and Trinket. They are discussing how to thank Jia Yun for returning a handkerchief of Crimson's.

The story of Crimson continues with Xi-feng appraising her as a capable maid, and assigning her the duty of carrying a complicated message, an errand she carries out excellently. Xi-feng tries to find a way to make Crimson her maid.

Bao-yu, we recall, has paid a visit to Dai-yu, but she is ignoring him. Out in the garden, Tan-chun wants a private word with Bao-yu. She gives him cash to buy her trinkets when in the markets. Tan-chun and Bao-yu are half-siblings, and quite close. (It is Tan-chun's brother Jia Huan who threw the hot wax on Bao-yu's face; their mother is Aunt Zhao, concubine to Jia Zheng.) They quibble about the shoes Tan-chun had made for Bao-yu recently.

Bao-yu, meaning to make things right with Dai-yu, finds fallen flower petals that she would usually have buried and decides to bury them for her. When he carries them to Dai-yu's grave for flowers, he finds someone reciting a long and very sad poem. He falls to the ground and weeps.

Chapter 28

General Comments:

This chapter develops the relationships between Bao-chai, Bao-yu and Dai-yu. Bao-yu and Dai-yu are getting along fairly well in this chapter, but Bao-yu will also notice Bao-chai's beauty. Hints that many think Bao-chai should become Bao-yu's wife are in this chapter, as well. Xue Pan's boorish behavior is once again on display during a drinking party with humorous poems. Crimson is transferred to Xi-feng's care.

Some Basic Notes

2:45—"A good whipping from your Pa ..." This is going to happen later.

2:63—"Her Grace" refers to Yuan-chun, the Imperial Consort.

2:65—Dai-yu's often quoted self-description (based on the Five Elements): "You forget, I'm not in the gold and jade class like you and your Cousin Bao. I'm only a common little wall-flower (草木)!"

Storyline

We learn (but are not surprised) that the person reciting aloud the long, sad poem of the last chapter was Dai-yu. Bao-yu, upon hearing the portions of the poem that claim that Dai-yu will not be long in this world, falls to the ground weeping. He thinks how sad it will be, and how empty the garden would feel, if all the beautiful women around him disappear. Dai-yu leaves while he is crying but they bump into each other again promptly and Bao-yu explains his sense of loneliness to Dai-yu, who begins to feel sympathy for him, gives up her anger towards him that had been anyway based on a misunderstanding (see the final pages of Chapter 26).

There is an extended conversation between various people about elaborate medicinal formulas. In the course of this conversation, Bao-yu teases his mother who says that his father could whip him for that type of (un-Confucian) behavior.

Xi-feng asks Bao-yu whether she can have Crimson, and Bao-yu agrees.

Bao-yu attends a party at Feng Zi-ying's house, where there is in addition Xue Pan, the female-role playing actor Jiang Yu-han (蒋玉菡 Bijou), and a high-class female entertainer Naugeuse (云儿/雲兒, Yun-er). They engage in a drinking game where poetry must be written about girls using the words "upset" "glum" "blest" and "content". Xue Pan's poetry is clumsy.

During this party, outside, Bao-yu and Jiang Yu-han get to know each other and exchange sashes. Xue Pan sees this. These will events will have later relevance.

Back at his room, Aroma notices that Bao-yu is now wearing a sash different from the one she gave him. They argue.

Xi-feng summons Crimson to her household.

Yuan-chun, the Imperial Consort, sends gifts to the family. Strangely, the gifts for Bao-yu and Bao-chai match perfectly, but Dai-yu's is different. We get some indirect information of how the family is interested in pairing Bao-chai and Bao-yu.

Bao-yu notices Bao-chai's beauty as he gazes at her white arm.

Chapter 29

General Comments

Xi-feng's fiery disposition is on display in this chapter when she strikes violently the young Daoist acolyte for getting in her way. Cousin Zhen's hot temper is also shown. The issue of Bao-yu's marriage is broached when the abbot of the Daoist temple the family visits offers to help find a bride. This makes Bao-yu exceptionally angry and this leads into an argument between Bao-yu and Dai-yu that has all the markings of a lovers' quarrel. Bao-yu is shown to have begun thinking of girls in a more "worldly" manner. The chapter has the pageantry of an outing, some nasty behavior, and a very lively lovers' argument.

Storyline

What starts as a small outing to the Daoist Temple of the Lunar Goddess becomes an all-family affair with everyone living in Prospect Garden grandly making the trip. Plays are planned.

Upon arrival Cousin Zhen comes out to greet Grandmother Jia and while Xi-feng is helping her down from her palanquin, a young Daoist acolyte runs into Xi-feng, who then strikes him severely across the face, knocking him down. Grandmother Jia, in contrast, tells him to be taken away safely, treated kindly, and given some money.

Cousin Zhen has someone spit in the face of his son, Jia Rong, because while he was working hard in the heat to receive all the ladies, Rong was cooling himself in the shade.

Abbot Zhang, a close friend of the family and now a well-appointed Daoist official, suggests to Grandmother Jia that he might be able to find a girl for Bao-yu to marry. Grandmother Jia says that it is too early, but that he should keep looking and that "looks and character" are more important than the wealth of the girl's family.

Bao-yu loans his Stone to the Abbot so he can show it to his fellow priests, who are very appreciative.

The plays begin but members of the household of General Feng begin to arrive in large numbers. Grandmother Jia decides not to return for the second day, as does Dai-yu and Bao-yu.

Bao-yu and Dai-yu argue fiercely, both thinking the other does not understand how much s/he cares. Aroma tries to mediate, as do other maids. Eventually, Bao-yu tries to smash his stone, Dai-yu throws up her medicine, all the maids are in tears, Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang hear of it and arrive worried, the two young people deny there is a problem and Grandmother Jia vents her anger on the servants who told her there was a problem.

The next day is Xue Pan's birthday. When both Dai-yu and Bao-yu skip the occasion; Grandmother Jia cries.

Aroma continues to try to heal the split between Bao-yu and Dai-yu.

Chapter 30

General comments

Dai-yu and Bao-yu again argue. Xi-feng sums up nicely their relationship: "I don't understand you two. What is it that you find to argue about? For every three days that you're friends, you must spend at least two days quarrelling. Look at you *now* — holding hands crying!" Bao-chai and Bao-yu also argue in this chapter. The pitiful story of Golden, one of Lady Wang's (Bao-yu's mother) maids, begins. Bao-yu kicks hard but accidentally Aroma in the ribs, and she spits up blood that night.

Storyline

Nightingale reprimands her mistress Dai-yu for treating Bao-yu so harshly. But when Bao-yu arrives they again argue hotly. Both talk about death. Bao-yu: "If you died, I should become a monk."

Xi-feng arrives as a peacemaker and takes them to see Grandmother Jia.

There Bao-yu says that Bao-chai is like Yang Gui-fei and this puts Bao-chai into a rage. Dai-yu is secretly satisfied.

Bao-yu flirts with Golden (Jinchuan, his mother's principal maid 金釧/金釧) and when Golden flirts back, Lady Wang wakes up, notices, strikes her, and fires her (though she has served her for 10 years).

Bao-yu chances upon an actress in the garden writing into the soil with a pin, over and over, the word “rose (薔/薔)”. He is caught in a cold rain shower.

When he returns to his residence, no one initially opens the gate which angers him. He kicks the first person to open it, not realizing this is Aroma. Aroma’s extremely kind disposition shows at this time as she does not blame him. She adds, “I’m the person you always begin things with.” Later that night she spits up blood.

Chapter 31

General comments

Various ladies and servants are irritating one another in this chapter. Bao-yu cares for Aroma, is attracted to Skybright despite their spat, and enjoys a visit from his tomboyish but appealing cousin Shi Xiang-yun. Glimpses of jealousy in this chapter.

Some Basic Notes

The Double Fifth (from wiki): The Duanwu Festival (also known as Dragon Boat Festival or 端午节 in Simplified Chinese) is a traditional and statutory holiday associated with Chinese cultures, though it is celebrated in other East Asian and Southeast Asian societies as well. ... The festival occurs on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar on which the Chinese calendar is based. This is the source of the alternative name of Double Fifth ... Three of the most widespread activities for the Duanwu Festival are eating (and preparing) zongzi, an angular rice ball wrapped in reed or bamboo leaves; drinking realgar wine, and racing dragon boats. ... Other common activities include hanging up icons of Zhong Kui (a mythic guardian figure), hanging up mugwort and calamus, taking long walks, and wearing perfumed medicine bags. Other traditional activities including a game of making an egg stand at noon, and writing spells. All of these activities, together with the drinking of realgar wine, were regarded by the ancients as effective in preventing disease or evil and promoting health and well-being. [Wallace: 5/5 is Child’s Day in Japan]

kylin = a “Chinese unicorn” hoofed fantastic animal, qilin 麒麟 (Jse: kirin)

Storyline

Aroma is very fearful about her vomiting blood. Bao-yu wants to get a doctor but she argues that it will draw attention to their romantic relationship. He secretly talks with the family doctor Wang Ji-ren who is not greatly concerned.

On the Double Fifth Lady Wang gives a party but everyone in attendance is in a bad mood, or becomes so watching those who are. The party breaks up early.

Xue Pan invites Bao-yu to a drinking party. Bao-yu returns drunk, finds someone in a bed set outdoors because of the heat. Thinking it is Aroma, he sits down next to her but it is Skybright (Qingwen, 晴雯). They talk their way through the argument of that morning where Skybright was talking back to her master and suggesting that she understood Aroma’s relationship with him.

Shi Xiang-yun visits.

Chapter 32

General comments

In this chapter, Bao-yu at last declares his love for Dai-yu except that she has already walked away. Aroma, however, hears him. Golden commits suicide, having been fired by her longtime

employer Lady Wang because of the few moments she flirted with Bao-yu, though he initiated the exchange. We glimpse again the dark side of living in the Jia estate.

Storyline

Banter among the visiting Shi Xiang-yun, Aroma, Bao-yu. Aroma seems jealous that Xiang-yun has a marriage arranged. She asks her to do some sewing for her, and Xiang-yun finally accepts. (Later Bao-chai tells Aroma that Xiang-yun is having to stay up late every night to complete her sewing but tells no one.)

Bao-yu is summoned by his father to entertain a guest. He is reluctant and Xiang-yun gives him advice that he should spend more time with the men, for his future.

Dai-yu, her head full of the stories of romances, worries that the matching kylin between Xiang-yun and Bao-yu will become the cause of a deep love between those two. However, when she goes to Green Delights to see how they might be getting on together, she overhears Xiang-yun lecturing Bao-yu on his social obligations and Bao-yu telling Xiang-yun that Dai-yu would never say such pointless things to him. She experiences a mixture of emotions that are explained in some detail: happiness, alarm, regret and sorrow. She begins to cry.

Bao-yu see her and a conversation turns once again into an argument. Both clearly have deep feelings for each other but, although near the point of expressing them, they part in tearful and angry silence.

Bao-yu then passionately declares his love for her: "Night and day, coz, sleeping and dreaming, you are never out of my mind." — But Dai-yu is gone and Aroma is standing in her place. She now understands their relationship. When Bao-chai appears, she deftly makes sure Bao-chai cannot divine the situation.

News arrives the Golden has committed suicide; she is at the bottom of a well. Lady Wang feels guilty. Bao-chai tries to relieve her feelings but Lady Wang knows the real reason for the death. Later she rebukes quietly Bao-yu and Bao-chai sees this, hearing enough to understand the basics of what really happened.

Chapter 33

General comments

Bao-yu gets along much better with women. Xue Pan, who is probably jealous of Bao-yu's good looks, gentlemanly demeanor, access to the Jia fortune, and may even be experiencing some homoerotic jealousy, lets the friendship / relationship between Bao-yu and Bijou, the actor, be known. On the other side, Jia Huan, who has already thrown hot wax on Bao-yu's face and cursed him with evil spells, and who definitely feels that he should have a chance at the Jia fortune (he is an elder brother but by a concubine, not his father's proper wife), alters the story of Golden and Bao-yu: "[Bao-yu] tried to rape ... Golden and when she wouldn't let him he gave her a beating [and so she killed herself]." The combined effect of these stories throws Bao-yu's father Jia Zheng into a rage and he beats his son nearly to death in one of the most violent scenes of the stories. Lady Wang and Grandmother Jia come to Bao-yu's rescue.

Storyline

Bao-yu, only half-conscious as he walked through the garden, overcome with thoughts of Golden, runs into his father.

A conversation between the two is escalating into an argument when a representative of Prince of Zhong-sun arrives to say that the Prince's favorite actor, Bijou, has disappeared and Bao-yu knows where he is.

Jia Zheng, greatly angered, sees the representative out when, upon returning to the room where he had asked Bao-yu to wait for him, is taken aside by Jia Huan who tells him, untruthfully, that there has been the suicide of a maid, Golden, because Bao-yu had tried to rape her.

With this double news, a very angry Zheng nearly beats his son to death.

Lady Wang, then Grandmother Jia arrive to rescue Bao-yu. Grandmother Jia threatens to move to Nanking.

Bao-yu is taken back to Green Delights to recover.

Chapter 34

General Comments

Bao-yu is surrounded by women who worry about them. Some feel he needs to reform, others are simply sympathetic to his current physical state. Dai-yu seems to be hurt as if she herself had been beaten. The charmingly nurturing and yielding Aroma, in this chapter, seems now to be someone who has insinuated herself into Bao-yu's life for her own ambitions. This had already been suggested by Xiang-yun in an earlier chapter. She forms an alliance with Lady Wang.

Storyline

Bao-yu asks Aroma to check "down there" to see how he is. While she is doing this, and telling him that he should listen to her advice better, Bao-chai arrives. She covers him. Bao-chai, too, says that he should listen to her (Bao-chai's) advice better. Bao-yu senses a strong love for him behind Bao-chai's words.

Bao-yu muses that it would almost be worth dying to feel the pleasure of so many beautiful woman caring about him.

Dai-yu visits, clearly in tremendous personal pain about the state Bao-yu is in. When she says to him, "I suppose you'll change now" he replies that he definitely will not.

Xi-feng, Aunt Xue and many other women visit.

After Bao-yu is asleep, Aroma goes to Lady Wang and in an extended conversation about how Bao-yu should reform, how he needed to be punished, and how he should be removed from the Garden, she wins her trust. Aroma has excellent strategy; she knows of the Golden affair but does not let on yet uses this as the model for why Bao-yu should be removed from the Garden. In so doing, she gains Lady Wang's trust, and creates some physical distance between Bao-yu and his cousins, while reducing her own distance to him. As Lady Wang says, "I am going to place Bao-yu entirely in your hands."

Aunt Xue, Xue Pan and Bao-chai spar over what roll Xue Pan had in Bao-yu's beating.

The next morning, Bao-chai happens to see a distraught Dai-yu leaving for her mother's place. She does not try to detain her.

Chapter 35

General Comments

This chapter begins to build Bao-chai as a strong candidate to be Bao-yu's wife. Grandmother Jia praises her to everyone and Lady Wang chimes in with agreement. Oriole, maid to Bao-chai, begins work for Bao-yu and speaks very well about her mistress. Bao-yu is doubly attracted to both maid and mistress. Dai-yu has removed herself from much of this conversation and seems somewhat side-lined in this chapter. In addition, the private affairs of the Xue family are

showcased in a conversation between mother and the two siblings, both arguments and reconciliations.

Storyline

Dai-yu returns to Naiad's House.

This is a chapter mostly of conversations and meals, among various people. Many of the conversations occur in Bao-yu's room.

Chapter 36

General comments:

In this chapter we get an opportunity to hear Bao-yu's view on scholars, death and a little bit about love (in the Charmante / Jia Qiang story). Aroma is positioned closer to Bao-yu by scheme of Xi-feng and Lady Wang. Bao-chai overhears a dream of Bao-yu's that resists the idea of marriage to her and welcomes the idea of marriage to Dai-yu.

Some basic notes:

2:200—the rant on this page by Xi-feng is about Lady Wang; that is, “Her Ladyship” refers to Lady Wang.

2:201—“pinafore” = 兜肚 *doudu*, a type of undergarment meant to keep the chest and abdomen warm



2:207— *The Return of the Souls* = The Peony Pavilion (牡丹亭, 1598 play by Tang Xianzu)

2:210—“Mrs Xue” = Aunt Xue

Story summary:

Grandmother Jia protects Bao-yu from his father and he plays freely in the garden, sharply criticizing as “career worms” those who think he should become more serious.

Aroma is transferred from the care of Grandmother Jia to Lady Wang, as a replacement for Golden.

Bao-chai overhears Bao-yu calling out in a dream that he doesn't believe in the marriage of gold and jade, that he believes instead in the marriage of stone and flower. This is an emotional blow to her.

Aroma and Bao-yu discourse on death: “Now *my* idea of a glorious death would be to die now, while you are all around me; then your tears could combine to make a great river that my corpse could float away on, far, far away to some remote place that no bird has ever flown to, and gently decompose there until the wind had picked my bones clean, and after that never, never to be reborn again as a human being.” (2:206)

Bao-yu, bored with the Garden, wanders over to Pear Tree Court (梨香院) in the Rongguo Estate where he seeks out the best of the young actresses, Charmante (齡官, Ling Guan). However, she rebuffs him and we learn that she is in love with Jia Qiang who manages the acting troupe.

Bao-yu complains about having to go to aunt Xue's birthday party.

Xiang-yun leaves the Jia estate for the time being.

Chapter 37

General comments:

The lively Crab-flower Poetry Club is founded.

Chapters 37-41 all happen around the eight month, twentieth day. Chapters 42 & 43 are within a few day of this date as well. Thus, this stretch of chapters is a bit unusual in taking so many chapters for so few days.

Some basic notes:

"Crab flower" in various places = crabapple

Story summary:

Bao-yu's father is sent away for a government appointment, leaving Bao-yu more free to do as he pleases.

Tan-chun conceives of the idea of a poetry group, to be called "Crab-flower Club" (海棠社 Haitang-sha, "Society of the Crab-apple"). Li Wan becomes president. Pseudonyms are decided for the members; poetry is composed and commented upon.

Xiang-yun is included belatedly in the group.

Chapter 38

General comments:

The poems in this chapter are lovely, as is the setting. The poems' content supports the portraits of the various individuals who wrote them.

Some basic notes:

That crab are eaten by members of the Crab-flower Club is just a coincidence of the translation. In the original there is no connection between the two.

Story summary:

Grandmother Jia and others (members of the poetry club and everyone's servants) gather at the Lotus Pavilion in the middle of the Garden's small river for the next poetry meeting. There are high-spirited conversations among servants and their mistresses.

After Grandmother Jia retires, the gathering turns to continued eating of crab and poem composition, the theme being chrysanthemums. The poems are critiqued in lively discussions.

After this Bao-yu and Dai-yu write additional poems that show off their literary talents.

Chapter 39

General comments:

Glimpses of mistress-servant relationships, Xi-feng's corrupt behavior, and we begin the extended visit (the second one) of the very interesting Grannie Liu, a poor and distant relative of the Wang family, seeking financial support.

Some basic notes:

Mrs Zhu = Li Wan

1 tael (兩 *liang*) — in the Qing dynasty, a tael was usually a fixed amount of silver of reasonably good grade. There were local variations but 1 tael tended to be about 40 grams of silver. One Chinese website (<http://history.cultural-china.com/en/183History3905.html>) puts the value of a mid-Qing tael at RMB 600-800 (\$88-\$117).

By poor relative Grannie Liu's shrewd calculations, the crab feast probably cost 20 tael, which would be sufficient for her country family to live on for a year.

Story summary:

The crab-eating party wraps up after an extended conversation about mistresses and their important head servants, Grandmother Jia—Faithful, Xi-feng—Patience, Bao-yu—Aroma, Lady Wang—Suncloud.

In a brief conversation between Aroma and Patience, we learn a little bit about how Xi-feng takes advantage of her role in managing Jia family money to make a profit on the side, by loaning out the allowances to servants and collecting the interest on the loans for her own.

Grannie Liu, with her grandson Ban-er, arrive, making another visit to the Jia family in search of cash support. She senses that Grandmother Jia likes her and entertains her with an extended story of a tragic girl who stole firewood in the snow, (a story that Bao-yu innocently takes seriously and sends his servant Tealeaf out to look for her the next day). The storytelling is interrupted by the report of a fire on the estate, one, however, that is already under control.

Chapter 40

General comments:

We get in this chapter some more than usually detailed descriptions of Prospect Garden and some of the residences within it. We also see the interesting interactions between the wealthy and poor (Grannie Liu), which are presented as humorous, bittersweet and sometimes unkind.

Some basic notes:

Mrs Zhu = Li Wan

2:281—"offering her tea in a covered cup": the *gaiwan*, a type of teacup we are familiar with now, first came into use in the Ming dynasty but wasn't widely used until the Qing dynasty. A mid-Qing *gaiwan*:



Story summary:

Grannie Liu is taken on a tour of the Garden and its residences, and joins in a going away feast for Shi Xiang-yun. She proves to be a savvy guest in some ways and a country bumpkin in others. She is the butt of many practical jokes; she plays along.

Chapter 41

General comments:

Escapades with Grannie Liu continue. Some of this is harsh (for example, Bao-yu: "That cup that the old woman drank out of: of course, I realize that you can't possibly use it any more, ..." 2:315. This chapter also has an extended tea drinking scene.

Some basic notes:

2:311—"Buddha's Hand" is an unusual shape citrus fruit.



Story summary:

The party with Grannie Liu continues, now a drinking party.

Afterwards, a visit is paid to the Green Bower Hermitage, a nunnery. There exquisite, rare teas are served in special cups.

The post-party group, meanwhile, decides to take Grannie Liu yet again on a tour of the Garden. She is left alone, however, and becomes lost and, in her drunken state, ends up inadvertently entering Bao-yu's bedchamber and collapsing into a drunken sleep there. Aroma astutely rescues the situation, guiding Grannie Liu quietly back out into the garden.

Chapter 42

General comments:

Grannie Liu's trip has been exceptionally successful. She has partied for days and now returns laden with gifts. Grandmother Jia, however, is left a bit exhausted from the festivities.

Bao-chai's more conservative nature is on display when she "scolds" Dai-yu for reading forbidden literature. Bao-chai admits to having read the same books and plays but adds: "As for girls like you and me: spinning and sewing are *our* proper business. What do we need to be able to read for? But since we *can* read, let us confine ourselves to good, improving books; let us avoid like the plague those pernicious works of fictions, which so undermine the character that in the end it is past reclaiming." (2:334)

This chapter includes interesting discussions about painting.

Some basic notes:

We learn that it is now the eight month, twenty-five day.

2:332— *The Return of the Souls = The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭, Mudanting, 1598 play by Tang Xianzu) and *The Western Chamber* (西廂記, Xixiangji, play by Wang Shifu, ca. 1260–1336)

Mrs Zhu = Li Wan

Lotus Dweller is the Crab-Flower Poetry Club pseudonym for Xi-chun, who is in charge of making a painting of Prospect Garden.

2:339—“We’ve got some Snow Wave (雪浪) paper still...” This was the paper used for the chrysanthemum poems.

Story summary:

The chapter opens with Grannie Liu announcing her intention to leave and Xi-feng blaming her unkindly for the illnesses that seem to have appears in both Grandmother Jia and her own child. However, Grannie Liu suggests that the problem is spirit possession and after exorcism rites, her child seems to be feeling better. She asks Grannie Liu to give the child a name, because it had been born on the seventh month, seventh day, considered unlucky. Grannie Liu tells her to fight fire with fire and name the child like the day: Qiao-jie.

Grannie Liu leaves with her grandson Ban-er. They are laden with gifts of various types.

Bao-chai and Dai-yu discuss forbidden romantic plays (“The Peony Pavilion” and “The Romance of the Western Chamber”, both said to be important influences on Cao Xueqin’s *Story of the Stone*.)

Li Wan gathers a group to discuss how to help Xi-chun finish her painting of Prospect Garden. Among discussions of painting styles and such, they make various suggestions, including drawing up an extensive list of supplies she will need.

Chapter 43

General comments:

Xi-feng’s avaricious ways are shown when, after the full group of relatives have contributed funds to the pot that will be used to fete her for her birthday, she reminds the planners of Jia Zheng’s two concubines Aunt Zhou and Aunt Zhao. You-shi whispers to Xi-feng: “What a mean, grasping young woman you are! Your aunt and your mother-in-law and all these other people forking out for your birthday, yet you still have to go squeezing more out of two poor, dried-up old gourds like Zhou and Zhao!” (3:349)

Some basic notes:

Mrs Zhen = Zhen You-shi

Story summary:

A huge birthday party is planned for Xi-feng. It is Grandmother Jia’s idea to create a birthday fund based on contributions from everyone. Who should contribute how much reveals something of the politics of the family. Also, Xi-feng and You-shi spar.

Story of the Stone Highlights & Chapter Comments, chpts 1-43
created for SAA Fall 2009, John R Wallace

It becomes the ninth month, second day. Amidst the onset of the party, with “the customary plays, but also juggling, acrobatics, story-telling by blind ballad-singers” (2:353–54), Bao-yu slips away to secretly honor the dead Golden (though in this chapter the purpose of his actions is not explicitly stated), deciding upon the Temple of the Water Spirit as the place to do his ritual.

Upon his return towards the end of the festivities, we find that both Aroma and Grandmother Jia had been tremendously worried about his unexpected and not very well explained absence.

Chapter summaries

44–51, no summaries written by Wallace

52 (winter)

Thoughts

Skybright is an interesting contrast to her superior, Aroma, and the man she serves, Bao-yu both of whom are of a more gentle nature, as is the maid ranking just below her, Musk. Cao's surrounding her thus with more restrained personalities enhances her fiery nature. Her sudden violent attack on Trinket punctuates this.

Xi-feng's power is touched on in this chapter, with a powerful circle of high-ranking women approving of her.

Dai-yu and Bao-yu seem to have emotionally and spiritually found one another.

Events

Xi-feng's virtues are extolled by Aunt Xue, Mrs Li, Lady Xing and Grandmother Jia

Bao-yu's maid Skybright continues to be ill

Bao-yu overhears Xi-feng's principal maid Patience telling his maid Musk how his maid Trinket stole the bracelet belonging to Patience that went missing a couple of months earlier, in Chpt 49, and how the maids around Bao-yu don't treat him very well

Bao-yu goes to the Naiad's House (Dai-yu's place) and spends time with "A Bevy of Beauties Keeping Warm in the Winter". They discuss poetry, including a poem composed by a foreigner. Dai-yu and Bao-yu are getting along wonderfully.

Grandmother Jia gives Bao-yu a rare peacock-feather cloak

Skybright stabs Trinket's hand (2:548) and she is removed from service. Trinket's mother is very angry and criticizes the way Bao-yu's maids address Bao-yu using his name rather than title.

Bao-yu accidentally burns a spot on his new cloak and Skybright, still sick, stays up all night to repair it.

53 (year-end events, New Year's celebrations)

Thoughts

The finances of the Jia family are put squarely on the table. Despite enormous sources of income, the outlays still exceed those and the situation is unsustainable. This works in delightful contrast to the protracted descriptions of opulence and wealth during all the New Year celebrations.



Events

Skybright recovers from her illness

Aroma returns, after having visited her family due to her mother's illness and death

In the 12th month, preparations for New Year celebrations begin

Bounty money arrives (an enormous catalogue of things, taking more than a month of travel to deliver), and there is an extended conversation about the financial condition of the Rong-guo and Ning-guo houses. The Rong-guo house, Bao-yu's house, seems to be under more financial pressure: (Jia Rong says, speaking to his father, acting head of the Ning-guo family) "...during each of the past two years they've been forced to draw on their capital to the tune of several thousands a year? During the first of those two years they had the Visitation — including the building of that great garden. Just imagine what *that* must have cost them. Another two years like these last two with another Visitation thrown in and they'll be cleaned out!" (2:564)

Jia Qin shows up, hoping to get handouts from Cousin Zhen, but is sharply rebuffed. (2:566)

Elaborate New Year celebrations ensue, extending over a couple of weeks. They include the sacrifice (ritual offering) of food to the ancestors, various banquets, and plays, and ritual visits to show appreciation, the exchange of gifts between the two branches of the family, etc.

There is an interesting footnote on page 578 written by "Stone" addressing the reader.

54 (includes First month, 15th & 17th days)

Thoughts

Xi-feng's peak of power is narrated with exuberance through the drum-beating drinking game and her holding an audience rapt with her joke-telling. Then her decline is introduced with the miscarriage. Xi-feng has not yet produced a male heir, something which would seal her grasp on family power.

Events

Aroma and Faithful (both having lost their mothers recently) have a friendly discussion. Bao-yu shows his sensitivity by not interrupting them.

At a party there are plays (with Grandmother Jia criticizing the predictable plots of popular plays) and drinking games (whomever is holding a plum blossom sprig when a beating drum stops but drink a cup and tell a joke) and general merriment. Xi-feng does much to please Grandmother Jia and the crowd in general. She is known as a great story-teller (as is Grandmother Jia).

Xi-feng has a miscarriage.

55 (following month)

Thoughts

Beginning with this chapter we have a series of chapters (at least up through 58) where the primary leaders of the family are preoccupied with other affairs (or are unwell and unable to fully govern) and responsibility is delegated to the next layer down. In such situations we see

how difficult it is to maintain control over the unruly and sprawling household, as well as how difficult it is just to survive politically, at all levels. Some manage this well, even superbly, others make missteps, and there are many casualties in the lowest ranks. Entwined into this context are discussion of financial issues and marriage plans.

It is stated here that Xi-feng cannot read or write. Since she and Grandmother Jia often seem cut from the same fabric, this is probably true of the grandmother as well.

Events

Xi-feng is not recovering quickly. (In fact we are told that she will carry her illness sickly for quite a while.) During her period of convalescence, Li Wan (the mistress of Sweet Rice Village) and Tan-chun (Bao-yu's elder half-sister, daughter of Sir Zheng and concubine Zhao (Aunt Zhao)) begin to manage the household for her. Li Wan is too sweet and young but Tan-chun, while quite and polite, turns out to be an entirely skillful manager, equal to Xi-feng, even though the servants thought they had seen an opportunity to manipulate the situation and even though Tan-chun's difficult and widely-disliked mother expected her to gain special benefits from the temporary appointment of her daughter to a position of management.

Patience and Xi-feng have a long talk about Tan-chun's difficult position (daughter of a concubine), and Xi-feng's difficult position, too, with so many enemies around. And they talk as well of the harsh financial realities of the Rong estates.

Tan-chun and her brother Jia Huan (who threw the hot wax on Bao-yu's face) are contrasted as entirely different.

We learn that Xi-feng cannot read or write, unlike Tan-chun (3:64)

56

Thoughts

This chapter returns aggressively to the theme of truth / fiction the status of representation through the creation of a double for Bao-yu and a dream that scatters consciousness liberally across the boundaries of the two.

Events

Tan-chun, Li Wan and Bao-chai, with Patience listening, think of ways they might economize and propose the idea of making some income from Prospect Garden, placing senior servants in charge.

The Zhen's ("Truth" family) visit and Jia (False" family) Bao-yu learns that there is a Zhen Bao-yu very much like him.

Bao-yu dreams that he is the other Bao-yu or, rather, dreams that he is both Bao-yus.

57

Thoughts

The temporary insanity of Bao-yu is the dramatic highlight of this chapter. However, the ominous topic of betrothals (i.e., the eventual end of Bao-yu's youth) and the disintegrating financial picture have their impact as well.

Events

The Zhen of the other Bao-yu's estate is grand.

Nightingale rebuffs Bao-yu when he touches her clothing, saying that they now must act more their age. Bao-yu is deeply hurt.

Nightingale, when rectifying this situation with him, inadvertently tells him that Dai-yu will, at some point, depart Prospect Garden and return to her relatives. This causes temporary insanity in Bao-yu and a terrible vomiting and coughing reaction in Dai-yu when she hears his condition. Nightingale says that this was a joke and Bao-yu recovers. Grandmother Jia does not seem to understand the depth of Bao-yu's feelings. (3:96 "So that's all it was!")

There is various talk about various betrothals, some real and some possible or not. (Bao-yu and Bao-qin as a misheard and incorrect bit of information, Dai-yu and Xue Pan as a cruel joke, Bao-yu and Dai-yu proposed by Nightingale drawing a snort from Dai-yu [3:102], Xing Xiu-yan and Xue Ke for real)

Xiu-yan as so poor that she pawned her warm cloths. Bao-chai quietly recovers them for her.

58 (Qing Ming Festival, so just after the Spring Equinox)

Thoughts

This continues the themes of the unruly nature of the household, and makes more explicit Bao-yu's rejection of beautiful, unmarried young women growing through the stages of childbirth and old age.

Events

The Dowager consort of the Late emperor dies and the ranked women of the Jia household (Grandmother Jia, Lady Xing, Lady Wang, You-shi, Hu-shi) had to be at the Palace everyday for 21 days.

Aunt Xue is left to look over the inhabitants of Prospect Garden. She moves in with Dai-yu, whom she adores.

The acting troupe is disbanded, to save money, and the actresses stay within the compound free to do as they please. They can be rather difficult. (3:121)

Bao-yu becomes sad when he thinks of beautiful young women having to become wives and bear children, and having to age.

Ex-actress Nenuphar is scolded for burning paper in the Garden. Bao-yu defends her. Later he learns that it is for a dead actress (Pivoine) who was her lover. (Joss paper burning is common during the Qingming Festival, called in this book Spring Cleaning; this is a festival that occurs on the 15th day after the Spring Equinox, to honor the dead.)

59**Thoughts**

With those of authority away, the Jia estate teeters on near chaos as the domestic help spins out of control. A simple act, Bao-chai's thoughtful gesture to obtain more rose-root orris for her resident Shi Xiang-yun, is the innocent initial event that starts the complex and unseemly chain-reaction of argument and tussle. And though this mess seems troublesome enough, Patience closes out the chapter by saying, "Oh, this is *nothing!* ... There have been seven or eight outbreaks just during these last three or four days. Compared with the others, this trouble of yours is a very minor affair." (3:146)

Events

Various of the Jia ladies leave for the funeral of the Dowager consort of the Late emperor who died in Chpt 58 and the Jia estate gets more guards and restricts more than usual the coming and going of its inhabitants.

Xiang-yun (orphaned grand-niece of Grandmother Jia and living at Bao-chai's place in the Garden) want rose-root orris (薔薇硝). Bao-chai sends women from her apartment to Dai-yu's place to get some and through various events this leads to a rather large fracas amongst actresses, maids and relatives of them (mothers and aunts), requiring refereeing by senior maids. The reasons are various but mostly resolve around prideful attitudes over unclear definitions of who is senior to whom and jealousy regarding those domestic positions (positions that include financial advantages).

[If you want further details, here are the events of chapter 59 as related by Cliff Notes, edited by me to include names as given in our translation.](#)

Awakening one morning, Xiang-yun discovers that she needs some rose-nitric (rose-root orris) powder to cure a spring rash. Bao-chai suggests asking Dai-yu for some. Ying-erh (Oriole) and Jui-kuan (Etamine) agree to run the errand, and on their way to Bamboo Lodge (Naiad's House), they pick up some twigs and flowers and fashion a basket, which pleases Dai-yu.

On their way back, Ying-erh (Oriole) asks Ou-kuan (Nenuphar) to go with them and wait for Dai-yu in Bao-chai's apartment. When Ying-erh (Oriole) picks more twigs to plait baskets, Chun-yen (Swallow) joins them, just shortly before Chun-yen (Swallow)'s aunt, Fang-kuan (Parfumee)'s foster mother, criticizes them sharply for picking twigs and flowers.

Then Mother Ho (Mamma He) arrives, looking for her daughter Chun-yen (Swallow). Seeing that the place is getting messy, Mother Ho (Mamma He) gives Chun-yen (Swallow) a good beating. Going to Bao-yu for help, Chun-yen (Swallow) meets Xiren (Aroma), who tries to pacify Mother Ho (Mamma He), but Mother Ho (Mamma He) is reluctant to take her advice, so they send for Ping-erh (Patience), hoping that she can cope with her. Ping-erh (Patience) says that Mother Ho (Mamma He) should be given forty strokes and driven out. At last, Mother Ho (Mamma He) is forced to admit her mistake and pleads to stay, which Bao-yu promises her that she can do.

60**Thoughts**

In addition to the types of disputes described in the previous chapter, there are problems having to do with Cook Liu's plans at finding employment for her daughter Fivey and suspicions turned in various directions (some right and some wrong) regarding objects that are being stolen.

Events

Another series of arguments and accusations ensues when Parfumees substitutes jasmine powder for rose-root orris that Jia Huan (Bao-yu's half-brother) expresses a desire for. At the same time, there has been a search going on for various missing items including Essence of Rose. Jia Huan's mother Aunt Zhao—who is being portrayed more and more as a crass woman filled with avarice who also lacks restraint and tact (you might recall the pressure she puts on Tan-chun to favor her family when Tan-chun assumes temporary control of the Rong-guo household)—is at the very heart of this outbreak of hostilities and is actually responsible for some of the missing items though she is not found out.

Cook Liu is trying to get a place for her daughter Fivey in Bao-yu's service, using the actress Parfumees, now attached to Bao-yu's apartments, as the inside negotiator.

Qian Huai wants to marry Fivey, but is making little progress on that front.

61**Thoughts**

Chess will figure heavily in the novel later.

Events

Cook Liu makes an enemy of Chess when she refuses her the evening meal she orders (egg-custard). Chess later ransacks the cook's kitchen and even after an apology from Liu and the delivery of her requested dish, she simply throws it on the ground, and continues her attack by suggesting the Liu is the Essence of Roses thief which leads to her daughter being accused of stealing the Snow powder. Mother and daughter nearly lose their jobs and get beaten but Bao-yu and Patience intercede.

Some of the details of chapters 60-61 as related by *Cliff Notes*, edited by me to include names as given in our translation. The basic analytic theme of *Cliff Notes*, across all 120 chapters, is the collapse of feudal values, thus the notes towards the end.

While Lady Dowager (Grandmother Jia), Lady Wang, Jia Chen (Cousin Zhen), and Jia Lian join the funeral cortege of the Imperial Concubine, numerous problems arise, one after another, in every household. In these two chapters, some of those problems are described in great detail.

Jui-kuan (Etamine) asks Chun-yen (Swallow) to give some rose-nitric (rose-root orris) powder to Fang-kuan (Parfumees) as a present. When Bao-yu asks Fang-kuan (Parfumees) what she has in her hand, she explains that it is rose-nitric (rose-root orris) powder for a spring rash. Jia Huan happens to overhear and asks for some, which Fang-kuan (Parfumees) promises him. But when

Fang-kuan (Parfume) discovers that she doesn't have enough, she wraps up a packet of jasmine powder and gives it to Jia Huan.

His ignorance is sneered at by Lady Zhao, who seizes this chance to bawl out the young actress. Encouraged by Mother Hsia (Aunt Xia), Ou-kuan (Nenuphar)'s foster mother, Lady Zhao rushes to Happy Red Court (Bao-yu's apartment) to insult Fang-kuan (Parfume). First, she throws the powder in Fang-kuan (Parfume)'s face, and then she curses her, calling her a painted whore. Feeling unjustly wronged, Fang-kuan (Parfume) argues back, saying, "We are all birds of a feather — all slaves here."

When Ou-kuan (Nenuphar), Jul-kuan, Tou-kuan (Nenuphar), and Kuei-kuan hear that Fang-kuan (Parfume) has been bullied by Lady Zhao, they all come to Fang-kuan (Parfume)'s defense, butting Lady Zhao with their fists and heads. Madame Yu (You-shi) and Li Wan arrive on the scene and come to Lady Zhao's rescue, asking her to go away with them.

Tan-chun, Lady Zhao's daughter, feels ashamed for her mother's lack of dignity; she thinks that her mother must have been spurred on by someone else to make such a scene. Ai-kuan (Artemisia) confides to Tan-chun that it was Mother Hsia (Aunt Xia) who stirred up the trouble.

Mother Hsia (Aunt Xia)'s granddaughter Chan-chieh (Cicada, "Ciggy") is serving in Tan-chun's apartment, so she asks Mother Hsia (Aunt Xia) to be on her guard when Fang-kuan (Parfume) goes to speak to Mrs. Liu (Cook Liu) in order to prepare a cool, vinegary vegetable dish for supper.

Remembering that Fang-kuan (Parfume) is serving in Bao-yu's apartment, Mrs. Liu (Cook Liu) decides to use this opportunity to ask Fang-kuan (Parfume) to ask Bao-yu to secure a job for her daughter Wu-erh (Fivey). After promising to do her a favor, Fang-kuan (Parfume) goes to ask Bao-yu for some rose-flavored juice for Liu Wu-erh (Fivey). Receiving the juice, Wu-erh (Fivey) thanks Fang-kuan (Parfume) profusely. Wu-erh (Fivey)'s cousin is ill in bed, and since her mother wants to give him some juice, she goes to her elder brother's home to present the juice to her nephew as a tonic.

It happens that Lady Zhao's nephew Qian Huai is there to visit the patient (Qian Huai wants to marry Wu-erh [Fivey]), but she refuses to accept his proposal). When Mrs. Liu (Cook Liu) sees that Qian Huai is there, she rises to take her leave. Then her sister-in-law gives her a packet of Pachyma Cocos (Lycoperdon Snow) powder, which Wu-erh (Fivey) wants to share with Fang-kuan (Parfume). When Wu-erh (Fivey) goes to see Fang-kuan (Parfume), she is quizzed by Mrs. Lin (Lin Zhi-xiao's wife), who suspects Wu-erh (Fivey) because it is reported that things have disappeared in Lady Wang's rooms, so Wu-erh (Fivey) is to be watched during the night.

Meanwhile, Ping-erh (Patience) discovers that there is a bottle of rose-flavored juice missing, and Ying-chun's maid Lian-hua (Lotus) tells on Mrs. Liu (Cook Liu) because Mrs. Liu (Cook Liu) did not serve her sister, Ssu-chi (Chess), the steamed, beaten egg that she had requested. In anger, Xi-feng orders Wu-erh (Fivey)'s mother to be given forty strokes and be driven out.

However, on the suggestion of Ping-erh (Patience), an investigation is made. Finally, Tsai-yun (Sunset), urged by Lady Zhao, admits that she committed the crime. Bao-yu, however, conceals the theft and says that he took the Pachyma Cocos (Lycoperdon Snow) powder without anybody's knowing. Xi-feng, knowing that Bao-yu is lenient to the maids, suggests asking all the maids to kneel in the sun on shards of porcelain with nothing to eat or drink. Then they will confess. Finally, Ping-erh (Patience) succeeds in persuading Xi-feng to be more lenient to them whenever she can and mind her own business, if possible.

The differences in the lifestyles of the masters and the servants and the maids of the Jia family are more evidence of the fact that these servants and maids live on the bottom stratum of society, enslaved by their masters. Their destinies are not in their own hands. Therefore, resistance and

rebellion seem to be inevitable. However, note that the quarrel between Mrs. Liu (Cook Liu) and her daughter Wu-erh (Fivey), and the quarreling between the other slaves are similar to the quarrels between the masters and servants in the Jia family.

All of these conflicts shake the rules of existence of the big aristocratic family. Thus, in order to maintain their control, the aristocrats must always try their best to suppress all rebellion and get rid of unfaithful servants so as to consolidate authority. These incidents over rose-flavored juice and Pachyma Cocos (Lycoperdon Snow) powder are small and insignificant, but they are portents of stormy emotional crises, as well as social crises, in the future.

62 (Bao-yu's birthday)

Events

Festivities begin for Bao-yu's birthday, with its feasts and drinking games.

Caltrop is shown to be widely liked.

63

Thoughts

This chapter includes an interesting footnote by "Stone" on foreign-born slaves and cross-dressing. (3:237)

Events

Festivities continue.

Sir Jing, the nominal head of the Ning-guo household who spent his time with Daoist alchemy, trying to become immortal, dies. You-shi has to manage funeral arrangements on her own (since everyone is away).

64 (Seventh month)

Thoughts

Cousin Zhen, Jia Rong and Jia Lian make a threesome of sexually wayward, morally challenged, men.

Events

Cousin Zhen and Jia Rong follow form for Sir Jing's funeral but party with young female relations as soon as possible afterwards.

Xi-feng is "up and down" with her illness.

Bao-yu visits Dai-yu and finds that he is awkward in his speech around her and cries.

Dai-yu has written poems which Bao-yu titles as "Songs for Five Fair Women". Bao-chai, in a dissenting and traditional opinion, says that women should be moral and industrious and that poetry is only incidental.

Jia Lian and soon afterwards Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang return to the estate.

Grandmother Jia has a brief illness.

The lecherous Jia Lian is interested in You Er-jie. (You San-jie has not seems as interested in him.) You Er-jie seems open to the idea too. ("You Er-jie was a highly impressionable young woman. Already, in the past, she had compromised herself with her sister's husband." (3:271)

Jia Rong, whom himself wants access to You Er-jie, suggests to Jia Lian that he take her as a secret wife. The narrative explains in detail why this is a terrible plan (3:266) (including X-feng's expected jealousy) but it is done under the cover of him needing a son. "...Tell him you did it for the family, because Aunt Feng is unable to have a son" (3:265-6) and that "in a year or two, as soon as Xi-feng was dead, he would move her inside and make her his Number One." (3:271).

They set up a 20-frame house on Little Flower Lane.

65

Thoughts

The You sisters are some of the most amorous women of this volume. And You San-jie is refreshingly fearless when it comes to men.

It is rather nice to see the tables turned on Jia Lian and Cousin Zhen, who constantly conspire to compromise women.

Events

You Er-jie settles in with Jia Lian. Cousin Zhen makes a play for You San-jie, who turns out to be more than he can handle. Er-jie presses Lian to find a husband for her currently hyper-woman of a sister.

Joker gives You Er-jie the skinny on the Jia family: Xi-feng is to be feared, Patience has reason on her side, Li Wan is a little Buddha, and so on. Jokes are also made about Miss Wood (Lin Dai-yu) and Miss Snow (Xue Bao-chai). [The character for Lin is written with the ideogram for "tree" doubled and Xue is homonymous with "xue" meaning snow.]

66

Bao-yu's character is described by Joker; San-jie shows some affinity for Bao-yu: "'To hear you speak, it sounds as if the two of you would get on very well together,' said Er-jie. 'I think we *ought* to betroth you to him. Why not?'" (3:295)

Jia Lian is sent to Ping-an on secret business for half a month. Before he leaves, Er-jie tells him the San-jie's secret love for the past 5 years has been Liu Xiang-lian and that is who she is saving herself for.

On his travels, Lian coincidentally runs into Xiang-lian, and Xue Pan for that matter. The two men have become like brothers since Xiang-lian saved Pan's life from a gang of robbers. (Xiang-lian had been the one who beat up Pan nearly to death.)

Lian tells Xiang-lian about San-jie and Xiang-lian gives his heirloom double swords (a "duck" and a "drake"—a romantic pair representing everlasting love) to Jia Lian as his pledge to marry her.

But he begins to have second thoughts. He tells Bao-yu, whom he is questioning to try to learn more about San-jie: "It's almost as if the girl's family was doing the pursuing. I can't help feeling very dubious about the whole affair... [And, doubting that she is still a virgin, reacting to Bao-yu's pun about it:] It won't do. This is a thoroughly bad business. the only clean things about that Ning-guo House are the stone lions that stand outside the gate. The very cats and dogs there are corrupted!" (3:302, 303)

San-jie overhears Xiang-lian's declaration to Jia Lian that he plans to ask for a return of the swords. She runs into the room with the swords, one hidden behind her back, and cuts her throat with the Duck as she offers the scabbard to him. She dies on the spot.

Liu is shocked. San-jie appears to him in a vision: "I love you for five years .. I did not know that your heart was as cold as your face. ..." and "From love I came' from love I now depart. I wasted my life for love, and now that I have woken up, I am ashamed of my folly. From now on we are nothing to each other, you and I — nothing." (3:306)

Xian-lian disappears with a crippled Daoist.

67

Xue Pan returns from his trip. He has forgotten, but his workers remembered, two cases of gifts for his mother (Aunt Xue) and sister (Bao-chai).

Bao-chai distributes her portion among family members. While the greedy Aunt Zhao is particularly delighted, Dai-yu is sad because Hu-qui toys remind her of home. Bao-yu tries to comfort her.

Gradually we realize through indirect vignettes that Xi-feng has discovered Er-jie, and her husband's secret marriage to her. (This is not the taking of a concubine; it is, indeed, a marriage.) We have encountered Xi-feng's jealousy before. That an enormous storm is brewing is imminently clear.

Patience (Ping-er, 平兒) is the one who overheard comments about the "new mistress" (xin er-nainai, 新二奶奶). Xi-feng interrogates, with fearful passion and accuracy, Brightie (a man in her employ) and Joker (trusted male servant for Jia Lian her husband) for the absolute full details, and then conceives a plan.

68

On the one hand:

With her husband Jia Lian still away, a sweet-tongued Xi-feng gains You Er-jie's trust and brings her to Prospect Garden, installing her in a well-appointed residence (but removing Er-jie's maids and replacing them with one of her own, Mercy, as well as setting up spies).

While also:

Xi-feng has Brightie investigate Er-jie's past and learns that Er-jie was betrothed to a man named Zhang Hua, now 19, and "a gambler and a wastrel" (3:340). Hua is unaware that his father accepted 20 taels to break the engagement. Xi-feng pressures a cautious but frightened (of Xi-feng's threats) Hua into bringing a claim against the Jia family. The content of this lawsuit is that Brightie (Hua refused to say Jia Lian) pressured Hua's parents, during a period of national and family mourning, to break off an existing engagement to marry Er-jie, setting aside his lawful wife (Xi-feng). Of course Xi-feng does all of this in the shadows.

Brightie is arrested but at the court he says that it is not him, that Hua has lied. Hua admits to this and says the person behind the pressuring was, in truth, Jia Rong.

Xi-feng sends a member of her family, Wang Xin, with 300 taels to pay off the Censor to soften his treatment of Rong. Cousin Zhen, when told by his grandson Rong that he stands accused, also sends 200 taels to the Censor.

Xi-feng goes to see You-shi and spits in her face. Er-jie is her step-sister and Xi-feng acts as if You-shi has worked against her. She then turns her fury on Jia Rong. She plays the wronged woman / wife to the hilt, and when she threatens to take the case to Cousin Zhen You-shi and Rong agree to pay her 500 taels that she says she took from Lady Wang without telling her, to pay the Censor (even though she actually only paid him 300).

She maneuvers Rong into deciding on his own to find a way to return Er-jie to Zhang Hua even while Xi-feng retains her façade of generously accepting this new wife as an equal (in recognition of the need for a male heir).

69

On the one hand:

Xi-feng introduces Er-jie to Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang, as a new family member. They are much taken by her beauty and accept the new arrival as long as she waits to become Lian's wife until after the period of mourning is over. (Too late for that.)

While also:

Xi-feng wants to force Zhang Hua to take Er-jie but from the point of view of family pride this wouldn't be appropriate. Instead Cousin Zhen decides to make him and his father take the family quiet money and leave the region, which they do. Xi-feng, worried that at some point in the future Zhang Hua will show up again to cause trouble, wants him killed. Brightie feels this is going too far and lies to her that Zhang Hua was killed by highwaymen.

Jia Lian returns from his long trip and is rewarded for his business transactions by his father with the gift of one of his father's concubines, the 17-year-old Autumn.

Xi-feng is able to turn this upstart of a girl (who immaturely over-estimates her position in the family merely because it was Jia She who granted her concubine status with Lian) against Er-jie. Xi-feng manipulates this "borrowed knife" to drive Er-jie first to the miscarriage of the son she was carrying, then to suicide by gold ingestion.

70

Er-jie is buried near her sister San-jie. (Grandmother Jia refuses to allow her to go to the family temple.)

The New Year approaches.

The Poetry Club meetings are on the point of being revived, but Bao-yu is depressed over Liu Xiang-lian's death, San-jie's suicide, Er-jie's suicide, and Fivey's illness. "He was beginning to look and act like a half-wit and his speech was frequently disordered and nonsensical. Aroma and the other maids were frightened out of their wits." (3:376) However, the gaiety among his women cheers him up and soon poetry is again the topic, and spring is spent with birthdays, poetry appreciation and kite flying. When the kite strings are cut to allow the kites to drift away, it seems to be a bitter-sweet moment in the story.

Summer turns to autumn with Bao-yu studying more than usual because Dai-yu avoids him somewhat, fearing the anger of his father if she becomes a distraction to his studies.

71

Jia Zheng returns from his time in the capital, looking a bit older.

Grandmother Jia celebrates her 80th birthday. It is a huge affair. There is, however, argumentation among the servants and ladies. In particular, Xi-feng has two of You-shi's servants tied up, for poor service. However, this eventually leads to a public humiliation for Xi-feng, with Lady Zing, You-shi, and Lady Wang piling on. Grandmother Jia is, however, supportive.

There is an interesting discussion about the difficult position of daughter-in-law's (Xi-feng is Lady Xing's daughter-in-law.) Bao-yu also talks causally about when he might die.

In the chapter's final, short scene, Faithful (Yuanyang, 鴛鴦)'s catches Ying-chun's head maid, Chess (Siqi, 司棋), making love with her cousin.

72

Chess and her cousin had been childhood friends and they had just exchanged love-vows and were on the point of consummating their feelings when Faithful had come upon them. Now Chess is terrified that Faithful will not keep the secret. When the cousin runs away the loss of her love and the anxiety over Faithful's possible actions makes her ill. Faithful, worrying that others will make a connection between Chess's illness and the cousin's flight, vows to Chess to keep the secret.

Xi-feng has not been feeling well for a month. There is a constant "drip-drip" of blood. Faithful's elder sister died of something similar.

Lian asks Faithful to procure some of her mistress's (Grandmother Jia) jewelry to pawn, so that Lian can make ends meet. Xi-feng joins in this criminal activity, making Lian pay her 200 or so taels to help put pressure on Faithful. Lian: "Even for that you want to charge! No wonder you and I — " (3:425) The Jia family seems to have some very serious cash flow problems. She also speaks with pride about the wealth of her own family, the Wangs, and, further, reminds her husband that in a couple of days will be the anniversary of Er-jie's death.

73

An outer encasement of a window falls with a crash.

Bao-yu is on the verge of being tested in his studies by his father but the sound of a man jumping down from the wall, perhaps a thief, perhaps a watchmen turned thief, perhaps nothing, becomes an excuse for illness and an escape from tests.

Tan-chun reports to Grandmother Jia about misbehavior of servants, in particular gambling and money networks to support it. Grandmother Jia sees this behavior as very dangerous, leading to drinking with drinking leading to leaving gates open, with that leading to the entry of thieves and other possible worse crimes. She rounds up ring-leaders, gives out lashes as punishment, permanently removes some from employ and docks the pay of others. She destroys items used for gambling.

A maid, Simple, finds in the garden a purse with pornographic embroidery.

It seems that Ying chun is very lax in oversight of her maids, and deferential (unnecessarily according to Grandmother Jia) to her wet nurse. Things are missing from the household.

74 — the search of the Garden, the Xi-chun/You-shi fight

Thoughts

Xi-chun, in wanting to break relations with You-shi, echoes Liu Xiang-lian (the one who jilted San-jie and became a Daoist wanderer)'s claim that the Ning-guo house is full of corruption. ("The only clean things about that Ning-guo House are the stone lions that stand outside the gate. The very cats and dogs there are corrupted!" [Chpt 66, 3:302, 303]) This is pointing at the husband-wife-son group of Cousin Zhen, You-shi, and Jia Rong but by extension to You-shi's two sisters Er-jie and San-jie, and perhaps reaching even farther back to Qin-shi (Chapter 10ish).

If you look inside boxes you find things you don't want to find. Searching causes discord both by wrongly accusing some and by turning up problems that one didn't know existed.

Xi-chun is shown to be a very hot-headed young lady while also putting to words what many of us are thinking, that the Jia household has probably become rotten to the core.

Events

Various issues are happening at the same time: Cook Liu's younger sister has been accused of being part of the servant gambling rings, which is an incrimination extended not to Cook Liu herself, as perhaps even one of the leaders. Further: there is a missing pearl-and-gold phoenix. Further: Xi-feng is still not feeling at full power. Further: Faithful did, after all, decide to help Jia Lian filch items from Grandmother Jia in order to pawn them for cash and the missing items have been noticed by his mother Lady Xing and no one knows how she could have found out.

And, on top of these things, a more major event: Lady Wang arrives at Xi-feng's place outraged at the pornographic pouch that has been discovered in the Garden. She thinks it belongs to Xi-feng. This is not the case and so a search party of trusted maids is gathered, to search the Garden for similar such items, which would identify the owner of this particular lost item.

Wang Shan-bao's wife, one of Xing's servants from her childhood, takes the lead in this search. She thinks the culprit is Skybright (Qingwen) so Bao-yu's apartments are raided first. Skybright is indignant, and innocent. The raid moves on to Tan-chun's apartments. She is angry, too, about being suspected. On top of that, Wang Shan-bao's wife foolishly spars with Tan-chun, underestimating her opponent. She touches Tan-chun's clothing and is forcefully stuck by Tan-chun. Li Wan is searched without such incidents. Xi-chun's place, it turns out, does indeed have, inside Picture (Ru-hua, 入画)'s chest, objects associated with a man. They belonged to her brother so they do not indicate a romantic or lewd relationship of any sort but they were smuggled into the estate illegally. Picture's claims as to the provenance of the items waits confirmation, as does further punishment of her.

It turns out that Chess has, in her chest, the most incriminating material. She is detained for the time being. (Xi-feng is losing blood and too ill to pursue the matter to its end.)

There is irony in the fact that Chess is granddaughter to Wang Shan-bao's wife. "Wang Shan-bao's wife, who had sought out the wrongdoing of others with such single-minded persistency, was now mortified to discover that the only wrongdoer she had succeeded in unmasking was her own granddaughter." (Chpt 74, 3:478)

Xi-chun harshly scolds Picture while You-shi criticizes Xi-chun for scolding her. The moment escalates into a fight between Xi-chun and You-shi, with Xi-chun wanting to break off relations, asserting that You-shi is corrupt. She wishes to be rid of Picture, as well. Xi-chun is unmarried and very worried about her reputation; You-shi realizes this but finds the accusations against her family name nearly impossible to bear. These passages describe Xi-chun's youthful indiscretion in her manner of talk and argument, as well as her "perverse contrariness" (Chpt 74, 3:480). It comes out during this fight, by the way, that You-shi cannot read or write; it is one of the items Xi-chun wants to claim as a mark of her superiority. (Chpt 74, 3:481).

75 — the Zhens are raided, Cousin Zhen gambles, the garden lets out a ghostly sigh, Bao-yu and Jia Huan write poetry under the mid-Autumn moon

Thoughts

The government raid of the Zhen estate is an interesting escalation from the little private raid of the Jia Garden. And of course it therefore makes a strong statement as an omen for the Jia family itself.

The ancestors sigh in great sadness over the state of the Jia family.

The "mid-Autumn" moon is the famous Harvest Moon or August Moon (since the mid-Autumn month is the 8th month, although by our calendar it is the September moon).

Events

The Zhen family estate has been confiscated and the Zhen's have been summoned to the capital for questioning.

We hear that Wang Shan-bao's wife received a beating for her behavior in the previous chapter.

Grandmother Jia wants to plan the mid-autumn party; there is an informal luncheon of the items that will be served at that party. there is a limited amount of special rice. "Meals are made to measure nowadays," said Faithful. "We can't afford to be extravagant..." (chpt 75, 3:489)

Cousin Zhen, who is supposed to be mourning his father Jia Jing, has organized gambling under the cover of archery (dice and cards allow for relaxation after the exertion of archery). Lady Xing's brother Dumbo (Xing De-quan), and of course Xue Pan are part of this drinking group. Even Bao-yu is required to visit daily. (Chpt 75, 3:491). Dumbo talks about how his sister Lady Xing took all the family money with her when she went to the Jia household, leaving the other sister's destitute.

On 8/14, under the near full moon, Cousin Zhen's party hears a frightening sigh at the foot of one of the garden walls, and the sound of a door opening and closing from inside the ancestral temple. (Chpt 75, 3:498).

On the night of the mid-autumn moon, Bao-yu and Jia Huan compose poetry, in front of Grandmother Jia and her sons. Each is praised for different reasons.

76 — mid-Autumn moon parties and poetry composition by Dai-yu & Xiang-ling with additions by Adamantina

Thoughts

The Grandmother Jia party feels really lonely, with the far away music of the flute beneath the full moon accenting the feeling.

The idea of two beautiful women staying up all night under the full moon to write poetry and feel melancholy is really attractive. It is a nice, quiet, moment in a narrative that has had so much noise in it recently.

Events

The mid-Autumn party continues late into the night but Grandmother Jia is feeling a little lonely with the absence of Bao-chai, Bao-qin (partying on their own), Li Wan and Xi-feng (both ill). Still the flute music under the moon, heard from a distance, is beautiful and You-shi tells her a humorous story. At the end of the party around 2AM it is just Grandmother Jia and Tan-chun and empty chairs.

Dai-yu slips away to view the moon on her own, feeling very sad. Bao-yu is preoccupied with Skybright's illness. Xiang-ling becomes a companion for Dai-yu. They write poetry, and while they are lively in the making of it, writing until nearly dawn, the poem itself is melancholy. It ends: "Where, moon-embalmed, a dead muse lies in state." (Chpt 76, 3:522). They visit Adamantina, who adds her own verses.

77 — Chess and Skybright and other women are removed from the estate; Skybright is near death

Thoughts

Lady Wang is concerned that Bao-yu accept his studies more seriously. This seems to link with the poetry writing and evaluation of it by his father in the earlier chapter. She begins removing the women around him.

Maids and entertainers meet sad fates. Bao-yu seems entirely ineffective in shielding them.

Bao-yu is clearly very close to Skybright, and is being looked over by Aroma, who works for his mother. It may be that she has a part in the removal of rival women with an eye on a future marriage with him.

That Bao-yu is sexually attacked is a comic scene that seems almost a jarring counter-point to the tragic events of the chapter.

Events

The Jia family does not have on hand the expensive herb ginseng for the treatment of Xi-feng.

Lady Wang, hearing about the items Chess had kept and how she procured them, is incensed and has her removed from the house. Her mistress Ying-chun does not try to keep her nor does Bao-yu who encounters her unexpectedly being escorted off the grounds just as he himself was returning. "Bao-yu, fearing that if he said anything it would only make matters worse, glared at them in silence; but he could not resist pointing his finger at them when they had gone and —

sotte voce — giving bitter vent to his feelings: ‘Strange, the way they get like this when they marry! It must be something in the male that infects them.’” (Chpt 77, 3:534)

Lady Wang now goes to Bao-yu’s place to remove Skybright from service, despite her being seriously ill. The reason is not clear. There is speculation that she is simply too attractive. She then removes others that might corrupt her son: Citronella (for having her birthday on the same day as Bao-yu and making a joke about them being, therefore, destined for each other), Parfumee and all other entertainers. She leaves Aroma in place. Lady Wang seems to know in great detail the intimate secrets of his household. Probably the source is Aroma, who has been working secretly for Lady Wang for a couple of years. (Chpt 34: “I am going to place Bao-yu entirely in your hands.”) The text reads, when Bao-yu asks her how his mother could know so much: “Somewhat taken aback by this question, Aroma hung her head and pondered it for some moments, but she was unable to think of an explanation. She laughed embarrassedly.” (Chpt 77 3:538)

The background of Skybright is given.

Bao-yu secretly visits her off-estate at her home (they exchange personal items as keepsakes), only to be sexually thrown upon by Skybright’s cousin. He runs away.

Bao-yu had been sleeping with Skybright at night because Aroma had become more distant from him since she began to work with Lady Wang. She returns. He sees a vision of Skybright, who says she will die.

Three ousted entertainers — Parfumee, Nenuphar and Etamine — become Buddhist nuns under the tutelage of Eueresia at Water-moon Priory.

78 — Lady Wang’ plans for Bao-yu; Bao-yu’s poetry writing skills about the woman warrior “Fourth Sister Lin”; Skybright dies and Bao-yu writes and elegy

Thoughts

The Garden is fading. Bao-yu is slowing beginning to spend more time in the company of male scholars.

The “Elegy and Invocation” for Skybright is remarkably extensive.

Events

Lady Wang explains to her mother Grandmother Jia how she had Skybright removed and secretly retained Aroma as a future concubine for Bao-yu, paying her a salary from her own funds. Grandmother Jia had felt Skybright was the superior of the two girls but accepts Lady Wang’s judgment and actions.

Bao-chai is moving out of the Garden, because, she says, her mother is not doing well.

Bao-yu is seen by his maid Musk to be wearing trousers of Skybright’s handiwork. Bao-yu asks after her and searches for a way to see her again but is unable to until after she dies. He has been told that she will become a spirit who looks over the hibiscus flower.

Bao-yu ponders that Chess, Picture, Parfumee and the other actresses were gone. Skybright has died. Bao-chai has moved out. And it looks like Ying-shun will soon be marrying.

Bao-yu's father has located a good topic for a poem; it is based on a warrior woman named "Fourth Sister Lin" (Lin Si-niang 林四娘 and, yes, it is the same last name as Dai-yu). Everyone writes poems about her but Bao-yu's stands out.

Bao-yu writes an elegy for Skybright.

79 — Dai-yu senses a dark future, Dao-yu is beaten down by recent events; Ying-chun marries, Xue Pan marries; both are unfortunate.

Thoughts

Marriage as a depressing next stage of life.

Events

Dai-yu discusses with Bao-yu the contents of his elegy and when Bao-yu suggests a certain set of lines, she is filled with "an almost unbearable feeling of premonitory dread". (Chpt 79, 3:584)

Jia She will marry Ying-chun to the military man Sun Shao-zu. The Sun family have had a connection to the Ning and Rong houses from generations past, although it is, as Jai Zheng considers, a rather cheap connection made by social climbers. Grandmother Jia is not enthusiastic either but the marriage goes forward, with the marriage to be complete before the end of the year.

Bao-yu runs into Caltrop in the Garden. She comes less frequently now that her master Xue Pan has returned. He, too, is planning a marriage in this case with a young 17-year-old beauty named Xia Jin-gui who is a spoiled "monster", who "the exterior she presented to the world made one think of the flowers in spring; underneath it there were lightnings and tornadoes." (Chpt 79, 3:591) When Bao-yu (rightly) points out that Xue Pan's marriage will not be to Caltrop's advantage, she becomes angry and walks away. Bao-yu feels weakened by the Garden raid, the loss of Chess and Ying-chun and Skybright.

Xue Pan begins to lose his characteristic bluster and fall under Jin-gui's control, but Bao-chai seems an adversary equal to her.

80 — Xue Pan's husband ousts Caltrop; Ying-chun's marriage is a disaster

Thoughts

For all his hulk, anger and raw violence, Xue Pan, the Oaf King, is reduced to simpering when it comes to romantic situations: not only is he now a hen-pecked husband but he was equally abused, and then in love with, Liu Xiang-lian the actor. Bao-chai is smart, strong and reasonable; her brother is ill-behaved, not very bright, and essentially quite weak.

Caltrop has been passed around a lot in the course of this narrative, and has a history of names: Zhen Ying-lian, slave girl, Bottle Gourd [Temple] Girl, Caltrop, Lily.

Bao-chai's strength shows in this chapter.

Events

Caltrop comes under attack by Xue Pan's new wife Jin-gui. She uses a young woman Moonbeam to turn Pan against his Caltrop (renamed "Lily" by the new wife). This strategy would have

worked had not Aunt Xue and Bao-chai seen through her ploy. Bao-chai takes Caltrop as her own servant.

Jin-gui then turns on Moonbeam, to be rid of her, but Moonbeam holds her ground.

Xue Pan is worn down by his warring women. His mother and sister feel sorry for him but can do nothing. The whole estate seems to know that he has married a "demon wife".

Ying-chun is unhappily married to her immoral husband Sun Shao-zu. She comes for a visit. While warmly greeted by the members of the Garden, her own mother Lady Xing seems to lack interest in her plight.