

# **The Good Earth Book Notes**

## **The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck**

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## Author/Context

Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker was born on June 26, 1892 in Hillsboro, West Virginia. Her father, Absalom Sydenstricker, a West Virginian, was a preacher who was afflicted by the missionary craze of the 1880s. Pearl's mother, Carie Stulting, had met Absalom Sydenstricker, a minister of the Southern Presbyterian Church, in Hillsboro, her birthplace. The couple married in 1880, and set out for California where they would board a steamer that would take them to China. As Presbyterian missionaries and God's agents, they arrived in Hangchow, China to save the unfortunate Chinese who were ignorant about Christianity.

Pearl was sixth of the seven children of Absalom and Carie. She was born in the United States during her parents' year of home leave from China. She was taken to China when she was three months old. As a precocious child, she asked many questions and read everything that came within her reach. She was educated at home by her mother and a Chinese tutor, first publishing in the *Christian Observer* as a girl of six. She began to write regularly for the *Shanghai Mercury*, an English newspaper that offered rewards for children's stories and essays. Pearl was encouraged by her mother to write every week, and later decided to become a novelist. Living in Chiangking, Pearl learned Chinese before any other language, and played with Chinese children. She grew up with Chinese customs and traditions, even having a Chinese governess. Later she said that as a child, she simultaneously belonged to two worlds—an American missionary world and a Chinese world. This explains her wish as a novelist to encourage intercultural understanding among different peoples.

During the time Pearl was growing up in China, the country was restless and violent, and hatred against foreigners culminated in the Boxer Uprising of 1900. During the fearful time, Pearl and the rest of her family, except for her father, went to live in Shanghai. In 1901, the family, including Absalom, went to the United States, but returned to Chiangking after a year. During adolescence, Pearl was sent to a nearby missions school for girls. Pearl wanted to attend college in the United States, and attended Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Virginia, a Christian institution. Finding encouragement and academic stimulation at Randolph-Macon, Pearl adapted well to her collegiate life, but continually felt like an outsider because she embraced a culture that Americans found alien. She studied Philosophy, and teacher assisted Psychology for a year after graduating.

After graduating, Pearl stayed in America, but sought a passage to China when she received news of her mother's illness. In China, she met John Lossing Buck, an American agricultural missionary who arrived after the Chinese Revolution. Pearl and Lossing were married in Chiangking in 1917, and immediately moved to Ahnwei where Pearl gathered ideas for *The Good Earth*. Although the marriage lasted for eighteen years, it was hardly a happy one.

Pearl began writing during what she called a "fantastic era," a period of turmoil for China. She published stories in *Nation*, *The Chinese Recorder*, *Asia*, and *Atlantic*

*Monthly*. Her first novel was *East Wind, West Wind* which was published by the John Day Company in 1930. She later divorced Lossing, and married John Day's publisher, Richard Walsh, who published everything Pearl wrote. *East Wind, West Wind* received favorable review, but Walsh knew that Pearl could write better. *The Good Earth* was published in 1931, and became the best-selling book of 1931 and 1932, bringing Pearl the Pulitzer Prize, the Noble Prize for Literature, and many other literary honors. Pearl's exquisite storytelling and the appeal of a story about land were two of the many reasons for its high success in America. The novel was translated into over thirty languages, made into a play and an MGM motion picture. Other non-fictional work and novels quickly followed *The Good Earth* including *A House Divided*, *Dragon Seed*, *Pavilion of Women*, and *The Time is Noon*.

Pearl S. Buck died in Danby, Vermont on March 6, 1973.

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# Plot Summary

The novel begins on the day of Wang Lung's marriage. The woman he will be getting as his wife has been a slave since being a young girl at the great House of Hwang. Wang Lung, a humble, poor peasant farmer, goes to the great house to get his woman. O-lan is plain looking, dull, and slow, but she is hard working, thrifty, and resourceful. One day, she tells Wang Lung that she is with child, and later gives birth to a boy by herself. Winter comes, and Wang Lung is ready because of the good harvest he has had. There is a surplus of silver that he hides in a hole in his bedroom.

The New Year comes, and on the second day, O-lan visits the House of Hwang with the first born baby. The great house is not as prosperous as it has been before, and Wang Lung decides to buy some of their land with the extra silver he has hidden in his hole. Spring comes, and O-lan is again with child, giving birth to another boy. Again, Wang Lung's harvests are good, and he hides more silver in the hole. Wang Lung's own status in the village grows as a result of his prosperity.

One day, Wang Lung's uncle, a lazy old man, comes to ask for money for his daughter's wedding dowry. On the same day, O-lan gives birth to a third child-this time, a girl. Wang Lung is hit with a sense of evil. All during the summer, rain does not come, and the fields dry up. A period of famine follows. Soon, O-lan is big with yet another child, but the famine continues. Wang Lung, unable to bear it anymore, suddenly decides that he and his family will go south. O-lan gives birth, but the baby is dead when Wang Lung comes to look at it. Later, as he is wrapping the body to bury it, he notices bruise marks around its neck.

The next day, Wang Lung's uncle comes to make him sell his land, but he does not sell it, determined to return. Wang Lung and his family walk through the town, and get on a train that takes them to a southern city. At the city, they build a hut along the wall of a big house. O-lan and the children beg for money, and Wang Lung works as a ricksha puller. Wang Lung constantly longs for his land. One day, the gates of the wealthy family's house are opened to the poor, and the commoners swarm in to loot the property. Wang Lung, swept into the innermost court of the house, discovers a frightened rich man from whom he demands money. With the gold he received from the man, Wang Lung is finally able to return home.

When Wang Lung gets home, he finds the house in a bad condition, but he and his family work to make repairs. O-lan is again with child, and the family has enough to eat before the next harvest. One night, Wang Lung finds a pouch of jewels between O-lan's breasts. She tells him that she found them in the wealthy man's house. Taking the jewels from O-lan, except for the two pearls she wishes to keep for herself, Wang Lung buys more land from the House of Hwang.

Ching comes to live with Wang Lung as his steward. O-lan gives birth again-this time, to two children, a boy and a girl. Wang Lung's eldest daughter, on the other hand, does not



act her age, never saying anything. The two eldest sons are sent to school to be educated.

On the seventh year, there is a flood, and the fields are filled with water. Wang Lung becomes idle, not having anything to do on his land. He goes to a great teahouse to pass time, and is tempted to visit a beautiful girl named Lotus with whom he becomes enchanted.

Wang Lung's uncle, whom he has not seen for long, comes back with his family. The uncle's wife realizes that Wang Lung is sick with love for another woman, and offers to arrange the union between himself and Lotus. On a hot summer day, Lotus comes to his house with her serving woman, Cuckoo.

Realizing that his eldest son is now a grown boy, Wang Lung decides that the time has come for the son to be married. After learning that his son visits a whore, Wang Lung goes to the prostitute, paying her not to see his son anymore. When he angrily complains to his uncle that the uncle's son has led the eldest son into corruption, the old man threateningly shows Wang Lung that he is a member of a fearful bandit group, and Wang Lung cannot do anything to drive his uncle out.

Liu, a grain merchant, agrees to the union between his daughter and the son of Wang Lung, but is not willing to do anything for now except sign papers. One day, a small cloud hangs over the sky, and locusts fall over the land. Forgetting everything, Wang Lung and his workers try to save the fields from the locusts. As a result of hard work, the best of the lands are spared.

One day, Wang Lung's eldest son comes to tell him that he wishes to go south for more learning. After catching his son with Lotus, Wang Lung beats the boy savagely, and decides to send the lustful, wandering adolescent south. Wang Lung takes the second son out of school and makes him an apprentice under Liu. While arranging the apprenticeship of the second son, Wang Lung also discusses marrying his second daughter to the son of Liu.

Wang Lung notices that O-lan is constantly in pain. The doctor comes to the house, and tells him that O-lan is very sick and will die. When the New Year approaches, however, O-lan regains enough strength to train her daughter-in-law to prepare food. O-lan tells Wang Lung that she wishes to see her son married before she dies. The eldest son is called from the city, and the ceremony is held. At the end of the day, O-lan dies, and not long after, Wang Lung's old father also dies.

After the wedding and the funeral, there is a flood and a famine follows. Wang Lung's uncle and his wife become increasingly demanding, knowing that they provide protection for Wang Lung's house. To guard his daughter from the uncle's son, Wang Lung decides to send her to the home of her betrothed. Wang Lung buys opium for his uncle and his wife to make them helpless and quiet. The waters wane in the fields, and winter lapses away into summer. Wang Lung buys land and daughters from the people



who have returned from the south. He learns that his eldest daughter-in-law is with child.

One day, his eldest son suggests that the family move to the vacant great house in town. Wang Lung agrees, liking the idea of living in a house where a great family used to live. Leaving the uncle and his wife, Wang Lung's family moves to the house in town. Ching goes looking for a suitable maiden for the second son, and finds a girl three villages away. Soon, the second son's wedding day is set.

Fortunately for Wang Lung, the uncle's son goes off to a war in the north, and soon after, his first grandson is born. Wang Lung spends more time in his town house, rarely going out to his land and gradually renting out parcels of his land to tenants. After Ching dies of old age, Wang Lung does less and less of going to see his lands, eventually renting all of them out and permanently moving into the house in town.

Soon, all of the courts in the great house are rented for Wang Lung's family and the commoners in the outer courts are driven out. Because the third son does not wish to remain on the land as a farmer, Wang Lung reluctantly engages a tutor for the boy. The wife of the eldest son continuously and faithfully bears children, and the second son's wife also gives birth. One day, Wang Lung's uncle is found dead. Wang Lung moves the uncle's wife to the house in town.

One day, the son of Wang Lung's late uncle, who has become a soldier, comes to stay at Wang Lung's house with other soldiers. Although the fierce soldiers ravage the house, there is nothing that can be done. Luckily, however, the uncle's son soon leaves when the army moves out of the city.

Wang Lung begins to feel a secret yearning for one of the slaves who is a pale, delicate girl. Pear Blossom reciprocates this love by saying that she likes old men. The third son, who initially expressed an interest in Pear Blossom, leaves home to become a soldier. Wang Lung loves Pear Blossom, but his love for her gradually turns into the love of a father for his daughter. Pear Blossom patiently serves Wang Lung who is now a very old man. Wang Lung leads a quiet, isolated life in his court, seldom visiting Lotus and hearing about his family from Cuckoo. Although many things have changed, his love for the land is constant. As the time nears for him to die, Wang Lung decides to move back to his house on the land with Pear Blossom, his "poor fool," and some servants. One day, he follows his two sons out to the land. When he hears them making plans to sell the land, Wang Lung becomes hysterical, crying that the selling of the land will be the end of the family. Although the sons assure their father that they will not sell the land, they look over his head and secretly smile at one another.

## Major Characters

**Wang Lung:** Wang Lung is a poor peasant farmer whose love for the land sustains him through the difficult times of his life. After marrying a slave from a great house, he gradually rises from a poor, humble, country farmer to a wealthy, respected, landowning patriarch of a great family. He multiplies his fortunes through the help of his loyal wife, O-lan, and his faith in the good earth.

**O-lan:** O-lan is sold by her parents during a famine to the great House of Hwang where she works as a kitchen slave until being given to Wang Lung. She is a dark, plain-looking, dull woman who rarely speaks. Although she is not beautiful, O-lan is extremely patient, hard working, resourceful, and faithful. She gives birth to three sons and three girls, and five children survive. She knows that Wang Lung can never love her, but is extremely loyal to him. After having worked all her life for Wang Lung and the family, O-lan dies from an incurable illness.

**Old Man (Wang Lung's father):** Wang Lung's father comes from a family of farmers, and has worked on the land for most of his life before bequeathing it to Wang Lung. He is an old man who becomes increasingly feeble with age, spending most of his time eating and sleeping. He dies soon after O-lan dies.

**Ching:** Ching is Wang Lung's nearest neighbor who, with Wang Lung's rising fortunes, comes to live with him, and becomes his steward, overseeing various matters of the field and the workers. Ching is a small, timid man who rarely speaks. The famine destroys his family, but he spends the rest of his life serving Wang Lung like an extremely faithful dog. After Ching dies, Wang Lung can no longer bear to go out to his land by himself.

**Eldest son of Wang Lung (Nung En):** He is Wang Lung's first born. During adolescence, he is lustful, troublesome, and moody like a young lord of a great house. He is sent to school to be educated, and eventually goes south to become a scholar. Later, he returns to marry a town-born maid who is the daughter of a grain dealer. As an adult, he is highly conscious of the status and the wealth of his family in town. He is also very extravagant, and scornful of the common people. Later, he becomes an official among the rich men in town, and gets himself a second wife.

**Second Son of Wang Lung (Nung Wen):** Even as a child, the second son is different from his older sibling. Sharp and thrifty, he is apprenticed to the grain merchant Liu after school. Later, the second son becomes a clerk of the grain shop, comes to manage Wang Lung's finances, and marries a village maid. He and his haughty older brother do not get along as a result of various differences. Later, the second son sets up a grain market of his own.

**Third Son of Wang Lung:** The third son is born as a twin with a girl child. He has O-lan's gravity and silence. Wang Lung wishes to keep him on the land as a farmer, but he does not wish to be a farmer. Wang Lung finally allows a tutor for the third son so that



he may be educated, but the third son runs away from home to become a soldier. Later, people from the south say that he has become a high ranking military official of the revolution.

**Wife of the Eldest Son:** She is a properly demure, fair maid from town who is the daughter of Liu, the grain merchant. After marrying the eldest son, she gives birth to Wang Lung's first grandson. The wife of the second son and she do not get along.

**Wife of the Second Son:** She is a good-humored, robust village maid who marries the second son. She gives birth to a girl child.

**Eldest Daughter of Wang Lung (Poor Fool):** When she is born, a sense of evil strikes Wang Lung, as though an era of misfortune has begun for him. She is an infant during the famine, and most likely, because of lack of nourishment, the eldest daughter grows up to be mildly retarded. She never talks nor does she ever grow up to do things befitting a child of her age. She simply smiles like a baby, and plays with a piece of cloth. Because Wang Lung pities her, he loves and cares for her the most out of all the rest of the children. Even as he is dying of old age, Wang Lung does not forget 'his poor fool,' making sure that she will be taken care of by someone. Pear Blossom promises Wang Lung that she will look after the eldest daughter after his death.

**Daughter of Wang Lung (Born and killed during the famine):** The second daughter is born during the famine, but dies immediately after being born. It is suggested that O-lan kills her because it is during the famine, and a girl is only a burden, brought up to be given to other families in marriage. Wang Lung notices bruise marks around the child's neck as he wraps the body to bury it.

**Second Daughter of Wang Lung:** She is born as a twin with Wang Lung's third son. She is an extremely pretty, delicate girl who is later sent off to be married to the son of Merchant Liu. O-lan binds her feet tightly so that she will not meet a fate like that of herself as an unloved, undesired wife of a man.

**Wang Lung's Uncle (younger brother of Wang Lung's father):** Wang Lung's uncle is a lazy, sly, old man who is a burden and a constant source of trouble to Wang Lung. Unlike Wang Lung, he is not a hard-working farmer, always gambling away whatever money he has. He joins a group of dangerous bandits during the famine, and comes back to use that to threaten Wang Lung. He and his wife live off Wang Lung's wealth, and later die of age and excessive opium use.

**Uncle's Wife:** The wife of the uncle is a fat, loud, greedy woman who is as lazy and devious as the uncle is. She arranges the union between Wang Lung and the beautiful Lotus. She dies some time after her husband from having smoked too much opium.

**Son of the Uncle:** He is the lustful, base son of Wang Lung's uncle who is also a constant source of annoyance to Wang Lung and his family. He lures Wang Lung's oldest son into prostitution during adolescence, and lusts after Wang Lung's second daughter so that the maid has to be sent to the home of her betrothed for protection. Later, he goes off to a war in the north and becomes a soldier. For a short time, he



returns to Wang Lung's house with a group of rowdy soldiers, stirring up confusion and trouble within the household, but goes away as soon as he came after leaving one of Wang Lung's slaves pregnant.

**Lotus:** Lotus is a pretty, slender girl of the great tea house who later becomes Wang Lung's mistress. Her delicate features and little face enchant Wang Lung. At Wang Lung's house, she leads a life of good food, silk clothes, and luxury. Although beautiful, she is quick-tempered and spoiled. As an old woman, Lotus is fat and lazy, caring for nothing but food and jewelry.

**Cuckoo:** Cuckoo is a handsome woman with a sharp face and hard features. She is a sly, quick-witted woman who will do anything for money. Although a mere slave at the House of Hwang, she is the Old Lord's favorite. Later, after the great house has fallen into poverty and deterioration, she wields power and control over the Old Lord, selling the family land to Wang Lung in exchange for jewels. After the Old Lord dies, Cuckoo becomes the keeper of the teahouse Wang Lung frequents to see Lotus. She comes to Wang Lung's house as a serving woman to Lotus. When she comes, there is trouble between her and O-lan.

### Minor Characters

**Gatekeeper of the great house of Hwang:** He is the haughty, condescending gatekeeper who lets Wang Lung into the house on the day he goes to get O-lan. According to Cuckoo, he is one of the robbers to loot the great house during the famine.

**Gatekeeper's wife:** She is the pockmarked wife of the gatekeeper. Later, when Wang Lung goes to the great house to decide whether or not he will rent it, she lets him into the courts.

**Old Mistress:** She is the mistress of the great house who gives O-lan away to Wang Lung. Because of her constant opium smoking, she is haggard and distracted. When Wang Lung first sees her, she is a small old lady, clad in satin and jewels and sitting on a dais.

**Old Master:** He is the lord of the great house. When Wang Lung goes to see him to buy land, he has been reduced to an old man, helpless under the control of a cunning slave (Cuckoo).

**Merchant Liu:** He is the grain merchant in town who marries his daughter to Wang Lung's eldest son. He also agrees to marry his son to Wang Lung's second daughter and apprentices Wang Lung's second son.

**Pear Blossom :** She is a pale, frail girl who is sold to Wang Lung following a famine. She waits on Lotus, but gains her disfavor by refusing to be given to the son of Wang Lung's uncle. She is a frightened, delicate creature who prefers Wang Lung to young men. She takes care of Wang Lung in old age, and comforts him by promising to take



care of his poor fool after his death. Because she is a very pretty girl, Wang Lung's third son and the uncle's son all show interest in her.

**Slave:** She is the stout slave of Wang Lung who volunteers to be given to the son of the uncle when he comes as a soldier. Later, she gives birth to a girl child, and takes care of the uncle's wife who is dying. She asks Wang Lung to find a husband for her so she can be married, and Wang Lung chooses to give her to the laborer who caused Ching's death.

**Laborer:** He is a ruddy, rustic farmer who inadvertently causes Ching's death. He is later given one of Wang Lung's slaves who wishes to be married to a farmer.

**Yang, the whore:** She is the coarse, aged whore who lives in the court of the great house after the fall of the Hwang family. She is visited by Wang Lung's eldest son during his adolescence. Wang Lung asks her that she refuse to see his son when he comes to see her in exchange for money. She agrees to the arrangement.

**Girl Cousin of Wang Lung (Daughter of the uncle) :** She is the daughter of Wang Lung's uncle. One day, Wang Lung sees her talking freely with a man, and the uncle comes to Wang Lung to ask for some money to provide for her wedding dowry.

**Schoolmaster at the small school near the city gate:** He is the old master of the small school near the city gate who once failed the government examinations, and decided to turn to teaching young men in the classics.

**First Grandson of Wang Lung:** The eldest son's wife gives birth to a son who is Wang Lung's first grandchild.

## Objects/Places

**Earth/ Land/ Field:** Wang Lung's love for the earth is a chief driving force in his life. The only thing he loves with any constancy is the earth, and this is because the earth is constant as well. Unlike food or silver, the earth is something that can never be taken away from him. Wang Lung always keeps returning to his land, and yearns for it whenever he is away. It serves as a healing element for him whenever he has domestic troubles, and is the foundation upon which he has founded his great family.

**Temple to the Earth God:** The temple is on the western field, and it was built by Wang Lung's grandfather who was also a farmer. It is made of bricks and tiles. Under the roof of the temple, there are two small earthen figures. It is the Earth God and his mistress. They wear robes of red paper, and on a good New Year, they are given new robes. As a humble farmer, Wang Lung always remembers to pay respects to the god and his lady, but as a wealthy landlord, he becomes careless.

**House of Hwang:** This is where the great Hwang family dwells, and Wang Lung initially goes into the house to get O-lan who has been a slave in the family. Later, Wang Lung, as a man of fortune and land, rents the house to live there with his own family.

**(Un)Bound feet:** Wang Lung is disappointed and repulsed when he realizes that O-lan's feet are not bound. O-lan was sold to the great house as a child, and thus, her mother did not have the time to bind her feet. Later, O-lan insists on tightly binding the feet of their second daughter so that she may have small feet. The girl cries every night because of the pain. Lotus has small feet that have been bound.

**Shantung:** Shantung is the northern city where O-lan's parents came from to sell O-lan to the great house.

**Dyed Eggs:** Wang Lung dyes eggs in red dye to distribute to other villagers in honor of the birth of his first male child. Later, Wang Lung's son does the same when his first son is born.

**Wang Lung's ox:** The ox has been Wang Lung's field companion for many years, but must be killed during the famine to provide food for the family.

**Firewagon (train):** Wang Lung and his family pay to board a train, a firewagon, to travel south during the famine.

**Public Kitchen:** In the southern city, there are public kitchens where poor people pay a small fee to fill their bellies with white rice.

**Ricksha:** Wang Lung works as a ricksha puller in the southern city to earn money.

**Anhwei:** Anhwei is the name of Wang Lung's birthplace where the language is slow and deep.



**Kiangsu:** Kiangsu is the name of the city that Wang Lung and his family go to during the year of the famine. It is a city where people speak rapidly and foodstuffs are plentiful.

**Village of huts:** A village of huts forms along the wall of a great house in the southern city. The huts are inhabited by poor workers such as Wang Lung and his family who have come south as a result of the famine in the countryside.

**Gold:** Wang Lung is swept up by the mob of looting people when the gates of the great house are opened. He finds a frightened rich man, and demands gold from him. With this gold, Wang Lung is able to return home to his land.

**Jewels:** O-lan finds a small bag of jewels during the looting of the great house. Upon discovery, Wang Lung demands them from her, and with these, he buys more land from the Hwang family.

**Pearls:** O-lan willingly gives all the jewels to Wang Lung, but asks him to allow her to keep two pearls for herself. She keeps them in a small pouch between her breasts, but one day, Wang Lung takes them from her to give to Lotus. After O-lan's death, Wang Lung wishes that he had not taken the pearls from her.

**Small School near the City Gate:** Wang Lung is embarrassed by the fact that he is illiterate, and cannot make out any characters while doing business at the grain market. He wishes to see his sons become educated, and sends them to a small school near the city gate that is being kept by an old teacher who once failed the country examination.

**Great Tea Shop in Town:** It is a newly opened teashop whose owner is a man from the south. Wang Lung begins to frequent the place when he becomes idle as a result of not having any work to do on the land. At the teashop, Wang Lung meets Cuckoo who has become the keeper of the shop, and eventually Lotus who is one of the many beautiful girls working there.

**Redbeards:** This is the dangerous bandit group to which Wang Lung's uncle belongs. The men in this group roam around the northern countryside, destroying homes and killing people.

**Locusts :** One year, the sky turns black and a great roar fills the air as locusts fall from the sky to destroy the fields. Wang Lung and his laborers work furiously to destroy these insects, and succeed in saving the best of Wang Lung's fields.

**Opium :** When Wang Lung goes to the great House of Hwang to get O-lan, he sees the Old Mistress smoking opium. Later, in order to make his uncle and his uncle's wife powerless and 'undesiring,' he and his son devise a plan to give as much opium as possible to the couple. Wang Lung's uncle and his wife become haggard and sick as a result of excessive opium use.

# Quotes

Quote 1: "There is this woman of mine. The thing is to be done." Chapter 1, pg. 18

Quote 2: "There was only this perfect sympathy of movement, of turning this earth of theirs over and over to the sun, this earth which formed their home and fed their bodies and made their gods...Some time, in some age, bodies of men and women had been buried there, houses had stood there, had fallen, and gone back into the earth. So would also their house, some time, return into the earth, their bodies also. Each had his turn at this earth. They worked on, moving together-together-producing the fruit of this earth." Chapter 1, pg. 22

Quote 3: "Out of this body of his, out of his own loins, life!" Chapter 2, pg. 23

Quote 4: "Sell their land! Then indeed are they growing poor. Land is one's flesh and blood." Chapter 5, pg. 37

Quote 5: "Last year this time I was slave in that house." Chapter 5, pg. 38

Quote 6: "It is only a slave this time-not worth mentioning." Chapter 7, pg. 46

Quote 7: "Well and [the children] must all starve if the plants starve." Chapter 8, pg. 48

Quote 8: "They cannot take the land away from me. the labor of my body and the fruit of the fields I have put into that which cannot be taken away. If I had the silver, they would have taken it. if I had bought with the silver to store it, they would have taken it all. I have the land still, and it is mine." Chapter 8, pg. 53

Quote 9: "I shall never sell the land! Bit by bit, I will dig up the fields and feed the earth itself to the children and when they die I will bury them in the land, and I and my wife and my old father, even he, we will die on the land that has given us birth." Chapter 9, pg. 61

Quote 10: "When the rich are too rich there are ways, and when the poor are too poor there are ways...and that way will come soon." Chapter 13, pg. 84

Quote 11: "But Wang Lung thought of his land and pondered this way and that, with the sickened heart of deferred hope, how he could get back to it. he belonged, not to this scum which clung to the walls of a rich man's house; nor did he belong to the rich man's house. He belonged to the land and he could not live with any fullness until he felt the land under his feet and followed a plow in the springtime and bore a scythen in his hand at harvest." Chapter 14, pg. 87

Quote 12: "Yes, but there was the land. Money and food are eaten and gone, and if there is not sun and rain in proportion, there is again hunger." Chapter 14, pg. 90



Quote 13: "The hour has come-the gates of the rich man are open to us!" Chapter 14, pg. 97

Quote 14: "Hunger makes a thief of any man." Chapter 15, pg. 101

Quote 15: "I must stick a little incense before those two in the small temple. After all, they have power over earth." Chapter 15, pg. 103

Quote 16: "There was such a mass of jewels as one had never dreamed could be together, jewels red as the inner flesh of watermelons, golden as wheat, green as young leaves in spring, clear as water tricking out of the earth." Chapter 16, pg.104

Quote 17: "Then Wang Lung, without comprehending it, looked for an instant into the heart of this dull, and faithful creature, who had labored all her life at some task at which she won no reward." Chapter 16, pg. 106

Quote 18: "And it [seems] to Wang Lung that he [is looking] at O-lan for the first time in his life and he [sees] for the first time that she [is] a woman whom no man [can] call other than she was, a dull and common creature, who [plods] in silence without thought of how she [appears] to others." Chapter 18, pg. 121

Quote 19: "My mother did not bind them, since I was sold so young. But the girls' feet I will bind-the younger girl's feet I will bind." Chapter 18, pg. 122

Quote 20: "...he chose one most beautiful, a small, slender thing, a body light as a bamboo and a little face as pointed as a kitten's face, and one hand clasping the stem of a lotus flower in bud, and the hand as delicate as the tendril of a fern uncurled." Chapter 18, pg. 126

Quote 21: "Yet never could he grasp her wholly, and this it was which kept him fevered and thirsty, even if she gave him his will of her." Chapter 19, pg. 130

Quote 22: "Then slowly she thrust her wet wrinkled hand into her bosom and she drew forth the small package and she gave it to him and watched him as he unwrapped it; and the pearls lay in his hand and they caught softly and fully the light of the sun, and he laughed. But O-lan returned to the beating of his clothes and when tears dropped slowly and heavily from her eyes she did not put up her hand to wipe them away; only she beat the more steadily with her wooden stick upon the clothes spread over the stone." Chapter 19, pg. 134-5

Quote 23: "But she answered nothing except to say over and over, moaning, 'I have borne you sons--I have borne you sons.'" Chapter 20, pg. 140

Quote 24: "She swayed upon her little feet and to Wang Lung there was nothing so wonderful for beauty in the world as her pointed little feet and her curling helpless hands. And he ate and drank of his love and he feasted alone and he was satisfied." Chapter 20, pg. 144



Quote 25: "Now the anger that arose in Wang Lung's heart was an anger he had not known in all his life before, although as things had prospered with him and as men came to call him rich, he...had grown full of small sudden angers, and he was proud even in the town. But this anger now was the anger of one man against another man who steals away the loved woman, and when Wang Lung remembered that the other man was his own son, he was filled with a vomiting sickness." Chapter 24, pg. 175

Quote 26: "For I must die-sometime anyway. But the land is there after me." Chapter 26, pg. 185

Quote 27: "There in that land of mine is buried the first good half of my life and more. It is as though half of me were buried there, and now it is a different life in my house." Chapter 26, pg. 195

Quote 28: "When day came back he was back upon his land, walking through the gate in the wall about the town as soon as it was open after dawn came. And he smelled the fresh smell of the fields and when he came to his own land he rejoiced in it." Chapter 29, pg. 215

Quote 29: "The common people had to move, then, and they moved complaining and cursing because a rich man could do as he would and they packed their tattered possessions and went away swelling with anger and muttering that one day they would come back even as the poor do come back when the rich are too rich." Chapter 30, pg. 224

Quote 30: "It seemed to him that now his life was rounded off, and he had done all that he said he would in his life and more than he could ever have dreamed he could." Chapter 32, pg. 241

Quote 31: "But when Lotus accused him he took thought to look and he saw it was true that the girl was very pretty and pale as a pear blossom, and seeing this, something stirred in his old blood that had been quiet these ten years and more." Chapter 32, pg. 243

Quote 32: "He sat there and his blood ran full and hot like the blood of a young man." Chapter 33, pg. 247

Quote 33: "I like old men-I like old men-they are so kind." Chapter 33, pg. 248

Quote 34: "But still one thing remained to him and it was his love for his land. He had gone away from it and he had set up his house in a town and he was rich. But his roots were in his land and although he forgot it for many months together, when spring came each year he must go out on to the land." Chapter 34, pg. 257

Quote 35: "Now evil, idle son-sell the land! It is the end of a family-when they begin to sell the land. Out of the land we came and into it we must go-if you will hold your land you can live-no one can rob you of land-if you sell the land, it is the end." Chapter 34, pg. 260



# Topic Tracking: Earth

## Chapter 2

Earth 1: There is a prevailing sense that the earth is the provider of all basic things needed to sustain life. There is also the sense that the earth is the place where man rises from and ultimately returns to by the end of his life. These sentiments are established from the very beginning of the novel. O-lan and Wang Lung work the land together harmoniously, both having a deep reverence for the land.

## Chapter 5

Earth 2: When Wang Lung hears that the Hwang family wishes to sell land, he is shocked. Because land is directly connected with life, he cannot imagine parting with it and is surprised to hear that the Hwangs would sell it.

## Chapter 6

Earth 3: When he first buys a piece of land from the Hwang family, Wang Lung is ecstatic. But when he realizes that to the great house, the land does not mean much, Wang Lung has an intense motivation to accumulate as much land as possible.

## Chapter 8

Earth 4: During the famine, to Wang Lung, keeping the fields alive is just as important, if not more, as keeping his own family alive; the destruction of the land means the fall of his own family. When O-lan tells him that the plants must go dry if the children are to have anything to eat, Wang Lung replies that the children must starve if the plants die.

## Chapter 9

Earth 5: When his uncle tries to get him to sell his land, Wang Lung cries out in protest that he will never sell the land that is man's birthplace as well as his burial place.

## Chapter 11

Earth 6: Thus, when Wang Lung and his family go to the southern city during the famine, Wang Lung continually yearns for the land. Although life in the city is hard and agonizing, the thought that his land is back home waiting for him brings him peace and comfort.

## Chapter 12

Earth 7: When Wang Lung learns that his second son has stolen a piece of meat from a woman, he is in despair because his sons are growing up as thieves in the city. He tells himself that they must go back to the land because city life is corrupting and evil. There is a sense that the land is where innocence and honesty reside.



### **Chapter 13**

Earth 8: Wang Lung's father, like Wang Lung, also cherishes an unwavering faith in the land. When Wang Lung yearns for the land, wanting to return to it, the father understands him well. He tells Wang Lung that there were times in his life when he also had to leave the land. When Wang Lung reminds his father that he always returned, the old man simply replies that it was because there was the land.

### **Chapter 14**

Earth 9: In the southern city, Wang Lung labors like many other desperate men in the village of huts, but the thought of his land makes him feel different from all the other people. He belongs to the land, not to the city, and certainly not to the downtrodden group of poor laborers.

Earth 10: Wang Lung is always devoted to his land. When other men talking about doing different things with money, Wang Lung talks of buying land from which to reap harvests. Others ridicule him for it, but he is resolute, not minding their scorn for him.

Earth 11: The city becomes increasingly restless, and Wang Lung sees many people shouting in front of a large crowd in the streets. One day, a man is talking about how the rich people and the capitalists are killing the poor commoners. Initially, Wang Lung is interested in this talk, but quickly loses interest when the man disregards the importance of the land. To Wang Lung, land is more valuable than anything because it is always constant. It is something that can never be taken away from him unlike food or money.

Earth 12: When people in the city become fearful, the city life becomes more and more unbearable to Wang Lung who constantly yearns for the land. He even thinks seriously about selling his daughter if only it would enable him to return to his land.

### **Chapter 15**

Earth 13: When Wang Lung and his family finally do return to the land, Wang Lung cannot part from it nor can he stop thinking about it. Wanting to be alone with his land, Wang Lung spends many days planning and thinking about what to plant.

### **Chapter 16**

Earth 14: Wang Lung is not the only character in the book who knows the value of the land. Even Cuckoo, the slave who sells him the Hwang land, tells him that the reason for the fall of the Hwang family was the family's heedlessness to the land.

### **Chapter 22**

Earth 15: Wang Lung forgets the land for awhile when he is sick in love with Lotus. When Lotus comes to his house, he is plagued by various domestic problems, but when the waters in the fields recede and Wang Lung is able to work his land, he is immediately healed of his sickness. Earth is a healing agent for Wang Lung.



### **Chapter 23**

Earth 16: Wang Lung is so attached to his land that despite the threat his bandit uncle poses to his family, he cannot move to town for fear of living without his land close by.

Earth 17: When Wang Lung is burdened by troubles in his household, he turns to the land for comfort. After he has worked on the land, he immediately feels better. When the locusts threaten to destroy his crops, Wang Lung works on his land for seven consecutive days. It is exhausting, but healing at the same time.

### **Chapter 26**

Earth 18: O-lan also acknowledges and respects the earth. As she lies dying, O-lan tells Wang Lung that he must not sell the land in his futile attempts to cure her. She will die sometime, but the land will always be there, even after her death. It is forever constant.

### **Chapter 28**

Earth 19: Wang Lung is always reluctant to part with his land. When his eldest son suggests that the family go live in what used to be the great House of Hwang, Wang Lung initially dismisses the suggestion, reminding his unappreciative son that if it had not been for the land, the family would have starved and the son himself would not have become a lord.

### **Chapter 29**

Earth 20: Even after having moved to the house in town, Wang Lung still returns to the land everyday to walk around.

### **Chapter 34**

Earth 21: Over the years, Wang Lung ages and changes, but one thing remains within him - his consideration and never failing love for the land. Although he leaves it for awhile after having built his fortune, he always returns to the land every spring.

Earth 22: The last scene of the book is a poignant one in which Wang Lung hysterically yells at his two sons when he overhears them talking about selling the land. He is appalled and distressed, unable to control his tears at the mention of selling the land. He scolds his sons, telling them that it will be the end of the family if they begin to sell the land. Land is where they have come from and where they must return. It is also the only constant thing that cannot be taken away.



# Topic Tracking: God

## Chapter 1

God 1: As a humble farmer, Wang Lung relies on the good favor of the Earth God and his mistress. On the day of his marriage, Wang Lung takes O-lan to the temple where they burn incense and stand before the gods to pay respects.

## Chapter 4

God 2: Wang Lung is extremely happy when his first son is born, but he is afraid of the "malignant" spirits in the air who might undermine his happiness. Thus, he pays a visit to the Earth God and his mistress. He seems to believe that they wield much power and that they can provide protection for him and his family. It comforts him to know that the Earth God and his lady are there.

## Chapter 5

God 3: Wang Lung always remembers the Earth God and his mistress. When the New Year approaches, his father makes a new robe for the couple, and Wang Lung burns incense before them.

## Chapter 9

God 4: Wang Lung attributes everything that happens to him to the Earth God and his lady. When the famine hits and the family suffers, Wang Lung blames the Earth God, attributing it to his cold-heartedness.

## Chapter 15

God 5: After having endured through the famine, Wang Lung and his family come home, returning to the land. Although Wang Lung felt that the gods turned their backs on him, he does not forget to see the Earth God and his mistress upon arrival. He still blames them for what he has had to endure, scolding them.

God 6: Even after having scolded the gods for having been wicked to humans during the difficult period of the famine, Wang Lung still acknowledges and pays due reverence to the power they have over earth. He tells himself to place an incense before the two figurines at the temple because they have power over earth.

## Chapter 23

God 7: Wang Lung is not the only one in the village who relies on the power of the Earth God. When the locusts threaten to destroy the crops, women visit the Earth God to pray for the safety of the fields.

## Chapter 27



God 8: As Wang Lung expands his fortunes, he becomes increasingly confident and careless. He disregards the power of the Earth God and his lady. When Ching tells him that there will be a flood soon, Wang Lung complains that he has never had any luck from the Earth God and his lady. He is unappreciative of the good fortune that the Earth God has bestowed on him earlier. When Ching implores him not to speak about the gods that way, Wang Lung dismisses Ching.

## **Chapter 29**

God 9: Despite Wang Lung's carelessness, when the birth of his grandchild approaches, he is so desperate and anxious that he pays a visit to the Earth God and his mistress. Instead of imploring, however, he threatens them to give him a grandson.

God 10: Wang Lung is bitter and resentful toward the Earth God when he learns that Ching is dying. He thinks that the Earth God and his mistress, jealous of the town goddess to whom he has given a new robe, are intentionally wreaking havoc in his life.



# Topic Tracking: Women

## Chapter 1

Women 1: *The Good Earth* gives much insight into the ways in which women were treated in Chinese society around the time in which the story takes place. Footbinding is a practice that is mentioned several times throughout the novel. Small, bound feet are considered beautiful and desirable female characteristics. Thus, when Wang Lung discovers that O-lan's feet are not bound, he is disappointed. O-lan's unbound feet will continue to irritate and repulse Wang Lung.

## Chapter 5

Women 2: Female babies are considered worthless and burdensome. In order to ward off evil spirits from their firstborn son, O-lan and Wang Lung pretend that their child is an undesirable female with an incurable disease.

## Chapter 7

Women 3: The novel also gives insight into what was considered proper female behavior in Chinese society. Wang Lung is shocked to see his older girl cousin, a daughter of the uncle, talking freely to a village man. A free interaction between a grown man and woman is considered scandalous, inappropriate, and disgraceful.

Women 4: The belief that the birth of a female child in a family is a misfortune reverberates throughout the book. When O-lan has her first daughter, she tells Wang Lung that the child is not worth mentioning. Because it is only a girl, it does not deserve any recognition.

Women 5: When Wang Lung hears that the child is a girl this time, he is extremely distraught and depressed. He even goes as far as to think that an era of bad luck has begun for him because daughters are raised only to be given to other families.

## Chapter 9

Women 6: A second girl child is born during the famine. Although it is not explicitly told, it is suggested that O-lan kills it immediately after birth. When Wang Lung examines the body, he sees bruise marks around the dead child's neck. Putting the body of his dead daughter on the ground some distance away from his home, Wang Lung must turn his back on the child's body, knowing that the stray, hungry dog loitering around will eat it.

## Chapter 13

Women 7: Girls are like commodity or stock in trade. During a year of famine, families sell their daughters in exchange for money. O-lan tells Wang Lung that she was also sold by her parents to the great house during a difficult time. She is willing to sell their eldest daughter to get Wang Lung back to his land.



Women 8: A man in a nearby hut tells Wang Lung that like many others, he has had to sell his daughters to survive. According to him, others kill their daughters as soon as they are born instead of selling them as slaves.

### **Chapter 15**

Women 9: When Wang Lung returns to the land, he discovers that all of his girl cousins were sold by his uncle during the famine. Even the ugly ones were sold to provide every last bit of money.

### **Chapter 18**

Women 10: As Wang Lung becomes wealthier and more idle, he begins to carefully examine O-lan. Realizing that she is ugly, Wang Lung is repulsed by her appearance. In a rush of anger, he mentions her unbound feet, and O-lan is immediately ashamed and apologetic. She promises to bind the feet of her daughter.

### **Chapter 25**

Women 11: It seems as though a woman who wishes to be loved by her husband needs to have small, bound feet. This is what O-lan seems to have instilled in the second daughter. She tells Wang Lung that she has been ordered by O-lan to not say anything about her footbinding because without bound feet, she will not be loved by her husband.

### **Chapter 28**

Women 12: The sense that female children are commodities to be constantly bought and sold persists throughout the book. During the famine, men sell their daughters in exchange for money or farming tools with which they will rebuild their lives.

### **Chapter 29**

Women 13: When the time comes for his eldest daughter-in-law to give birth, Wang Lung desperately wishes for a grandson. He bribes the goddess of mercy with a new robe and even threatens the Earth God to give him a male grandchild. The birth of a male child in a family is an occasion to be celebrated and appreciated. The birth of a girl, on the other hand, is a shameful and bitter affair.

### **Chapter 31**

Women 14: The wife of the eldest son is a prim and proper town maid. In contrast, the wife of the second son is a village maid who is more open and whose behavior is condemned by the eldest son. The accepted mode of behavior for women in society is one guided by timidity and reservation. When the son of Wang Lung's uncle accosts the two daughter-in-laws, the town maid is properly shy, but the village maid is not. The eldest son disapproves of the second daughter-in-law's behavior.

### **Chapter 32**

Women 15: Once born, girls have no place to claim in the family. When the slave who conceives by the uncle's son gives birth to a baby girl, Wang Lung is relieved because if she had given birth to a son, the baby would have had to be acknowledged. Because it is only a girl, the newborn child is not important.

# Chapter 1

It is the day of Wang Lung's marriage. His father is coughing from the other room, and Wang Lung lies on his bed. Getting up from the bed, he feels the wind by sticking his hand out through a hole in the window and thinks it is a good omen. He goes into the kitchen that is made of straw and the earth from the fields, and carefully fills the cauldron with water. Water is precious, but after thinking, he suddenly pours all of the water from the jar and decides to wash his whole body because he wishes himself to be clean today. While making the fire, Wang Lung thinks to himself that this is the last day he will have to light the fire himself. Ever since his mother died six years ago, Wang Lung has had to do it for himself and his father, but after today, there will be a woman in the house to do it.

Wang Lung's father comes out of his room, and complains that he has not yet had his daily water. Wang Lung makes him tea, but his father complains that it is wasteful. Seeing Wang Lung's bath water, he continues scolding Wang Lung even as he carries the tub into the room.

After washing himself, Wang Lung puts on a coat and a pair of trousers that he wears only on special days. When his father complains again that he needs something to eat, Wang Lung quickly prepares a corn gruel. Going back into his own room, Wang Lung thinks that he would like to be newly shaven for the occasion. Taking his pouch of money, he counts how much he has - he needs to think about food that he will have to buy for the dinner. He has invited people from the village to dine in honor of his wedding. Although he is initially hesitant, Wang Lung decides to go for a shave.

On his way, Wang Lung passes the fields and the city wall. He also passes the great House of Hwang where he will go get the slave girl who will be his wife. His father had insisted that there were only slaves left for the poor. Farmers like Wang Lung could not afford the costly expense of weddings. The woman would keep house, give birth to children, and work in the fields, things a pretty woman would certainly not do for Wang Lung. Wang Lung knew nothing about the woman who was to be his wife except for the fact that she was not pockmarked and that she did not have a split upper lip.

Wang Lung goes into the Street of Barbers and seats himself on a stool to be shaven. He feels timid because with townspeople, he always feels as though he is the object of ridicule. When the barber comments on Wang Lung's braid as being out of fashion, he jumps up, crying out in panic that he cannot cut it off without asking his father. After the shave, Wang Lung pays - to him it is a lot of money. At the market, Wang Lung buys pork, lotus leaf, beef, beancurd, jelly, and at the candle shop, he buys a pair of incense sticks. He makes his way toward the House of Hwang, but is suddenly frightened. Having never before been to a great house, he is ashamed to go in asking for a woman.

Wishing to stall, he turns around and heads down to a restaurant to eat something, but when he can delay no longer, Wang Lung heads to the great house. He is greeted by a gatekeeper with a large mole on his left cheek who is haughty and rude to Wang Lung



the farmer. Wang Lung is forced to yield a piece of silver to the scornful gatekeeper before he will lead Wang Lung into the house. Wang Lung is led through a long veranda, and at the center of the room sits the Old Mistress who is smoking a pipe of opium. Her opium smoking distracts her from Wang Lung, but she finally calls for the slave he has come to get who is named O-lan. When a woman comes into the room, Wang Lung is disappointed to see that she has unbound feet.

#### Topic Tracking: Women 1

The Old Mistress tells Wang Lung that the woman came to the great house as a child because her parents, who had come from a northern city called Shantung, sold her during a year of famine. She also tells him that she is a virgin and has been a good slave. After telling O-lan to bring her the first born child to see, the Old Mistress dismisses them both. She is very absorbed in her opium smoking.

Wang Lung looks back to see the woman for the first time and observes her square face, nose, wide mouth, and small eyes, finding no beauty in her face. On the way home, Wang Lung buys O-lan peaches, which she greedily eats. Soon, they reach the temple to the earth, a temple that Wang Lung's grandfather made from bricks and tiles. Adorned in red robes, the Earth God and his lady sit under the roof of the temple. Every New Year, Wang Lung's father buys new red paper to make robes for this couple. After having lit the incense, Wang Lung and O-lan stand before the gods, and it is "a moment of marriage" for them.

#### Topic Tracking: God 1

When they reach Wang Lung's house, the old man pretends not to notice O-lan, concentrating on the sky. Wang Lung tells O-lan that there will be guests for whom she will need to make food. Guests include Wang Lung's uncle, his son, some farmers, and Ching, his next door neighbor. O-lan cooks, but does not go out because she does not like to appear before men. The guests all praise the good food. Despite his protests to the guests, Wang Lung is proud of the food that O-lan has prepared. After the guests have left, Wang Lung finds O-lan asleep by the ox. Waking her and leading her into the room, Wang Lung shyly undresses himself, telling himself: "There is this woman of mine. The thing is to be done." Chapter 1, pg. 18. After the light has been put out, Wang Lung is suddenly happy. As though self-conscious of what he is about to do, he laughs and seizes O-lan.

## Chapter 2

The next morning, Wang Lung lies on his bed, watching O-lan get up and dress. He tells her to take the first bowl of hot water to his father. Wang Lung is pleased that another person makes the fire and boils the water in the morning; it is a "luxury of idleness." Although Wang Lung spends his days as usual, he cannot stop thinking about O-lan who now belongs to him, and wonders if she likes him. Although he thinks her plain, he likes it that her body has been untouched by the young lords of the great House of Hwang.

During the next several months, Wang Lung observes O-lan. He likes it that when he returns from the land, food is ready on the table, and he does not need to prepare it for himself and his old father. O-lan cleans the house, collects fuel by roaming around the countryside, picks animal droppings to manure the fields, mends clothes, and cleans the beddings. She is very resourceful and thrifty, but her face is always expressionless, except for an occasional look of fear.

One day in early summer, as Wang Lung is working out in the fields, O-lan comes to work beside him. "There [is] only this perfect sympathy of movement, of turning this earth of theirs over and over to the sun, this earth which formed their home and fed their bodies and made their gods...Some time, in some age, bodies of men and women [have] been buried there, houses [have] stood there, [have] fallen, and gone back into the earth." Chapter 2, pg. 22

Topic Tracking: Earth 1

At the end of the day, O-lan tells plainly and without expression that she is with child. Wang Lung is momentarily speechless, but is pleased. When they arrive home, Wang Lung tells his father the news, and the old man is also happy. Astounded, Wang Lung thinks to himself: "Out of this body of his, out of his own loins, life!" Chapter 2, pg. 23.

## Chapter 3

When the birth of the child approaches, Wang Lung tells O-lan that someone should come to help with the giving of birth. When Wang Lung suggests that someone from the House of Hwang comes to help her, O-lan becomes angry because she will not return to the great house without her son in her arms, dressed in good clothes. Because of her pride, O-lan wishes to return to the great house as a respected mother of a male child. Wang Lung is surprised that O-lan speaks so much and that she has thought all these things. Nevertheless, he gives her the cash to buy the necessary cloths to make coats for herself and the child. Wang Lung thinks of the silver that has come from earth: it will be used to dress his first born child.

O-lan works beside Wang Lung in the field until the very hour of giving birth. Wang Lung arrives home from the fields to discover in astonishment that O-lan has even prepared food for himself and the old man. Standing by the door, he hears O-lan panting in whispers. After smelling blood, Wang Lung hears a cry, and O-lan tells him that it is a male child. The old father laughs at the good news, even as he says that there will no longer be any peace in the house because of the child. Wang Lung is happy and proud.

When he enters the room, O-lan is lying on the bed, with the child next to her. Seeing her tired face and sunken eyes, he is touched. He declares loudly that he will go to the city the next day to buy red sugar for her to drink with water and eggs to dye red for the village. He wishes for everyone to know that he has a son.



## Chapter 4

The day after the son is born, O-lan gets up to prepare food, but does not go out to the land to work with Wang Lung. Wang Lung goes to town to buy eggs and red sugar. He proudly tells the storekeeper of the sweet shop that the sugar is for the mother of his first born son. Coming out of the shop, however, Wang Lung is overcome with a sudden fear of ill-meaning spirits in the air. Stopping by the candle shop, he buys incense and places them before the gods of the earth at the temple, thinking to himself that the earthen figurines wield much power.

Topic Tracking: God 2

Soon, O-lan is back in the fields. As she works, the child lies on the ground, sleeping. O-lan nurses him whenever he becomes hungry.

Winter approaches, but the family is comfortable and well fed. The harvests have been good, and there are plenty of foodstuffs for the family. Because Wang Lung does not gamble away his money or spend it extravagantly like some villagers, he is able to sell his grain at the best price. Unlike Wang Lung, however, his uncle always sells his grain prematurely.

On the child's month birthday, Wang Lung invites people to distribute dyed eggs. After the celebration, the long awaited rains come, and Wang Lung is relieved. During this time, there is usually visiting among the villagers, but Wang Lung and O-lan do not do much visiting, fearful of those who might be prone to borrow things from them. From his crops, Wang Lung is able to make a lot of money. Afraid to keep it himself, Wang Lung and O-lan dig a hole in their room to store the silver which gives them "a sense of secret richness and reserve."

## Chapter 5

It is almost the New Year, and preparations are being made in every household of the village. Wang Lung buys red papers of letters for happiness and sticks them on his tools, plow, ox buckle, and other farming implements for luck. His father makes new robes for the two gods of the earth temple. Wang Lung burns incense before the figurines for the New Year.

Topic Tracking: God 3

O-lan makes New Year cakes that no other woman in the village knows how to make. The cakes are to be taken to the Old Mistress at the House of Hwang when she takes the newborn son to see her. Hearing this, Wang Lung is more proud, feeling superior to his uncle and other neighbors who come to his house to feast.

On the second day of the New Year, dressed in their best clothes, Wang Lung and O-lan set out with their new son for the great house. When the gatekeeper of the great house greets them, Wang Lung regards him as inferior. While Wang Lung is waiting in the gatekeeper's room, O-lan goes into the courts with the baby. When she returns, she tells Wang Lung that the great house seems to be declining in its wealth. Listening to this, Wang Lung is extremely proud because he has done well, but suddenly shrinks in fear. Thinking that being openly happy will invite misfortunes, Wang Lung says aloud that the child is a female diseased with smallpox. This is meant to confuse the spirits who might mean him harm.

Topic Tracking: Women 2

O-lan tells Wang Lung that it was inevitable that the wealth of the great house declined. The lords spend money freely, and the Old Master and the Old Mistress add on to the expenses with concubines and opium. When O-lan tells him that the family wishes to sell some of their lands, Wang Lung is shocked, exclaiming: "Sell their land! Then indeed are they growing poor. Land is one's flesh and blood." Chapter 5, pg. 37.

Topic Tracking: Earth 2

After thinking, Wang Lung cries that he will buy the Hwang land. Although O-lan initially opposes the idea because the land is too far, Wang Lung is adamant, and she is soon convinced. As though she cannot believe it, she says to herself: "Last year this time I was slave in that house." Chapter 5, pg. 38.

## Chapter 6

After digging the silver out of the hole in his bedroom, Wang Lung goes to the House of Hwang. Depressed to see the empty hole, Wang Lung partly wishes the silver back. The glory of buying land from the Hwang family is not as great as he had imagined because he arrives too early. The Old Lord who is asleep cannot be awakened, and the business must be discussed with an agent.

Nevertheless, Wang Lung buys a piece of the Hwang land. When he goes out to inspect it, he realizes that although the land means a great deal to him, the loss of it does not mean much to the great house. Wang Lung angrily decides that he will fill the wall with silver after silver, and buy more land from the House of Hwang. To Wang Lung, the land becomes "a sign and a symbol."

Topic Tracking: Earth 3

Spring comes. Wang Lung and O-lan work day after day, while the old man watches the child. One day, Wang Lung is annoyed to find O-lan pregnant again because there is so much work to do for the land. She reassures him, however, that the second birth will not be as difficult as the first. One day in autumn, O-lan goes back home one morning to give birth, coming back again to Wang Lung as the sun is setting. She tells him that it is another male child, a second son, and Wang Lung is again very happy. He thinks that O-lan brings him much good fortune.

Again, the produce from the year is good, and Wang Lung is able to hide more silver. The land that he bought from the great house is very fruitful, yielding more harvest than his own land. Now everyone in the village knows that Wang Lung is the owner of a piece of the Hwang land. His status rises in the village.

## Chapter 7

Wang Lung's uncle is the younger brother of Wang Lung's old father. He is a lazy man whose wife does not work, and whose children, dirty and disgraceful, roam around the village. One day, Wang Lung is ashamed and angry to see his girl cousin, a daughter of the uncle, going around the neighborhood, talking freely with a village man.

Topic Tracking: Women 3

Wang Lung goes to the uncle's house and begins to shout at the uncle's wife. She is a shrill woman and angrily cries back at Wang Lung. She profusely sheds tears. In return, Wang Lung becomes angry and talks back to the uncle's wife. He leaves her screaming and ranting, wallowing in self-pity.

The next day, Wang Lung's uncle comes to the field where he is working. O-lan is not beside him because of a third birth that is coming. When Wang Lung's uncle approaches him, Wang Lung knows that he has come to ask something of him. The uncle starts blaming his evil destiny and bad luck, lamenting that he cannot be as rich as Wang Lung. Wang Lung becomes angry and talks back to the uncle, telling him that he is rich because he works. The uncle, insulted at Wang Lung's shouting, slaps him on his cheeks and denounces him for being so insolent to an elder. Unable to say anything, Wang Lung listens to his uncle threaten to tell the whole village of his behavior. Wang Lung has no other choice but to give what the uncle has come to request--some silver for the dowry of his grown daughter.

Wang Lung goes to his house and into his room where he detects a smell of blood. O-lan then tells him that she has given birth to a girl: "It is only a slave this time-not worth mentioning." Chapter 7, pg. 42. A "a sense of evil" strikes Wang Lung.

Topic Tracking: Women 4

He tells O-lan that he needs to lend some silver to his uncle, and O-lan says that it is not lending, but giving. After giving the money to the uncle and returning to the field to work, Wang Lung is pained to think that his uncle will probably waste the money on a gambling table. Returning home, Wang Lung is depressed and weary, thinking that daughters are only burdens to families who must rear them for other families.

Topic Tracking: Women 5

He is sad to think that it will be another year before he gets enough silver to buy land. When a flock of crows flies across the sky over his head, Wang Lung thinks that it is an evil omen.



## Chapter 8

It is as though the gods have decided to ignore Wang Lung because it does not rain when it should. The earth dries up, and the plants dry up. O-lan tells Wang Lung that if the family is to have any water, the fields must be left dry. He cries aloud in despair: "Well and [the children] must all starve if the plants starve." Chapter 8, pg. 48

Topic Tracking: Earth 4

The only land that survives is the one by the moat that Wang Lung concentrates his energy into keeping alive. He sells his crops as soon as he is able to harvest them and takes the silver to buy more land from the House of Hwang, which is on the brink of ruin. The Old Mistress continually yearns for expensive opium, and the Old Lord is constantly taking in young concubines. The young lords are careless with money. Thus, when Wang Lung comes with money to buy land, the agent of the family is more than eager. The newly bought land is twice as big as the first plot that Wang Lung bought from the family.

Autumn comes, and still there is no rain. Wang Lung continues working in his fields, garnering whatever produce he can manage to reap. The two boys also work with their parents. In the house, there is a general fear of starvation, but the girl child is kept full by O-lan's breast milk. Soon, however, O-lan is again with child, and there is no milk for the baby girl.

Before long, there is no more rice or wheat left, and the old man suggests that Wang Lung's ox be eaten. Wang Lung initially protests because the ox has been a companion to him from his youth while he worked in the fields. When the children cry for food, however, he finally relents. O-lan cuts the ox's neck and cooks the flesh for the family to eat.

In the village, there is a rising hostility against Wang Lung because people think that he is hiding silver and food. Wang Lung's uncle, resentful that Wang Lung will not give him any more food than he has already given, begins spreading rumors in the village that Wang Lung has silver and food, but will share with none. One day, some angry villagers break into Wang Lung's house, determined to loot. When they see that he has no more than they do, they are disappointed. When they start seizing Wang Lung's pieces of furniture, O-lan bravely comes forward to stop them. The men are ashamed and begin to leave. Ching, who is one of these men, leaves quickly in shame because he has grabbed some beans. Wang Lung now has nothing to feed his family, but comforts himself with the thought of his land. He thinks to himself: "They cannot take the land away from me. The labor of my body and the fruit of the fields I have put into that which cannot be taken away. If I had the silver, they would have taken it. If I had bought with the silver to store it, they would have taken it all. I have the land still, and it is mine." Chapter 8, pg. 53



## Chapter 9

Despite the starvation and the pain, Wang Lung tells himself that something should be done; there is a "is a determination to live" within Wang Lung. He resents the gods for the misfortune and drags himself to the temple of the earth. He spits at the earthen figurines in anger and bitterness.

Topic Tracking: God 4

Wang Lung and his family have eaten what they could. Now, none of them get up in the morning. In the village, there are no animals roaming around anywhere, and the bellies of the children swell out. Wang Lung's daughter lies quietly wrapped in a quilt, and he feels pity for his daughter who cannot even sit on her own. Wang Lung's old father is better than the rest because he is the first one to be given anything to eat.

One day, Ching comes to tell Wang Lung that people are eating dogs and even human flesh. Wang Lung's uncle and his wife are said to be eating human flesh. Fearful and panicky, Wang Lung suddenly cries out that they will leave and go south. O-lan tells him to wait until tomorrow when she will have given birth. He feels a sudden pity for his wife who is starving, yet carrying a life inside her. Wang Lung gets a handful of beans from Ching and gives them to O-lan who, without any food, will most likely die giving birth.

O-lan gives birth at night while Wang Lung waits in the middle room. It does not matter to him now whether or not the baby is male or female because it would just be one more mouth to feed. There is suddenly a baby's cry, but when there is no sound after that, Wang Lung becomes worried. When he goes into the room, O-lan tells him that the child is dead. Looking at the dead body, Wang Lung sees that it had been a girl. Taking the dead child out of the room, he wraps it in bits of broken mat. Examining the body, he sees two bruised spots on its neck. He takes the body as far as he can and puts it against an old grave. When a starving dog approaches, Wang Lung tries to scare it away, but has no more energy left in him to do anything.

Topic Tracking: Women 6

The next morning, Wang Lung cannot believe that he ever thought of leaving with his helpless children, his old father, and his weak wife. Sitting in the doorway, he sees his uncle approaching with three other men. His uncle is not as thin as he should be during these difficult times. The uncle has brought these men to help Wang Lung sell his land. Looking at the well-fed and well-dressed men from the town, Wang Lung says decidedly that he will not sell his land, but his resolution is soon shaken after seeing how thin his son has become. When he miserably asks one of the men how much he will pay for the land, the man states plainly and without remorse a price that is hardly anything for a piece of land. Wang Lung cannot endure any longer as a surge of anger rises within him. He yells that he will never sell his land: "I shall never sell the land! Bit by bit, I will dig up the fields and feed the earth itself to the children and when they die I will bury



them in the land, and I and my wife and my old father, even he, we will die on the land that has given us birth." Chapter 9, pg. 61.

Topic Tracking: Earth 5

Wang Lung is weeping like a child when O-lan comes to the door to say matter of factly that they will not sell the land. She adds, however, that they will sell their furniture for which the men give two silver pieces. After they have left, Wang Lung decides to go south while there is any money left. Taking a look at his fields, he comforts himself by repeating that at least, he still has his land.

## Chapter 10

The next morning, the family starts their walk to the south. Wang Lung carries the girl child, but helps his father after seeing the feeble old man. They pass the temple of the earth and the gate of the wall. They pass the great House of Hwang and people sitting on the doorsteps. One laments that the rich will not spare anything to the poor during such hard times, and another cries that he would destroy the great house if he had enough strength.

Evening sets in, and soon Wang Lung and his family are swept up in a crowd of people who are also going south by catching "a firewagon" for a small fee. Although initially hesitant, Wang Lung sees that his father and the rest of the family are exhausted from the day's walk. Another day of walking would be too much for them all. Suddenly, with a roaring, the firewagon rushes up, and Wang Lung's family is swept up with the multitude amidst the confusion into the train.



## Chapter 11

After Wang Lung pays for the train fare, he buys some bread and rice with the money left over. On the firewagons, there are men and women who have been to the south before, and they talk about the various things to do when one gets to the city. One man tells Wang Lung the right way to buy mats and to beg. Wang Lung is struck by the idea that he must beg in the city; he does not like it. The man also tells him about public kitchens where hungry people can go and fill their bellies with rice gruel for a penny.

When the firewagon stops, Wang Lung leaves his frightened family to buy mats from the market. Looking around to see where he can build a hut, he sees a village of huts along the wall of a big house. O-lan, remembering how to build a hut from her childhood, shapes the mats in certain ways to make a shelter for the family. After the shelter has been taken care of, Wang Lung suggests that they go look for a public kitchen where they can get something to eat. They are almost cheerful at the thought of having something to eat, and pick up their chopsticks and bowls. After walking for awhile, the family comes to two buildings of mats where there are big cauldrons and earthen stoves. People are lined up in multitudes, waiting to be fed. Wang Lung and his family are swept up in the crowds and get their bowls filled.

After eating in the public kitchen, Wang Lung and his family return to the hut to sleep until the next morning. The next day, Wang Lung is at a loss at what to do because they need more money. Looking around the city, there is a general sense of plenitude; no one seems to starve in the city. O-lan suggests that she, the sons, and even the old man beg on the streets. She takes a bowl in her hands and shows the boys how to beg. On the streets, O-lan points to the girl child in her bosom as she begs to evoke sympathy in people. When the children do not take begging seriously, they are scolded and slapped by O-lan who sends them out crying.

Wang Lung rents a ricksha for the day. Pulling the ricksha is initially awkward for him, but he must work if he is to earn any money. While he is practicing pulling, an old man hails him. Deaf, the man does not hear Wang Lung's protests that he is new at ricksha pulling, but tells him to take him to the Confucian temple. Asking his way around as he pulls, Wang Lung reaches the temple gates, and the man pays him. Not used to the work, Wang Lung's body aches, but he is astonished at how easily the money has come. Later, however, it turns out that the old man gave Wang Lung only half of the usual fare. Wang Lung initially does not mind this much until he remembers that he must pay the rental fee for the ricksha. By the end of the day, he has only a penny for himself. Returning to the hut, Wang Lung is distressed and depressed. Life in the city is difficult, and he cannot help yearning for his land. The thought of it gives him momentary peace.

Topic Tracking: Earth 6

Wang Lung discovers that O-lan and the children have received a small amount of cash from begging that will pay for a meal the next morning. Although he has not received

anything, the old man is worry-free. He has worked all his life and feels that now in his old age, he will be well taken care of.

## Chapter 12

Wang Lung gradually gets used to the city and its inhabitants, but he and his family are still like foreigners in a strange place. Kiangsu, the city, is very different from Anhwei, Wang Lung's birthplace. Everything seems hurried; everyone seems impatient. Wang Lung, his family, and the rest of the people in the village of huts never feel like they are part of the busy city of extravagance.

One day, Wang Lung is hailed by a strange-looking creature dressed in a black robe. He cannot make out whether the creature is a male or a female, but can understand that the person wishes to go to the Street of Bridges. As he begins to pull, he asks around to discover that the creature is a female foreigner from America. At the destination, the woman gives him twice the usual fare. Back at the hut, O-lan tells him that the foreigners are the ones from whom she will beg because they readily give money. Wang Lung realizes that in the city, there are those who are more foreign than him.

Another thing that Wang Lung learns about the city is that there is a general abundance of food. In the city, markets are filled with various foodstuffs, and no one seems to starve. Day after day, Wang Lung and his family go to the public kitchen to be fed because they can never afford to get enough money to cook in their hut. Whenever they have any extra money, the family buys some cabbage to cook, and the boys steal fuel from the fuel carts in the streets. One day, the eldest son returns with a swollen eye because he was caught stealing by a farmer. The second son is more skilled. One night, Wang Lung comes home to find pork. When he discovers that the younger boy stole it, Wang Lung throws the pork and beats his son. O-lan is indifferent to the boy's stealing, however, calmly putting the meat back into the pot. Wang Lung is distraught because he cannot bear to have his sons growing up as thieves. He thinks to himself that they must go back to the land.

Topic Tracking: Earth 7



## Chapter 13

Throughout the city, wealth and abundance prevail, but Wang Lung's family and many others in the village of huts live in poverty, unable to participate in any of the luxuries of the city, working at the service of the rich. The children steal whenever they can, but the old people are more accepting of their circumstances. Among the young people, there is anger and discontent. They work all their lives only to be living on the fringes of poverty, barely able to feed themselves. It is late winter and spring approaches. O-lan is again with child and leaves the daughter to the old man's care while she begs.

One day, Wang Lung reminds his father of the land. The father understands his son's yearning for the land because he has also had to leave it during hard times. But the father tells Wang Lung that he always returned to the land.

Topic Tracking: Earth 8

Wang Lung, determined, says to himself that they will also return. He returns to the hut depressed, and O-lan tells him that it is possible to return if they would only sell the girl child. Wang Lung is astonished to hear this, but O-lan says that her parents also sold her during a difficult time.

Topic Tracking: Women 7

The temptation is great to Wang Lung, but looking at his poor daughter, he cannot do it. As he sits outside the hut, bemoaning his miserable circumstances, he is joined by another man from a nearby hut who tells him that Wang Lung is not the only one suffering. He has had to sell some of his daughters last winter to provide for his family.

Topic Tracking: Women 8

The man says that "when the rich are too rich there are ways, and when the poor are too poor there are ways...and that way will come soon." Chapter 13, pg. 84. According to the man, there are jewels, servants, money, and food in abundance behind the gray wall. At night, Wang Lung has trouble sleeping, thinking of all the things that lie beyond the wall. He considers selling his daughter, but cannot reach a decision. He does not see a way out of this bleak life in the city.



## Chapter 14

In spring, those who begged everyday can now go out to the hills to find food. O-lan does the same with the boys. Wang Lung works as hard as he has done before, but the warmth of the days and the rains make everyone restless and dissatisfied. During the evening, people gather outside the huts to talk. Although he listens, Wang Lung feels that he does not belong to this group of men because he has his land waiting for him back home. Always conscious of this, Wang Lung is reluctant to cast himself with these weary, poor men who labor endlessly everyday. "[Wang Lung] belonged to the land and he could not live with any fullness until he felt the land under his feet and followed a plow in the springtime and bore a scythe in his hand at harvest." Chapter 14, pg. 87

Topic Tracking: Earth 9

One day, as the men are sitting around discussing what they would do if they had any money, Wang Lung says that he will buy land from which to reap harvests. The men ridicule him and laugh at him, but Wang Lung is steadfast in his resolution.

Topic Tracking: Earth 10

The city itself is restless. In the streets, there are people who constantly give out fliers. Wang Lung cannot read them, but he is given them twice. Once, a Westerner gives him a paper with a picture of Jesus Christ hanging from the cross. Although Wang Lung cannot understand what the flier says, he is frightened of the picture. A young, well-dressed city man who cries out to the crowd that "the rich and the capitalists" are killing them, gives another paper. Although initially interested, Wang Lung soon turns away because the man disregards the matter of the land. To Wang Lung, there is always the land. "Money and food are eaten and gone, and if there is not sun and rain in proportion, there is again hunger." Chapter 14, pg. 90

Topic Tracking: Earth 11

From the men who gather outside the huts to talk, Wang Lung learns that there lives a rich man behind the wall. The people in the huts are resentful of the injustice of never having anything that others have in abundance. Only Wang Lung is unaffected by this because he wants only his land.

One day, Wang Lung watches a man being seized by a group of soldiers in the street. Realizing that they are all commoners like himself, he quickly hides. Later, from the keeper of a shop, he learns that common laborers are being seized by the army to carry weapons and bedding for a war. Terrified, Wang Lung quickly comes back home. He is tempted to sell his daughter to get back to the land, but O-lan tells him to wait for several more days as there is strange talk everywhere.

Wang Lung does not work as a ricksha puller any longer, but at night, pulls cargo for the houses of merchandise. During the day, he sleeps inside the hut. When the city is

increasingly filled with fear and unrest, Wang Lung cannot bear to stay in the city any longer, continually yearning for the land.

Topic Tracking: Earth 12

Inside the hut, Wang Lung hears soldiers marching outside. It is said that because of the approaching enemy, those who own anything are frightened, but Wang Lung and his family who have nothing are not scared. One day, Wang Lung is told to stop coming to the houses of merchandise, and the public kitchen closes. There is no one to beg from in the streets. Although he is tempted to sell his daughter again, he cannot do it upon hearing that O-lan was beaten constantly in the House of Hwang.

Suddenly, there is a great noise that frightens Wang Lung and the rest of the family. They hear a rising roar filling the streets, and a great door being opened. A man tells them: "The hour has come-the gates of the rich man are open to us!" Chapter 14, pg. 97. O-lan is soon gone, and Wang Lung also goes out. There is a crowd of commoners, pushing against the gates of the great house to enter. Wang Lung is swept along the crowd into the house and through the many courts. People take different treasures of the rich, snatching and pushing. Wang Lung, the only one in the crowd who does not take anything, is thoroughly bewildered. Dragged along with the crowd, he finds himself in the back of the innermost court of the house. Wang Lung sees a big, middle-aged, well-dressed man who has not yet escaped who pleads with Wang Lung to spare his life. Wang Lung threateningly demands money from the frightened man who eagerly gives him gold coins. Clutching the gold, Wang Lung returns home, telling himself that they will go back to the land tomorrow.

## Chapter 15

With the gold coins, Wang Lung prepares for his homecoming by buying wheat, rice, and corn seeds from the south, vegetable seeds, and an ox. Upon arrival, Wang Lung and his family find their house in tatters and their farming implements and the door missing, but Wang Lung is not bothered. He goes to town to buy new things for the house, and in the evening, he stands and looks out at his fields, just wishing to be alone on his land.

Topic Tracking: Earth 13

From Ching, Wang Lung learns that a group of robbers lived in his house over the winter. Wang Lung's uncle was well acquainted with the bandit. The villagers tell him that "Hunger makes a thief of any man." Chapter 15, pg. 101. Having grown thin and old, Ching has lost his wife and has given his daughter away to a soldier during the famine. Giving Ching some seeds from the south, Wang Lung tells him that he will help plow Ching's land with the newly bought ox.

Wang Lung is happy that his uncle is no longer living in the village. No one knows where he is, but some say that he has gone to the city. Others say that he has moved to a far place with his family after having sold all of his daughters.

Topic Tracking: Women 9

Completely devoted to his land, Wang Lung spends days thinking of what to plant on what part of his land. When he is exhausted, he lies down on the earth to sleep. O-lan is also kept busy with rebuilding the house and fixing the walls and the floors. One day, O-lan and Wang Lung buy new household goods at the town, including candlesticks, incense urn, and candles. With these, Wang Lung goes to the temple of the earth to visit the god and his lady standing under the roof. Seeing the figurines weathered and worn, Wang Lung scolds them for not having been kinder to men.

Topic Tracking: God 5

Before long, things are as they should be. O-lan is pregnant, and the children play happily while the old man lazily sleeps. The rice and the beans grow in the fields. Wang Lung tells himself: "I must stick a little incense before those two in the small temple. After all, they have power over earth." Chapter 15, pg. 103

Topic Tracking: God 6



## Chapter 16

One night, Wang Lung discovers a bundle of jewels buried between O-lan's breasts. "There [are] such a mass of jewels as one [has] never dreamed could be together, jewels red as the inner flesh of watermelons, golden as wheat, green as young leaves in spring, clear as water tricking out of the earth." Chapter 16, pg. 104. She tells him that she found them in the rich man's house in the city. She saw a loose brick in the wall and knew that it was a secret hiding place for jewels. Wang Lung is astonished, but decides that it is safer to convert the jewels into land. O-lan hesitatingly asks Wang Lung if she can keep two of the jewels for herself. Wang Lung is surprised, but O-lan insists on asking so humbly and pitifully that he finally relents. "Then Wang Lung, without comprehending it, [looks] for an instant into the heart of this dull, and faithful creature, who [has] labored all her life at some task at which she [wins] no reward." Chapter 16, pg. 106. He does not understand her, but is moved to see her so earnest and wishful. When he gives the jewels, O-lan carefully picks out two pearls and hides them between her breasts.

Wang Lung then goes to the great House of Hwang with the jewels. When he pounds on the gate, the Old Lord himself comes to get the door. According to the lord, the agent of the house has left a long time ago. When Wang Lung talks about having come to pay to buy land, a good looking woman appears to let Wang Lung into the house. Wang Lung can tell that she is only a slave, but there seems to be none else in the house except the woman and the Old Lord.

Driving the Old Lord away, the slave is eager to discuss money with Wang Lung who does not know what to do because he is hesitant to do business with a woman. The slave tells him that there is no one else in the house except the Old Lord and herself. The Old Mistress died when the thieves came to loot the house, and the servants and the slaves were gone long before that. Many of the thieves were former servants including the gatekeeper who knew where the jewels and the secret treasures were stored. The slave further tells Wang Lung that this fall of the great house was inevitable because the lords stopped overseeing the land matters.

Topic Tracking: Earth 14

From what he can garner from the slave's talk, Wang Lung realizes that she is clinging to the Old Lord in the last years of his life for whatever she can get from him. Although the slave tells him that the Old Lord will do anything she tells him, Wang Lung is still uncertain. He tells her that he will return later.

At a teashop, Wang Lung is deep in thought about the fall of the great house. He thinks that it is all because they have left the land. He decides to make his two sons work in the fields so they will not turn out like the young lords of the great house who, separated from the land, did not know its worth and importance. From the shopkeeper, Wang Lung learns that the clever slave who is called Cuckoo is in complete control of the Old Lord. The Hwang land is for sale.

Coming out of the teashop, Wang Lung knocks on the door of the great house. Cuckoo opens the door, more than willing to sell the land for jewels.

## Chapter 17

Now Wang Lung owns a lot of land. Ching, upon Wang Lung's suggestion, sells his small piece of land to come live with him. Ching and Wang Lung plant rice in the fields that have had much rain and Wang Lung hires two workers for the harvest. Remembering the young lords of the House of Hwang, Wang Lung sets his two sons to work in the fields. O-lan, however, does not work in the fields because Wang Lung can afford laborers. Wang Lung expands his fortune and enlarges his house.

Soon, it is time for O-lan to give birth again. This time, she gives birth to twins—a daughter and a son. Although he is happy for the birth of the newborn children, he is sad because of his eldest daughter, who does not do anything befitting a child of her age. She smiles like a baby, but never says a word. Wang Lung calls her his "poor fool."

Although famines always come once in awhile, Wang Lung seeks to establish himself safely enough to never have to go south again. For seven years, Wang Lung amasses his fortune. Soon, he has six men working for him and builds a new house near the old one for the family.

Although a silent and timid man, Ching proves himself loyal and honest to Wang Lung, overseeing all the laborers and working diligently on behalf of Wang Lung. Ching and Wang Lung are like brothers.

By the fifth year, Wang Lung feels the shame of being illiterate. Although a prosperous landowner, he is ignorant. One day, he decides to put the eldest son in school so that he may be a scholar, accompanying Wang Lung to grain markets to read and write for him. When the second son also insists on going, both sons are sent to school. After all the preparations have been made, the boys are arranged to attend a small school near the city gate kept by a schoolmaster who once failed the government examination. Taking the boys to school on the first day, Wang Lung is filled with pride. At school, the schoolmaster gives the boys school names. The eldest son is named Nun En, and the second son is named Nung Wen. "Nung" means "one whose wealth is from the earth."

## Chapter 18

During the seventh year, the lands are flooded. Wang Lung is not alarmed, however, because there is enough in the storage for the family to survive and his house is built on a hill. But the lands cannot be worked; Wang Lung is idle and restless, never having anything to do. His old father is frustrating because he never completely understands how wealthy Wang Lung has become. The eldest daughter does nothing but give her baby smiles. When he looks at O-lan, he notices her unkempt hair, and her flat, coarse face. "And it [seems] to Wang Lung that he [is looking] at O-lan for the first time in his life and he [sees] for the first time that she [is] a woman whom no man [can] call other than she was, a dull and common creature, who [plods] in silence without thought of how she [appears] to others." Chapter 18, pg. 121. Bearing his gaze, O-lan is painfully self-conscious, but Wang Lung is not satisfied. Soon, he is ashamed for scolding his faithful wife, but cannot rid himself of the irritation he feels. When in a rush of anger, he mentions O-lan's unbound feet, O-lan murmurs an apology: "My mother did not bind them, since I was sold so young. But the girls' feet I will bind-the younger girl's feet I will bind." Chapter 18, pg.122.

Topic Tracking: Women 10

Wang Lung becomes increasingly irritated and rushes out of the house. Because he has become a wealthy landowner, Wang Lung does not seem to see things as they were before. Things are not good enough for him. Wandering around the streets, Wang Lung spots a newly opened teashop where there are pictures of women hanging up on the walls. Initially, Wang Lung is timid, going in everyday to drink tea and staring at the pictures of the beautiful women. One day, however, he meets Cuckoo who has become the keeper of the shop. At her suggestion, Wang Lung carefully examines the pictures and picks "one most beautiful, a small, slender thing, a body light as a bamboo and a little face as pointed as a kitten's face, and one hand clasping the stem of a lotus flower in bud, and the hand as delicate as the tendril of fern uncurled." Chapter 18, pg. 126. Catching himself, Wang Lung is embarrassed and quickly exits the teahouse, but he cannot help the feelings surging up within him.

## Chapter 19

Nothing happens to prevent Wang Lung from returning to the great teahouse. Thus, one evening, putting on his best robe, Wang Lung goes to the teashop where he meets Cuckoo who is scornful of Wang Lung. Angry and injured, Wang Lung enters the teashop and mentions the small girl whose picture he was so enchanted with, and Cuckoo silently leads him to the room of the girl who is called Lotus. When Wang Lung enters the room with Cuckoo, Lotus is seated on a quilt. Wang Lung is fascinated with her, watching her as though she were a picture.

After his first meeting with Lotus, Wang Lung is sick in love. Everyday, he goes into the teashop, waits for Lotus, and goes into her room. Although he is able to see her everyday, he is never satisfied, always "fevered and thirsty, even if she gave him his will of her." Chapter 19, pg. 131. Wang Lung is restless all during the summer because of his love for her.

Soon, Wang Lung cannot face O-lan, the children, or the old father. He becomes fastidious with his hair, his clothes, and the way he smells. One day, O-lan comments that Wang Lung reminds her of the lords in the great house, and he is secretly pleased. There is a constant spending of silver. Not only does Wang Lung have to pay the fee for going into see Lotus, but he also has to satisfy the various desires the girl has for jewels and other trinkets.

O-lan does not know what Wang Lung does everyday, but watches him as he continually takes money out of the wall and other hiding places. One day, as O-lan is washing clothes, Wang Lung returns home to demand the pearls that she has been keeping. He cruelly tells her that he needs them, and that there is no need to keep what one will never use.

*"Then slowly she [thrusts] her wet wrinkled hand into her bosom and she [draws] forth the small package and she [gives] it to him and [watches] him as he [unwraps] it; and the pearls [lie] in his hand and they [catch] softly and fully the light of the sun, and he [laughs]. But O-lan [returns] to the beating of his clothes and when tears [drop] slowly and heavily from her eyes she [does] not put up her hand to wipe them away; only she [beats] them more steadily with her wooden stick upon the clothes spread over the stone." Chapter 19, pg. 134-35.*

## Chapter 20

Wang Lung's uncle suddenly returns with his son and his wife. Now a wealthy man, Wang Lung cannot turn his elderly relatives out of the house because he would lose face in the village where he has been gaining respect.

Upon arrival, the uncle's shrewd wife learns that Wang Lung is "mad over another woman." Overhearing the uncle's wife talking to O-lan, Wang Lung suddenly gets the idea that he will buy Lotus to bring her to the house so she can always be with him. He asks the uncle's wife to arrange the union of himself and Lotus.

Wang Lung does not go to the teahouse until he sees the matter settled. Impatient, he continually instructs the uncle's wife who is more than confident that she will be able to settle the matter successfully. Wang Lung harangues O-lan with sweeping, washing, cleaning, and moving furniture for Lotus' arrival. He has an additional court built to the house where he will be able to spend time with Lotus. He and the uncle's wife decorate Lotus' room. During all of this, he is impatient and nervous, letting his frustration out on the children and O-lan. One day, when O-lan is unable to bear any longer, she weeps, telling him: "I have borne you sons-I have borne you sons." Chapter 20, pg. 140.

One day, the uncle's wife tells him that the matter has been completed. Cuckoo will come for a hundred pieces of silver, and Lotus is to have jewels, silk clothes, and shoes. Wang Lung is relieved and happy to see the end of the matter. After giving the uncle's wife some money for settling it, Wang Lung awaits Lotus' arrival.

On an August day, Lotus comes riding in a sedan chair, followed by Cuckoo who comes as her serving woman. Wang Lung and the uncle's wife lead Lotus into her court. The house is empty because Ching and the rest of the workers are in the fields, and O-lan has gone out with the little children. The two sons are in school, and the father has become so old, hearing and seeing nothing.

At night, O-lan returns, but says nothing. She prepares food as she always does, eats with the children, and goes into the room to sleep alone.

Lotus never comes outside, but lies in her room. Cuckoo and Lotus both live in the separate court newly made by Wang Lung. Wang Lung visits her every night in her quarters, [eating] and [drinking] of his love...[feasting] alone." Chapter 20, pg. 144.



## Chapter 21

Soon after the arrival of Lotus and Cuckoo, there is trouble in the house. O-lan and Cuckoo do not get along. O-lan and Cuckoo had both been slaves at the House of Hwang, but O-lan had been a mere kitchen slave, whereas Cuckoo had been the lord's favorite. Cuckoo did not treat O-lan very well at the great house, and O-lan is still bitter about it. To O-lan, living with Cuckoo is a painful insult.

As soon as Lotus and Cuckoo arrive, O-lan starts to show her dislike for the latter by refusing to leave any heated water for Cuckoo's use. Wang Lung talks to O-lan about it, but she is adamant, reminding him that he took away her pearls for Lotus. To pacify Cuckoo, Wang Lung has a new kitchen built, but the kitchen becomes a new source of problems for Wang Lung because Cuckoo spends too much money on food. Because he does not want to upset Lotus, however, Wang Lung cannot complain.

Furthermore, Lotus befriends the uncle's wife who spends most of her time in the inner court, eating the expensive foods. Wang Lung does not like the loud, shrewish wife of his uncle, and when he tries to get Lotus away from her, Lotus becomes peeved. He has no other choice but to leave the uncle's wife alone.

Because of all these troubles, Wang Lung's love for Lotus slackens. One day, Wang Lung's old father wakes up to see Lotus walking around in the court. He calls her a "harlot," and does not stop screaming. The old man soon grows a hatred for Lotus, doing childish things to her. Wang Lung cannot do anything about his elderly father, but Lotus becomes vexed.

Another day, Wang Lung hears Lotus shrieking. Running to her court, he sees his daughter and son with his eldest daughter, his "poor fool." Lotus had been repulsed when the poor fool approached her to grab her colorful robe. When Wang Lung comes running, Lotus accusingly points to his children and tells him that she will not tolerate them. Wang Lung, becoming angry, shouts back at Lotus because he is angry that she has called his children "idiots." Soon his anger melts away, but Wang Lung's love for Lotus is not as complete.

One day after the summer has ended, Wang Lung discovers that the water in his fields has receded. Suddenly, hearing his land calling him, he decides to go work on the land himself.



## Chapter 22

Working on his earth heals Wang Lung of his sickness of love.

Topic Tracking: Earth 15

At night, he visits Lotus who protests that she is not the wife of a farmer, but he feels free. The earth has rid him of the sickness of love, and now he does not care that Lotus is disdainful of his garlic smells and earth stains.

Many men in the village, who admire his ability to keep two women in the house, envy Wang Lung. One is for his pleasure, and the other is the working mother of his children who feeds him. Wang Lung increasingly garners respect and admiration from the men in the village.

The rains come, and there is harvest. In the winter, Wang Lung goes to the grain market to sell his produce, and he has his eldest son accompany him. He is extremely proud that his son is able to read and write. Walking back home with his son, Wang Lung thinks to himself that he should look for a wife for the grown boy. He discusses the matter with Ching, who remembering his own daughter, tells Wang Lung that if he had his daughter with him, he would marry her off to Wang Lung's family for nothing. Wang Lung thanks Ching, but secretly thinks that the wife of a common farmer would have been insufficient for his first born.

The New Year comes, and villagers come to see Wang Lung to wish him happiness. Wang Lung greets these men with dignity. With food everywhere on the table, people know that Wang Lung has had another good year.

Spring comes soon, and the eldest son suddenly turns moody and peevish, unwilling to eat or go to school. Wang Lung does not know what to do, and one day, the second son tells him that his older brother was not in school that day. Wang Lung is angry, and beats his son with a bamboo until O-lan stops him. O-lan tells Wang Lung that their son is acting like one of the young lords in the great House of Hwang. Wang Lung cannot understand because he never had such times during adolescence, but he is secretly proud that he has a son who acts like a young lord of a once great family.



## Chapter 23

Lotus complains and pouts when Wang Lung seems distracted during his visit. Wang Lung is pondering over what to do with his eldest son who must be married. Lotus tells Wang Lung of a man who used to frequent the teahouse and visit her occasionally. The man who was generous and courteous had a daughter he spoke of often. Cuckoo comes into the room to tell Wang Lung that the man is a grain merchant named Liu, and Wang Lung is excited because he sells his grain at his shop. Although Cuckoo is more than eager to go arrange the union between Wang Lung's son and Liu's daughter, Wang Lung wishes to wait.

One day in early morning, the eldest son comes home drunk. O-lan and Wang Lung have to support him into a room where he falls asleep. From the second son, Wang Lung learns that the eldest son has not been in school. Upon interrogating the son of his uncle, he learns that the son frequents the house of the whore who lives in what used to be the great house. She is an old, haggard prostitute who receives poor commoners. Wang Lung immediately goes to see the prostitute, reaching an agreement with her. She will refuse to see his son for money.

Returning home, Wang Lung tells Cuckoo to arrange the marriage between his son and the daughter of Liu. Looking at his sleeping son, Wang Lung is angry and frustrated that his young boy should have visited a prostitute like the woman he had seen. Angry, Wang Lung goes to his uncle to complain, but the uncle can only laugh. When Wang Lung yells at the old man, he is surprisingly indifferent to Wang Lung's threats. Suddenly opening his coat, he reveals a beard of red hair and a red cloth which are signs of a group of robbers called the Redbeards who wander around the northwest, doing terrible things to farmers and their families. Wang Lung, unable to say anything, goes out.

Wang Lung, not knowing what to do, is frightened. He can no longer afford to be rude to his uncle, for he does not know what the man will do. It is true that over the years, bandits have never harassed his family and his house. Although men and children were starving during hard times, Wang Lung's house was safe. Wang Lung had thought that it was simply good fortune bestowed on him from the gods, but now he knows the reason. His uncle, one of the robbers, was the reason Wang Lung's house had been safe all this time. Generous and courteous to the uncle's family, Wang Lung thinks of moving within the city wall where he and his family will be safe, but cannot imagine being cut off from his land. It does not suffice as a solution.

Topic Tracking: Earth 16

Another solution would be to go to town and report his uncle to the magistrate, but no one would believe him, and he would most likely be punished for disrespectful conduct to the elderly.

Cuckoo returns to tell Wang Lung that the union between the two children has been agreed to, but Liu wishes to wait several more years because the girl is too young. Wang Lung is distressed because he does not know what to do with his son's ill temper.

The next morning, Wang Lung goes out to the fields so that the earth may do its healing working on him. Indeed, working in the fields heals Wang Lung of all the anger and frustration he has felt within his household. One day, the locusts come, threatening to destroy the crops. Although people are hopeless, Wang Lung, forgetting all his domestic troubles, is determined to fight the locusts. Some women visit the earth gods in the little temple with incenses.

Topic Tracking: God 7

Wang Lung and his laborers do whatever they can to save the fields, and even after the locusts come, Wang Lung's best fields are salvaged. After having had nothing to think about but his land for seven consecutive days, Wang Lung is healed. After having fought the locusts, Wang Lung does not deem his domestic troubles as overly serious or burdensome.

Topic Tracking: Earth 17

## Chapter 24

One day, the eldest son tells Wang Lung that he wishes to go south to attend a greater school. Unwilling to send his son south, Wang Lung forbids him to go, but the son is determined to get away from the watchful eyes of his father. Looking at his son and then at himself, Wang Lung is painfully aware of the differences between the two of them. His son has grown into a fine-looking, smooth young man, and Wang Lung is a farmer, earth-stained and dark. Wang Lung is suddenly contemptuous of his son's looks and angrily shouts at his son to get out on the fields.

At night, Lotus tells Wang Lung that the eldest son wishes to go away; she has heard this from Cuckoo. Wang Lung dismisses the idea, and for a short while, things seem to be quiet.

Although the locusts have destroyed a lot of the crops, Wang Lung is still able to make a lot of gold and silver from selling his harvest. Wang Lung is proud to have Lotus as his mistress because she becomes lovelier with the lapsing of time. O-lan, on the other hand, has grown haggard over the years, saying that there is a "fire in [her] vitals." One night, O-lan tells Wang Lung that the first son goes to see Lotus too often when he is away, and that it is better to send the son south so he would not be near Lotus. At first, Wang Lung thinks that O-lan is jealous and laughs the idea away, but soon is forced to think about it seriously when at night, Lotus does not yield to him, complaining about his smells. Wang Lung thinks that it was strange that Lotus had known the son's desire to go away.

The next day, he pretends to go out, but when he soon returns, he sees his son with Lotus in the inner court. Wang Lung feels a swelling of anger, and it "[is] the anger of one man against another man who steals away the loved woman." Chapter 24, pg. 175. Tearing away a piece of bamboo from the grove, he goes into the inner court to lash at his son, beating him until blood comes dripping down. He beats the son until he is satisfied, and sends the son to his own room. After sitting down to think for awhile in the courtyard, Wang Lung decides to send the boy south. Physically and emotionally weary, Wang Lung goes out to his fields to seek consolation.

## Chapter 25

After the eldest son leaves, Wang Lung feels as though peace has finally come. Wang Lung decides to apprentice the second son at a shop before the boy becomes restless and moody like the older son. A small, short boy with sharp eyes, he is quite different from the eldest son. Wang Lung arranges a meeting with the grain merchant Liu to apprentice the son. When he visits Liu, Wang Lung sees that the family lives in prosperity, but not in excessive indulgence. He does not want a daughter-in-law who will be condescending toward the family of her husband.

When the two men meet, they bow to each other, liking and respecting each other. When Wang Lung brings up the subject of his second son and expresses his wish to have him apprenticed to Liu, Liu agrees. Pleased, Wang Lung mentions his second daughter, and the two men tentatively agree on arranging a union between the daughter and Liu's young son, for a "double rope."

Coming home, Wang Lung meets his second daughter who is a very pretty child with bound feet. When he looks at her closely, however, he sees that she has been crying because of her feet binding. It is so painful that she cannot sleep at night, but O-lan has told her not to say anything to Wang Lung because without bound feet, she would be unloved by her husband just as O-lan is unloved by Wang Lung. Wang Lung is astonished to hear this.

Topic Tracking: Women 11

That night, he is unable to sleep at peace because he remembers what the second daughter told him. He is sad because it is the truth that he has never loved O-lan. Soon after, the second son is sent away for the apprenticeship, and the papers for the younger daughter's marriage are signed. Wang Lung decides to keep his third son for the land because it is sufficient to have two sons who can read and write.

After having settled his children's matters, taken care of the fields, and become accustomed to his life with Lotus, he now has time to notice O-lan who has grown old and thin. He also notices that O-lan is constantly in pain. He feels guilty about O-lan, but comforts himself with the thought that he has always been good to her, never beating her and always giving her the money she needed. But he cannot forget what his daughter told him as it continues to bother him. One day, Wang Lung asks O-lan what is wrong, but she can only answer that it is the "pain in [her] vitals." A doctor comes to look at O-lan, and he tells Wang Lung that O-lan will soon die. Back in his mind, Wang Lung also realizes that O-lan will die. After having paid for his medicine, Wang Lung goes into the kitchen where O-lan has lived most of her life to weep.



## Chapter 26

O-lan lies dying for many months. In the meantime, Wang Lung and the family realize what a big presence she has been in their lives because no one knows what to do around the house. The old man is confused and impatient because O-lan no longer comes to him.

The only person who does not know anything is the eldest daughter who always smiles. One day Wang Lung and the two children forget to bring her in from outside and the poor fool is later found, crying and trembling. Wang Lung begins to scold his son and daughter, but remembers that they are only children carrying out adult responsibilities.

While O-lan lies dying, Wang Lung does not pay attention to the land, turning all the affairs over to Ching's care. Winter comes, and during the cold season, Wang Lung sits by O-lan, warming her bed with fire. O-lan protests that it is too expensive, but Wang Lung cries that he will sell all of his land if it will make her better. But O-lan says calmly in return: "I must die-sometime anyway. But the land is there after me." Chapter 26, pg. 185

Topic Tracking: Earth 18

Because he knows that O-lan will die soon, Wang Lung buys two good coffins for her and his father. Wang Lung sits by O-lan day after day, but they do not talk much. She is often faint, murmuring various random things. When she does this, Wang Lung takes her hand and strokes it, but is sad and tortured because he can never love her. Rather, he notices how ugly O-lan is and cannot help being repulsed. Because of this, however, Wang Lung is especially kind to O-lan. Even when he goes to visit Lotus, he is not at ease, always thinking about O-lan.

On some days, O-lan is more clear-headed than she is on others. One day, she calls for Cuckoo and tells her that although in the great house Cuckoo was a beautiful favorite of the Old Lord, she has been a man's wife, bearing him sons. O-lan tells Wang Lung that after her death, neither Cuckoo nor Lotus should be allowed to enter her room and touch her things.

Near the New Year, O-lan is suddenly better, and tells Wang Lung that preparations need to be made for the New Year. She asks him to call the maid, who is betrothed to the first son, for she will teach the girl what to do. The daughter-in-law comes in a sedan chair with her mother and an old servant. Wang Lung is happy that she seems dutiful and proper, and O-lan is also very happy which is comforting to Wang Lung.

O-lan also asks to be allowed to see her eldest son be wed to the daughter-in-law before she dies. She tells him that she wants to die, knowing that Wang Lung will have a grandson. Because Wang Lung wishes to make O-lan happy, he agrees and sends for his son from the city to be married. Cuckoo makes all the needed preparations for the marriage feast, and many villagers are invited.

Wang Lung's son returns home the night before his marriage. In the two years that he has been away from home, he has grown tall and good-looking; he is a polished, well-dressed lord of a wealthy family. Wang Lung is extremely proud to see his son this way. Upon arrival, the son is sad to see his mother ill.

The maid is taken to Lotus' chambers where Lotus, Cuckoo, and the uncle's wife prepare her by washing and dressing her on the day of the marriage. The men of the family and the guests are in the middle room, and the daughter-in-law comes in followed by the eldest son with his two brothers. Wang Lung's old father, understanding what is happening, laughs happily to the amusement of all the guests. The son seems pleased with his wife, and Wang Lung, in return, is happy that he has chosen the right maid for him. The son and the daughter-in-law bow to the old father, to Wang Lung, and then to O-lan. She sits up, waiting for them, and Wang Lung thinks that she will be healthier again. After bowing to her, the couple sits by O-lan's bed, drinking the marriage wine.

Feasting soon begins, and there are food and people everywhere. There are people Wang Lung does not even know, for many have come from far to attend the ceremony. O-lan wishes the doors opened so that she will be able to hear and smell everything. After the feast, however, O-lan becomes tired and faint. She tells the son and his wife to look after Wang Lung, the old father, and the poor fool, but no one else. She makes it clear that they are not bound in duty to Lotus. After, O-lan falls in and out of consciousness, murmuring things to herself and turning her head. Wang Lung sits alone beside her, but cannot help being repulsed by O-lan's dull, ugly face. For a short moment, O-lan fixes her eyes on Wang Lung and gazes at him for some time as though she does not know who he is. Soon, her head droops, and she is dead.

After O-lan dies, Wang Lung asks his uncle's wife to prepare the body for burial. Wang Lung goes to make the necessary preparations. He goes to see a geomancer for a lucky burial date and rents a temple to store the coffin until the time of the burial. As if making amends for O-lan after her death, Wang Lung does everything he can for her. The whole family goes into mourning, and the eldest son moves into O-lan's room with his new wife. Wang Lung permanently moves into the inner court.

One morning, the second daughter goes into the room of Wang Lung's father to find the old man dead. Wang Lung decides to bury O-lan and his father together on the same day. Placing the coffin of his father in the middle room until the burial date, Wang Lung grieves for his father because the old man lived so long, barely alive.

On the set burial date, Taoist priests come to chant for the dead. Wang Lung does not mind that the land he will bury O-lan and his father in is a good piece of land because being buried in the family's own land is what a proper, established family does. After chanting, Wang Lung and his family, including the poor fool and Lotus, dressed in robes of white sackcloth, are carried to the burial site in sedan chairs. As O-lan's coffin is first lowered into the ground to await the old man's, the others weep loudly. Wang Lung does not cry because he thinks that what has happened is inevitable. After the coffins have been buried, Wang Lung walks home alone, wishing that he had not taken the pearls away from O-lan. He tells himself: "There in that land of mine is buried the first good half

of my life and more. It is as though half of me were buried there, and now it is a different life in my house." Chapter 26, pg. 195. Wang Lung weeps and wipes his tears away like a child.

## Chapter 27

After the wedding and the funeral, Ching wants to discuss the land with Wang Lung who has not had much time to think about the earth and the harvests lately. Ching tells him that there will probably be a flood this year. Wang Lung speaks irreverently of the gods, but Ching is fearful and does not dare to do the same. Following Ching to the fields, Wang Lung looks over his fields and finds them already wet and muddy. It is not yet summer, but when the summer rains come, there will certainly be a flood. Wang Lung continues to curse the god in heaven, but Ching tells him not to talk that way about the god who is more powerful than a human being. Wang Lung is a wealthy man, however, and this makes him careless and angry.

Topic Tracking: God 8

Just as they had expected, there is a flood that year. Attempts to mend the broken dam are unsuccessful when the new magistrate spends all the money that has been raised for the effort before killing himself. Soon, the whole country is under the water. The villages are like islands, and men get around in rafts made of tables and beds. As if that was not enough, it rains day after day.

Wang Lung's house is safe because it is on a hill, but his fields are completely immersed in water. That year, because there are no harvests, people starve. Some go south, and others join bandit groups. In order to protect the town from the robbers, soldiers keep watch in front of the gate. The famine continues because water does not recede in time for the seeds to be planted for next year's harvest.

Wang Lung tries to curb the spending of money in his own household, and as a result, frequently gets into fights with Cuckoo who insists on buying meat everyday. When the winter approaches, Wang Lung becomes strict about what is bought in the house, keeping track of everything they have with his eldest daughter-in-law. One day, Wang Lung releases all the workers because they are left idle. To Lotus who is used to being indulged, Wang Lung secretly gives oil and sugar.

Although Wang Lung wishes to keep it a secret, he is not as poor as he makes it seem. He has silver hidden in the room where his eldest son and the daughter-in-law sleep, and some money stowed away in other parts of the house. But everyone around him goes hungry, and he is aware of the fact that many resent him for having enough with which to survive. Because Wang Lung understands that he and his family would not be safe without his uncle, he is polite to the uncle and his family who soon understand the power they wield in the house. The uncle's wife and his son become increasingly demanding, and the uncle comes to Wang Lung to ask for money which he must yield. Soon, the uncle and his family receive the best treatment in the house.

Wang Lung's eldest son is dissatisfied because the uncle's son continuously peeps at his wife. Wang Lung also tells his son that he hates the uncle and his family as much as the son hates them, but that there is nothing to do because the uncle belongs to the



Redbeards. The eldest son suggests that they push the uncle's family into the water, but Wang Lung, a softhearted man, cannot commit murder. Wang Lung wishes for a way to keep the uncle and his wife weak and "undesiring," and the son suggests that they buy them as much opium as they will have. Wang Lung is initially doubtful because opium is expensive and does not readily consent.

One day, after Wang Lung catches the son of the uncle grabbing his second daughter in the courtyard, he decides to send the daughter to the house of her husband-to-be. Liu agrees to keep the daughter in the house for safekeeping. On his way back home, Wang Lung sees a shop of tobacco and opium where he buys six ounces of opium for the uncle and his wife.



## Chapter 28

After sending the second daughter away to the house of her betrothed, Wang Lung is free of anxiety. One day, he offers his uncle some opium which he takes more than eagerly because it is something that only wealthy men smoke. After that day, Wang Lung makes sure that there are pipes of opium lying around the house because it brings him peace.

Winter passes by, and the waters in the fields recede. The eldest son breaks the news that Wang Lung's daughter-in-law is with child. The prospect of having a grandchild is a comforting one to Wang Lung when he is burdened with problems. Spring passes by, and summer brings back all the people who had left the village during the famine. Many seek Wang Lung to borrow money, and he willingly lends it at high interest. Others sell their lands when they can no longer borrow any money, and those without anything else sell their daughters.

Topic Tracking: Women 12

One day, Wang Lung buys five daughters from men in exchange for seed, oxen, and plow. A few days after that, a man comes to Wang Lung, wanting to sell a girl of seven. Wang Lung is unwilling to buy her because the girl looks weak, but Lotus immediately likes her because of her pretty looks. Wang Lung finally agrees to buy the small girl to please Lotus and to see the frightened, hungry maid fed.

When Wang Lung goes to inspect his lands with Ching, he takes his third son along whom he wishes to keep on the land. Just when Wang Lung thinks there is peace in his house, trouble rises again because the eldest son and the son of the uncle do not get along. The son is suspicious of his cousin's conduct toward his wife as well as Lotus, and complains to Wang Lung. He scolds his son that it is not appropriate to be so fond of his wife as though she were a "harlot." When the son suggests that they move to a new house to leave the uncle and his family behind, Wang Lung is unaffected, reminding his son that without the land, the son would not have become such a polished young lord of a rich family.

Topic Tracking: Earth 19

Wang Lung harbors mixed feelings toward his son. On one hand, he is proud of the smooth, wealthy lord his son has become, but he is also scornful of the son. The eldest son continually insists that the family should move to the vacant inner courts of the great House of the Hwang. The mention of the great house piques Wang Lung's interest who has not forgotten the day he, a humble farmer, went there to get a slave for a wife. When he thinks that he can live in this great house, Wang Lung is thoughtful. He likes the idea that he can sit where the Old Mistress once sat as she gave O-lan away. Wang Lung is driven by these thoughts and his frustration with the lazy uncle's son. The uncle and his wife have been quieted with the opium, but their son is a constant source of trouble.

One day, Wang Lung consults his second son about moving into town and living in the great house, and the son is pleased with the idea. The son also expresses a wish to be wed. Unlike his older brother, however, the second son does not want a town maid who would constantly be badgering him about spending money. When Wang Lung asks the son what kind of a woman he wishes to marry, he tells his father in specific detail the kind of maid he would like to marry. Wang Lung is astonished at his son's wisdom and careful forethought and feels that the second son is quite different from his older sibling. He assures his son that he will have Ching look into the matter of his marriage.

As though seriously considering the idea of moving into the great house, Wang Lung goes to town to look at the house, remembering the time when he came for O-lan as a poor farmer. Dirty commoners inhabit the outer courts, but Wang Lung walks through the courts until he reaches a gate beside which sits a sleeping woman. Wang Lung looks carefully at the woman to realize that she is the wife of the gatekeeper of the great house many years ago. He is suddenly sad to think that so many years have passed since he came with O-lan with their firstborn. Waking the woman, Wang Lung asks to be let in. Going in and looking around to examine all the familiar places, Wang Lung shouts that he will have the house.



## Chapter 29

Once he has made up his mind, Wang Lung wants everything to be arranged quickly. He tells his eldest son to arrange the matter of renting the house and sends for his second son to help with the moving. After Lotus, Cuckoo, and the slaves are moved, Wang Lung's eldest son, his wife, and their servants are moved. Wang Lung is reluctant to leave his land immediately and keeps his youngest son by his side. When it is finally time for him to go, he cannot easily part with the land. He tells his sons to prepare his court in the house and decides to move whenever he wishes to go. He decides to take his poor fool with him when the time comes because no one else will take care of her. Wang Lung decides to move when the second son's marriage affairs have all been settled because he wishes to be near Ching who is arranging the matter.

In the house, Wang Lung is left with his third son, the fool, Ching, the uncle's family, and the laborers. The uncle and his wife move into the quarters where Lotus used to live, but Wang Lung does not mind because he sees that his uncle will soon die. Ching and the workers live in the outer rooms, and Wang Lung and his family live in the middle rooms with a servant.

Wang Lung asks Ching to look into the matter of his second son's marriage. Ching has become old and gaunt, but he is still an honest man who faithfully serves Wang Lung. After having looked around the area for a suitable maid for the second son, Ching comes back to tell Wang Lung about a maid who lives three villages away. After Wang Lung has approved of the match and signed the papers, the matter is arranged and the wedding day is set.

With Ching having become too old and his third son still too young to take care of land matters, Wang Lung rents out some of his land to people who are more than willing to be his tenants. After renting his land out, Wang Lung does not have much to do. Although he spends most of his time at the new house in town, "when day came back he was back upon his land...And he smelled the fresh smell of the fields and when he came to his own land, he rejoiced in it." Chapter 29, pg. 215

Topic Tracking: Earth 20

One day, as though the gods are being good to Wang Lung, the uncle's son who has long been restless after all the women have been moved out, decides to go to a war in the north. Wang Lung pretends to be reluctant, but gives him some silver to prepare for the journey. After he has gone, there seems to be peace at last in the house.

Wang Lung spends more and more time in his town house as the birth of his grandchild approaches. Looking at his life in retrospect, Wang Lung is proud and happy to have come so far. He adopts a stylish, extravagant life style of silk clothes and good food.

One day, Wang Lung is awakened by the groans of his daughter-in-law at labor. He is suddenly frightened, as he has never been for many years. He promises the "goddess



of mercy" at the temple in town a new robe if his grandchild turns out to be a male child. Still agitated, Wang Lung buys more incense to visit the two earth gods at the temple of the earth in the middle of the field. He threatens the god and his lady that there will be nothing for them if his grandchild is not a boy.

Topic Tracking: Women 13

Topic Tracking: God 9

Near the night, Lotus comes to tell Wang Lung that a grandson has been born. Wang Lung is happy and thinks of the time when his first son was born. O-lan had gone into the small room by herself, not willing to have anyone with her at the time of her birth. The wife of the eldest son, Wang Lung thinks, is rather fussy to have everyone running around for her. Thinking of the time when O-lan breastfed the son, Wang Lung is sad to hear that a nursemaid will have to be found for the grandson because the daughter-in-law cannot nurse her own baby.

A month after the child's birth, the eldest son holds a birth feast, inviting guests and dying hundreds of eggs to distribute to the guests. After the feast, at the eldest son's suggestion, tablets of ancestors are set up with the names of Wang Lung's grandfather and his father. There is space left for Wang Lung's name after he dies and the names of his sons. After this, Wang Lung remembers the promise he made to the goddess of mercy for a new robe and goes to town to give the money for it.

On his way back home, Wang Lung is informed by a worker that Ching is dying. Wang Lung curses the earth gods because he thinks that they are jealous that he gave a red robe to the town goddess.

Topic Tracking: God 10

The laborers tell Wang Lung that Ching was teaching a newly hired farmer the right way of holding the flail, but it was too much on the old man. When the men bring the newly hired laborer before Wang Lung, he beats the country boy over the head until he hears Ching moaning. Ching soon dies, and Wang Lung weeps for his old, faithful friend. Despite the protests of his sons, Wang Lung buys him a nice coffin and wears white mourning. He wishes to bury Ching where O-lan and his father are buried, but the sons protest forcefully. Wang Lung gives over to burying Ching by the entrance to the wall because Ching has always been a protector to him against evil.

Wang Lung is too sad to go see his lands without Ching. Although he does not ever think of selling his lands, he rents all of them out to tenants. Leaving his uncle and his wife to the care of one of his laborers, Wang Lung permanently moves into the town house, rarely coming to the house on the land.

## Chapter 30

Everyday, Wang Lung sits in his chair in the sun, smoking his water pipe and resting while others work his land to bring him money and harvest. Wang Lung would be at peace if only the eldest son would leave him alone, but there are many things that the eldest son wishes for such as new tables, bowls, and chairs. He also complains about the dirty commoners living in the front courts, suggesting that the family buy the courts to drive the poor people out. Because Wang Lung is annoyed to be bothered by his son, he leaves the son to do whatever he likes.

The son spends money as he likes, buying new things for the house. When he passes the outer courts where the commoners are, he walks by haughtily, and the commoners laugh at him for having forgotten that his father was once a common farmer. Later, the common people are driven out because the rent fees for the rooms have been increased. Although they know that Wang Lung's eldest son has arranged this through the son of the Old Lord Hwang, they are helpless to do anything about it. All they can do is tell themselves angrily that they will come back "even as the poor do come back when the rich are too rich." Chapter 30, pg. 224.

Wang Lung does not know all of this because he is always sleeping and eating while his son arranges everything. His son has carpenters and masons repair the room that the common people used. He decorates the courts with pools of fish and flowers. The son and his wife look over the courts together and discuss what else needs to be done. People in town no longer call Wang Lung "Wang the Farmer," but "Wang the Big Man" or "Wang the Rich Man." In the meanwhile, a lot of money is spent, but Wang Lung does not realize it until the second son comes to him to complain that too much money is being spent in the house. Wang Lung tries to soothe him by telling the second son that it is all for his wedding, but he persists in his disapproval.

Wang Lung soon calls the first son to admonish him, but the son tells Wang Lung that it is necessary for the family to live up to what everyone else is calling them-"the great family Wang." Although Wang Lung is secretly proud and happy, he tells his son to stop spending so much money. The son complies but wishes to discuss the matter of his youngest brother who, according to him, should not grow up so ignorant. Wang Lung insists on having at least one of the sons on the land, but the eldest son tells him that the brother cries at night because he is unhappy. Wang Lung begins to think seriously about his third son whom no one pays much attention. After his conversation with the eldest son, Wang Lung calls for his tall, thin boy who is as grave and silent as O-lan was. When Wang Lung asks him if it is true that he does not want to work on the land, the boy again answers that it is so, and in turn, Wang Lung becomes angry. It seems to him that his sons are all very troublesome; daughters seem to be far better children. The second daughter has gone to the home of her betrothed and the other, the poor fool, never says anything. Nevertheless, after his anger has passed, Wang Lung allows a tutor for the third son, and turns over all his financial matters to the second son.



Wang Lung's second son is the most puzzling to him because he, unlike the first son who is proud and conscious of the opinions of others, is exceedingly calculating and careful with money. The first son, contemptuous of his stingy brother, is haughty to the village bride of his brother on the wedding day. Wang Lung's sons are all very different. The eldest son does not want the family to be anything less than a great house whereas the second son is more concerned about conserving money. The youngest son is trying to learn as much as he can. The only one in the house who is completely worry free seems to be the grandson of Wang Lung who is always content and happy. Wang Lung derives comfort and happiness from watching his grandchild. As the years lapse, the eldest daughter-in-law continually conceives and bears, and soon Wang Lung sees many children running around the house. The second son's wife also gives birth, but it is only a girl. This, however, is appropriate because it is out of respect to the wife of the eldest son.

The winter of the fifth year is colder than any other winter in recent memory. The uncle and his wife lie on their beds everyday. Having smoked opium for a long time, they are "like two old dry sticks." When Wang Lung buys two coffins for them, the uncle is comforted to know that he will be well provided for even after death. One evening, the uncle is found dead. Wang Lung buries him beside his father and causes the whole family to enter into a year of mourning only because it is appropriate to do so in an established family. The uncle's wife is moved into the town house where she smokes opium on her bed everyday. Wang Lung is astonished to see a once shrewish, fearful woman lying, helpless, yellow, and withered.



## Chapter 31

Wang Lung always hears of wars, but has never seen one nor has he ever been close to one. He hears of men going to wars, but it is always a distant thing in a faraway place for him. However, one day, it is near, and he hears it first from his second son who tells Wang Lung that the price of grain has risen because of the war.

One day, Wang Lung's grandson is standing at the gate, watching a swarm of fierce looking, dangerous men passing through the town. Before Wang Lung is able to go inside the house and lock the gate, however, he is hailed by the son of the uncle. He and other soldiers barge into Wang Lung's house before he can say anything, settling themselves on Wang Lung's floors and filling every corner of the house.

Wang Lung's eldest son is notified of what has happened. The son, seeing every man with a knife, is courteous to his cousin who tells him that he and the soldiers will rest for an indeterminate number of days until there is another war. The second son comes home running to inform his brother and father that they must be courteous to the soldiers. A man he used to know was killed by some soldiers for protesting. Although Wang Lung and his sons put all the women in the inner courts to protect them, the cousin is free to come and go as he wishes because he is a relative. The cousin looks at all the women, commenting on the wives of the sons. The wife of the first son is demure and timid, but the wife of the second son answers back to the cousin. Watching this, the first son is ashamed and uncomfortable because they should not be conversing so freely.

Topic Tracking: Women 14

The cousin says maliciously that he prefers the wife of the second son to the wife of the first son, and the wife of the eldest son becomes angry, quickly retiring into an inner room.

The cousin also visits Lotus whom he calls "Old Mistress," and Lotus is pleased. After, the cousin goes to see his mother who lies on her bed, drowsy and hazy. She looks at him for a long time, but does not know what to do except offer him opium which he will not take. The uncle's wife has been reduced to a yellow-skinned, haggard woman. For a moment, Wang Lung is afraid that the cousin will blame him for what has happened to his mother, but the cousin says nothing.

The soldiers destroy and abuse Wang Lung's house, crushing the chairs and stepping on the flowers in the garden. But the family hates the cousin the most because he goes around the house, eyeing all the slaves. Cuckoo suggests that there is nothing else to do but give the cousin a slave for pleasure. The cousin wishes to have Pear Blossom, the pale small girl that Wang Lung bought during the famine, but the girl is terrified. Lotus is peeved because of the fuss that the girl is making over an unimportant matter, but Wang Lung does not want to send the frightened, weeping maid to the coarse, lustful cousin. After having pacified the angry Lotus, Wang Lung finds a way to avoid

sending Pear Blossom to the cousin. Instead of Pear Blossom, another slave volunteers to go, and the matter is resolved. Wang Lung is kind and gentle to the little slave who is still cowering in fear.

The cousin stays in Wang Lung's house for almost two months before going to another war. The slave who was given to him conceives, and the cousin is happy to be leaving a child behind him. After he and the rest of the soldiers leave, there is only ruin and confusion in Wang Lung's house.

## Chapter 32

After the soldiers leave, Wang Lung and his sons bring in workers to repair the house. Wang Lung orders the slave who carries the child of his cousin to look after the uncle's wife. The slave gives birth only to a girl, which is a relief because if it had been a boy, she would have claimed a place in the family for her son.

Topic Tracking: Women 15

Wang Lung tells the slave that she will be able to get the room of the uncle's wife after her death. When he gives her money, the slave asks Wang Lung to keep it as dowry and to wed her to a farmer. Wang Lung agrees to do this after the death of the uncle's wife and thinks that a man will come to get this slave just as he had once come to the great house to get O-lan.

One morning, the slave comes to tell Wang Lung that the uncle's wife has died. Wang Lung thinks of a suitable man for the slave, and can only remember the farmer who received a beating from him for causing the death of Ching. He sends for the man, and when he comes, Wang Lung, seated on a dais in the hall, speaks to them both. The man is more than happy to take the woman because he is too poor to wed anyone else. When Wang Lung comes down from the dais, he feels that "his life [is] rounded off and he [has] done all that he said he would in his life and more than he could ever have dreamed he could." Chapter 32, pg. 241. At this point, Wang Lung is close to sixty-five years old and has five grandsons. It seems to him that there is nothing else to trouble him in his old age.

But peace is elusive because the wife of the eldest son and the wife of the second son do not get along, having grown to hate each other as a result of small quarrels. The hatred between these two women is worsened by the lack of love between the two brothers. The eldest son resents the fact that the second brother looks after all the monetary affairs of the house, and the second brother does not approve of the older brother's extravagant life style and spending.

Wang Lung himself has a problem of his own with which to grapple. Since he rescued the small slave Pear Blossom from falling into the hands of the lustful cousin, Lotus dislikes the maid and is jealous of her. One day, she accuses Wang Lung of looking at the girl. Although Wang Lung has not looked at the girl, he begins to look after Lotus brings it up. He sees that the girl is indeed very pretty, and "something [stirs] in his old blood that [has] been quiet these ten years and more." Chapter 32, pg. 243.

Wang Lung's youngest son is also a source of trouble. When the soldiers were at the house, the boy had listened to their glorious war stories in fascination. Now, he wishes to become a soldier. Angry and astonished, Wang Lung forbids it, trying to coax the boy. Wang Lung says that it is disgraceful to have a soldier for a son, but the son talks of fighting, revolution, and freedom. Wang Lung tries to change the son's mind by promising a wife, but the boy says that a woman will not do. When Wang Lung asks if

there is a slave he wants, the boy unwillingly and timidly mentions Pear Blossom. Suddenly, Wang Lung, looking at his youthful son, feels jealous. He angrily tells him to keep off the slaves, as he will not tolerate the corrupt ways of young lords in his household. The boy also becomes angry, storming out of the room and leaving Wang Lung confused and weary of the constant problems in his house. He is angry and jealous because he secretly wants to have Pear Blossom for himself.

## Chapter 33

Wang Lung cannot stop thinking about Pear Blossom and watches her wherever she goes. One summer night of that year, Wang Lung is sitting under a tree in his court, and "his blood [runs] full and hot like the blood of a young man." Chapter 33, pg. 247. Earlier that day, he had wanted to go to his land to feel the earth under his feet, but he does not do this because he is no longer a poor farmer. So Wang Lung roams around the courts, staying away from Lotus who will be able to tell when a man is restless. Wang Lung is ashamed and thinks to himself that it would be better to give the maid to his third son, but he does not like the thought.

One night, sitting under the tree near the gate of his court, he beckons Pear Blossom who is passing by. When she fearfully approaches him, he touches her coat, but stops himself. Suddenly, Pear Blossom seizes his feet, lying on the ground. She tells him: "I like old men-I like old men-they are so kind." Chapter 33, pg. 248. When he protests and tells her that she should be with a youthful man, Pear Blossom tells him that she prefers old men. Wang Lung holds the maid gently, happy just to feel her flesh against his, and Pear Blossom clings to him like a daughter to a father.

Wang Lung is unwilling to tell anyone of what has happened between himself and Pear Blossom, but Cuckoo detects it and threatens to tell Lotus. In exchange for money from Wang Lung, however, Cuckoo is able to relate the news to Lotus without angering her.

Then there are his three sons to whom he must relate what has happened, and he is suddenly ashamed. But Wang Lung repeats to himself that he is the master of his own house and that he can do whatever he wishes. One by one, the sons come. The second son comes first, and Wang Lung and he discuss his family affairs and matters pertaining to the land. The second son says nothing about Pear Blossom, and goes away after having seen her bringing out tea. On the same day, the eldest son comes. Wang Lung is initially afraid of his proud, handsome son, but soon sees that he is a timid man who is afraid of his own wife. When Wang Lung calls for Pear Blossom, the eldest son admiringly looks at his father, envying him. The youngest son comes in the evening. Wang Lung is sitting in his room, smoking, and Pear Blossom is on the other side of the table. Suddenly, the son appears before them both, not having been detected. The boy's eyes gleam fiercely. He tells his father that he will now go for a soldier, and his youngest son suddenly frightens Wang Lung. After throwing a frightful look at Pear Blossom, the third son rushes out of the room, never to be seen again. The next morning, Wang Lung's youngest son is nowhere to be found.



## Chapter 34

As summer wears into autumn and turns into winter, Wang Lung's love for Pear Blossom gradually turns into a love of a father for a daughter. She is a comfort to him, serving him loyally and even being kind to his poor fool. One day, he tells Pear Blossom that when he dies, she should feed the poor fool a poison he purchased at the medicine shop, but Pear Blossom protests and assures Wang Lung that she will take care of the poor fool.

Wang Lung increasingly spends much of his time withdrawn in his courts with the poor fool and Pear Blossom. He worries that for Pear Blossom, it is too quiet and lonely, but she seems content and happy. He wonders why she hates young men, but unable to elicit any answers from her, gives up asking any questions.

Day by day, Wang Lung sits around in his room or lies sleeping in the sun as his old father once did. He knows that he is nearing the end of his life, but is satisfied. Sometimes, he goes to see Lotus who greets him courteously. When Wang Lung goes to see his sons and their families, they are also courteous, but one day, after feeling like an outsider in their courts, he goes to see them no longer. He occasionally asks Cuckoo about his family, and Cuckoo tells him all the news. The two wives of his sons are still fighting with one another, and the eldest son is looking to get a second wife. As for the third son, people who come from the south say that he has become a military official during the Revolution.

For Wang Lung, "still one thing [remains] to him and it [is] his love for his land. He [has] gone away from it and he [has] set up his house in a town and he [is] rich. But his roots [are] in his land and although he [forgets] it for many months together, when spring [comes] each year he must get out on to the land." Chapter 34, pg. 257

Topic Tracking: Earth 21

One day, walking over to the burial land, he remembers everyone he has buried there. He thinks that he shall be next and wishes to buy a coffin for himself. Returning home, he calls for his eldest son to tell him that he wishes to see his coffin. Although the eldest son protests outwardly, he buys a coffin made from a nice, fragrant, durable wood for his father, which comforts and pleases him. For the remaining days of his life, Wang Lung wishes to spend it in his old house on the land and takes his poor fool, Pear Blossom, and servants there to live out his life.

Spring wears away, and summer passes. It is now autumn. Wang Lung is now so old that he does not think much about anything except his food, his drink, and his land. When he holds his earth in his hands, Wang Lung is content. His sons visit him every so often to pay their respects. When they do not come, Wang Lung complains, but Pear Blossom tells him about them. The eldest son is an officer in the town among wealthy men, and he has gotten a second wife. The second son is going to have his own grain market. Wang Lung listens, but soon forgets all that she tells him.



One day, Wang Lung is unusually clear-headed. His sons have come to visit him, but after seeing their father, they go out to the land. Wang Lung is close behind them, listening silently. The sons, not knowing that Wang Lung is following them, talk of selling the land and dividing the money between themselves. When Wang Lung hears of selling the land, he breaks out in anger, crying: "Now evil, idle son-sell the land! It is the end of a family-when they begin to sell the land. Out of the land we came and into it we must go-if you will hold your land you can live-no one can rob you of land-if you sell the land, it is the end." Chapter 34, pg. 260

Topic Tracking: Earth 22

Wang Lung weeps hysterically, and his sons try to soothe him by assuring him that they will not sell the land. Holding the earth in his hand, Wang Lung cries. The sons repeat that they will not sell the land, but over Wang Lung's head, they look at each other and smile as though they are only humoring their old, feeble father.