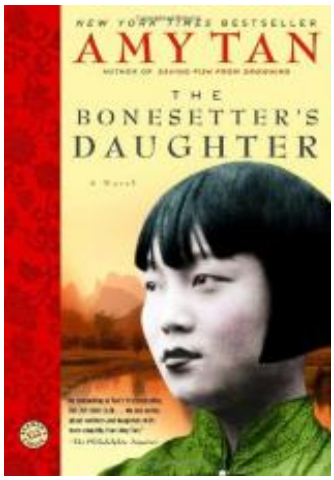
The Bonesetter's Daughter

by Amy Tan



About the Book

In memories that rise like wisps of ghosts, LuLing Young searches for the name of her mother, the daughter of the Famous Bonesetter from the Mouth of the Mountain. Trying to hold on to the evaporating past, she begins to write all that she can remember of her life as a girl in China. Meanwhile, her daughter Ruth, a ghostwriter for authors of self-help books, is losing the ability to speak up for herself in front of the man she lives with and his two teenage daughters. None of her professional sound bites and pat homilies works for her personal life; she knows only how to translate what others want to say.

Ruth starts suspecting that something is terribly wrong with her mother. As a child, Ruth had been constantly subjected to her mother's disturbing notions about curses and ghosts, and to her repeated threats to kill herself, and was even forced by her mother to try to communicate with ghosts. But now LuLing seems less argumentative, even happy, far from her usual disagreeable and dissatisfied self.

While tending to her ailing mother, Ruth discovers the pages LuLing wrote in Chinese, the story of her tumultuous and star-crossed life, and is transported to a backwoods village known as Immortal Heart. There she learns of secrets passed along by a mute nursemaid, Precious Auntie; of a cave where dragon bones are mined, some of which may prove to be the teeth of Peking Man; of the crumbling ravine known as the End of the World, where Precious Auntie's scattered bones lie, and of the curse that LuLing believes she released through betrayal.

Like layers of sediment being removed, each page reveals secrets of a larger mystery: What became of Peking Man? What was the name of the Bonesetter's Daughter? And who was Precious Auntie, whose suicide changed the path of LuLing's life? Within LuLing's calligraphed pages awaits the truth about a mother's heart, what she cannot tell her daughter yet hopes she will never forget.

Set in contemporary San Francisco and in a Chinese village where Peking Man is being unearthed, The Bonesetter's

Daughter is an excavation of the human spirit: the past, its deepest wounds, its most profound hopes. The story conjures the pain of broken dreams, the power of myths, and the strength of love that enables us to recover in memory what we have lost in grief. Over the course of one fog-shrouded year, between one season of falling stars and the next, mother and daughter find what they share in their bones through heredity, history, and inexpressible qualities of love.

Discussion Guide

1. Memory plays an important role in **The Bonesetter's Daughter**. How is Ruth?s life affected by her childhood memories? How do LuLing?s memories affect her behavior around Ruth?

2. How does LuLing attempt to convey the difficulties of her formative years to Ruth? Does she succeed? Why/why not? In the constant sparring between Ruth and LuLing, who do you think is at fault?

3. Much of **The Bonesetter's Daughter** revolves around superstition. How does this aspect of Chinese culture affect LuLing?s actions? Is Ruth superstitious? Does she realize that she is manipulating her mother as a child?

4. Why does Ruth try so hard to distance herself from her Chinese heritage?

5. Why does Ruth lose her voice once a year on August 12th? In what way does Ruth "regain" her voice by the end of the novel?

6. How does Ruth use her professional talents to her advantage? In what way does her job stifle her ability to communicate? Are there any inherent advantages of Ruth?s uncanny ability to "spin gold out of dross"?

7. How is LuLing affected by the family curse? How does she react when she learns of her mother?s true identity? In your opinion, was it wrong for Precious Auntie to keep this secret from her daughter? Why does Precious Auntie keep this information from LuLing for so long?

8. What is the significance of Ruth?s learning the family name at the end of **The Bonesetter's Daughter**? What does Ruth learn about her name that helps change her opinion of her mother?

9. How does LuLing rebel against Precious Auntie? Is Ruth similar to LuLing in this respect? What are the consequences of Ruth?s insolence in her teenage years? Whose rebellion causes more lasting results?

10. What does Ruth learn about her mother and about her own cultural heritage that helps to mend her strained relationship with Art, as well as with Fia and Dory?

Author Bio

Amy Tan is the author of several novels, including THE JOY LUCK CLUB and THE BONESETTER'S DAUGHTER. She is a co-producer and co-screenwriter of the film version of THE JOY LUCK CLUB and is on the board of American

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