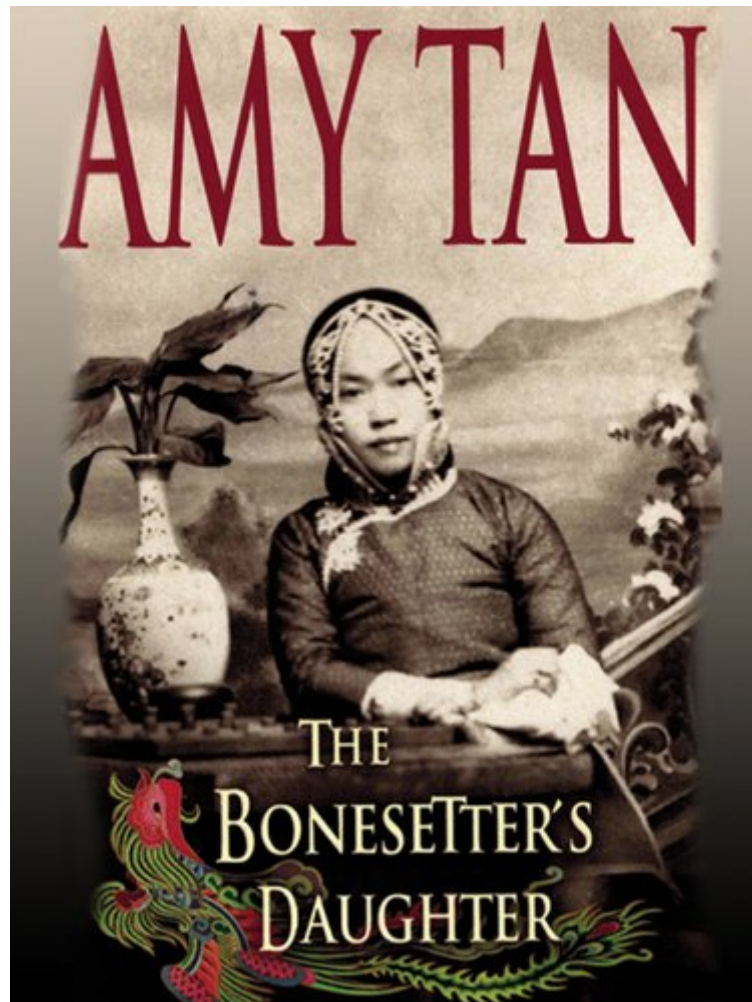


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The Bonesetter's Daughter



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

In "The Bonesetter's Daughter," set in San Francisco and in North China, Amy Tan tells the story of Ruth Young and her mother, LuLing, in a story that reflects much of her own background. In the story, Ruth is a successful "book doctor," a ghostwriter who translates other people's thoughts into a coherent book--a skill at which she is adept. She is the "as told to" name below the author's, although the real creative effort is her own. Like Amy Tan herself, Ruth is in her forties, and the similarities do not stop there. While the book is not strictly autobiographical, there are a great many parallels between the author and Ruth. For example: both of their mothers were stricken with Alzheimers disease, and both had stormy relationships with their Chinese mothers, both of whom were suicidal. Ruth's mother, LuLing, came from China in the late 'forties, as did Amy Tan's mother. The story is told in three parts: first is Ruth's ten-year relationship with Art and his two daughters--teenagers in the story--with whom she lives; a relationship that is in trouble for reasons that Ruth cannot determine or resolve. Art seems to be a self-centered individual who takes advantage of Ruth's tendency to always place her own interests secondary. The second part of the story is LuLing's own story in China, which, fearing memory loss, she is writing, in Chinese calligraphy and which she eventually presents to her daughter. Ruth, because of their difficult relationship lets the manuscript gather dust for seven years, untranslated. LuLing's life story is a tale of tragedy and suffering, lost love and a tempestuous relationship with her own mother, Precious Auntie, which later--after her mother's death--haunts her.

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