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The Dungeon

Elizabeth Meyers

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Banks, Lynne Reid. *The Dungeon*. HarperCollins, 2002. ISBN 0066237823. \$17.89. 279 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Adventure stories; Historical fiction;

Subject: Revenge--Juvenile fiction; Chinese--Scotland--Juvenile fiction; Voyages and travels--Juvenile fiction; Book—Reviews;

After losing everyone he loved to a bitter feud between himself and a nearby Scottish laird, Bruce MacLennan is set on revenge. He orders his men to build him a massive castle-one that sports marvelous defenses...along with a fearsome dungeon intended to hold only one man. While the castle is being constructed, MacLennan, sick of the land he once loved, seeks for adventure in exotic places. He spends most of the time in China, making his living by fighting in petty battles between warlords. On an impulse, MacLennan buys a little Chinese girl to serve him, and as they journey throughout China, she almost begins to replace his own dead children, a fact MacLennan denies vehemently to himself. When they return to Scotland and MacLennan's plan for revenge goes horribly awry, he turns in anger and blame to the one person he's come to care about, and only realizes too late what his impulse for revenge has cost him.

There's no doubt that Lynne Reid Banks's descriptions of medieval Scotland and China are well written. However, the real meat of the book is her exploration of the consequences faced by a person blinded by rage and pain. Watching MacLennan verbally and even physically abuse the loyal Peony (the Chinese girl) is often distressing, and the ending is more grueling than cathartic, but mature readers will appreciate the message of warning, along with the hint that, in the end, love just might be able to heal all wounds.