

"Kubla Khan" Summary

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The poem starts by talking about a place called Xanadu. In Xanadu, a king named Kubla Khan ordered to build a beautiful and grand pleasure-dome (a kind of palace or building made for joy and relaxation). A sacred river called Alph flowed through deep, endless caves and finally went into a sunless sea. Around the pleasure-dome, there were ten miles of fertile ground. It was surrounded by walls and towers. There were green gardens, sweet-smelling trees, very old hilly forests, and sunny spots.

Then, the speaker describes a very wild and mysterious deep crack in the land, covered with cedar trees. It looked magical and a little scary, like a place haunted by a sad woman crying for her demon lover. From this deep crack, a powerful fountain of water would burst out again and again. This powerful burst would throw huge rocks into the air. The river Alph flowed from this fountain. The river Alph twists and turns through the woods and valleys. After that, the river sinks into the lifeless sea. In the middle of all this noise, Kubla Khan heard old voices predicting war.

Above the river, the shadow of the pleasure-dome floated on the waves. The sounds of the fountain and caves mixed together. The sound created beautiful music. The whole scene seemed magical—a shining pleasure-dome and cold caves of ice all in the same place.

Later, the speaker talks about a dream he once had. He saw an Abyssinian girl (a girl from Africa) playing a musical instrument called a dulcimer. The girl was singing about a beautiful mountain called Mount Abora. The speaker wishes he could bring back her song in his mind. If he could do that, he feels he would be so inspired that he could build the magical pleasure-dome in the sky just by using music.

If people saw him doing that, they would be amazed and a little scared. They would see his flashing eyes and flying hair and would treat him like someone holy and powerful—someone who has tasted heavenly food and drink (honey-dew and milk of Paradise).