

THE KITCHEN GODS

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The lilies bloomed that day. Out in the courtyard, in their fantastic green-dragoned pots, one by one the tiny, ethereal petals opened. Dong-Yung went rapturously among them, stooping low to inhale their faint fragrance. The square courtyard, guarded on three sides by the wings of the house, facing the windowless blank wall on the fourth, was mottled with sunlight. Just this side of the wall a black shadow, as straight and opaque as the wall itself, banded the court with darkness; but on the hither side, where the lilies bloomed and Dong-Yung moved among them, lay glittering, yellow sunlight. The little box of a house where the gate-keeper lived made a bulge in the uniform blackness of the wall and its shadow. The two tall poles, with the upturned baskets, the devil-catchers, rose like flagstuffs from both sides of the door. A huge china griffon stood at the right of the gate. From beyond the wall came the sounds of early morning--the click of wooden sandals on cobbled streets and the panting cries of the coolies bringing in fresh vegetables or carrying back to the denuded land the refuse of the city. The gate-keeper was awake, brushing out his house with a broom of twigs. He was quite bald, and the top of his head was as tanned and brown as the legs of small summer children.

"Good morning, Honorable One," he called. "It is a good omen. The lilies have opened."

An amah, blue-trousered, blue-jacketed, blue-aproned, cluttered across the courtyard with two pails of steaming water.

"Good morning, Honorable One. The water for the great wife is hot and heavy." She dropped her buckets, the water splashing over in

runnels and puddles at her feet, and stooped to smell the lilies. "It is an auspicious day."

From the casement-window in the right balcony a voice called:

"Thou dunce! Here I am waiting already half the day. Quicker! quicker!"

It sounded elderly and querulous, a voice accustomed to be obeyed and to dominate. The great wife's face appeared a moment at the casement. Her eyes swept over the courtyard scene--over the blooming lilies, and Dong-Yung standing among them.

"Behold the small wife, cursed of the gods!" she cried in her high, shrill voice. "Not even a girl can she bear her master. May she eat bitterness all her days!"

The amah shouldered the steaming buckets and splashed across the bare boards of the ancestral hall beyond.

"The great wife is angry," murmured the gate-keeper. "Oh, Honorable One, shall I admit the flower-girl? She has fresh orchids."

Dong-Yung nodded. The flower-girl came slowly in under the guarded gateway. She was a country child, with brown cheeks and merry eyes. Her shallow basket was steadied by a ribbon over one shoulder, and caught between an arm and a swaying hip. In the flat, round basket, on green little leaves, lay the wired perfumed orchids.

"How many? It is an auspicious day. See, the lilies have bloomed. One for the hair and two for the buttonholes. They smell sweet as the breath of heaven itself."

Dong-Yung smiled as the flower-girl stuck one of the fragrant, fragile, green-striped orchids in her hair, and hung two others, caught on

delicate loops of wire, on the jade studs of her jacket, buttoned on the right shoulder.

"Ah, you are beautiful-come-death!" said the flower-girl. "Great happiness be thine!"

"Even a small wife can be happy at times." Dong-Yung took out a little woven purse, and paid over two coppers apiece to the flower-girl.

At the gate the girl and the gate-keeper fell a-talking.

"Is the morning rice ready?" called a man's voice from the room behind.

Dong-Yung turned quickly. Her whole face changed. It had been smiling and pleased before at the sight of the faint, white lily-petals and the sunlight on her feet and the fragrance of the orchids in her hair; but now it was lit with an inner radiance.

"My beloved Master!" Dong-Yung made a little instinctive gesture toward the approaching man, which in a second was caught and curbed by Chinese etiquette. Dressed, as she was, in pale-gray satin trousers, loose, and banded at the knee with wide blue stripes, and with a soft jacket to match, she was as beautiful in the eyes of the approaching man as the newly opened lilies. What he was in her eyes it would be hard for any modern woman to grasp: that rapture of adoration, that bliss of worship, has lingered only in rare hearts and rarer spots on the earth's surface.

Foh-Kyung came out slowly through the ancestral hall. The sunlight edged it like a bright border. The doors were wide open, and Dong-Yung saw the decorous rows of square chairs and square tables set rhythmically along the walls, and the covered dais at the head for the guest of honor. Long crimson scrolls, sprawled with gold ideographs,

hung from ceiling to floor. A rosewood cabinet, filled with vases, peach bloom, imperial yellow, and turquoise blue, gleamed like a lighted lamp in the shadowy morning light of the room.

Foh-Kyung stooped to smell the lilies.

"They perfume the very air we breathe. Little Jewel, I love our old Chinese ways. I love the custom of the lily-planting and the day the lilies bloom. I love to think the gods smell them in heaven, and are gracious to mortals for their fragrance's sake."

"I am so happy!" Dong-Yung said, poking the toe of her slipper in and out the sunlight. She looked up at the man before her, and saw he was tall and slim and as subtle-featured as the cross-legged bronze Buddha himself. His long, thin hands were hid, crossed and slipped along the wrists within the loose apricot satin sleeves of his brocaded garment. His feet, in their black satin slippers and tight-fitting white muslin socks, were austere and aristocratic. Dong-Yung, when he was absent, loved best to think of him thus, with his hands hidden and his eyes smiling.

"The willow-leaves will bud soon," answered Dong-Yung, glancing over her shoulder at the tapering, yellowing twigs of the ancient tree.

"And the beech-blossoms," continued Foh-Kyung. "'The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.'"

"The foreign devil's wisdom," answered Dong-Yung.

"It is greater than ours, Dong-Yung; greater and lovelier. To-day, to-day, I will go to their hall of ceremonial worship and say to their holy priest that I think and believe the Jesus way."

"Oh, most-beloved Master, is it also permitted to women, to a small wife, to believe the Jesus way?"

"I will believe for thee, too, little Lotus Flower in the Pond."

"Tell me, O Teacher of Knowledge--tell me that in my heart and in my mind I may follow a little way whither thou goest in thy heart and in thy mind!"

Foh-Kyung moved out of the shadow of the ancestral hall and stood in the warm sunlight beside Dong-Yung, his small wife. His hands were still withheld and hidden, clasping his wrists within the wide, loose apricot sleeves of his gown, but his eyes looked as if they touched her. Dong-Yung hid her happiness even as the flowers hide theirs, within silent, incurving petals.

"The water is cold as the chill of death. Go, bring me hot water--water hot enough to scald an egg."

Foh-Kyung and Dong-Yung turned to the casement in the upper right-hand wing and listened apprehensively. The quick chatter of angry voices rushed out into the sunlight.

"The honorable great wife is very cross this morning." Dong-Yung shivered and turned back to the lilies. "To-day perhaps she will beat me again. Would that at least I had borne my lord a young prince for a son; then perhaps--"

"Go not near her, little Jewel. Stay in thine own rooms. Nay, I have sons a-plenty. Do not regret the childlessness. I would not have your body go down one foot into the grave for a child. I love thee for thyself."

"Now my lord speaks truly, as do the foreign devils to the shameless, open-faced women. I like the ways of the outside kingdom well. Tell me more of them, my Master."

Foh-Kyung moved his hands as if he would have withdrawn them from his apricot-colored sleeves. Dong-Yung saw the withheld motion, and swayed nearer. For a moment Dong-Yung saw the look in his eyes that engulfed her in happiness; then it was gone, and he looked away past her, across the opening lily-buds and the black rampart of the wall, at something distant, yet precious. Foh-Kyung moved closer. His face changed. His eyes held that hidden rapture that only Dong-Yung and the foreign-born priest had seen.

"Little Jewel, wilt thou go with me to the priest of the foreign-born faith? Come!" He withdrew his hand from his sleeve and touched Dong-Yung on the shoulder. "Come, we will go hand in hand, thou and I, even as the men and women of the Jesus thinking; not as Chinese, I before, and thou six paces behind. Their God loves men and women alike."

"Is it permitted to a small wife to worship the foreign-born God?" Dong-Yung lifted her eyes to the face of Foh-Kyung. "Teach me, O my Lord Master! My understanding is but young and fearful--"

Foh-Kyung moved into the sunlight beside her.

"Their God loves all the world. Their God is different, little Flower, from the painted images, full of blessings, not curses. He loves even little girl babies that mothers would throw away. Truly his heart is still more loving than the heart of a mother."

"And yet I am fearful--" Dong-Yung looked back into the shadows of the guest-hall, where the ancestral tablets glowed upon the wall, and crimson tapers stood ready before them. "Our gods I have touched and handled."

"Nay, in the Jesus way there is no fear left." Foh-Kyung's voice dropped lower. Its sound filled Dong-Yung with longing. "When the wind screams in the chimneys at night, it is but the wind, not evil

spirits. When the summer breeze blows in at the open door, we need not bar it. It is but the summer breeze from the rice-fields, uninhabited by witch-ghosts. When we eat our morning rice, we are compelled to make no offering to the kitchen gods in the stove corner. They cannot curse our food. Ah, in the Jesus way there is no more fear!"

Dong-Yung drew away from her lord and master and looked at him anxiously. He was not seeing her at all. His eyes looked beyond, across the fragile lily-petals, through the solid black wall, at a vision he saw in the world. Dong-Yung bent her head to sniff the familiar sweet springtime orchid hanging from the jade stud on her shoulder.

"Your words are words of good hearing, O beloved Teacher. Nevertheless, let me follow six paces behind. I am not worthy to touch your hand. Six paces behind, when the sun shines in your face, my feet walk in the shadow of your garments."

Foh-Kyung gathered his gaze back from his visions and looked at his small wife, standing in a pool of sunshine before him. Overhead the lazy crows flew by, winging out from their city roosts to the rice-fields for the day's food.

"Tea-boiled eggs!" cried a vender from beyond the wall. A man stopped at the gate, put down his shoulder-tray of food, and bargained with the ancient, mahogany-scalped gate-keeper. Faint odors of food frying in oil stole out from the depths of the house behind him. And Dong-Yung, very quiet and passive in the pose of her body, gazed up at Foh-Kyung with those strange, secretive, ardent eyes. All around him was China, its very essence and sound and smell. Dong-Yung was a part of it all; nay, she was even the very heart of it, swaying there in the yellow light among the lily-petals.

"Precious Jewel! Yet it is sweeter to walk side by side, our feet stepping out into the sunlight together, and our shadows mingling behind. I want you beside me."

The last words rang with sudden warmth. Dong-Yung trembled and crimsoned. It was not seemly that a man speak to a woman thus, even though that man was a husband and the woman his wife, not even though the words were said in an open court, where the eyes of the great wife might spy and listen. And yet Dong-Yung thrilled to those words.

An amah called, "The morning rice is ready."

Dong-Yung hurried into the open room, where the light was still faint, filtering in through a high-silled window and the door. A round, brown table stood in the center of the room. In the corner of the room behind stood the crescentic, white plaster stove, with its dull wooden kettle-lids and its crackling straw. Two cooks, country women, sat in the hidden corner behind the stove, and poked in the great bales of straw and gossiped. Their voices and the answers of the serving amah filled the kitchen with noise. In their decorous niche at the upper right hand of the stove sat the two kitchen gods, small ancient idols, with hidden hands and crossed feet, gazing out upon a continually hungry world. Since time was they had sat there, ensconced at the very root of life, seemingly placid and unseeing and unhearing, yet venomously watching to be placated with food. Opposite the stove, on the white wall, hung a row of brass hooks, from which dangled porcelain spoons with pierced handles. On a serving-table stood the piled bowls for the day, blue-and-white rice patterns, of a thin, translucent ware, showing the delicate light through the rice seeds; red-and-green dragoned bowls for the puddings; and tiny saucer-like platters for the vegetables. The tea-cups, saucered and lidded, but unhandled, stood in a row before the polished brass hot-water kettle.

The whole room was full of a stirring, wakening life, of the crackling straw fire, of the steaming rice, all white and separate-kerneled in its great, shallow, black iron kettles, lidded with those heavy hand-made

wooden lids, while the boiling tea water hissed, and spat out a snake of white steam.

With that curious democracy of China, where high and low alike are friendly, Dong-Yung hurried into her beloved kitchen.

"Has the master come?" asked the serving maid.

"Coming, coming," Dong-Yung answered. "I myself will take in his morning rice, after I have offered the morning oblations to the gods."

Dong-Yung selected two of the daintiest blue-and-white rice-pattern bowls. The cook lifted off the wooden lid of the rice-kettle, and Dong-Yung scooped up a dipperful of the snow-white kernels. On the tiny shelf before each god, the father and mother god of the household, Dong-Yung placed her offering. She stood off a moment, surveying them in pleased satisfaction--the round, blue bowls, with the faint tracery of light; the complacent gods above, red and green and crimson, so age-long, comfortably ensconced in their warm stove corner. She made swift obeisance with her hands and body before those ancient idols. A slant of sunshine swept in from the high windows and fell over her in a shaft of light. The thoughts of her heart were all warm and mixed and confused. She was happy. She loved her kitchen, her gods, all the familiar ways of Chinese life. She loved her silken, satin clothes, perfumed and embroidered and orchid-crowned, yet most of all she loved her lord and master. Perhaps it was this love for him that made all the rest of life so precious, that made each bowl of white rice an oblation, each daily act a glorification. So she flung out her arms and bent her head before the kitchen gods, the symbol of her ancient happiness.

"Dong-Yung, I do not wish you to do this any more."

Dong-Yung turned, her obeisance half arrested in mid-air. Foh-Kyung stood in the doorway.

"My lord," stammered Dong-Yung, "I did not understand your meaning."

"I know that, little Flower in my House. The new meaning is hard to understand. I, too, am but a blind child unused to the touch of the road. But the kitchen gods matter no more; we pray to a spirit."

Foh-Kyung, in his long apricot-colored garment, crossed the threshold of the kitchen, crossed the shadow and sunlight that striped the bare board floor, and stood before the kitchen gods. His eyes were on a level with theirs, strange, painted wooden eyes that stared forth inscrutably into the eating centuries. Dong-Yung stood half bowed, breathless with a quick, cold fear. The cook, one hand holding a shiny brown dipper, the other a porcelain dish, stood motionless at the wooden table under the window. From behind the stove peeped the frightened face of one of the fire-tenders. The whole room was turned to stone, motionless, expectant, awaiting the releasing moment of arousal--all, that is, but the creeping sunshine, sliding nearer and nearer the crossed feet of the kitchen gods; and the hissing steam fire, warming, coddling the hearts of the gods. Sun at their feet, fire at their hearts, food before them, and mortals turned to stone!

Foh-Kyung laughed softly, standing there, eye-level with the kitchen gods. He stretched out his two hands, and caught a god in each. A shudder ran through the motionless room.

"It is wickedness!" The porcelain dish fell from the hand of the cook, and a thousand rice-kernels, like scattered pearls, ran over the floor.

"A blasphemer," the fire-tender whispered, peering around the stove with terrified eyes. "This household will bite off great bitterness."

Foh-Kyung walked around the corner of the stove. The fire sparked and hissed. The sunshine filled the empty niche. Not since the

building of the house and the planting of the tall black cypress trees around it, a hundred years ago, had the sunlight touched the wall behind the kitchen gods.

Dong-Yung sprang into life. She caught Foh-Kyung's sleeve.

"O my Lord and Master, I pray you, do not utterly cast them away into the burning, fiery furnace! I fear some evil will befall us."

Foh-Kyung, a green-and-gold god in each hand, stopped and turned. His eyes smiled at Dong-Yung. She was so little and so precious and so afraid! Dong-Yung saw the look of relenting. She held his sleeve the tighter.

"Light of my Eyes, do good deeds to me. My faith is but a little faith. How could it be great unto thy great faith? Be gentle with my kitchen gods. Do not utterly destroy them. I will hide them."

Foh-Kyung smiled yet more, and gave the plaster gods into her hands as one would give a toy to a child.

"They are thine. Do with them as thou wilt, but no more set them up in this stove corner and offer them morning rice. They are but painted, plastered gods. I worship the spirit above."

Foh-Kyung sat down at the men's table in the men's room beyond. An amah brought him rice and tea. Other men of the household there was none, and he ate his meal alone. From the women's room across the court came a shrill round of voices. The voice of the great wife was loudest and shrillest. The voices of the children, his sons and daughters, rose and fell with clear childish insistence among the older voices. The amah's voice laughed with an equal gaiety.

Dong-Yung hid away the plastered green-and-gold gods. Her heart was filled with a delicious fear. Her lord was even master of the gods.

He picked them up in his two hands, he carried them about as carelessly as a man carries a boy child astride his shoulder; he would even have cast them into the fire! Truly, she shivered with delight. Nevertheless, she was glad she had hidden them safely away. In the corner of the kitchen stood a box of white pigskin with beaten brass clasps made like the outspread wings of a butterfly. Underneath the piles of satin she had hidden them, and the key to the butterfly clasps was safe in her belt-jacket.

Dong-Yung stood in the kitchen door and watched Foh-Kyung.

"Does my lord wish for anything?"

Foh-Kyung turned, and saw her standing there in the doorway. Behind her were the white stove and the sun-filled, empty niche. The light flooded through the doorway. Foh-Kyung set down his rice-bowl from his left hand and his ivory chop-sticks from his right. He stood before her.

"Truly, Dong-Yung, I want thee. Do not go away and leave me. Do not cross to the eating-room of the women and children. Eat with me."

"It has not been heard of in the Middle Kingdom for a woman to eat with a man."

"Nevertheless, it shall be. Come!"

Dong-Yung entered slowly. The light in this dim room was all gathered upon the person of Foh-Kyung, in the gleaming patterned roses of his gown, in his deep amethyst ring, in his eyes. Dong-Yung came because of his eyes. She crossed the room slowly, swaying with that peculiar grace of small-footed women, till she stood at the table beside Foh-Kyung. She was now even more afraid than when he would have cast the kitchen gods into the fire. They were but gods,

kitchen gods, that he was about to break; this was the primeval bondage of the land, ancient custom.

"Give me thy hand and look up with thine eyes and thy heart."

Dong-Yung touched his hand. Foh-Kyung looked up as if he saw into the ether beyond, and there saw a spirit vision of ineffable radiance. But Dong-Yung watched him. She saw him transfigured with an inner light. His eyes moved in prayer. The exaltation spread out from him to her, it tingled through their finger-tips, it covered her from head to foot.

Foh-Kyung dropped her hand and moved. Dong-Yung leaned nearer.

"I, too, would believe the Jesus way."

In the peculiar quiet of mid-afternoon, when the shadows begin to creep down from the eaves of the pagodas and zigzag across the rice-fields to bed, Foh-Kyung and Dong-Yung arrived at the camp-ground of the foreigners. The lazy native streets were still dull with the end of labor. At the gate of the camp-ground the rickshaw coolies tipped down the bamboo shafts, to the ground. Dong-Yung stepped out quickly, and looked at her lord and master. He smiled.

"Nay, I do not fear," Dong-Yung answered, with her eyes on his face. "Yet this place is strange, and lays a coldness around my heart."

"Regard not their awkward ways," said Foh-Kyung as he turned in at the gate; "in their hearts they have the secret of life."

The gate-keeper bowed, and slipped the coin, warm from Foh-Kyung's hand, into his ready pocket.

"Walk beside me, little Wife of my Heart." Foh-Kyung stopped in the wide graveled road and waited for Dong-Yung. Standing there in the

sunlight, more vivid yet than the light itself, in his imperial yellow robes, he was the end of life, nay, life itself, to Dong-Yung. "We go to the house of the foreign priest to seek until we find the foreign God. Let us go side by side."

Dong-Yung, stepping with slow, small-footed grace, walked beside him.

"My understanding is as the understanding of a little child, beloved Teacher; but my heart lies like a shell in thy hand, its words but as the echo of thine. My honor is great that thou do not forget me in the magnitude of the search."

Dong-Yung's pleated satin skirts swayed to and fro against the imperial yellow of Foh-Kyung's robe. Her face colored like a pale spring blossom, looked strangely ethereal above her brocade jacket. Her heart still beat thickly, half with fear and half with the secret rapture of their quest and her lord's desire for her.

Foh-Kyung took a silken and ivory fan from an inner pocket and spread it in the air. Dong-Yung knew the fan well. It came from a famous jeweler's on Nanking Road, and had been designed by an old court poet of long ago. The tiny ivory spokes were fretted like ivy-twigs in the North, but on the leaves of silk was painted a love-story of the South. There was a tea-house, with a maiden playing a lute, and the words of the song, fantastic black ideographs, floated off to the ears of her lover. Foh-Kyung spread out its leaves in the sun, and looked at it and smiled.

"Never is the heart of man satisfied," he said, "alone. Neither when the willow fuzz flies in the spring, or when the midnight snow silvers the palms. Least of all is it satisfied when it seeks the presence of God above. I want thee beside me."

Dong-Yung hid her delight. Already for the third time he said those words--those words that changed all the world from one of a loving following-after to a marvelous oneness.

So they stepped across the lawn together. It was to Dong-Yung as if she stepped into an unknown land. She walked on flat green grass. Flowers in stiff and ordered rows went sedately round and round beneath a lurid red brick wall. A strange, square-cornered, flat-topped house squatted in the midst of the flat green grass. On the lawn at one side was a white-covered table, with a man and a woman sitting beside it. The four corners of the table-cloth dripped downward to the flat green grass. It was all very strange and ugly. Perhaps it was a garden, but no one would have guessed it. Dong-Yung longed to put each flower plant in a dragon bowl by itself and place it where the sun caught its petals one by one as the hours flew by. She longed for a narrow, tile-edged path to guide her feet through all that flat green expanse. A little shiver ran over her. She looked back, down the wide graveled way, through the gate, where the gate-keeper sat, tipped back against the wall on his stool, to the shop of the money-changer's opposite. A boy leaned half across the polished wood counter and shook his fist in the face of the money-changer. "Thou thief!" he cried. "Give me my two cash!" Dong-Yung was reassured. Around her lay all the dear familiar things; at her side walked her lord and master. And he had said they were seeking a new freedom, a God of love. Her thoughts stirred at her heart and caught her breath away.

The foreigners rose to greet them. Dong-Yung touched the hand of an alien man. She did not like it at all. The foreign-born woman made her sit down beside her, and offered her bitter, strong tea in delicate, lidless cups, with handles bent like a twisted flower-branch.

"I have been meaning to call for a long time, Mrs. Li," said the foreign-born woman.

"The great wife will receive thee with much honor," Dong-Yung answered.

"I am so glad you came with your husband."

"Yes," Dong-Yung answered, with a little smile. "The customs of the foreign born are pleasant to our eyes."

"I am glad you like them," said the foreign-born woman. "I couldn't bear not to go everywhere with my husband."

Dong-Yung liked her suddenly on account of the look that sprang up a moment in her eyes and vanished again. She looked across at the priest, her husband, a man in black, with thin lips and seeing eyes. The eyes of the foreign woman, looking at the priest, her husband, showed how much she loved him. "She loves him even as a small wife loves," Dong-Yung thought to herself. Dong-Yung watched the two men, the one in imperial yellow, the one in black, sitting beside each other and talking. Dong-Yung knew they were talking of the search. The foreign-born woman was speaking to her again.

"The doctor told me I would die if I came to China; but John felt he had a call. I would not stand in his way."

The woman's face was illumined.

"And now you are very happy?" Dong-Yung announced.

"And now I am very happy; just as you will be very happy."

"I am always happy since my lord took me for his small wife." Dong-Yung matched her happiness with the happiness of the foreign-born woman, proudly, with assurance. In her heart she knew no woman, born to eat bitterness, had ever been so happy as she in all the worlds beneath the heavens. She looked around her, beyond the failure of the

foreign woman's garden, at the piled, peaked roofs of China looking over the wall. The fragrance of a blossoming plum-tree stole across from a Chinese courtyard, and a peach-branch waved pink in the air. A wonder of contentment filled Dong-Yung.

All the while Foh-Kyung was talking. Dong-Yung turned back from all the greenness around her to listen. He sat very still, with his hands hid in his sleeves. The wave-ridged hem of his robe--blue and green and purple and red and yellow--was spread out decorously above his feet. Dong-Yung looked and looked at him, so still and motionless and so gorgeously arrayed. She looked from his feet, long, slim, in black satin slippers, and close-fitting white muslin socks, to the feet of the foreign priest. His feet were huge, ugly black things. From his feet Dong-Yung's eyes crept up to his face, over his priestly black clothes, rimmed with stiff white at wrist and throat. Yes, his face was even as the face of a priest, of one who serves between the gods and men, a face of seeing eyes and a rigid mouth. Dong-Yung shuddered.

"And so we have come, even as the foreign-born God tells us, a man and his wife, to believe the Jesus way."

Foh-Kyung spoke in a low voice, but his face smiled. Dong-Yung smiled, too, at his open, triumphant declarations. She said over his words to herself, under her breath, so that she would remember them surely when she wanted to call them back to whisper to her heart in the dark of some night. "We two, a man and his wife"--only dimly, with the heart of a little child, did Dong-Yung understand and follow Foh-Kyung; but the throb of her heart answered the hidden light in his eyes.

The foreign-born priest stood up. The same light shone in his eyes. It was a rapture, an exaltation. Suddenly an unheard-of-thing happened. The outside kingdom woman put her arms around Dong-Yung! Dong-Yung was terrified. She was held tight against the other woman's

shoulder. The foreign-born woman used a strange perfume. Dong-Yung only half heard her whispered words.

"We are like that, too. We could not be separated. Oh, you will be happy!"

Dong-Yung thought of the other woman. "In her heart she is humble and seemly. It is only her speech and her ways that are unfitting."

"We are going into the chapel a moment," said the priest. "Will you come, too?"

Dong-Yung looked at Foh-Kyung, a swift upward glance, like the sudden sweep of wings. She read his answer in his eyes. He wanted her to come. Not even in the temple of the foreign-born God did he wish to be without her.

A coolie called the foreign-born woman away.

The priest, in his tight trousers, and jacket, black and covered with a multitude of round flat buttons, stood up, and led the way into the house and down a long corridor to a closed door at the end. Dong-Yung hurried behind the two men. At the door the priest stood aside and held it open for her to pass in first. She hesitated. Foh-Kyung nodded.

"Do not think fearful things, little Princess," he whispered. "Enter, and be not afraid. There is no fear in the worship of Jesus."

So Dong-Yung crossed the threshold first. Something caught her breath away, just as the chanting of the dragon priests always did. She took a few steps forward and stood behind a low-backed bench. Before her, the light streamed into the little chapel through one luminous window of colored glass above the altar. It lay all over the gray-tiled floor in roses and sunflowers of pink and gold. A deep

purple stripe fell across the head of the black-robed priest. Dong-Yung was glad of that. It made his robe less hideous, and she could not understand how one could serve a god unless in beautiful robes. On the altar beneath the window of colored flowers were two tall silver candlesticks, with smooth white tapers. A wide-mouthed vase filled with Chinese lilies stood between them. The whole chapel was faintly fragrant with their incense. So even the foreign-born worshipers lit candles, and offered the scent of the lilies to their spirit God. Truly, all the gods of all the earth and in the sky are lovers of lit candles and flowers. Also, one prays to all gods.

The place was very quiet and peaceful, mottled with the gorgeous, flowerlike splashes of color. The waiting candles, the echoes of many prayers, the blossoms of worship filled the tiny chapel. Dong-Yung liked it, despite herself, despite the strangeness of the imageless altar, despite the clothes of the priest. She stood quite still behind the bench flooded and filled with an all-pervading sense of happiness.

Foh-Kyung and the black-robed priest walked past her, down the little aisle, to a shiny brass railing that went like a fence round before the altar. The foreign-born priest laid one hand on the railing as if to kneel down, but Foh-Kyung turned and beckoned with his chin to Dong-Yung to come. She obeyed at once. She was surprisingly unafraid. Her feet walked through the patterns of color, which slid over her head and hands, gold from the gold of a cross and purple from the robe of a king. As if stepping through a rainbow, she came slowly down the aisle to the waiting men, and in her heart and in her eyes lay the light of all love and trust.

Foh-Kyung caught her hand.

"See, I take her hand," he said to the priest, "even as you would take the hand of your wife, proud and unashamed in the presence of your God. Even as your love is, so shall ours be. Where the thoughts of my heart lead, the heart of my small wife follows. Give us your blessing."

Foh-Kyung drew Dong-Yung to her knees beside him. His face was hidden, after the manner of the foreign worshipers; but hers was uplifted, her eyes gazing at the glass with the colors of many flowers and the shapes of men and angels. She was happier than she had ever been--happier even than when she had first worshiped the ancestral tablets with her lord and master, happier even than at the feast of the dead, when they laid their food offerings on the shaven grave-mounds. She felt closer to Foh-Kyung than in all her life before.

She waited. The silence grew and grew till in the heart of it something ominous took the place of its all-pervading peace. Foh-Kyung lifted his face from his hands and rose to his feet. Dong-Yung turned, still kneeling, to scan his eyes. The black-robed priest stood off and looked at them with horror. Surely it was horror! Never had Dong-Yung really liked him. Slowly she rose, and stood beside and a little behind Foh-Kyung. He had not blessed them. Faintly, from beyond the walls of the Christian chapel came the beating of drums. Devil-drums they were. Dong-Yung half smiled at the long-known familiar sound.

"Your small wife?" said the priest. "Have you another wife?"

"Assuredly," Foh-Kyung answered. "All men have a great wife first; but this, my small wife, is the wife of my heart. Together we have come to seek and find the Jesus way."

The priest wiped his hand across his face. Dong-Yung saw that it was wet with tiny round balls of sweat. His mouth had suddenly become one thin red line, but in his eyes lay pain.

"Impossible," he said. His voice was quite different now, and sounded like bits of metal falling on stone. "No man can enter the church while living in sin with a woman other than his lawful wife. If your desire is real, put her away."

With instant response, Foh-Kyung made a stately bow.

"Alas! I have made a grievous mistake. The responsibility will be on my body. I thought all were welcome. We go. Later on, perhaps, we may meet again."

The priest spoke hurriedly.

"I do not understand your meaning. Is this belief of such light weight that you will toss it away for a sinful woman? Put her away, and come and believe."

But Foh-Kyung did not hear his words. As he turned away, Dong-Yung followed close behind her lord and master, only half comprehending, yet filled with a great fear. They went out again into the sunshine, out across the flat green grass, under the iron gateway, back into the Land of the Flowery Kingdom. Foh-Kyung did not speak until he put Dong-Yung in the rickshaw.

"Little Wife of my Heart," he said, "stop at the jeweler's and buy thee new ear-rings, these ear-rings of the sky-blue stone and sea-tears, and have thy hair dressed and thy gowns perfumed, and place the two red circles on the smile of thy cheeks. To-night we will feast. Hast thou forgotten to-night is the Feast of the Lanterns, when all good Buddhists rejoice?"

He stood beside her rickshaw, in his imperial yellow garment hemmed with the rainbow waves of the sea, and smiled down into her eyes.

"But the spirit God of love, the foreign-born spirit God?" said Dong-Yung. "Shall we feast to him, too?"

"Nay, it is not fitting to feast to two gods at once," said Foh-Kyung. "Do as I have said."

He left her. Dong-Yung, riding through the sun-splashed afternoon, buying colored jewels and flowery perfume and making herself beautiful, yet felt uneasy. She had not quite understood. A dim knowledge advanced toward her like a wall of fog. She pressed her two hands against it and held it off--held it off by sheer mental refusal to understand. In the courtyard at home the children were playing with their lighted animals, drawing their gaudy paper ducks, luminous with candle-light, to and fro on little standards set on four wheels. At the gate hung a tall red-and-white lantern, and over the roof floated a string of candle-lit balloons. In the ancestral hall the great wife had lit the red candles, speared on their slender spikes, before the tablets. In the kitchen the cooks and amahs were busy with the feast-cooking. Candles were stuck everywhere on the tables and benches. They threw little pools of light on the floor before the stove and looked at the empty niche. In the night it was merely a black hole in the stove filled with formless shadow. She wished--

"Dong-Yung, Flower in the House, where hast thou hidden the kitchen gods? Put them in their place." Foh-Kyung, still in imperial yellow, stood like a sun in the doorway.

Dong-Yung turned.

"But--"

"Put them back, little Jewel in the Hair. It is not permitted to worship the spirit God. There are bars and gates. The spirit of man must turn back in the searching, turn back to the images of plaster and paint."

Dong-Yung let the wall of fog slide over her. She dropped her resistance. She knew.

"Nay, not the spirit of man. It is but natural that the great God does not wish the importunings of a small wife. Worship thou alone the great God, and the shadow of that worship will fall on my heart."

"Nay, I cannot worship alone. My worship is not acceptable in the sight of the foreign God. My ways are not his ways."

Foh-Kyung's face was unlined and calm, yet Dong-Yung felt the hidden agony of his soul, flung back from its quest upon gods of plaster and paint.

"But I know the thoughts of thy heart, O Lord and Master, white and fragrant as the lily-buds that opened to-day. Has thy wish changed?"

"Nay, my wish is even the same, but it is not permitted to a man of two wives to be a follower of the spirit God."

Dong-Yung had known it all along. This knowledge came with no surprise. It was she who kept him from the path of his desire!

"Put back the kitchen gods," said Foh-Kyung. "We will live and believe and die even as our fathers have done. The gate to the God of love is closed."

The feast was served. In the sky one moon blotted out a world of stars. Foh-Kyung sat alone, smoking. Laughter and talk filled the women's wing. The amahs and coolies were resting outside. A thin reed of music crept in and out among the laughter and talk, from the reed flute of the cook. The kitchen was quite empty. One candle on the table sent up a long smoky tongue of flame. The fire still smoldered in the corner. A little wind shook the cypress-branches without, and carried the scent of the opened lilies into the room.

Dong-Yung, still arrayed for feasting, went to the pigskin trunk in the corner, fitted the key from her belt into the carven brass wings of the butterfly, and lifted out the kitchen gods. One in each hand, she held them, green and gold. She put them back in their niche, and lifted up a

bowl of rice to their feet, and beat her head on the ground before them.

"Forgive me, O my kitchen gods, forgive my injurious hands and heart; but the love of my master is even greater than my fear of thee. Thou and I, we bar the gates of heaven from him."

When she had finished, she tiptoed around the room, touching the chairs and tables with caressing fingers. She stole out into the courtyard, and bent to inhale the lily fragrance, sweeter by night than by day. "An auspicious day," the gate-keeper had said that morning. Foh-Kyung had stood beside her, with his feet in the sunshine; she remembered the light in his eyes. She bent her head till the fingers of the lily-petals touched her cheek. She crept back through the house, and looked at Foh-Kyung smoking. His eyes were dull, even as are the eyes of sightless bronze Buddhas. No, she would never risk going in to speak to him. If she heard the sound of his voice, if he called her "little Flower of the House," she would never have the strength to go. So she stood in the doorway and looked at him much as one looks at a sun, till wherever else one looks, one sees the same sun against the sky.

In the formless shadow she made a great obeisance, spreading out her arms and pressing the palms of her hands against the floor.

"O my Lord and Master," she said, with her lips against the boards of the floor, softly, so that none might hear her--"O my Lord and Master, I go. Even a small wife may unbar the gates of heaven."

First, before she went, she cast the two kitchen gods, green and gold, of ancient plaster, into the embers of the fire. There in the morning the cook-rice amahs found the onyx stones that had been their eyes. The house was still unlocked, the gate-keeper at the feast. Like a shadow she moved along the wall and through the gate. The smell of the lilies blew past her. Drums and chants echoed up the road, and the sounds

of manifold feastings. She crept away down by the wall, where the moon laid a strip of blackness, crept away to unbar the gates of heaven for her lord and master.