

Het and the Cherry Tree

Once, YISUN strolled through the grand red halls of her speaking house. He roamed between the golden feathered arches in the depths of night, once the halls were devoid of any other's presence, so he could bask in the remnant vibrations of all the words that had been spoken there earlier that day and enjoy the taste of the fruit of his creation. Many a word had been said that day indeed, some in contemplation, some in anger, some in folly, and others in drunkenness; but YISUN's favourites were those that had been said just to be spoken. What a marvellous opulence of existence it was, that ability to speak words without saying a single thing, what a colossal, monumental waste and spoil. YISUN rejoiced and smiled in the fourth way and bathed in those imperceptible reverberations engulfing them.

It was then that she noticed another hot flame brightly ablaze in her vicinity. Stood outside, Het the Dutiful, Watcher at the Gates, still guarded the entrance in the depths of the night and silence. As YISUN approached her, Het bowed deeply, as was custom.

"Come, Het," spoke YISUN, "join me for a lollygag in the gardens."

"Oh King of Kings, I would like nothing more," said Het, "but I must guard the gates, for there is none else to do so."

"Worry not," said YISUN, "none shall seek entry before dawn. Instead, let us visit the cherry tree in my gardens. I've much desire to see it tonight."

Het nodded and followed him dutifully as YISUN led them into his famed plum gardens. It was said that a single bite of the plums' flesh would grant immortality, for which reason they were coveted feverishly by mortals. This was much to YISUN's dismay, for immortality was a terrible curse and one of the three For-

bidden Punishments. Hence, the gardens were guarded by a handsome red buck with ten antlers, which none of the intruders scaling the walls or digging tunnels or sneaking through cracks had bested yet. The buck greeted them with a bow, as was custom, and left them to their own devices.

Het and YISUN strolled through the vast gardens, where the famed plum trees were in full bloom, for both seasons and daylight were but a formality in that place. They walked for a good while until they reached a far corner, where there indeed stood a mighty cherry tree among the plums, which Het had never seen before. It stood tall and wide, with deep grooves in its old bark, blossoming beautifully in radiant rose colours.

“Speak freely, child,” YISUN said to Het, while basking in the sight of the pink petals, “I see clearly that questions cloud your mind’s fires. Your duties do not bind you to silence, too, so speak, if you nurture that desire.”

“Oh Queen of Queens, it is as you say,” Het said bashfully, “my thoughts have been troubled lately.”

And YISUN, being in a playful mood, said nothing.

“I stand guard at the gates, as is my duty,” continued Het, “where my siblings and servants and pilgrims and retainers pass through daily. Some come and go seeking wisdom and enlightenment, while others lust for riches, conquests, and glory. Yet whoever passes that threshold fuels their step with aim and ambition.”

And YISUN, being in a generous mood, said nothing.

“But among my siblings, only I remain,” Het went on, “standing still by the gates forevermore, as they toil and scour the universe to sate the hungers of their ambition. Hence, I am troubled, oh Lord of Lords. I worry that duty may obstruct me from myself indefinitely, and I fret I may be in the wrong to remain in this state.”

YISUN nodded and spoke thusly: “In this plum garden, this old cherry tree bears fruit each year. It has done so for many years, and it does so on its own, without any instruction or command.”

Looking at the cherry tree as if it were an old friend, YISUN then said, “Back when it was but a sapling, this tree did not bear any fruit whatsoever; it did not even flower. I remember it well. Though as beautifully as it blooms now, the blossoms are yet to turn into sweet cherries. They shall ripen last. And even though they may be last, they would not be if the tree had not matured first.”

Het contemplated this. “Should I strive to be the tree, then?” she asked, “Or the blossom? Or perhaps the cherry?”

“Why be any?” said YISUN and smiled in the thirty-seventh way.

And when Het looked up again, she saw that the tree before her now was a plum tree, no different from the hundreds of other plum trees in YISUN’s gardens. Het inspected the fragrant and delicate plum blossoms, pondering YISUN’s words. Then she bowed deeply and thanked YISUN for her lesson, whereupon she returned to guard the doors of the great speaking hall with her mind at ease.