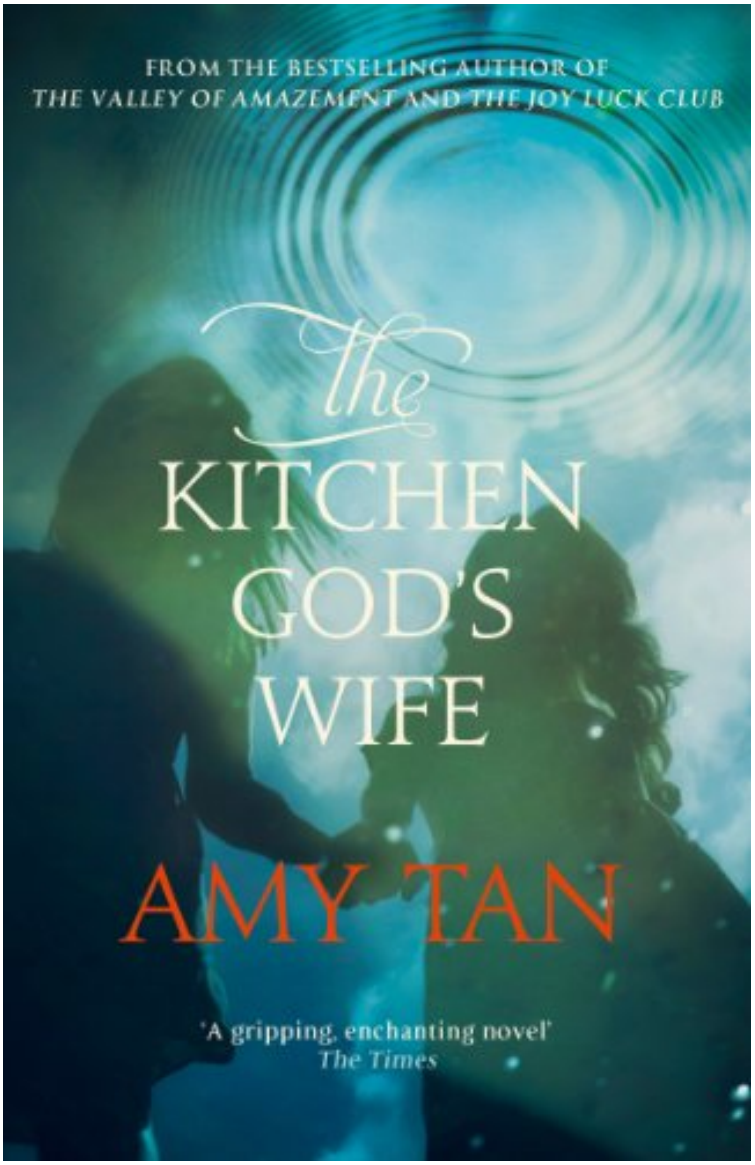
The Kitchen Gods Wife



Par Amy Tan
*audiobook | *ebooks | Download PDF | ePub | DOC*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #226853 dans eBooksPubli le: 2012-09-06Sorti le: 2012-09-06Format: Ebook Kindle

Par Amy Tan : The Kitchen Gods Wife before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Kitchen Gods Wife:

Description : Description du produit"Tan is one of the prime storytellers writing fiction today."NEWSWEEKWinnie and Helen have kept each other's worst secrets for more than fifty years. Now, because she believes she is dying, Helen wants to expose everything. And Winnie angrily determines that she must be the one to tell her daughter, Pearl, about the past--including the terible truth even Helen does not know. And so begins Winnie's story of her life on a small island outside Shanghai in the 1920s, and other places in China during World War II, and traces the happy and desperate events tha led to Winnie's coming to America in 1949."The kind of novel that can be read and reread with enormous pleasure."CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Prsentation de l'diteurThe international bestseller from the much-loved author of The Joy Luck Club and The

Bonesetters Daughter.Pearl Louie Brandt has a terrible secret that she tries desperately to keep from her mother, Winnie Louie. And Winnie has long kept her own secrets about her past and the confusing circumstances of Pearls birth. Fate intervenes in the form of Helen Kwong, Winnies so-called sister-in-law, who believes she is dying and must unburden herself of all falsehoods before she flies off to heaven. But, unfortunately, the truth comes in many guises, depending on who is telling the taleThus begins a story that takes us back to Shanghai in the 1920s, through the Second World War and the harrowing events that led to Winnies arrival in America in 1949. The story is one of innocence and its loss, tragedy and survival, and, most of all, the enduring qualities of hope, love and friendship.ExtraitTable of ContentsTitle PageCopyright PageDedicationAcknowledgementsI - THE SHOP OF THE GODSChapter 2 - GRAND AUNTIE DUS FUNERALChapter 3 - WHEN FISH ARE THREE DAYS OLDChapter 4 - LONG, LONG DISTANCEChapter 5 - TEN THOUSAND THINGSChapter 6 - PEANUTS FORTUNEChapter 7 - DOWRY COUNTINGChapter 8 - TOO MUCH YINChapter 9 - BEST TIME OF YEARChapter 10 - LOYANG LUCKChapter 11 - FOUR SPLITS, FIVE CRACKSChapter 12 - TAONAN MONEYChapter 13 - HEAVENS BREATHChapter 14 - BAD EYEChapter 15 - A FLEA ON A TIGERS HEADChapter 16 - THE GREAT WORLDChapter 17 - THE FOUR GATESChapter 18 - AMERICAN DANCEChapter 19 - WEAK AND STRONGChapter 20 - FOUR DAUGHTERS ON THE TABLEChapter 21 - LITTLE YUS MOTHERChapter 22 - ONE SEASON LEFTChapter 23 - SINCERELY YOURS TRULYChapter 24 - FAVORChapter 25 - BAO-BAOS WEDDINGChapter 26 - SORROWFREEFOR THE BEST IN PAPERBACKS, LOOK FOR THEPraise for The Kitchen Gods WifeThe book takes flight ... As the story all but tells itselfso seamlessly it feels as if Tans ancestors are speaking through herit bestows on us a host of luminous surprises.... Almost every page of the old wifes tale is lit up with the magic of a world in which birds can sound like women crying and sweaters are knit in the memory of spider webs. Yet all the storybook marvels are grounded in a survivors vinegar wit. And in front of the watercolor backdrops are horrors pitiless enough to mount a powerful indictment against a world in which women were taught that love means always having to say youre sorry.... Tan has transcended herself again.TimeAn absorbing narrative of Winnie Louies life, which she tellsor offersas a gift to her daughter Pearl. Much happens in the telling: long-held secrets are revealed, and a familys myths are transferred ceremoniously on to the next generation.... Tan returns to the richly textured world of Californias immigrant Chinese ... with its brilliant tapestry of characters and conflicts here and overseas.... She is a wonderful writer with a rare power to touch the heart.NewsweekRiveting ... The book rings with distinctive voices, and its laden with those details that make readers feel theyve gained a toehold on another world.USA TodayA beautiful book ... What fascinates in The Kitchen Gods Wife is not only the insistent storytelling but the details of Chinese life and tradition; not only how people lived but how their sensibility shines through, most notably in their speech. For Amy Tan has command of a language in which event and concrete perception jump into palpable metaphor and images from the daily world act like spiritual agents.Los Angeles Times Book Amy Tan is foremost a storyteller.... Almost every page is a tour through the senses, making the smells, sounds, sights, tastes and textures of pre-Communist China as real and alive as squirming eels and screaming sidewalk vendors.... An often breathtaking story from an important literary talent.The Atlanta Journal-ConstitutionRemarkable ... An absolutely riveting tale of a life that has indeed flowed inexorably forward like a river... This woman with pretty skin, foolish heart, strong will, scared bones, speaks with a voice that is unforgettable. She is an incredibly rich character, whose flaws are as understandable as her strengths.Chicago Sun-TimesThe Kitchen Gods Wife above all tells the story of how Winnie was once Weiwei, the most richly imagined character Ms. Tan has yet created.... Winnie lays her life out in gorgeous, raw detail, a succession of charactersmany of whom grow in depth and complexity as the book progresses.The Wall Street JournalAn entire world unfolds in a Tolstoyan tide of event and detail.... Give yourself over to the world Ms. Tan creates for you.The New York Times Book Gripping, sweeping ... Amy Tan stitches a beautiful literary tapestry, rich and dense with color, texture, pattern.... This is incantatory prose, a breathless roller coaster ride through a brilliant desperate world made magic by superstition and old wives tales and the pure drama of hard times. ... Amy Tan is one of our master storytellers.The Miami HeraldMesmerizing ... compelling ... The Kitchen Gods Wife is a single, bold blossom that represents Tans own flowering as a novelist.... Tan paints not only a vivid portrait of one womans amazing life but also a memorable, detailed picture of the repressive society that dictated that life.... The narrative is so powerful, so true, that one believes wholeheartedly in Winnie, that her story was somehow fated to be told. How fortunate readers are that Amy Tan has told it so well.Orlando SentinelRiveting story ... The Kitchen Gods Wife hooks you early, drawing

you into a life, a culture and a period in history that exert a mesmerizing appeal. ... Tan gives us an intimate and memorable portrait.The Seattle TimesOne extraordinary aspect (among many) of Amy Tans second novel is its narrative drive.... It is a story of sweeping scope ... told with the kind of convincing detail that gives fiction the ring of truth.... Tans greatest accomplishment here is the character of Winnie herself, who is both innocent and sly, generous and selfish, appealing and annoyingwoman not unlike Emma Bovary.... Winnie makes The Kitchen Gods Wife the kind of novel that can be read and reread with enormous pleasure.Chicago TribuneThe Kitchen Gods Wife, like a Chinese proverb, is paradoxical and wise. ... The energy and intelligence of Tans prose will also leave a reader looking forward to her future efforts.The Milwaukee JournalPENGUIN BOOKS THE KITCHEN GODS WIFEAmy Tan is the author of The Joy Luck Club, The Kitchen Gods Wife, The Hundred Secret Senses, The Bonesetters Daughter, Saving Fish from Drowning, and two childrens books, The Moon Lady and Sagwa, which was adapted as a PBS production, for which she served as a creative consultant and writer. Tan was also a coproducer and coscreen-writer of the film version of The Joy Luck Club, and her essays and stories have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. She is the literary editor for WEST, the weekly magazine produced by the Los Angeles Times. Her work has been translated into more than thirty languages. She lives with her husband in New York and San Francisco.PENGUIN BOOKSPublished by the Penguin GroupPenguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R ORL, England Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephens Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India Penguin Group (NZ), cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany,Auckland 1310, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South AfricaPenguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R ORL, EnglandFirst published in the United States of America by G. P. Putnams Sons 1991Published simultaneously in Canada Published in Penguin Books 2006Tan, Amy.The kitchen gods wife / Amy Tan.p. cm.eISBN : 978-1-101-00715-0I. Title.PS3570.A48K-7828 CIP 813.54dc20TO MY MOTHER, DAISY TAN, AND HER HAPPY MEMORIES OF MY FATHER, JOHN (1914-1968), AND MY BROTHER PETER (1950-1967) WITH LOVE AND RESPECTI am grateful to the other mothers of this book: Sandra Dijkstra, Molly Giles, and Faith Sale. As a writer, I feel lucky to have your wisdom and advice. As a friend, I feel blessed. And thanks always to Robert Foothorap, Gretchen Schields, and Lou DeMattei for warmth, humor, and Chinese take-out foodessential ingredients for writing this book.ITHE SHOP OF THE GODSWhenever my mother talks to me, she begins the conversation as if we were already in the middle of an argument.Pearl-ah, have to go, no choice, my mother said when she phoned last week. After several minutes I learned the reason for her call: Auntie Helen was inviting the whole family to my cousin Bao-baos engagement party.The whole family means the Kwongs and the Louies. The Kwongs are Auntie Helen, Uncle Henry, Mary, Frank, and Bao-bao. And these days the Louies really refers only to my mother and me, since my father is dead and my brother, Samuel, lives in New Jersey. Weve been known as the whole family for as long as I can remember, even though the Kwongs arent related to us by blood, just by marriage; Auntie Helens first husband was my mothers brother, who died long before I was born.And then theres my cousin Bao-bao, whose real name is Roger. Everyone in the family has been calling him Bao-bao ever since he was a baby, which is what bao-bao means, precious baby. Later, we kept calling him that because he was the crybaby who always wailed the minute my aunt and uncle walked in the door, claiming we other kids had been picking on him. And even though hes now thirty-one years old, we still think of him as Bao-baoand were still picking on him.Bao-bao? How can he have an engagement party? I said. This will be his third marriage.Fourth engagement! my mother said. Last one he didnt marry, broken off after we already sent a gift. Of course, Helen is not calling it engagement party. She is saying this is a big reunion for Mary.Mary is

coming? I asked. Mary and I have a history that goes beyond being cousins. Shes married to Doug Cheu, who went to medical school with my husband, Phil Brandt, and in fact, she was the one who introduced us to each other sixteen years ago.Mary is coming, husband and children, too, my mother said. Flying from Los Angeles next week. No time to get a special discount. Full-price tickets, can you imagine?Next week? I said, searching for excuses. Its kind of late notice to change our plans. Were supposed toAuntie Helen already counted you in. Big banquet dinner at Water Dragon Restaurantfive tables. If you dont come she is one-half table short.I pictured Auntie Helen, who is already quite short and round, shrinking to the size of a table leg. Who else is coming?Lots of big, important people, my mother answered, saying the word important as if to refer to people she didnt like. Of course, she is also telling people Bao-bao will be there with his new fiance. And then everybody asks, Fiance? Bao-bao has a new fiance? Then Helen, she says, Oh, I forgot. This is supposed to be a big surprise announcement. Promise not to tell. My mother sniffed. She lets everyone know that way. So now you have to bring a gift, also a surprise. Last time what did you buy?For Bao-bao and that college girl? I dont know, maybe a candy dish.After they broke up, did he send it back?Probably not. I dont remember.You see! Thats how the Kwongs are. This time dont spend so much.Two days before the dinner I got another phone call from my mother.Now it is too late to do anything about it, she said, as if whatever it was were my fault. And then she told me Grand Auntie Du was dead at age ninety-seven. This news did come to me as a surprise; I thought she had already died years ago.She left you nice things, my mother said. You can come get it this weekend.Grand Auntie Du was actually Helens blood relative, her fathers half sister, or some such thing. I remember, however, it was my mother who had always helped take care of Grand Auntie. She carried out her garbage every week. She kept the old lady from subscribing to magazines every time she got a sweepstakes notice with her name printed next to the words One Million Dollars. She petitioned Medi-Cal over and over again to pay for Grand Aunties herbal medicines.For years my mother used to complain to me how she did these thingsnot Helen. Helen, she doesnt even offer, my mother would say. And then one daythis was maybe ten years agoI cut my mother off. I said, Why dont you just tell Auntie Helen whats bothering you and stop complaining? This was what Phil had suggested I say, a perfectly reasonable way to get my mother to realize what was making her miserable so she could finally take positive action.But when I said that, my mother looked at me with a blank face and absolute silence. And after that, she did stop complaining to me. In fact, she stopped talking to me for about two months. And when we did start talking again, there was no mention of Grand Auntie Du ever again. I guess thats why I came to think that Grand Auntie had already died long ago.What was it? I asked when I heard the news, trying to sound quiet and shocked. A stroke?A bus, my mother said.Apparently, Grand Auntie Du had been in vigorous health, right up to the end. She was riding the One California bus when it lurched to the side to avoid what my mother described as a hotrod with crazy teenagers running a stop sign. Grand Auntie pitched forward and fell in the aisle. My mother had gone right away to visit her at the hospital, of course. The doctors couldnt find anything wrong, besides the usual bumps and bruises. But Grand Auntie said she couldnt wait for the doctors to find out what she already knew. So she made my mother write down her will, who should get the thirty-year-old nubby sofa, her black-and-white TV set, that sort of thing. Late that night, she died of an undetected concussion. Helen had been planning to visit the next day, too late.Bao-bao Roger said we should sue, one million dollars, my mother reported. Can you imagine? That kind of thinking. When we found out Grand Auntie died, he didnt cry, only wants to make money off her dead body! Hnh! Why should I tell him she left him two lamps? Maybe I will forget to tell him.My mother paused. She was a good lady. Fourteen wreaths already. And then she whispered: Of course, we are giving everyone twenty-percent discount.My mother and Auntie Helen co-own Ding Ho Flower Shop on Ross Alley in Chinatown. They got the idea of starting the business about twenty-five years ago, right after my father died and Auntie Helen was fired from her job. I suppose, in some way, the flower shop became the dream that would replace the disasters.My mother had used the money donated by the First Chinese Baptist Church, where my father had served as an assistant pastor. And Auntie Helen used the money she had saved from her job at another flower shop, which was where she learned the business. That was also the place that had fired her. For being too honest, is what Auntie Helen revealed to us as the reason. Although my mother suspected it was because Auntie Helen always urged her customers to buy the cheapest bouquets to save money.Sometimes I regret that I ever married into a Chinese family, Phil said when he heard we had to go to San Francisco, a hundred miles round-trip from our house in San Jose, made worse by weekend football traffic. Although hes become genuinely fond of my mother over the fifteen years weve been married, hes still exasperated by her demands. And a weekend with the extended family is definitely not his preferred way to spend his days off from the

hospital.Are you sure we have to go? he said absently. He was busy playing with a new software program he had just loaded onto his laptop computer. He pressed a key. Hotcha! he exclaimed to the screen, and clapped his hands. Phil is forty-three years old, and with his wiry gray hair he usually strikes most people as reserved and dignified. At that moment, however, he had the pure intensity of a little boy playing with a toy battleship.I pretended to be equally busy, perusing the help-wanted section. Three months ago, I took a position as a speech and language clinician with the local school district. And while I was basically happy with the job, I secretly worried that I had missed a better opportunity. My mother had put those thoughts in my head. Right after I announced I had been chosen over two other candidates for the same position, she said, Two? Only two people wanted that job?And now Phil looked up from his computer, concerned. And I knew what he was thinking, about my medical condition, as we called it, the multiple sclerosis, which thus far had left me not debilitated but easily fatigued. Itll be a stressful weekend, he said. Besides, I thought you couldnt stand your cousin Bao-bao. Not to mention the fact that Mary will be there. God, what a dingbat.Um.So cant you get out of it?Um-nh.He sighed. And that was the end of the discussion. Over the years that weve been married, weve learned to sidestep the subject of my family, my duty. It was once the biggest source of our arguments. When we were first married, Phil used to say that I was driven by blind devotion to fear and guilt. I would counter that he was selfish, that the things one had to do in life sometimes had nothing to do with what was fun or convenient. And then he would say the only reason we had to go was that I had been manipulated into thinking I had no choice, and that I was doing the same thing to him. And then our first baby, Tessa, came along, and a year later my illness was diagnosed. The shape of our arguments changed. We no longer fought self-righteously over philosophical differences concerning individual choice, perhaps because Phil developed a sense of duty toward the baby, as well as to me, or at least to my medical condition. So the whole issue of individual choice became tricky, a burden to keep up, until it fell away, along with smoking cigarettes, eating veal, and wearing ivory.These days, we tend to argue about smaller, more specific issuesfor example, my giving in to Tessas demands to watch another half-hour of television, and not our different attitudes toward discipline as a whole. And in the end, we almost always agree perhaps too readily, because we already know the outcome of most disagreements.Its a smoother life, as easy as we can make it. Although it bothers me from time to time. In fact, sometimes I wish we could go back to the old days when Phil would argue and I would defend my position and convince at least myself that I was right. Whereas nowadaystoday, for instanceIm not really sure why I still give in to my family obligations. While I would never admit this to Phil, Ive come to resent the duty. Im not looking forward to seeing the Kwongs, especially Mary. And whenever Im with my mother, I feel as though I have to spend the whole time avoiding land mines.So maybe it was guilt toward Phil or anger toward myself that made me do this: I waited until the next day to tell Phil wed have to stay overnightto attend Grand Auntie Dus funeral as well.For the dreaded weekend, Phil and I had decided to come into the city early to get settled and perhaps take the girls to the zoo. The day before, we had had a polite argument with my mother over where we would stay.Thats very kind of you, Winnie, Phil reasoned with my mother over the phone. But weve already made reservations at a hotel. I listened on the other line, glad that I had suggested he call and make the excuses.What hotel? my mother asked.The TraveLodge, Phil lied. We were actually booked at the Hyatt.Ai, too much money! my mother concluded. Why waste money that way? You can stay at my house, plenty of rooms.And Phil had declined gracefully. No, no, really. Its too much trouble. Really.Trouble for who? my mother said.So now Phil is getting the girls settled in the room that once belonged to my younger brother. This is where they always stay whenever Phil and I go away for a medical convention. Actually, sometimes we just say its a medical convention, and then we go back home and do all the household chores we arent able to finish when the children are around.Phil has decided that Tessa, who is eight, will sleep on the twin bed, and three-year-old Cleo will get the hideaway cot.Its my turn for the bed, says Cleo. Ha-bu said.But Cleo, reasons Tessa, you like the cot.Ha-bu! Cleo calls for my mother to rescue her. Ha-bu!Phil and I are staying in my old room, still crammed with its old-fashioned furniture. I havent stayed here since Ive been married. Except for the fact that everything is a bit too clean, the room looks the same as when I was a teenager: the double bed with its heavy legs and frame, the dressing table with the round mirror and inlay of ash, oak, burl, and mother-of-pearl. Its funny how I used to hate that table. Now it actually looks quite nice, art deco. I wonder if my mother would let me have it.I notice that she has placed my old Chinese slippers under the bed, the ones with a hole at each of the big toes; nothing ever thrown away, in case its needed again twenty years later. And Tessa and Cleo must have been rummaging around in the closet, scavenging through boxes of old toys and junk. Scattered near the slippers are doll clothes, a rhinestone tiara, and a pink

plastic jewelry case with the words My Secret Treasures on top. They have even rehung the ridiculous Hollywood-style star on the door, the one I made in the sixth grade, spelling out my name, P-E-A-R-L, in pop-beads.Gosh, Phil says in a goofy voice. This sure beats the hell out of staying at the TraveLodge. I slap his thigh. He pats the mismatched set of guest towels lying on the bed. The towels were a Christmas gift from the Kwongs right after our family moved from Chinatown to the Richmond district, which meant they had to be thirty years old.And now Tessa and Cleo race into our room, clamoring that theyre ready to go to the zoo. Phil is going to take them, while I go to Ding Ho Flower Shop to help out. My mother didnt exactly ask me to help, but she did say in a terse voice that Auntie Helen was leaving the shop early to get ready for the big dinnerin spite of the fact there was so much to do at the shop and Grand Aunties funeral service was the very next day. And then she reminded me that Grand Auntie was always very proud of mein our family proud is as close as we get to saying love. And she suggested that maybe I should come by early to pick out a nice wreath.I should be back at five-thirty, I tell Phil.I wanna see African elephants, says Tessa, plopping down on our bed. And then she counts on her fingers: And koala bears and a spiny anteater and a humpback whale. I have always wondered where she picked up this trait of listing thingsfrom Phil? from me? from the television?Say Please, Phil reminds her, and I dont think they have whales at the zoo.I turn to Cleo. I sometimes worry she will become too passive in the shadow of her confident big sister. And what do you want to see? I ask her gently. She looks at her feet, searching for an answer.Dingbats, she finally says.As I turn down Ross Alley, everything around me immediately becomes muted in tone. It is no longer the glaring afternoon sun and noisy Chinatown sidewalks filled with people doing their Saturday grocery shopping. The alley sounds are softer, quickly absorbed, and the light is hazy, almost greenish in cast.On the right-hand side of the street is the same old barbershop, run by Al Fook, who I notice still uses electric clippers to shear his customers sideburns. Across the street are the same trade and family associations, including a place that will send ancestor memorials back to China for a fee. And farther down the street is the shopfront of a fortune-teller. A hand-written sign taped to the window claims to have the best lucky numbers, the best fortune advice, but the sign taped to the door says: Out of Business.As I walk past the door, a yellow pull-shade rustles. And suddenly a little girl appears, her hands pressed to the glass. She stares at me with a somber expression. I wave, but she does not wave back. She looks at me as if I dont belong here, which is how I feel.And now Im at Sam Fook Trading Company, a few doors down from the flower shop. It contains shelves full of good-luck charms and porcelain and wooden statues of lucky gods, hundreds of them. Ive called this place the Shop of the Gods ever since I can remember. It also sells the kind of stuff people get for Buddhist funeralsspirit money, paper jewelry, incense, and the like.Hey, Pearl! Its Mr. Hong, the owner, waving me to come in. When I first met him, I thought his name was Sam Fook, like the shop. I found out later that sam fook means triple blessing in old Cantonese, and according to my motheror rather, her Hong Kong customerssam fook sounds like a joke, like saying the Three Stooges.I told him he should change the name, my mother had said. Luckier that way. But he says he has too much business already.Hey, Pearl, Mr. Hong says when I walk in the door, I got some things for your mother here, for the funeral tomorrow. You take it to her, okay?Okay. He hands me a soft bundle.I guess this means Grand Aunties funeral will be Buddhist. Although she attended the First Chinese Baptist Church for a number of years, both she and my mother stopped going right after my father died. In any case, I dont think Grand Auntie ever gave up her other beliefs, which werent exactly Buddhist, just all the superstitious rituals concerning attracting good luck and avoiding bad. On those occasions when I did go up to her apartment, I used to play with her altar, a miniature red temple containing a framed picture of a Chinese god. In front of that was an imitation-brass urn filled with burnt incense sticks, and on the side were offerings of oranges, Lucky Strike cigarettes, and an airline mini-bottle of Johnnie Walker Red whiskey. It was like a Chinese version of a Christmas crche.And now I come to the flower shop itself. It is the bottom floor of a three-story brick building. The shop is about the size of a one-car garage and looks both sad and familiar. The front has a chipped red-bordered door covered with rusted burglarproof mesh. A plate-glass window says Ding Ho Flower Shop in English and Chinese. But its easy to miss, because the place sits back slightly and always looks dark and closed, as it does today.So the location my mother and Auntie Helen picked isnt exactly bustling. Yet they seem to have done all right. In a way, its remarkable. After all these years, theyve done almost nothing to keep up with the times or make the place more attractive. I open the door and bells jangle. Im instantly engulfed in the pungent smell of gardenias, a scent Ive always associated with funeral par-lors. The place is dimly lit, with only one fluorescent tube hanging over the cash registerand thats where my mother is, standing on a small footstool so she can see out over the counter, with dime-store reading glasses perched on

her nose.She is talking on the telephone in rapid Chinese and waves impatiently for me to come in and wait. Her hair is pulled straight back into a bun, not a strand ever out of place. The bun today has been made to look thicker with the addition of a false swatch of hair, a horses tail, she calls it, for wearing only on important occasions.Actually, now I can tellby the shrillness of her pitch and the predominance of negative vuh-vuh-vuh soundsthat shes arguing in Shanghainese, and not just plain Mandarin. This is serious. Most likely its with a neighborhood supplier, to judge from the way shes punching in numbers on a portable calculator, then reading aloud the printed results in harsh tones, as if they were penal codes. She pushes the No Sale button on the cash register, and when the drawer pops forward, she pulls out a folded receipt, snaps it open with a jerk of her wrist, then reads numbers from that as well.Vuh! Vuh! Vuh! she insists.The cash register is used to store only odds and ends, or what my mother calls ends and odds and evens. The register is broken. When my mother and Auntie Helen first bought the store and its fixtures, they found out soon enough that anytime the sales transaction added up to anything with a 9 in it, the whole register froze up. But they decided to keep the cash register anyway, for stick- em-up, is how my mother explained it to me. If they were ever robbed, which has yet to happen, the robber would get only four dollars and a pile of pennies, all the money that is kept in the till. The real money is stashed underneath the counter, in a teapot with a spout thats been twice broken and glued back on. And the kettle sits on a hot plate thats missing a plug. I guess the idea is that no one would ever rob the store for a cup of cold tea.I once told my mother and Auntie Helen that a robber would never believe that the shop had only four dollars to its name. I thought they should put at least twenty in the cash register to make the ruse seem more plausible. But my mother thought twenty dollars was too much to give a robber. And Auntie Helen said she would worry sick about losing that much moneyso what good would the trick be then?At the time, I considered giving them the twenty dollars myself to prove my point. But then I thought, Whats the point? And as I look around the shop now, I realize maybe they were right. Who would ever consider robbing this place for more than getaway bus fare? No, this place is burglarproof just the way it is.The shop has the same dull gray concrete floor of twenty-five years ago, now polished shiny with wear. The counter is covered with the same contact paper, green-and-white bamboo lattice on the sides and wood grain on the top. Even the phone my mother is using is the same old black model with a rotary dial and a fabric cord that doesnt coil or stretch. And over the years, the lime-colored walls have become faded and splotched, then cracked from the 89 earthquake. So now the place has the look of spidery decay and leaf mold.Hau, hau, I now hear my mother saying. She seems to have reached some sort of agreement with the supplier. Finally she bangs the phone down. Although we have not seen each other since Christmas, almost a month ago, we do none of the casual hugs and kisses Phil and I exchange when we see his parents and friends. Instead, my mother walks out from around the counter, muttering, Can you imagine? That man is cheating me! Tried to charge me for extra-rush delivery. She points to a box containing supplies of wire, clear cellophane, and sheets of green wax paper. This is not my fault he forgot to come last week.How much extra? I ask.Three dollars! she exclaims. I never cease to be amazed by the amount of emotional turmoil my mother will go through for a few dollars.Why dont you just forget it? Its only three dollarsIm not concerned about money! she fumes. Hes cheating me. This is not right. Last month, he tried to add another kind of extra charge too. I can tell shes about to launch into a blow-by-blow of last months fight, when two well-dressed women with blond hair peer through the door.Are you open? Do any of you speak English? one of them says in a Texas drawl.My mothers face instantly cheers, and she nods, waving them in. Come, come, she calls.Oh, we dont want to bother yall, one of the ladies says. If you might could just tell us where the fortune cookie factory is?Before I can answer, my mother tightens her face, shakes her head, and says, Dont understand. Dont speak English.Why did you say that? I ask when the two ladies retreat back into the alley. I didnt know you hated tourists that much.Not tourists, she says. That woman with the cookie factory, once she was mean to me. Why should I send her any good business?Hows business here? I say, trying to steer the conversation away from what will surely become a tirade about the cookie woman down the street.Awful! she says, and points to her inventory around the shop. So busybusy myself to death with this much business. You look, only this morning I had to make all these myself.And I look. There are no modern arrangements of bent twigs or baskets of exotica with Latinate-drooping names. My mother opens the glass door to a refrigerator unit that once housed bottles of soda pop and beer.You see? she says, and shows me a shelf with boutonnieres and corsages made out of carnations, neatly lined in rows according to color: white, pink, and red. No doubt well have to wear some of these tonight.And this, she continues. The second shelf is chock-full of milk-glass vases, each containing only a single rosebud, a fern frond, and a meager sprinkling of babys breath. This is the type of floral arrangement you give to hospital

patients who go in for exploratory surgery, when you dont know yet whether the person will be there for very long. My father received a lot of those when he first went into the hospital and later right before he died. Very popular, my mother says.This, too, I had to make, she says, and points to the bottom shelf, which holds half a dozen small table sprays. Some for tonight. Some for a retirement dinner, my mother explains, and perhaps because I dont look sufficiently impressed, she adds, For assistant manager at Wells Fargo.She walks me around to view her handiwork in other parts of the shop. Lining the walls are large funeral wreaths, propped on easels. Ah? my mother says, waiting for my opinion. Ive always found wreaths hideously sad, like decorative lifesavers thrown out too late.Very pretty, I say.And now she steers me toward her real pride and joy. At the front of the shop, the only place that gets filtered daylight for a few hours a day, are her long-lasting bargains, as she calls themphilodendrons, rubber plants, chicken-feet bushes, and miniature tangerine trees. These are festooned with red banners, congratulating this business or that for its new store opening.My mother has always been very proud of those red banners. She doesnt write the typical congratulatory sayings, like Good Luck or Prosperity and Long Life. All the sayings, written in gold Chinese characters, are of her own inspiration, her thoughts about life and death, luck and hope: First-Class Life for Your First Baby, Double-Happiness Wedding Triples Family Fortunes, Money Smells Good in Your New Restaurant Business, Health Returns Fast, Always Hoping.My mother claims these banners are the reasons why Ding Ho Flower Shop has had success flowing through its door all these years. By success, I suppose she means that the same people over the last twenty-five years keep coming back. Only now its less and less for shy brides and giddy grooms, and more and more for the sick, the old, and the dead.She smiles mischievously, then tugs my elbow. Now I show you the wreath I made for you.Im alarmed, and then I realize what shes talking about. She opens the door to the back of the shop. Its dark as a vault inside and I cant make out anything except the dense odor of funeral flowers. My mother is groping for the piece of string that snaps on the light. Finally the room is lit by the glare of a naked bulb that swings back and forth on a cord suspended from the high ceiling. And what I now see is horrifyingly beautifulrow after row of gleaming wreaths, all white gardenias and yellow chrysanthemums, red banners hanging down from their easels, looking like identically dressed heavenly attendants.I am stunned by how much hard work this represents. I imagine my mothers small hands with their parchmentlike skin, furiously pulling out stray leaves, tucking in sharp ends of wire, inserting each flower into its proper place.This one. She points to a wreath in the middle of the first row. It looks the same as the others. This one is yours. I wrote the wishes myself.What does it say? I ask.Her finger moves slowly down the red banner, as she reads in a formal Chinese I cant understand. And then she translates: Farewell, Grand Auntie, heaven is lucky. From your favorite niece, Pearl Louie Brandt, and husband.Oh, I almost forgot. I hand her the bundle from Sam Fooks. Mr. Hong said to give you this.My mother snips the ribbon and opens the package. Inside are a dozen or so bundles of spirit money, money Grand Auntie can supposedly use to bribe her way along to Chinese heaven.I didnt know you believed in that stuff, I say.Whats to believe, my mother says testily. This is respect. And then she says softly, I got one hundred million dollars. Ai! She was a good lady.Here we go, I say, and take a deep breath as we climb the stairs to the banquet room.Pearl! Phil! There you are. Its my cousin Mary. I havent seen her in the two years since she and Doug moved to Los Angeles. We wait for Mary to move her way through the banquet crowd. She rushes toward us and gives me a kiss, then rubs my cheek and laughs over the extra blush shes added.You look terrific! she tells me, and then she looks at Phil. Really, both of you. Just sensational.Mary must now be forty-one, about half a year older than I am. Shes wearing heavy makeup and false eyelashes, and her hair is a confusing mass of curls and mousse. A silver-fox stole keeps slipping off her shoulders. As she pushes it up for the third time, she laughs and says, Doug gave me this old thing for Christmas, what a bother. I wonder why she does bother, now that were inside the restaurant. But thats Mary, the oldest child of the two families, so its always seemed important to her to look the most successful.Jennifer and Michael, she calls, and snaps her fingers. Come here and say hello to your auntie and uncle. She pulls her two teenage children over to her side, and gives them each a squeeze. Come on, what do you say? They stare at us with sullen faces, and each of them grunts and gives a small nod.Jennifer has grown plump, while her eyes, lined in black, look small and hard. The top part of her hair is teased up in pointy spikes, with the rest falling limply down to the middle of her back. She looks as if she had been electrocuted. And Michaels faceits starting to push out into sharp angles and his chin is covered with pimples. Theyre no longer cute, and I wonder if this will happen to Tessa and Cleo, if I will think this about them as well.You see how they are, Mary says apologetically. Jennifer just got her first nylons and high heels for Christmas. Shes so proud, no longer Mommys little girl.Oh, Mother! Jennifer wails, then

struggles away from her mothers grasp and disappears into the crowd. Michael follows her.See how Michaels almost as tall as Doug? Mary says, proudly watching her son as he ambles away. Hes on the junior varsity track team, and his coach says hes their best runner. I dont know where he got his height or his athletic abilitycertainly not from me. Whenever I go for a jog, I come back a cripple, Mary says, laughing. And then, realizing what shes just said, she suddenly drops her smile, and searches the crowd: Oh, theres Dougs parents. I better go say hello.Phil squeezes my hand, and even though we say nothing, he knows Im mad. Just forget it, he says.I would, I shoot back, if she could. She always does this.When Phil and I married, it was Mary and Doug who were our matron of honor and best man, since they had introduced us. They were the first people we confided in when we found out I was pregnant with Tessa. And about seven years ago, Mary was the one who pushed me into aerobics when I complained I felt tired all the time. And later, when I had what seemed like a strange weakness in my right leg, Phil suggested I see Doug, who at the time was an orthopedist at a sports medicine clinic.Months later, Doug told me the problem seemed to be something else, and right away I panicked and thought he meant bone cancer. He assured me he just meant he wasnt smart enough to figure it out himself. So he sent me to see his old college drinking buddy, the best neurologist at San Francisco Medical Center. After what seemed like a year of testsafter I persuaded myself the fatigue was caused by smoking and the weakness in my leg was sciatica left over from my pregnancythe drinking buddy told me I had multiple sclerosis.Mary had cried hysterically, then tried to console me, which made it all seem worse. For a while, she dropped by with casserole dishes from terrific recipes she just happened to find, until I told her to stop. And later, she made a big show of telling me how Dougs friend had assured her that my case was really quite mild, as if she were talking about the weather, that my life expectancy was not changed, that at age seventy I could be swinging a golf club and still hitting par, although I would have to be careful not to stress myself either physically or emotionally.So really, everythings normal, she said a bit too cheerfully, except that Phil has to treat you nicer. And what could be wrong with that?I dont play golf, was all I told her.Ill teach you, she said cheerily.Of course, Mary was only trying to be kind. I admit that it was more my fault that our friendship became strained. I never told her directly how much her gestures of sympathy offended me. So of course she couldnt have known that I did not need someone to comfort me. I did not want to be coddled by casseroles. Kindness was compensation. Kindness was a reminder that my life had changed, was always changing, that people thought I should just accept all this and become strong or brave, more enlightened, more peaceful. I wanted nothing to do with that. Instead, I wanted to live my life with the same focus as most peopleto worry about my childrens education, but not whether I would be around to see them graduate, to rejoice that I had lost five pounds, and not be fearful that my muscle mass was eroding away. I wanted what had become impossible: I wanted to forget.I was furious that Doug and his drinking-buddy friend had discussed my medical condition with Mary. If they had told her that, then they must have also told her this: that with this disease, no prognosis could be made. I could be in remission for ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years. Or the disease could suddenly take off tomorrow and roll downhill, faster and faster, and at the bottom, I would be left sitting in a wheelchair, or worse.I know Mary was aware of this, because I would often catch her looking at me from the corner of her eye whenever we passed someone who was disabled. One time she laughed nervously when she tried to park her car in a space that turned out to be a handicapped zone. Oops! she said, backing out fast. We certainly dont need that.In the beginning, Phil and I vowed to lead as normal a life together as possible. As normal as possibleit was like a meaningless chant. If I accidentally tripped over a toy left on the floor, I would spend ten minutes apologizing to Tessa for yelling at her, then another hour debating whether a normal person would have stumbled over the same thing. Once, when we went to the beach for the express purpose of forgetting about all of this, I was filled with morbid thoughts instead. I watched the waves eating away at the shore, and I wondered aloud to Phil whether I would one day be left as limp as seaweed, or stiff like a crab.Meanwhile Phil would read his old textbooks and every medical article he could find on the subject. And then he would become depressed that his own medical training offered no better understanding of a disease that could be described only as without known etiology, extremely variable, unpredictable, and without specific treatment. He attended medical conferences on neurological disorders. He once took me to an MS support group, but we turned right around as soon as we saw the wheelchairs. He would perform what he called weekly safety checks, testing my reflexes, monitoring the strength of my limbs. We even moved to a house with a swimming pool, so I could do daily muscle training. We did not mention to each other the fact that the house was one-story and had few steps and wide hallways that could someday be made wheelchair-accessible, if necessary.We talked in code, as though we belonged to a secret cult, searching for

a cure, or a pattern of symptoms we could watch for, some kind of salvation from constant worry. And eventually we learned not to talk about the future, either the grim possibilities or the vague hopes. We did not dwell on the past, whether it had been a virus or genetics that had caused this to happen. We concerned ourselves with the here and now, small victories over the mundane irritations of lifegetting Tessa potty-trained, correcting a mistake on our charge-card bill, discovering why the car sputtered whenever we put it into third gear. Those became our constants, the things we could isolate and control in a life of unknown variables.So I cant really blame Phil for pretending that everything is normal. I wanted that more than he did. And now I cant tell him what I really feel, what its like. All I know is that I wake up each morning in a panic, terrified that something might have changed while I slept. And there are days when I become obsessed if I lose something, a button, thinking my life wont be normal until I find it again. There are days when I think Phil is the most inconsiderate man in the world, simply because he forgot to buy one item on the grocery list. There are days when I organize my underwear drawer by color, as if this might make some kind of difference. Those are the bad days.On the good days, I remember that I am luckylucky by a new standard. In the last seven years, I have had only one major flare-up, which now means I lose my balance easily, especially when Im upset or in a hurry. But I can still walk. I still take out the garbage. And sometimes I actually can forget, for a few hours, or almost the entire day. Of course, the worst part is when I remember once againoften in unexpected waysthat I am living in a limbo land called remission.That delicate balance always threatens to go out of kilter when I see my mother. Because thats when it hits me the hardest: I have this terrible disease and Ive never told her.I meant to tell her. There were several times when I planned to do exactly that. When I was first diagnosed, I said, Ma, you know that slight problem with my leg I told you about. Well, thank God, it turned out not to be cancer, butAnd right away, she told me about a customer of hers who had just died of cancer, how long he had suffered, how many wreaths the family had ordered. Long time ago I saw that mole growing on his face, she said. I told him, Go see a doctor. No problem, he said, age spotdidnt do anything about it. By the time he died, his nose and cheekall eaten away! And then she warned me sternly, Thats why you have to be careful.When Cleo was born, without complications on my part or hers, I again started to tell my mother. But she interrupted me, this time to lament how my father was not there to see his grandchildren. And then she went into her usual endless monologue about my father getting a fate he didnt deserve.My father had died of stomach cancer when I was fourteen. And for years, my mother would search in her mind for the causes, as if she could still undo the disaster by finding the reason why it had occurred in the first place.He was such a good man, my mother would lament. So why did he die? And sometimes she cited Gods will as the reason, only she gave it a different twist. She said it must have been because my father was a minister. He listened to everyone elses troubles, she said. He swallowed them until he made himself sick. Ai! Ying-gai find him another job.Ying-gai was what my mother always said when she meant, I should have. Ying-gai meant she should have altered the direction of fate, she should have prevented disaster. To me, ying-gai meant my mother lived a life of regrets that never faded with time.If anything, the regrets grew as she searched for more reasons underlying my fathers death. One time she cited her own version of environmental causesthat the electrician had been sick at the time he rewired our kitchen. He built that sickness right into our house, she declared. Its true. I just found out the electrician diedof cancer, too. Ying-gai pick somebody else.And there was also this superstition, what I came to think of as her theory of the Nine Bad Fates. She said she had once heard that a person is destined to die if eight bad things happen. If you dont recognize the eight ahead of time and prevent them, the ninth one is always fatal. And then she would ruminate over what the eight bad things might have been, how she should have been sharp enough to detect them in time.To this day it drives me crazy, listening to her various hypotheses, the way religion, medicine, and superstition all merge with her own beliefs. She puts no faith in other peoples logicto her, logic is a sneaky excuse for tragedies, mistakes, and accidents. And according to my mother, nothing is an accident. Shes like a Chinese version of Freud, or worse. Everything has a reason. Everything could have been prevented. The last time I was at her house, for example, I knocked over a framed picture of my father and broke the glass. My mother picked up the shards and moaned, Why did this happen? I thought it was a rhetorical question at first, but then she said to me, Do you know?It was an accident, I said. My elbow bumped into it. And of course, her question had sent my mind racing, wondering if my clumsiness was a symptom of deterioration.Why this picture? she muttered to herself.So I never told my mother. At first I didnt want to hear her theories on my illness, what caused this to happen, how she should have done this or that to prevent it. I did not want her to remind me.And now that so much time has gone by, the fact that I still havent told her makes the illness seem ten times worse. I am

always reminded, whenever I see her, whenever I hear her voice.Mary knows that, and thats why I still get mad at hernot because she trips over herself to avoid talking about my medical condition. Im mad because she told her mother, my Auntie Helen.I had to tell her, she explained to me in an offhand sort of way. She was always saying to me, Tell Pearl to visit her mother more often, only a one-hour drive. Tell Pearl she should ask her mother to move in with her, less lonely for her mother that way. Finally, I told my mother I couldnt tell you those things. And she asked why not. Mary shrugged. You know my mother. I couldnt lie to her. Of course, I made her swear not to tell your mother, that you were going to tell her yourself.I can drive, I told Mary. And thats not the reason why I havent asked my mother to live with me. And then I glared at her. How could you do this?She wont say anything, Mary said. I made her promise. And then she added a bit defiantly, Besides, you should have told your mother a long time ago.Mary and I didnt exactly have a fight, but things definitely chilled between us after that. She already knew that was about the worst possible thing she could have done to me. Because she had done it once before, nine years ago, when I confided to her that I was pregnant. My first pregnancy had ended in a miscarriage early on, and my mother had gone on and on about how much coffee I drank, how it was my jogging that did it, how Phil should make sure I ate more. So when I became pregnant again, I decided to wait, to tell my mother when I was in my fourth month or so. But in the third month, I made the mistake of confiding in Mary. And Mary slipped this news to her mother. And Auntie Helen didnt exactly tell my mother. But when my mother proudly announced my pregnancy to the Kwongs, Auntie Helen immediately showed my mother the little yellow sweater she had already hand-knit for the baby.I didnt stop hearing the laments from my mother, even after Tessa was born. Why could you tell the Kwongs, not your own mother? shed complain. When she stewed over it and became really angry, she accused me of making her look like a fool: Hnh! Auntie Helen was pretending to be so surprised, so innocent. Oh, I didnt knit the sweater for Pearls baby, she said, I made it just in case. So far, Auntie Helen had kept the news about my medical condition to herself. But this didnt stop her from treating me like an invalid. When I used to go to her house, she would tell me to sit down right away, while she went to find me a pillow for my back. She would rub her palm up and down my arm, asking me how I was, telling me how she had always thought of me as a daughter. And then she would sigh and confess some bit of bad news, as if to balance out what she already knew about me.Your poor Uncle Henry, he almost got laid off last month, she would say. So many budget cuts now. Who knows whats going to happen? Dont tell your mother. I dont want her to worry over us.And then I would worry that Auntie Helen would think her little confessions were payment in kind, that she would take them as license to accidentally slip and tell my mother: Oh, Winnie, I thought you knew about your daughters tragedy.And so I dreaded the day my mother would call and ask me a hundred different ways, Why did Auntie Helen know? Why did you never tell me? Why didnt you let me prevent this from happening to you?And then what answer could I give?At the dinner, weve been seated at the kids table, only now the kids are in their thirties and forties. The real kidsTessa and Cleoare seated with my mother.Phil is the only non-Chinese tonight, although that wasnt the case at past family events. Bao-baos two former wives were what Auntie Helen called Americans, as if she were referring to a racial group. She must be thrilled that Bao-baos bride-to-be is a girl named Mimi Wong, who is not only Chinese but from a well-to-do family that owns three travel agencies.From Publishers WeeklyTan's (The Joy Luck Club) mesmerizing second novel, again a story that a Chinese emigre mother tells her daughter, received a PW boxed review, spent 18 weeks on PW 's hardcover bestseller list and was a Literary Guild and Doubleday Book Club main selection in cloth.