

sure that she was willing to accept all that the difference meant.

There were her feet; she pouted as she looked down at them. Of course, it was very pleasant to be able to run about at will in the garden or on the hillside, and to escape the pain of the foot-binding, but still one did not like to be entirely out of fashion. A girl is a girl in the Orient as well as elsewhere, and Gale's companions, who could scarcely move about, were beginning to follow her free steps with glances of contemptuous pity, and to remark that, even if the very best were done for her at once, she could never hope to be very 'lily-footed.' But Gale's father would have none of it; he said that if her feet were bound her hands should be bound also.

It had been a long time, too, since they had celebrated any of the birthdays of the gods, or kept a lamp burning at the New Year to welcome the kitchen god back after his holiday. There were the general celebrations in which one could share, and the grave of the grandfather never lacked gilt papers to flutter over it, but Gale could not boast of the number of cakes and sticks of incense carried to the temple or of fetes and ceremonies for the household gods. And though she and her mother sometimes went with their friends, yet the girl knew that deep in her heart she had no faith in the countless images the others worshipped.

She still was not sure that she was ready to turn entirely to the new ways. It sounded very sweet and comforting sometimes when her father talked to her of the things the 'white teachers' had taught, and sometimes, when she looked up at all the stars at night, her heart grew both hungry and glad at the thought of the Friend her father knew. People might hint and sneer a little, secretly, but they sought her father's counsel when they were in difficulty, and he was much respected in the village. Would he be so wise and trustworthy if it were not for the things which he believed? Gale did not know. The mother said little, and one could not tell just where she stood—especially if one did not care to learn, and Gale did not; she was not ready to know just where she stood herself, and she wished she could stop thinking of it all.

A shrill young voice sounded through the garden, and Gale's little cousin Kim Kek followed the voice. He looked almost as broad as he was long in his gay jacket and loose, flapping trousers, but he wore an air of great importance, as became an eldest son of the mature age of seven years. He had been sent with a message to his uncle, but he lingered contentedly enough when he found he could not deliver it.

'I will stay till he comes back,' he announced.

'Oh, no!' said Gale. 'He will not come for three days.'

She was sorry the moment the words were spoken, for Kim Kek's black eyes became inquisitive at once.

'Why should he stay so long? Where did he go?'

'To Swatow,' admitted Gale, reluctantly. Little Kim Kek would be sure to relate all he saw and heard, she reflected. Also Aunt Silver Flower had a tongue that loved to talk.

'Why did he go there?' demanded Kim Kek.

'Would I be so bold as to ask him that?' said Gale, reprovingly. 'Be sure I did not.'

But Kim Kek was not so easily repressed. His black eyes gleamed with a sudden mingling of mischief and sagacity, and, bobbing his small head until his queue flapped wildly, he declared, emphatically:—

'Ah, I know! It was to see the "white teachers" he went. Everyone says my uncle is of their way now, and you need not try to hide it. Maybe you will never see him any more. All the people in the village say the foreign devils make wonderful medicine out of the eyes and hearts of any they can coax to join them. They may kill your father.'

'Those are only silly tales; they are not true,' answered Gale, stoutly; yet a sickening shiver of fear crept over her. She, too, suspected that her father's errand had been to seek the missionaries, perhaps to openly join himself to their faith, and she knew that Kim Kek's words but voiced the popular

opinion. How did she know that the traveler would ever come again?

Then her courage and common sense rallied. She remembered the white lady whom she had heard talk, and still better the gentle presence beside a sick bed. 'You should not believe such evil things, Kim Kek,' she said, but the indignant tone in her voice was for herself even more than for the child. 'You should not call such names when it was the white doctor woman who made your mother well.'

'If she did, my mother does not turn to the new way,' insisted the boy. 'When I am a man, I will make plenty of worship to my ancestors and our own gods, but I will not run after the strangers and make people whisper about me and shake their heads when I pass by.'

'It will be well if you ever grow to be a man like my father,' she said, and then she wisely changed the subject by drawing her young cousin's attention to matters of interest in the garden.

Kim Kek undoubtedly enjoyed himself. He partook of Gale's store of boiled rice and sweet potatoes. He lingered far into the afternoon, though she reminded him that Aunt Silver Flower might be waiting, and finally it grew so late that he feared to take the homeward walk alone. He, too, would sleep in the little straw-hut, he said. A girl could not take care of a garden all alone.

But long after the little fellow was peacefully sleeping upon his mat, the girl's black eyes, wide and watchful, looked out into the night. She could see the red glow of distant charcoal pits, and higher still the stars, quiet and calm, as if they, too, were anxious at every sound, and by and by, when the moon arose and flooded the place with its light, she slipped from the hut to assure herself that all was safe. Down by the little gate in the hedge she stopped for a moment and looked along the deserted road twisting away in the white moonlight. It was purposely narrow and crooked, that evil spirits might not find their way along it and do harm to the villages.

'Yet men travel it easily enough, and even children; the spirits must be very stupid if they cannot find their way,' thought Gale.

In spite of her brave resolution to stay by herself, Kim Kek's childish presence did make the place less lonely, and, reassured by her tour of investigation, the girl's tangled thoughts finally lost themselves in dreams.

The night passed without alarm, and in the morning Kim Kek boasted of the protection he had afforded. He was so proud of his guardianship that Gale greatly feared he would tell of the exploit to all whom he met, and so advertise the fact of her being alone. She tried to caution him without arousing his wilfulness.

'We will be careful of what we say, for if thieves do not know that my father is away they will be less likely to come,' she remarked, with studied carelessness.

But he had scarcely started on his homeward way before something of much greater importance put the whole matter out of his mind. People were running to and fro near the river bank, and there were cries of terror and exclamations of amazement, while the crowd constantly increased until the whole village seemed to be pouring out toward the spot.

'What is it? What is it?' demanded Kim Kek of those whom he knew, and then he saw

his elder sister among the others. 'What is it?' he asked again.

'Oh, a dreadful bamboo dragon has come down the river, no one knows from where,' she said, tremblingly. 'But it has landed right on our shore, and it will bring sickness and trouble to all the village; everyone says it will. Oh, why did it come here? I am afraid, Kim Kek.'

Others were afraid, also, for the village wisecracks were shaking their heads dolefully, and prophesying evils, many and dire. The dragon was of a kind worshipped in many places, and was made of bamboo twigs, gorgeously painted, with glaring eyes and a hideous snout. It was usually stationed near a river, and was pacified and kept in an enviable frame of mind by being lowered reverently into the water or placed in a temple on land, according as the soothsayers interpreted its desires. This one had broken loose from its moorings somewhere and brought its unwelcome presence here, where, of course, its errand could only be mischief and harm. Kim Kek enjoyed spreading the news, even though it might be bad, and he ran and told Gale.

'Oh, there is no doubt that it means evil, for you see how it lies with the great mouth toward the village,' said an old woman, as the girl joined the throng. 'My daughter-in-law is sick, and now I fear she will die. Ah, why must it have come here!'

Everyone wished it away, but no one dared to touch it. Instead, people were bringing offerings from their poor homes to appease its wrath, rice and fruit and gifts of fowl.

Gale looked at the tearful faces of some who had sick friends, and then with a feeling of disgust at that image of bamboo and paint—nothing but twigs and a daub of color! she did not fear that thing. With a sudden rush of feeling, the question which had been so long balancing in Gale's mind settled itself then and there. She knew where she belonged. She was her father's daughter, and she believed in the great Friend in heaven. With a thrill of exultation that last knowledge came to her, and then a swift wave of pity swept over her as she saw the troubled faces round her.

'See! it cannot hurt; it is only sticks and paint,' she said, stepping quickly forward and poking her umbrella into the frame of bamboo. 'If we do not want it here, we will not have it here; we will send it away,' and, with a few vigorous thrusts, the frame was pushed into the water and went bobbing helplessly down the stream.

There was a moment's terrified silence, and then a murmur ran through the throng, but it was a voice of relief, as if a nightmare had been lifted. The girl might have brought the curse of an evil spirit upon herself—some thought she had—but surely it would be only upon herself, and the village was saved, so that they were disposed to praise her. And there were some who went away secretly wondering about the power which protected her, and the God in whom she believed.

Gale went back to her garden amazed at herself. It seemed to the overstrained heart and brain as if the long day would never end. She longed to throw herself into her mother's arms and talk to her, and more than all she wanted to see her father again. That night she stayed alone, but with the morning her father came. He had heard in the village the story of what she had done, and he called her his brave girl, but she knew that the joy in his face meant more than any pleasure in her courage and faithfulness; that he understood the new life that had come to her.

Later the mother told her about it—how he had gone to the city to openly avow the faith he had so long held, and to become a member of the native church there. But his journey had to do with Gale as well; for her he had sought a place in the 'white teachers' school, and she was to go and learn all the things she was hungering and thirsting to know.

The girl listened as if in a dream. Once she had visited that school for an hour, and ever since it had lived in her memory. The gates seemed opening wide into a wonderful new world, and deep down in her heart a voice began to sing:—

'Some day I, too, shall carry the light; I, too, shall tell of Him.'

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