



The Kitchen God's Wife

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Winnie 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 terrible 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 that led to Winnie's coming to America in 1949.

The Kitchen God's Wife Details

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From Reader Review The Kitchen God's Wife for online ebook

Bloodorange says

[(one of protagonist's children dies, quite straightforwardly, of plague) (hide spoiler)]

Tania says

She is not related by blood, not even by marriage. She is not someone I chose as my friend. Sometimes I do not even enjoy her company. I do not agree with her opinions. I do not admire her character. And yet we are closer perhaps than sisters, related by fate, joined by debts. I have kept her secrets. She has kept mine. And we have a kind of loyalty that has no word in this country.

3.5 stars. The Kitchen God's Wife covers many themes and places, yet it is very easy to read. After reading it I have a much better understanding of the Chinese culture. Most of the book (all the chapters narrated by Winnie) almost feels like a letter, as there is no dialogue. I thought it would bother me, but I actually enjoyed it. It allowed Winnie to tell her story in her own words, as well as sharing Helen's opinion with us, which showed us what other people thought was going on. And as we know what we feel and experience internally, is not necessarily what other people see. What I loved most was the genuine female characters and the relationships they build. You don't have to always like someone to love them. I will be reading more books by this author.

The Story: Pearl Louie Brandt has a terrible secret which she tries desperately to keep from her mother, Winne Louie. And Winnie has long kept her own secrets - about her past and the confusing circumstances of Pearl's birth. Fate intervenes in the form of Helen Kwong, Winnie's so-called sister-in-law, who believes she is dying and must unburden herself of all falsehoods before she flies off to heaven. Thus begins a story that takes us back to Shanghai in the 1920s, through World War II, and the harrowing events that led to Winnie's arrival in America in 1949.

Willow says

Amy Tan writes about women (complex women!) and I think that's one of the things I love about her books. The men in her stories are shadows, almost undeveloped, with little presence except when they are cruel and threatening.

I found this closed women's world wonderfully refreshing, especially after reading so many books where men are the main focus. In *The Godfather*, Mario Puzo jumped into Mama Corleone's point of view for just one small bit; just long enough to reveal that the wife of the mafia godfather did not concern herself with her

husband's violent world. She didn't care. After all, men never concerned themselves with women's problems. They were from two different worlds, and this separate view reminded me of Winnie, the main protagonist in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Winnie is so distant from her cruel husband that she doesn't even know if Wen Fu is a gangster, and Tan never confirms it either. After all, it's not important. The main focus is all about women.

And the women are vivid too. Winnie and Helen come alive. By the end of the book I felt I knew them... quite well. Both their personalities and voices are so strong. I can still imagine them bickering with each other.

And they are friends too -- true friends, who resent and care about each other. They even talk trash, yet they still stick together. I found this push and pull so real. There's always a bit of one-upmanship with friends, and Tan knows this. You want good things for your friends, but you never want them to be **too** successful or **too** happy. It's like sibling rivalry. LOL

Another great character was Auntie Du, who is an older woman with no husband (he died) and no money. She can't even write. But she turns out to be this lovely hero, whom I just wanted to hug. In a society that undervalues widows and spinsters, I loved that she saved the day, and she didn't even ask for credit. What a great character!

As with all of Tan's books, I love her simple but lyrical prose, and I love all the details she adds about China before and after the war. Tan takes you a different world and a different culture, but makes it familiar simply by introducing you to these fascinating and flawed women. The love and pain they feel is universal, and I found myself quite choked up at the end, thinking about the friends and family that are in my own women's world.

Problems I had with this book were the slow parts. Winnie's daughter Pearl is definitely not as interesting as her mom (although I found her relationship with her mother poignant.) Wen Fu (Winnie's husband) is almost too cruel, too inhuman. He's such a monster. I really hated him, which is good for a villain. But like all Tan's men, he was a shadow, very evil, but a shadow nevertheless. I think Tan revealed way too much of the ending in the beginning when Pearl is telling her story. Having Winnie go back and explain how things led up to where she was in the present, when you already know the outcome, kills a lot of the suspense.

But all in all, I enjoyed this a lot. If you've never read a Tan book, you'll be instantly transported to a new world. But if you've read her other books, you'll definitely recognize many of the same themes and character types that she usually writes about.

I give *The Kitchen's God's Wife* **** ½.

It's a great book!

Anna H says

Had to catch my breath....I just love Amy Tan, and I wanted to give this modern classic five stars because she's certainly worth it as a writer. But I kept hoping and worrying about our main character, Winnie! How many times can one person get f--ed over in a lifetime? Before they're even 30?! I know, I know -- World War II, the Chinese, the Chinese, the Chinese, spousal abuse, the Chinese, the Chinese, the Chinese..... I get it.....but I had to suspend my disbelief a bit at the end in a plot involving a final confrontation with the

villain..... I also would have liked to see more development of the present day part of the story. Some loose ends didn't quite get tied up.

But this is worth diving into headfirst -- Tan is a writer who's conversational style of narrati0n is so good, she takes you directly to the villages and cities in war-torn China so well, you're totally immersed in the story. The novel works as an inter-generation immigrant story as well as historical fiction and family drama - - if you like these types of fiction, you'll probably think this is worth a read.

Jennifer Cole says

What I learned from this book--my favorite part:

"Isn't that how it is when you must decide with your heart? You are not just choosing one thing over another. You are choosing what you want. And you are also choosing what somebody else does not want, and all the consequences that follow. You can tell yourself, That's not my problem, but those words do not wash the trouble away. Maybe it is no longer a problem in your life. But it is always a problem in your heart."

Debra says

The book begins with Pearl planning on attending a wedding but then also learns there is a funeral. As most of Tans books, this book deals with family history, relationships, some cultural history of China, the life of women in China and assimilation to the United States.

Winnie and her friend Helen have a kept a secret for most of their lives, Winnie's daughter Pearl also has a secret she has been keeping from her Mother. Helen steps in, claims she is dying (is she?) and tells each Winnie and Pearl that they need to tell their secrets or she will. Winnie decides that she will tell her daughter what she has kept secret from her.

Winnie's story is set on a small island outside of Shanghai in the 20's but she moves to other locations in China prior to coming to the United States in 1949.

Winnie's story is a sad one, born to a beautiful mother who one day disappeared she is sent to live with a distant relative, he way of life changes drastically. She ends up being married to a man who physically and emotionally abuses her. This is only the beginning. Her story may be painful to some who have suffered domestic violence, or who have suffered the loss of their children. Winnie does not have a happy life until she meets Pearl's father in China at a Military Dance. They fall in love and then begins the story of Winnie trying to escape to be with the man she loves. Pearl in turn, shares her "secret" with her Mother. Her secret does not have the same impact (for me the reader). Their shared confessions serve to bring them closer and ends with Winnie wanting to take Pearl on a trip.

Amy tan does complex relation ships well. She is able to show the complexities of Mother/Daughter relationships. Winnie and Pearl were not close their relationship has not always been good. Tan also writes about female friendships, husband/wife relationships in this book. Her writing is beautiful and lyrical. I enjoyed how Winnie's story was told. It almost felt like a book within a book.

4 Stars for me. I found I did not like this book as much as I liked some of her others. Tan's writing is beautiful but at times I wanted to have things speed up a little. Some may not like the changing POV of the

main characters. But I think most wont mind.

Carla says

I thought I had read this book many years ago, but knew that if I had, I would notice right away. I guess I didn't read it! What an wonderful story. A story of secrets held for many many years. Of a Mother and daughter from not only different generations, but cultures and continents. I find the stories of new immigrants and their American born children fascinating. Particularly when the immigrants life in their home country was impoverished, abusive, and horrifying particularly due to war. There is then such a huge gap between the parents and children, and lack of understanding, unless stories are shared. The threat given, of secrets being exposed, sets the story up for a history that the mother shares with her daughter. It's never too late to reveal how your history impacted on who you are today.

Spider the Doof Warrior says

I love this book. Winnie is so brave. She was stuck with an evil, horrible husband. She went through WW2. Her daughter didn't know all of this about her so she tells her all that she went through. It's a great book about revealing secrets and her daughter learns to admire her mother's strength and find the same in herself.

Also, why do so many folks have to marry horrible, awful people?

Kasia says

I adore the way Amy Tan intertwines more than one story line into her books, at first glance it seems that the tale centers on Pearl, the daughter of a Chinese immigrant, who has morphed into the modern American culture and who finds her mother annoying and old fashioned at times. Once the reader gets familiar with Pearl the story then turns back to her mother, Winnie and her childhood friend Helen. Winnie's story is sad and beautiful at the same time, her suffering and struggles to overcome an abusive husband who's been keeping her from freedom half her life are intense and emotionally moving. Tan's rich, descriptive writing has deep meanings hidden in words. I found myself laughing quite often, which was a surprise because the story is pretty intense. As usual the author supplies us with deep insight into the ugly reality of life, one of my favorite lines was on page 352, "The society is like bright pain applied on top of a rotten wood" which made me stop and think, digest and absorb her wise words, Tan is a master of writing tales with imperfect characters, so many of them have so called rotten bases, and their struggle to improve and move on make the tale even more vivid and intense. In this case it was the way of life for Pearl in wartime China, the harsh reality was that she didn't have much of a saying; all the older men and women in her house seemed to run her life, and the male dominated culture didn't help when the girl was going through hardship, if anything it made her life more hellish, and at times it was hard to read but I continued, good books aren't always pretty.

This was a good and potent read, I must warn readers that they might get angry at the bad men in Pearl's life, but her struggles never diminished her personality and her big heart, which she has to this day. I feel that

Tan's books not only entertain but also teach a lot, not to mention show us how life in the past was so much harsher, and remind us of individual struggles that women still have to go through, whether they are someone's wife or daughter or best friend, and that deep down we are strong, and our stories are beautiful, and that life might never be fair, but we try our best to fight for it.

Anca Rucareanu says

Acesta este un roman care mi-ar fi plăcut să nu se termine prea curând. Este un volum care mi-a predat despre viața femeii puternice în 598 de pagini, care mi-a facilitat incursiunea într-o țară ce pare că ar fi mai bună decât cea din prezent cu aceleași mentalități prezente și în secolul XX (perioada în care este plasată acțiunea acestei cărți), un roman care m-a înduioșat cu grația autoarei de a prezenta momente triste și clipe luminoase deopotrivă, un roman care și-a câștigat cu siguranță un loc în topul celor mai bune citite în anul acesta.

<https://ancasicartile.wordpress.com/2...>

Julie says

This is my favorite of Amy Tan's books. I loved it!

Debbie Zapata says

Secrets. Mothers and daughters nearly always keep secrets from each other. But at some point in life the secrets need to be told....don't they? Winnie, Pearl's mother, faces this dilemma. Winnie's dearest friend Helen is threatening to tell Pearl all of the secrets of Winnie's early years in China. So Winnie decides to tell Pearl her life story before Helen does. Because of course Helen would not tell it correctly anyway.

But Pearl has a secret of her own. Will hearing her mother's secrets give her the courage to share hers?

This book was sometimes quite painful to read. Readers who are overly sensitive to scenes of abuse of any kind may not be able to deal with parts of this story. We see what Winnie lived through because of her arranged marriage to a complete jerk; and from the war in China in the 1930's and 40's. She suffered immensely but did have a few triumphs at times and somehow held onto a deep-down core of strength that perhaps surprised even herself.

Chance is the first step you take, luck is what comes afterward.

But you have to have the courage to take that first step, and trust that the luck will follow your path. I think Winnie did this the best way she could. I hope Pearl learns to do the same.

I promised my mother that I would take her this book in May. She recently discovered Tan's work when she read *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. We are planning a book swap. It will be fun to discuss them after reading, because we have discovered a bit of a secret between ourselves lately. Every so often we both actually like the same books! Maybe that means one or the other of us is getting older and smarter?

Caroline says

The book starts out in contemporary America, and is narrated by Pearl – a second generation Chinese emigrant, who is trying to balance her own 21st century American family life with the needs of her Chinese mother and her mother's friends. From the third chapter on the narrating is taken over by Winnie, Pearl's mother, and it transforms into being the story of her life – told against the background of her living in Shanghai in the 1930s and 40s, under the Kuomintang, but with the Communists already making their presence felt, and her experiences with the Japanese invasion of Shanghai . On a personal level it is about Winnie's relationships, with her own mother, with her first husband Wen Fu, with her friends Hulan, Peanut, Min and Grand Auntie Du, and finally, about her relationship with the Chinese-American translator Jimmy Louie.

The first pillar of the book for me was the suffocating nature of the family life portrayed. It starts in the present day, with a mother/daughter relationship that I found cringingly intrusive. In fact the whole family is way too over bearing, and that isn't even just blood relatives. It also includes various friends who have been sucked into this gooey familial web.

The second pillar was the superstition that is rife throughout the whole story. From the eccentricities of Grand Auntie Du's household alter , to a plethora of omens that drench the lives of these people – inspiring or damning – and always taken seriously. At one stage there is a visit to a fortune teller, but this seems superfluous given that their lives are already heavily dominated by a super-awareness of portents of good and bad fortune.

The third and final pillar of the book for me was the ubiquitous male dominance in Chinese society at this time. This was illustrated in the general culture, in the licence given to Winnie's first husband, and in the heavy governance of her father, both towards her and her mother. Men ruled and marriage was all. But this pillar had woodworm.... The women in the story were rebelling – through friendship and support for one another, through the changing politics of the time, and through the sheer cussedness and determination of the main female protagonists in the story.

My least favourite character at the beginning of the book was Helen, or Hulen as she was known in China, but as time went on I could not help but be beguiled by the riches that the author brought to her personality. She was stupid and clumsy, touching, wily, endearing, maddening, loyal, naive, preposterous, turncoat and vulnerable... By the end of the book I found her quite irresistible. Such a huge character. It was a pleasure to follow the ups and downs of her friendship with Winnie, and have my initial dislike so overturned. In fact all the women characters in the book had a lot of presence for me.

The book ends with a return to the present day, with Winnie and her daughter Pearl coming to terms with a lot of things in one another's lives that they had previously kept secret, and we sense a new closeness between them.

For the most part though the book is harsh and quite brutal. Winnie did not have an easy life, not only in personal terms, but also in what she went through whilst being bombed, in fleeing the Japanese army, and in the aftermath of the war. Having said that – there is a happy ending – and the glow from that did much to warm the cockles of my cowardly heart.

Carolyn F. says

I read this book years ago (okay decades). As with the other books I've read by this author, a lot of untold sorrows with a sort of redemption at the end. Good book.

Julia says

great story about a relationship between a mother and daughter. we all, to some degree, struggle with our relationships with our mothers. this book made me look deeply at my own relationship with my mom and got me thinking about how much about my mom and her life that i still don't know. my mom is reading this now and we've had some great conversations about this and what it means to our own relationship.

this is a wonderful story about (1) the incredible love of a mother; (2) cultural assimilation and native cultures; (3) the rise of communist china; (4) a woman's fight for self-determination and empowerment; (5) surviving domestic violence.

Olivermagnus says

When we meet Winnie Louie, she seems like a traditional Chinese wife, ruling her family with a combination of love and superstition. Now widowed, she still misses her husband, Jimmie Louie, and worries excessively about her two grown children. Winnie has secrets she has kept hidden since her youth in China, secrets she wants to tell Pearl but is afraid to.

Pearl Louie, now in her 40s, has secrets too. She has just been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and knows that her mother will wonder what she has done to cause Pearl's illness. Most of the novel then switches to Winnie's narration and the story of her life in China. She is sent to live with relatives but then makes a terrible mistake that will fill her life with pain and misery. Her story is both tragic and painful to read about.

I originally read this book when it was first published in 1995 but discovered that I couldn't remember anything about it. Amy Tan does a wonderful job of making her characters realistic and every word from Winnie seemed believable. The first section was a little slow, but once we go back to China with Winnie, I couldn't put it down. It has several subplots and all of them are engaging. The characters are complex and the relationships between the women is especially insightful. While some of the scenes are tragic, I'm glad that I had a chance to read this novel once more.

Ivana Books Are Magic says

The Kitchen God's Wife was my second novel by Amy Tan. As it often the case with Tan, this novel focuses on the dynamics of an American Chinese family, more precisely on the relationship between a mother and a daughter. There are other characters, but there is no doubt that the mother and the daughter are the protagonists of this novel. Pear and Winnie are not only the sole narrators, they are what this novel is about.

The Kitchen God's Wife opens with the daughter's narration. Pearl has been born to a Chinese mother and Chinese American father, that is, Pearl's mother moved to USA to get married to an American Chinese man. Consequently, Pearl's mother Winnie is still deeply rooted in her Chinese culture. Pearl, on the other hand, has grown up in USA and belongs to another culture. Pearl has a secret that she hides from her mother. Pearl has multiple sclerosis, a vicious immune disease (all immune diseases are chronic and incurable, so it is perhaps not that strange that Pearl hides it from Winnie). Pearl's condition being something that I understand perfectly (suffering from an immune disease myself), made it easier for me to get involved into the story from the start. As the story progresses, we realize that the relationship between the Pearl and Winnie is quite complex, which by might another reason why Pearl has revealed her health condition to almost everyone but Winnie.

When an elderly aunt dies, Pearl meditates about her past and present. While Pearl is reflecting on and writing about Chinese funeral customs, she also shares a lot about Chinese beliefs and traditions. I quite enjoyed reading about that. The way Pearl was explaining cultural related things was simple but interesting. Pearl doesn't go into great detail, but as I said, she does some cultural explaining. What follows next is that Pearl's mother Winnie invites Pearl and her family to an engagement party of their cousin. At the same time, Pearl's aunt Helen confront Pearl, insisting that Pearl must tell Winnie the truth about her health condition or the aunt will. Helen does the same thing to Winnie, demanding that Winnie reveals her past (and the secrets it hides) to Pearl.

I won't get into what happens next (to avoid spoilers) but I need to mention that Winnie becomes a narrator as well. Winnie retells her incredibly painful life with a powerful voice. At times it was difficult to read about everything that happened to Winnie, I often felt like it was, quite frankly, too much. Is it even possible that so many horrible things can happen to somebody? There were a few episodes that could have been left out, as there was no need to turn an already tragic story into some kind of a contest of how many horrible things can happen to a single person. At one point I even felt frustrated, wondering how Winnie will ever manage to escape the vicious circle she was trapped in, but I'm certainly glad I continued reading as it all comes together in the end. Winnie makes for an amazing narrator, I simply loved her character. Even if I felt there was simply too much happening to Winnie, I sympathized with her every step of the way. While I was reading Winnie's story I felt transported to another time and place. Pearl's narrative is modern, Winnie's is more old fashion, and somehow these two work perfectly together. Some parts of Winnie's narrative continue to haunt me, especially one particular sentence that also happens to be my favourite quote from this book: *„That is the saddest thing when you lose someone you love- that person keeps changing. And later you wonder. Is it the same person I lost? Maybe you lost more, maybe less, there are thousand things that come from imagination and you don't know which is which, which was true, which is false“.*

I sweat that has to be one of the most profound things ever written about grief. When we mourn for somebody, when we try to accept somebody's death, what we are afraid of is not only how we will live without them but how we will leave without their memory. The older I get, the more I realize that memory often plays trick on us. It is not as reliable as we want and need it to be. This the worst of pain, to wonder whether we remember the loved ones correctly, and knowing there is no way we can know for sure. That doubt (often followed by guilt) is perhaps what hurts us the most.

On overall, I would say that this novel was easier to follow than The Joy Luck Club, mainly because there are only two narrators. In addition, the narrators both have very distinct voices. It is easy to understand both Winnie and Pearl but perhaps even more importantly one can understand why misunderstandings between them occur, perhaps even why they had to occur. Their relationship is a complex but a loving one. The way Pearl and Winnie act both in respect to one another and to other people makes sense, the motivation behind

their actions is very clear.

This rounded character development is something I quite liked. Their characters are better developed and more rounded compared to those in *The Joy Luck Club* (even if we admit that there was less place for character development in that book, I have to notice that those characters were a little flat while these are anything but). Finally, both Winnie's and Pearl's life stories are interesting and worth reading, even if I think that on Winnie's side of things there was some exaggeration. Not in the sense that these kind of terrible things described in Winnie's life story didn't use to happen to women, and probably still do for that matter, but in the sense that it felt excessive to include that amount of trauma and put it all on the shoulders of one character.

This novel seems better developed and more mature than Tan's first, yet somehow I still liked it a bit less than *The Joy Luck Club*. Having already been introduced to similar themes in Amy Tan's previous novel, I have to admit that I felt a little less involved in the story. Reading *The Joy Luck Club* felt like being immersed into a magical world. I felt involved while I was reading this book, but not as fully immersed into the narrative as with the first one. There is magic in this one for sure, but something of that newness of reading experience that contributed to the feeling of what I now can call 'wonder' is gone. Had this been the first Amy Tan novel I have ever read, I would have probably given it five stars, this way I think that a four star marking is more appropriate. I loved this novel but I can't say I have fallen madly in love with it or anything like that. I had a feeling I got what I was hoping for, if you know what I mean, but there wasn't anything extra. However, there is no doubt in my mind that *The Kitchen God's Wife* is a powerful novel, one well worth reading. I would certainly recommend this one, especially to those interested in themes it explores.

Lynn says

Full review: <http://books-n-music.blogspot.com/201....> I never cease to be amazed at the treatment and plight of women throughout history. I'm certain I wouldn't have lived long, 'cause, honestly, my goal would have been to make sure I took out at least a couple of the meanest men with me! Unbelievable to me and so very very sad. How can dismissing half the human race be justified? I assume Tan is accurate in her portrayal of females in China during the early to almost mid-20th Century. And if so...well, it just wasn't right. And her first/Chinese husband. What a vile creature. Wen Fu had absolutely no redeeming qualities whatsoever. I was so very glad for her to find Jimmie and make a life with him in the U.S. At least she was able to enjoy what appeared to be a true partnership and genuine love and respect with her second husband. (I feel as if I know that feeling well!) And the keeping of secrets and divulging of withheld knowledge and history...such a fascinating practice amongst us humans toward one another! Especially with regard to our own children. More and more I realize that no one person knows every little thing about any of us. We choose to share certain things with certain others, but I'm sure no one person has shared every little thing about themselves with any one other person...we spread ourselves out amongst those we know, as it were. And really, what do our grown children know about us? Especially with regard to our prior history before raising children? Probably very little. And if they knew more? Would it be eye-opening as it seemed to be for Pearl? Or not...? What an amazing study of secrets and relationships!

Hollie says

Maybe its because I just finished it, but I really liked this book. This is a story of a Chinese woman named

"Winnie" and the secrets she keeps from her daughter, not only to protect her daughter, but to protect herself and her best friend. As with many of the books we read, Winnie has had a hard life, almost horrific in some respects but the reason I love her is that the story isn't tragic, she doesn't complain about it (too much), or make herself out to be a hero, well except maybe in her own mind. She tells her story to her daughter and it is as if I would tell something to my best friend, there are some embellishments, side gossip stories, and a little humor. The relationship between Winnie and her best friend Hulan/Helen is so realistic it has to make you laugh a little inside. The things they go through, the love/hate relationship, its like a dramatic or disfunctional version of I love Lucy, its makes it so much easier to connect to these characters and a much more enjoyable read.

Claudia says

Me ha parecido un libro precioso y aunque no he podido leerlo con la rapidez con que me habría gustado, creo que el hecho de haberlo ido saboreando de a pocos, en momentos en que me ha resultado de compañía en situaciones difíciles, le da un valor muy especial y sin duda lo recordaré siempre con cariño por un montón de motivos, no solo literarios. La habilidad de la autora para narrar una historia tan dura y compleja como la de Winnie, sin solazarse en las penas, sino resaltando la fortaleza de los tremendos personajes, femeninos en particular, que aparecen en la historia, me resulta impresionante y sin duda quiero repetir, así que toca buscar otros títulos suyos. Muy, muy recomendable.
