

# Recipe Impossible

BIDDING FAREWELL TO THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN



*While there are many things a person cannot do or find in the Kingdom of Bhutan, there are some things that occur no other place on earth. I'm taking leave of this place of impossibilities and possibilities, and for my final meal, I request a curry of orchids and ferns.*

Do you know how the road forks three ways where the two rivers join in Chuzom? Have you seen how blue the water is as it gushes forth under the bridge? Gaze at this blue spectacle but don't take too long, because the day is short. The forest is different at night, busy with wildcats and other such things that might eat you before you can eat them.

Do you have an auto? Or maybe you have a cousin brother who is a driver? Either is fine, or better yet, go on foot because the trailhead is hard to see if you are moving fast. Take the road that heads up to the village of Haa. Have you seen that little man with bowlegs wearing the

yak hair *gho*? Have you seen that path that he emerges from onto the road? Stop there and descend into the forest.

Did you remember your basket? You will need a basket. You can make a basket, too, out of leaves or bamboo. Your grandmother knew how. Head down the escarpment and don't stumble on the stones, or you'll tumble head over heels into the thicket. Maybe that's good? Maybe in that thicket you will see what it is we're looking for? The orchid flower? That one that tastes so delicious? Do you know how to select them? No orchid is poisonous, but not all are tasty.

Remember when they served orchid curry at the cremation ground? Whose auntie had the recipe? If you can't find her, I cannot tell you her secrets. The butter must be home churned. Don't buy that packaged butter from India. Pure butter is hard to find. The old lady up the road sells hers wrapped in leaves. It's the real thing, uncut. Who do those

farmers think they are fooling when they cut their butter with banana heart pulp? Me? Yes, I have been fooled, and probably so have you. Find that old lady. But first finish with the forest.

Ho! There are some orchids. Pluck them. But only the ones with the pinkish stems. They are the tasty ones. Is a bunch enough? Who is coming to dinner? Just the five of you? Maybe ten? Better collect more. Better collect some wild fern fronds, too. Look for the delicate twirls, the heads that curl into themselves in the most tender shade of green. Stay away from the ones that have become black.

After you come out of the forest with your basket full of food, don't you feel good? Are your thigh muscles burning? Did you pay with a credit card? No, you did not. Do you really think the orchids will stay fresh in that plastic bag? What did your grandmother do? She didn't have plastic bags. Don't you think a

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## Fresh Orchid Flower Datshi

- Rinse your bundle of orchids.
- Slice the flowers into ovals.
- Place them in an earthen pot.
- Add sliced green chilis or just broken chilis, maybe about five.
- Add fresh butter, maybe as thick as your thumb and long as a newborn's foot.
- Add just enough water so that the level does not rise above the solids (about a mugful).
- Add salt and cook.
- When the orchids and chilies are soft, crumble the farmer's cheese and stir.
- The curry should hold around the orchids and chilies.
- The dish is ready when you know it is ready.
- This would serve a family of five.
- Enjoy.

*bangchun* will keep them just perfectly? The fronds will be protected, and they won't suffocate in the airless plasticene. Did you pack a hankie to dab the perspiration from your forehead as you ascend further up the road?

The mist will swirl at the sun-setting time. It will leave a film on your skin so that the contours of your face have an electric blue outline, the color of the sky. Is it really only 4:30? Why is it dusk? Because of the valley depth and the mountain height and the not yet coming of solstice. Get home quickly with your precious finds. The dogs will become bolder after dark. They don't care about your ferns and your orchids, only the tender flesh of your calves. Do you have kindling? Can you pluck a few pieces? Is that old lady still by the roadside? She blends in so well. Her *kira* is dusty, her teeth are red. Buy the last bundle of butter and also a few rounds of her fresh cheese, the one she makes out of pressed curd. Did you know that people from islands in the Pacific Ocean like Fiji and Hawaii make orchid salads mixed with seafood? Don't you want to go there and lay on the beach and eat orchids with scallops while a man with a ukulele sings "*Ai kakou me ke aloha*"? How did I get off topic? Where were we? Is the fire going? It's time to cook. ▼

Noa Jones finished a draft of her novel and is finally leaving Bhutan.

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