

KITE FLIER

by Dennis Haseley

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My father told me that when he was young he had traveled far from his home. Finally he came to a house on a hill overlooking a village. He learned the trade of stonework, while above him the clouds floated, like silk.

Then he married the beautiful daughter of a farmer and he began to fly kites.

He made kites of paper and wood that looked like crickets and cats, and a heron kite made of white silk. He flew them while my mother watched. Then, like a fisherman, he reeled them in, and while she laughed, he showed her what he'd caught.

The children of the village watched our house on the hill and the kites flying overhead, and they said, "Kite Flier is a wizard and can fly anything, even the stones he sets during the day." He laughed when he heard this. He knew it was his heart that was flying.

After they were married for a time my mother gave birth to me and became sick and died. And then Kite Flier made no kites.

But one day a scrap of silk from an old heron kite caught in the wind and flew over my cradle. My father heard me laugh. So he started making kites for me. "Watch," he said, as I lay on a blanket. And beneath a crescent moon my father flew a kite that looked like the crescent moon. "And there!" he shouted, and in a field of flowers he flew a kite like a blowing flower that I chased with my first steps.

When the children in the village saw the shapes flying, they came to our door and said, "Kite Flier, sell us your kites." He only shook his head and smiled.

As I grew older my father flew other kites. The day I learned to swim he launched the paper body of a fish with my proud head on it, and I laughed to see it skim and dive. When I fell from a tree and twisted my leg, he carried me home and sat with me all night. In the sky above us flew the gentle face of a woman. And the day I killed a

rabbit with a stone, he angrily sent me back to our house, and later I saw him fly a kite that flashed like lightning in the sky.

Like a fisherman who never lost a catch, he reeled in each kite and saved it. Later he taught me to build one. It was small and square and when I ran with it, it kicked like a puppy before it rose.

I grew taller and stronger and played in the village with the other boys, who were no longer interested in kites. As I spent less time with my father, he dreamed up kites I would love, kites of jackknives and dragons and masks, kites that skipped across the sky as I ran, and two fighter kites, one that always chased the other.

One day, my father launched a silver kite that rose and rose, and I closed my eyes and pretended I was soaring. I could see so far, and he was so small on the ground beneath me. Filled with faraway thoughts, I sat and gazed at the road or drew with a stick in the dirt. My father flew kites of blue and purple streamers that circled over me, and I would look at them sometimes, so pale they were almost invisible.

Finally, there came a day when all the kites my father flew could not make me smile or speak, so faraway were my thoughts. And I came to my father and said that I was now a young man and wished to go and see the world away from my home.

“No, you must stay,” said my father in a voice as heavy as a rock. I could see the colors of the kites behind him start to run, but I said, “I am sorry, I must travel now as you did when you were a young man.”

That night, my father and I set to work. We gathered those kites he had built for my mother and for me, cricket kites, kites like moons, like ships and cats, and for days and days he worked, carefully sewing the silk, gluing the bright paper, while I held and bent the thin wood. He worked with all his craft and I with all my strength until we built a huge kite.

On a windy morning, he carried it from our house and I walked behind, watching as he bent beneath a magnificent kite in the shape of a bird. It was streaked with the colors of sky and stone, and its wings, when they caught the morning sun, glowed with the colors of flames. As I helped him lift it into the wind, those wings fanned wide, and its tail of silk streamed out like clouds. We watched that wild bird rise above us, and when I caught a glimpse of its face, it looked like a human face with eyes faraway like stars.

Together, we held tightly to the line as the bird dove and tossed. We held on as it tugged in the morning wind and then, watching as it soared in the clear air, first I and then he let the string go. As the kite disappeared into the sky, my father gave a cry.

Then I walked down the hill to the road. And he turned and walked toward the village. I have not seen my father in a long time. But I know that always on the first strong wind of the year each of us climbs a hill and sets a kite free.