

The Kitemaker

by Chris Rose

In the tiny village of Jaizhar there was no cinema, no zoo, not even an old museum. There was nothing. It was not an interesting village. There were only two interesting things about it. Firstly, Jaizhar was perched on the top of a very big hill, the biggest hill in the entire region. The hill that Jaigarh perched on was so big that it was nearly a mountain. Because the little village of Jaizhar was so high up, it was possible to see the whole country from the top of it. At least that's what people said, but Mehfooz didn't believe them, because every time he tried to see the whole country, there were clouds all around. The only time when there weren't clouds it was because the wind had blown them away, but even when the wind had blown away the clouds, it was still impossible to see the whole country, because it was only a few seconds before the wind brought more clouds to replace the ones it had blown away. That was the second interesting thing about Jaizhar. They said it was the windiest place in the country, and possibly the windiest place in the world.

One day the mayor of the town had an idea.

"We need to make Jaizhar more interesting!" he said. "What ideas do you have to make Jaizhar more interesting?" Everybody in the town thought of ideas to make it a more interesting place. Some people wanted to open a cinema, other people to open a zoo, some others thought they should have a museum.

"No good!" said the mayor. "Nobody will walk all the way up the hill just to go to the cinema, or see some animals in the zoo, or visit a museum. Nobody wants to come here. It's always too windy!"

"I've got an idea!" said one man. "Because we have so much wind, let's make the most of it! Let's have a kite flying competition!"

Everybody loved the idea, especially the mayor, who liked the idea so much that he decided that it was his own idea.

Over the next few weeks everyone in the town became very excited about the competition. People came from all over the region to take part in the competition. Some of the best and most important kite flyers in the country were said to be coming as well.

"What a great place Jaizhar is!" said the visitors. "Lots of wind!"

The local kitemaker was, of course, very, very busy. Everyone wanted him to make a new kite for them. A kite that would win the competition. Mehfooz asked the kitemaker to make a kite for him as well.

"No chance" said the kitemaker to Mehfooz. "I've got hundreds of kites to make already, and no time. Anyway, you can't afford to buy one of my kites."

Mehfooz was disappointed, but he didn't give up.

"Ok" he said, "I can't afford to pay you, but if you make a kite which you can promise will win the competition, I'll give you half of the prize."

The kitemaker thought for a moment, and because the prize was a large number of gold coins, he didn't think much more than a moment.

"Done!" said the kitemaker. And the kitemaker that afternoon started to work on the best kite he had ever made. He found the lightest but strongest pieces of bamboo to make the frame, he found the most delicate yet strong piece of red silk to make the kite. He found the longest piece of thin string for the cord. He stitched the kite together with a thread made from spiders' webs. He put tiny pieces of mirrorwork on the kite, so that it would reflect the light as it flew.

The morning of the competition the kite was ready. Mehfooz ran to the kitemaker's shop. The kitemaker had hidden the special kite in the back room of his shop so that no one could see it until the competition began.

“Don’t forget” said the kitemaker to Mehfooz as he handed him the beautiful red kite, “half of the prize is mine!”

Mehfooz nodded, took the kite and ran to the main square of the town where the competition was already beginning. He had never seen so many kites. The sky was filled with them. The birds had all flown away, scared by the competition. There were so many kites they looked like the clouds which the wind had temporarily blown away. When he produced his kite, people marvelled at it.

“That is the most beautiful kite ever!” they cried. “It will easily be the winner!”

Mehfooz felt very pleased with himself, already sure that the gold coins would be in his pocket quite soon. As everybody watched, Mehfooz held the kite up and got ready to launch it. He thought he could throw it very gently, and that it would start to fly on its own. He threw it, and it went *thump* as it hit the floor. There was silence for a moment, and then everyone started to laugh.

“It might look like a good kite, but it can’t fly!” they shouted. Mehfooz tried again. This time he held it up and threw it a bit harder. But again, the kite merely went *thump* and hit the ground. Again the people laughed, then started to go away, more interested by the kites that were flying. Mehfooz wasn’t going to give up. Again he lifted and threw the kite, and this time it fell, but didn’t quite hit the ground. A tiny bit of wind got under the kite and held it just above the ground. The kite began to flap its wings slowly and heavily, like an enormous sleepy crow, one of those crows that is so lazy they prefer to walk than fly. And slowly, very slowly, the kite began to fly. Its big lazy wings became lighter, and the kite started to go higher in the sky. It started to move faster until it became a pigeon, darting around the rooftops, unsteadily, stopping for a moment then starting again, getting higher and higher until it turned into a swallow, high above the town, higher than any of the other kites now, swooping and diving and circling above the heads of all the people in the town who looked up at it, amazed now, silent with wonder.

The kite continued to soar higher and higher, and Mehfooz reeled out the cord which seemed to be endless, letting the kite go further and further, higher and higher until it turned into an eagle, circling the town at the top of the hill, pulling stronger and stronger for hours until it was nearly dark. When Mehfooz thought he could fly the kite no more, it pulled once again, and became a dragon, breathing fire against the dark night sky. The dragon swooped down into the town square then soared back up again.

“Let me go!!!!” shouted the dragon. “Mehfooz! Let me go!!!!!! Cut the cord and let me go. Let me fly free!!!!”

“No!” shouted Mehfooz. “I need to win! What can I give the kitemaker if I don’t win!” But the dragon didn’t listen to him, it just pulled harder and harder until Mehfooz could hardly control it any longer.

“Mehfooz!” shouted the dragon, “Let me go or I’ll pull you up here with me!!!”

That was the first and the last time they had a kite flying competition in the tiny village of Jaizhar. If you go there today, you will still find it an uninteresting place, without even a cinema or a zoo or a museum. But there is one interesting thing about the place, though. The people who live there say that if the wind ever blows the clouds which continually circle the town on top of the hill away for long enough, it is sometimes possible to see a boy being pulled around the sky by a beautiful red kite that almost looks as if it were a dragon.