



Shibumi and the Kitemaker

Mercer Mayer

Marshall Cavendish (October 1999)

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Shibumi, privileged daughter of an Emperor, is over-protected by her loving parents. But when she finally sees what is on the other side of her jasmine-scented gardens, she is dismayed at the poverty and ruin of the city. Determined to change things, the young girl enlists the help of the royal kite maker, who builds a kite (actually a kind of Japanese hang-glider) large enough to lift her into the air. Tethered to the kite maker and suspended above the palace, Shibumi demands that the emperor work to improve life for the whole city. When treacherous nobles try to shoot down the girl, she and the kite maker are carried away by the wind. Though the plot twists and turns much like a kite, Shibumi eventually returns to the city. She is reunited with her dying father, vowing to carry on the improvements he began.

Told in the style of an ancient legend, the story came from Mayer's experience as a child in Japan and is completely his own. This is one of the picture books for older children that have gained such popularity in the past few years. It is an eloquent text with substance: the beauty of craft, the love of a girl for her father, recognition of social injustice and the price to be paid for change. The illustrations are full color paintings, richly detailed with Japanese imagery and reminiscent of Mayer's work in *Beauty and the Beast* (Four Winds Press, 1978). The story and pictures combine to make a haunting, but satisfying book.

LEIGH FORREST (July / August 1999)

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