



Dragon Fire

O C E A N M I S T

Yvonne Palka

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*To my granchildren who inspired these stories
and to all children everywhere
May you discover the joy that lives
in your own hearts*



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PROLOGUE: A WILD RIDE

“Whoeee!” shouted Jaxon, as he and his sister were swept up over the tops of the tall firs. “Hey, Allie, can you see Dad and Mom down there? They’re tiny, like ants!” He was holding on to a spike with one arm and pointing below them with the other.

“Hang on, Jaxon!” Allie, breathless with excitement, hugged tightly to the spike of the great creature she was riding. The salt air scrubbed her face, and she could see how the setting sun made Jaxon’s cheeks glow. Then she noticed the eagle.

“Wow. Look over there, Jaxon—we’re eye to eye with that eagle.” Jaxon looked and sure enough, there was an eagle just off to the right, eyeing them cautiously as the serpentine shapes glided past.

The two giant creatures soon left the eagle behind as they swooped and curved around the sea stacks just off the edge of Shi Shi Beach. From that great height the cresting waves looked small, too, but Jaxon and Allie knew from past visits that those rollers were much larger than they appeared. Then the race was on!

“Come on, Shiran, how high can we climb?” Jaxon hollered. He grabbed the spike with both hands as the great beast pulled into a powerful arc skyward. Allie, too, rose gracefully away from the ground far below, her hair streaming.

Side by side the two creatures and their human companions rose, until they were looking down at the tops of the tall firs that guarded the cliff edge. “Hey, Allie, this must be how the astronauts feel when they rocket away from earth!” Jaxon shouted.

Allie just shook her head. How could he talk so much when she couldn’t even catch her breath? That crazy brother! They cruised and glided high over the trees and above Shi Shi Beach.

Then, all too soon, the four, beasts and children, found themselves heading back down to the sand. With a flap of powerful wings and one twist of a long sinuous tail, each massive creature landed gently at the water's edge. This incredible ride was over.

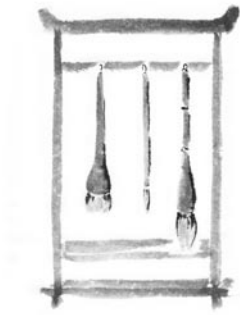
Allie rubbed the sleek neck of her hostess, Shalini. "Thank you," she said, and the stars in the creature's eyes shone even brighter.

Jaxon slid down reluctantly from the back of his companion and looked back up in awe.

"You're so cool," he said.



ASIAN BRUSH PAINTING SUMI-E



The Brush Dances and the Ink Sings

The Chinese have a saying, “The brush dances and the ink sings.” This is a perfect description of a sumi-e painting (pronounced *soo-me-ay*). The artist is working to capture the essence or spirit or *qi* (pronounced *chi*) of her subject in the painting. When the painter is very familiar with her subject, for example her pet cat or dragon, her awareness of its essence will allow her to paint it very freely and simply. The brush will dance, the strokes will be lively and free, and the image will seem alive on the paper. Others will be drawn to looking at her cat (or dragon) painting because it is full of *qi*. A good sumi-e painter can make even rocks come alive!

Sumi-e means “ink picture” in Japanese. “Sumi” means ink and “e” means painting or picture. Similar styles of

painting with brush and ink are often seen in other Asian countries, particularly China and Korea, and so this style of painting is now often referred to as Asian brush painting.

Sumi-e Paintings Are Alive

There are many folk stories that tell us about how thoroughly alive sumi-e paintings can be. One is about Sesshu, a Japanese master painter from the 14th century. As a boy, he displeased his teacher by drawing instead of studying his lessons. In punishment he was tied to a tree so that he would be forced to study. Instead, he drew such lifelike mice in the sand with his toe that they suddenly came to life and freed him by chewing through the ropes that held him!

The Early Days of Sumi-e

Ink painting began in China around 600 A.D. in the form of calligraphy, which means “beautiful writing.” The brush strokes used to form Chinese characters are the basis of the brush strokes used in painting. Chinese characters are often pictorial representations of the meaning of the word, so it was a natural transition from writing characters to painting pictures. Japanese Zen Buddhist monks

traveling in China about 1,000 years ago encountered this style of painting and brought it back to Japan, where it developed and flourished, both in painting and calligraphy.

Poetry with Sumi-e

Many Asian brush paintings have calligraphy associated with them, often in the form of a poem that describes in words something about the painting. The artist was often a poet as well. One traditional form of poetry that is well known is haiku, a form of Japanese poetry that consists of three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively. Haiku, like sumi-e painting, seeks to capture the essence of an experience or a moment in nature. For example, a haiku that might appear with a picture in this book could be

*Shi-Shi holds magic
Sand quivering, rocks rumbling
Sleeping dragons wake.*

The Four Treasures

Sumi-e gets its name from the ink that is used for the painting. Traditionally it comes in the form of a flat, often beautifully decorated ink stick (sumi) made from densely packed pine or carbon soot mixed with glue. To make the ink for painting, you carefully grind the stick with a little water in a special ink stone called a *suzuri*, until you get a smooth, black ink of the desired strength. These days it is also possible to buy prepared ink.

The materials of sumi-e are traditionally called the Four Treasures. That's because they are the treasures that help you create a painting that captures the essence of the subject and is full of energy and life. Besides the ink and the ink stone, the two other treasures are the brushes and the special paper. Brushes with bamboo handles are made from a variety of animal hairs; soft ones from sheep or rabbit hair, and stiffer ones from horse, badger, deer, sable, weasel, or other brown animal hairs. A sumi-e painter will use a variety of brushes of different sizes and textures to make a painting. The paper is often called rice paper, but it is actually made from a variety of plant materials, such as mulberry or bamboo.



Seals or Chops

On every painting you will find one or more red seals, or chops. One of the seals is usually the signature of the artist; either the artist's name in Chinese characters or a quality that they feel represents them at that moment, like serenity or happiness. Other chops might be qualities or images meaningful to the artist, perhaps the animal of their birth year in the Chinese zodiac, such as the tiger or the dragon.

Books About Sumi-e

You can learn more about sumi-e. Look for the book *The Boy Who Drew Cats*, by Marcia Hodges. It talks about how sumi-e paintings come to life. Another book that shows you how to do sumi-e painting is *The Sumi-e Book*, by Yolanda Mayhall. And a good way to remember the Shi Shi dragons and think about painting them is with the book *The Dragon Painter*, by Rosie Dickins and John Nez, or *The Sons of the Dragon King*, by Ed Young.