

A LIVING IN THE COUNTRY
SHORT TALE

GO FLY A
KITE



HARTLEY STEVENS

Go Fly a Kite

A Living-In-The-Country Short

In all respects, this is a work of fiction. Names, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events or locales is unintentional and coincidental.

Copyright © 2016 by Hartley Stevens

All rights reserved.

Go Fly a Kite

Published in the United States of America

By Big Toe, Writes, LLC.

Cover & Website www.HartleyStevens.com

design by Sharon Julien

www.sjulien.com

Editing, provided by Graeme Hague

Polgarus Studio

www.polgarusstudio.com

Original songs by Douglas Haines

www.douglashainesmusic.com

Go Fly a Kite

A Living-In-The-Country Short Tale

By

Hartley Stevens

About two years ago, I began noticing some of my friends take on the annoying habit of complaining about what they *can't* do anymore. We're all in our forties and maybe some things are inevitable. But still, I can't stand the idea of giving up.

Recently, in the Fall after football season, the family rented a house in St. Augustine. We regularly visit the beach, but I especially like the weather during autumn.

For a while, on our various visits, I watched fit, young people riding surfboards while holding on to a large kite. *Kite-surfing*... it looked like my kind of fun. Sitting in my lounge chair reading, I would often pause studying how they gracefully sliced back and forth, up and down the coastal edge. Other beach-types did the same, but on land, riding a large-wheeled skateboard along the densely packed sand.

Kite-surfing. Beautiful, simple, athletic. It felt like my mug of beer.

Sitting in the adjacent lounge chair, my wife made a sound. I turned and saw her looking over her sunglasses.

“What?” I said.

She pushed her sunglasses back up and grinned.

I told her, “I’m gonna do that. Tomorrow.”

She turned the page of her magazine. “I figured...”

“In the morning, I’m going over to that surf-shop and buy myself one of those kites.”

“I know, babe, I know. I can see it in your eyes. Have fun.”

“I’m going.”

“Yes, well... eat a good breakfast first.”

The next morning, I greased myself with SPF mach-much, suntan lotion, donned my running shorts and t-shirt, grabbed a Cliff Bar and a Gatorade, and headed for the kite store.

I’m a native, not a tourist, yet I still felt out of place inside the beach-side store full of people buying all manner of outdoor equipment, including kite-surfing gear.

After perusing all the isles, I finally caught the attention of a sales clerk behind the counter. She was a blonde seedling, sporting several tattoos and shiny piercings. She adjusted her hair and cinched it back with sunglasses.

She stood beside, looking at me, while I alternately looked at her then back to the strange apparatus on the walls. I said, “I want to do this kite-surfing thing—today. I need to buy a kite.”

Her grin spread wide, her eyes squinting. “Of course, you do. Have you ever surfed before?”

“No. I don’t want to surf, I want to *kite*-surf.”

She giggled, despite herself. “Today, you say?”

She said this with just the wrong amount of sarcasm and disdain. I’m not a tolerant man. “What’s your name?”

Smile. “Nina. What’s yours?”

She seemed like she may have ‘waked and baked’ before work. Still, I was hip and I was on vacation. My personal guardian of *assholery* appeared on my shoulder and spoke light, telling me to play it cool. I gathered my patience. “Nina...”

Wider smile. “That’s my name, too. What a co-inq-ee-dink...”

I brushed the guardian away and gathered the storm. But before it could blow, a weathered lad wearing only board-shorts and smears of sun-proof grease paint, smacked her bikinied ass and whispered in her ear. Nina snapped her teeth at him and returned to the rear of the counter.

Five-six and lean muscled, the lad offered his hand. “Name’s Levon, man.” He wrestled my fingers into several conflagrations, like those crazy hand-shake things they do. “What’s your name, man?”

“Hartley...”

“Awesome, dramatically *awesome* name, dude.”

“Thank you.”

“I heard you say you want to surf. Excellent. Good for *dudes* like you to get in the karmic game.”

I shook my head. “Yes, thank you, again. But, I don’t want to surf, I want to *kite*-surf. I watched some people at the beach yesterday. I want to buy the necessary equipment to get started this afternoon.”

He pulled a face, doubtful. “Duuuude....”

What the hell? Before I could blast forth with exasperation, the guardian bit deeply into my shoulder blade, almost as if the wife were coaching him. “What? Is there a problem?”

His gaze wandered over my salt and pepper hair. “You’re an athlete, man, yeah?”

“Yes.”

“But, you don’t—you haven’t surfed?”

I heard the blonde seedling giggle in the background. *Patience... patience... holiday mode.* “No.”

“Okay, let me give you a lesson. For free. Buy a small kite, man, and you and me, we’ll practice. If it works out, I’ll give you another lesson and we can use my equipment. Don’t go buying a board just yet.”

It was my turn to smile. I know the bait and switch routine. Still, I'm also a negotiator.

“What time for the lesson, if I buy the kite?”

“Right now, man. The wind is right. Buy the kite, fifty bucks, and I'll teach you to fly.”

Hesitant, I handed him a fifty-dollar bill. I'd never give a credit card over to this lot.

He beamed. “Awesome, dude. Let me grab a kite. Can we take your car?”

“Yes, my truck's out front.”

“A truck, awesome...”

Levon came out the rear of the store and tossed two long, compact cylindrical objects in the bed of the truck, then something smaller in the back seat of the cab. He jumped in the passenger seat and shut the door.

He pointed, we drove. “Vilano Beach, man. That's where the wind is today.”

It was only a few miles from the rented house, but in the opposite direction. I asked, “So, where'd you get the name Levon?”

“It's from the song, man. Your generation and all. The Mom loved Elton John. ‘He shall be Leeeeevon’,” he sang badly.

We were crossing the large expansion bridge connecting the main land to Vilano Beach. He pushed a button lowering his window. “Dude, you burn?”

I used the central controls and his window slid back up. “No.”

We crested the bridge and drove onto the beach. He pointed towards a portable toilet. “Need to take a wiz, before we get started. Okay?”

I parked and waited. Smoke eased from the vent of the toilet. Back in the truck he smelled of Mary-Jane. Whatever, I was on vacation.

We stood on the sandy point, facing out to sea with St. Augustine proper behind us. He’d assembled a small kite—very small—from the container in the back seat. He knotted rope, parachute cord, through different eyelets and cinched it back to a length of PVC pipe.

“Tether, cinch, curl, repeat. You see it, ‘H’?”

It all seemed very complicated. But this boy was stoned and *he* was doing it. “Yeah, I see it.”

He smiled sincerely, stood up and snatched at the PVC. The kite flew from the ground as if motor induced. He rocked the pipe back and forth and the kite did what kites do. An actual lesson in grace.

He handed me the pipe, saying, “Figure eight, man. Little tiny, subtle figure eights, that’s the key.”

I grabbed the reins and immediately the kite crashed to the ground. This happened sixteen more times before I could keep it in the air for any amount of time. Aided by herb, Levon was very patient.

“You got it man. Let’s hook you to a big kite.”

It was shocking how much effort it took to keep the *little* kite flying, but I said, “Let’s do it.”

The big kite was larger than my truck. He strapped me into a harness and clicked together buckles, straps and d-rings.

“The man thing, ‘H’, is to let your body flow. No, actually the *main* thing is to let go—if the kite takes off. That’s the main thing.”

I had my first serious moment of trepidation. “What?”

“The kite *likes* the wind, man. If you point her right, she’ll eat air like a banshee. If you feel like you’re losing control, just drop the handle on one side. The kite will lose the fluff of the beast and head to ground.”

“Beast?”

He lit up. Right there in front of me. Fuck it. I snatched the kite into the air and became some kind of instant kite-flying *savant*. I flew the kite, making it dance on the evening breeze. I did figure eights and toyed with more complicated moves.

Levon sat on the shore, clapped, praised and burned weed.

Day Two

Oh yeah. There was a Day Two.

At forty-five, I was still young of mind, tough of body and just too damn naïve to know better. I met Levon behind our rented house on the beach. He smelled bad and was wearing the same clothes from the day before. Nina, the blonde seedling from the surf shop, dropped him off from a converted VW van. He unloaded three large canvas-covered kites onto the sand. Then they enjoyed each other’s way too close company, right there, on the open beach while I warmed up muscles dormant from many days.

“H’, you need to hit this now. We’re gonna fly today, surf and sand. You need to hit this.”

I was wearing my clothes from the last Triathlon I'd ran. The one where I'd crossed the finish line, then passed out in the waiting arms of a masseuse foraging for dying whelps like me.

The night before, I'd noticed way too many grey chest hairs. I shaved the front of the silver-back. I was clean, I was ready. I was an athlete of the sea and sand.

“Get the devil's lettuce behind me, you anus. Give me the kite, give me the wind, give me the sand and sea.”

“Dude...”

“Yes...”

He made me practice with the small kite for an hour. He stank of youth and pride.

Today, I was a virtuoso. Even better than the evening before. I was smarter, harder, more lithe than the pack. The kite sailed at my whim.

Young master Levon consulted his iPhone. He said, “Big ‘H’, the wind is going to whip in here most severely within the hour. Big white bones at sea for a rookie. Maybe we should wait until tomorrow?”

The wife would be back at evening's end. I needed—no, I *wanted* her to see me kite-surfing. Smug little face set to rest.

I grabbed his arm. Looked into those bloodshot eyes. There was wisdom at least for the subject at hand. “Levon, buddy—let's set sail.”

He seemed to gather himself and turned sober.

“Okay, ‘H’, we’ll hit the sand with the board. You get it right, I’ll let you try on a board in the surf.”

Stoned, sun-worshipping son of a weed-smoking bitch. This guy was giving me an ultimatum. He was gonna, *let me*.

He punched a clipboard into my gut. “How old are you ‘H’?”

The pride gremlin bit deep into my neck meat. “Forty-five.”

“Weight?”

“One-ninety.”

“Height?”

“Six foot.”

Levon scribbled calculations. “You think you could take me in a fair fight?”

I saw where he was going. “You wouldn’t have a chance.”

Suddenly lucid eyes looked at me. “You think Nina is a spoiled bitch?”

Maybe Nina was his woman, his sweetheart. Maybe something more.

I’d hired him, I could say what I liked. “Yes, I think Nina, needs some coaching.”

He tossed away the blunt. “Let’s sky some kite, dude.”

He unfurled an enormous kite, *twice* the size of my truck. He hooked and laced and clamped. “Okay ‘H’, most important thing to remember is *let go*, if the wind starts beating you like a bitch. Let go with one hand and the kite falls, man.”

Lose control, let go—at least with one hand. Check.

I snatched and the pterodactyl shot into the air. I found the motor nerves, I flowed the figure eight, the kite responded. Levon became giddy, “You got it, man. You’re a natural. Just let it flow, feel the wind.”

I was humbled by his praise and tried harder. The kite crashed to the ground.

“Duuude... Easy, now big thunder. You can’t control the wind, it’s nature man. Flow with it, be humble, subtle. Let the Zen invade, enjoy little tiny bites.”

Sure, I wanted Zen. I’d read books and did yoga with the wife. But right now I wanted to get off the earth and kite-surf. Still, the guardian blew in my ear—*calm down, enjoy the moment, listen to the lad*.

I launched the kite and the winged beast shot back into the air. I calmed and focused on subtlety. After a moment or two, I was making figure-eights with one hand.

Levon tapped my back. “You can set her down easy. We’ll get you on a sand-board.”

I landed the kite expertly. “Levon, I don’t want the sand-skating, I want to get in the waves, I want to kite-*surf*.”

He looked serious. “Listen ‘H’, you’re the boss, but let’s get the land part down a little better, before we try the surf. You ride this board up and down the beach,” he decided a moment. “You ride out and back four times and I’ll help you get wet.”

On the horizon clouds were gathering. I didn’t notice much, but I could feel a change in temperature. I said, “Done.”

Levon went to the truck and returned, setting a flat board with wheels on the sand.

He said, “You got the steady wind, man, but there’re some gusts coming, too. Get the wings under control then lean back and step on the board.”

Lean, back, step on the board. Check. I launched the kite again.

It was one of those moments in life when man and nature become harmonious. My feet absorbed the board. I felt and listened to the wind. I flew down the hard sand on wheels and air—very fast. Screw what *forty* years old can’t do. I was flying.

I had trouble coming back, struggling with tacking against the wind. Still, I managed.

Levon was elated. He sparked up a spliff and offered. I declined.

“One more time like that ‘H’, we’ll get you in the water.”

I smirked. I snatched. The kite answered.

I stepped on the board and was whisked forward with rollercoaster intensity. Too fast, *way* too fast. I tried to ease off the board, grip the sand with my bare feet.

A black cloud magically appeared. The gods of wind expressed their contempt for human worth. The kite lifted me off the ground, inches, feet, yards...”

In the distant beyond... Levon yelled, “Let goooo, let goooo, man.”

The kite strings, attached to my chest and held in my hands, were suddenly in the grasp of a bull elephant. An *angry* bull elephant.

The trunk of the wind beast flipped me up in the air and slammed me down on the concrete-like sand, punching the breath from my lungs.

Oh, if only that was where the story ended...

Levon was still screaming, “Let goooo... let goooo...”

I didn’t—I *couldn’t* for some reason let go. The wind-elephant stood on two legs, grabbed the reins, snatched me from the beach, hurled me into the air and slammed me down again with hate’s own fury.

“Let goooo... *let goooo...*”

Oh no, I didn’t let go.

Angry elephant handed the evil baton of anguish off to my least favorite pterodactyl. It slammed my body to and fro, smiled and screeched low to the ground. The sand, grit laden with little crushed barnacles, ripped the hide from my pink ass—I’d lost my shorts long ago.

A blur from the edge of my vision. Silver bangles and tattoos. A buzzing sound. Nina rode up beside me on a four-wheeler and cut the parachute cord with a much too large knife. She was laughing the entire time.

I woke, looking up. The sun was still shining, but rain was falling. *The devil was beating his wife*, that's what Mama always said about sunshine and rain at the same time.

Nina and Levon were both kneeling beside me. He said, "You got any broken parts?"

I leaned over and puked sand. I wiped my mouth and got my bearings.

"Dude, dude... man, you are the *best time* I've ever had while instructing."

I remember smiling. *Fuck forty-five*. "Thanks, Levon."

He said, "Beach cops are coming. Me and Nina gotta blast. You want another lesson, tomorrow?"

I laid my head back against the sand. "We'll see Levon, we'll see."

Later that night, the wife, enjoyed every minute. Every painful minute, as she scrubbed my raw ass, shoulders, thighs, legs, hands and feet—with alcohol, in the shower.

The End

Before You Go...

If you enjoyed this story, please visit www.HartleyStevens.com for more short stories, novels and songs.