

# THE LITTLE KITE

Synopsis and Director's Statement



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# **THE LITTLE KITE - SYNOPSIS & DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

Written by James F. Robinson

## **LOGLINE**

Believing an impulsive rebellious action has somehow caused the death of her beloved Grandfather, 8-year old Tomasa seeks redemption by making a kite to fly in a indigenous Mayan "Day of the Dead" kite festival, despite a jealous older cousin's efforts at sabotaging her.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Tomasa is a young indigenous K'iche Mayan girl who lives in the remote mountain town of Chichicastenango, Guatemala with her Mother and baby sister Sophia. Her father has abandoned the family to find work in Mexico.

Tomasa's mother Veronica makes intricate hand-woven textiles - the kind Mayas have been crafting for millenniums. It is the only source of income for the family. Weaving is a sacred and endangered Mayan art, and Veronica insists that Tomasa become a weaver. Tomasa is not interested, a source of major conflict between mother and daughter.

Tomasa's Grandfather is dying, and lives far away. Tomasa must weave a belt for him. But Tomasa makes a mess of the project when her mother works in the garden. She rips it off the loom in frustration and hurries to school, a major act of rebellion for a Mayan girl.

That day they learn the Grandfather has died. Tomasa believes her rebellious action must have somehow caused the death of her Grandfather.

Veronica must sell her latest weaving for a pittance so they can travel home to Santiago Sacatepéquez, a Kaqchikel town with a different language and culture. Tomasa's affluent Aunt and Cousin have come from the city. Both are ashamed of their Mayan heritage and strive to pose as white "Ladinos."

There is a traditional Mayan-Catholic funeral. After, Tomasa finishes the belt, which goes on the family altar honoring the Grandfather. Maya-Catholic tradition believes

candles must stay lit on the altar and the family must pray for nine days as the departed's soul passes out of Purgatory.

Tomasa meets Mr. Mérida, her Grandfather's former best friend. He makes giant kites for the Santiago kite festival on All Saints Day. Tradition says the giant kites play a part in the welcoming of the ancestors' spirits as they visit their family in the cemetery.

Tomasa wants to build a kite to honor her Grandfather. She hopes this will make amends for her destruction of the belt. Mérida says girls don't build kites. Tomasa is stubborn - she begins the difficult process to build a kite, eventually with Mérida's reluctant help.

Tomasa secretly confesses her guilt to Mérida. The old man corrects her, telling her he was with her Grandfather at his death, the day before her tantrum. Together, they finish a beautiful small kite.

Mérida falls ill and must be hospitalized. Then, Tomasa's jealous cousin secretly destroys her kite one night. Tomasa is devastated, but finds the determination to rebuild the kite from scratch. The new kite is ugly and awkward, but Mérida tells her never to let obstacles defeat her.

All Saints Day brings a spectacle of huge, brightly colored kites in a grand festival. Despite many failures, Tomasa is able to get her kite aloft with her hand-made belt attached as a tail.

From a hospital window, Mérida sees Tomasa's ugly kite flying in the air, darting around the beautiful giant kites of the men... and smiles.

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## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

30 years ago, I scouted rural Mayan Guatemala for a sponsored film I was hired to make for a non-profit organization. That film was never made, but my contact with the indigenous Mayan people made a lasting impression on me. It seemed as if these people, despite the horrific political persecution they have suffered over the centuries, lived a enviable, "centered" life compared to my complicated and convenient life in the

United States. Their mystical connection to their land, their gift for craft and the spiritual rhythms of their lifestyles reminded me how artificial our “First World” life had become. The complicated weavings of this culture seemed to me a living art form, they are a physical form of mathematics you can hold in your hand and see with your eyes, a riot of color and design that proclaims Mayan pride and history. I always wanted to make a film among these people, and as America tumbled into the chaos and insanity of the 2006 elections, and their aftermath, my mind often went back to Mayan Guatemala, almost as an escape.

THE LITTLE KITE is the result, it has echoes of De Sica’s ‘BICYCLE THIEVES’ and Kiarostami’s ‘WHERE IS THE FRIEND’S HOME’ by allowing us to see this magical world through the eyes of a child.

THE LITTLE KITE will be shot digitally in two separate regions of rural Guatemala, in the mystical old Mayan market town of Chichicastenango in K’iche and Santiago in Sacatepéquez, the site of a giant kite festival that goes back hundreds of years. These communities represent two different Mayan “nations” and two different languages. The cast will feature indigenous Mayan non-actors and will feature three languages; Spanish, K’iche and Kaqchikel. The film will be shot in a fresh, naturalistic style, with a palette derived from the colors of Mayan weaving.

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