

“Kaguyahime “Digital Print, Hahnemuehle Photo Rag 308 gsm

(100% acid free cotton)

Size : 210mm x 297mm

Andrea Innocent (a.k.a innocentgirl), 2007.

10th Century Japanese Folktale about a mysterious girl, Princess Kaguya. It is considered to be the oldest known Japanese narrative.

Synopsis:

Whilst walking through the bamboo forest one day, Taketori-no Okina the Bamboo Cutter, notices a shining stalk of bamboo. On cutting it open he finds a baby the size of his thumb. As he and his wife are child-less he takes her home and they raise her as their own child naming her *Kaguya-hime* (Princess Kaguya, “radiant night princess”). After finding the tiny princess the Old Bamboo Cutter discovers a small nugget of gold inside every stalk of bamboo he cuts.

Soon he was very rich and over the years Kaguya-hime grows from a small baby into a woman of normal size and great beauty with long, brilliant gold hair. Her parents try in vain to hide her from outsiders but the news of her beauty spreads and soon five princes arrive at their door to ask for her hand in marriage.

Kaguya-hime, who is reluctant to marry, devises a series of impossible tasks for the princes to accomplish before she will consider their proposals. The first is told to bring her the holy basin of the Buddha, he returns instead with an expensive bowl, the Princess sees through his deception and he is dismissed. The second must retrieve an azalea made of silver and gold, the third the legendary robe of the fire-rat of China, the fourth a coloured jewel from a dragon and the fifth prince is to find the seashell treasure of the swallows. All princes try to deceive her but fail.

Following this the emperor, *Tenn* (meaning sky in Japanese) comes to visit the princess, he too asks for her hand in marriage. She rejects his advances too saying she is not of this country and therefore cannot go to the palace with him.

During that summer whenever Kaguya-hime would see a full moon her eyes filled with tears, as she secretly knew that on such a night she would be forced to leave her adopted home forever. Her parents see her sorrow but are left baffled as to its meaning. Finally as her behaviour becomes more and more unusual it is revealed that the princess is not of this world and that she must return to her people on the moon.

Note :In some versions of this tale the reason given for her stay on earth was as temporary punishment for a crime, another reason given was to keep her safe while during a celestial war.

As her departure day approaches, Tenn sets guards around her house to protect her, however when the ‘Heavenly Beings’ approach the house these men are blinded by a strange light. Kaguya-hime, resigned to her fate sadly says her goodbyes to her adopted family leaving notes of apology to her parents and the Emperor.

She then takes a taste of the ‘elixir of life’, attaching the remaining contents of the vial to her note to the Emperor. She removes her earthly robes and upon placing the feather robe on her shoulders all her sadness and compassion for the people of earth fades. The princess thus returns to her home on the moon.

Following this her parents, devastated by the loss, become sickly and bedridden. Meanwhile, the Emperor takes the note along with the elixir, the princess’ last mortal act, to the tallest mountain of Japan ‘*Suruga*’ (Suruga is the ancient name of a region that is now part of Shizuoka Prefecture, the region where Mt. Fuji is located). The letter is burnt on the summit with the hope that his message will reach her from that height. (In some versions the elixir is also destroyed as the Emperor did not desire to live forever without being able to see Kaguya-hime, While ‘*fujimi*’ is the name for immortality in Japanese it is also written that the image of the innumerable soldiers of Tenn’s army ascending the slopes of the mountain became the name of the great mountain, Mt Fuji literally “Mountain abounding with Warriors”). It is said that the smoke from the burning still rises to this day.

