

How All Stories Should End: A Review of *The Sky Husband* by Easterine Kire

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Bibliographic Information:

Name of the Book: *The Sky Husband*

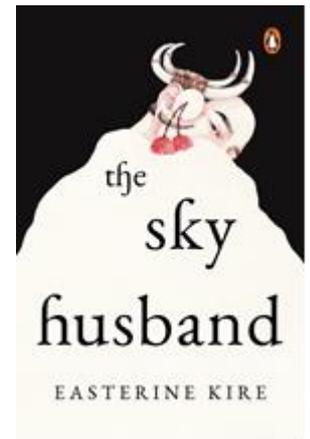
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Award-winning writer Easterine Kire is back with her latest book, *The Sky Husband*. The book is a collection of eight short stories that depict varying stories, settings and plots that revolve around the theme of love. The stories are easy to read, capturing the hearts of the readers from the start. The book cover has an illustration by Ogin Nayam who brings to life a picture of a man with eyes that seem to stare into the heart of the beholder. After reading the book, one comes to an understanding of the 'blinding' beauty of the man on the cover who seem to be an embodiment of the 'sky husband' himself. I feel that Easterine Kire wrote this book especially for her women readers who believe in finding one's true love. The book comprises of various kinds of love stories – teenage love, mystical and dreamlike love story, love story that emerged during turbulent times – all telling stories of 'difficult' loves. The first story titled 'The Sky Husband' tells the story of beautiful Aniya, the beloved of her village. In this story, Easterine Kire uses strong women characters who stay true to their beliefs. It is the old woman Hami who teaches Aniya to believe in dreams and learn to interpret her dreams as "*It is how God speaks to us*" (Kire, 2). Aniya tells Hami of "the one who had come into her dreams" (5), of the one whose beauty was so immense that it was 'blinding'. The author gives a delightful twist to the Naga legend of sky wives and recreates it into a story of sky husbands. The second story 'Chan and the Blue Forest' retells the story of a man named Chan who went missing for two years during which he had fallen in love with a forest spirit with "the loveliest face you could imagine" (Kire, 34). The forest spirit enticed him with forest song that sang of sweet, lasting affection. He was brought back to reality when he met his own spirit who made him realize that life was still sweeter than the sweetest love. Chan, unable to let go of the allure of the forest spirit, wasted away after refusing every girl he met only to return to the forest to reunite with his forest wife. The story 'The Tracker' opens with a light-hearted scene depicting the usual husband-wife relationship in a comic manner where the husband is unable to find anything on his own. The story takes a serious turn as it tells the

story of how the couple met as underground soldiers during the turbulent period of Naga history. Their love story is overshadowed by the guile of Ashi, a woman tracker depicting the perseverance of women in the underground Naga Army. The author skillfully writes about how relationships linger due to a history of shared experiences, how years have been added to their outward features as a result of the trauma they've undergone and how love is found even in the most traumatic places. The story 'Cherry Blossoms in April' was published earlier in *The Many that I am* by Zubaan. This is a story set in April 1944 when the Japanese army advanced into Kohima, of how a Naga woman fell in love with a 'fine' Japanese soldier who was so handsome that the women of the village wondered why he had come to battle as he did not look like "the sort who would go into battle" (Kire, 69). In this story, we find the courage of a woman in love, when she meets the one, her very own 'sky husband'. She boldly claimed the man whom she felt was rightfully hers. The short-lived love between Sanuo and the Japanese soldier transcends language barriers as they love wordlessly.

These are never the memories that remain and comfort. They are too fragile.

Perhaps we were never meant to love on earth. The finest love stories always end in death or parting. Perhaps we overreach ourselves when we love. (Kire, 76)

The two stories, 'Sometimes Life' and 'Sometimes Life (Bani's Story II)' are about the tragedy of unconfessed love. Insecure teenage love evolves into strong, unshakeable love as both parties are now sure of their true feelings. 'Sometimes Life' tells the love story of two couples - one is the story of aunt Nina and Uncle Fred whose love was still strong even after twenty years of marriage and the other one is the story of Bani and Liam, the difficult kind of love. Bani and Liam's love story is a teenage love story that started as a summer romance but was pursued only after many years had passed. Their misfortune was that they met during their teenage years, a time when they were so unsure of their feelings and actions. As the story ends, Bani's heart is full as her love, the one for whom she had waited thirty long years, finally had the courage to confess his love. The story 'Sometimes Life (Bani's Story II)' is a Romeo-Juliet kind of love dominated by family hate and finding love in the midst of hatred. The characters are being chained by the memory of the death of their loved one. The story 'Dodili Va'anilo' is about a woman finding her way back to her one true love, the man with the kindest eyes. This is a story about the love for the "one" who invited her, who wanted to enter her heart. The phrase 'Dodili Va'anilo' is a reference to Song of Songs 2:16 'My beloved is mine, and I am his' (Kire, 144). This is a short but extremely powerful story about 'his' love for a woman, a woman who has been away from him, in darkness for a very long time. In the last story 'How all Stories Should End', the author recalls memory looking back at the love story of uncle Ben and aunty Nima, the kind of love that carries you through the years. After celebrating sixty years of marriage, uncle Ben and aunty Nima leave Earth just 16 days apart from each other. Their love is so strong that even their spirits "reunited beyond all fear of parting" (Kire, 147). Easterine Kire, the author, aptly ends the book with the love story of uncle Ben and aunty Nima, a story based on real life. She writes -

Could any love story come up with a better ending than this one designed by the master storyteller? (Kire, 147)

Easterine Kire, the expert "storymaker", recalls memory by using simple words thus enabling her readers to live through her stories as she depicts the various kinds of love that a person may experience in this life. Her stories show how living and loving are easy with the "one" and that it takes no effort to be courageous and perseverant when love transcends time and the fear of being parted.

Reviewer's Details:

Dr. Lalthansangi Ralte is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Govt. J. Thankima College, Mizoram University. She finished her M. Phil and PhD from the Center for English Studies at JNU, New Delhi. Her areas of interest include Writings from Northeast India, Indian Writings in English, Translation Studies and Gender Studies. Her translations were included in *The Keepers of Knowledge: Writings from Mizoram* published by Zubaan. She has published a number of research papers on literature from Northeast India in peer-reviewed journals and books published by Springer Nature, Zubaan and Bloomsbury.