A Story of an Unlikely Love

Julianna went to Peru to learn and practice art. She quickly found her calling in macramé, the art of tying knot after knot in waxed string. She made necklaces, bracelets and rings and wore them and sold them. She was more concerned with tying herself down than letting herself go. She thought that if she stopped she might float away. In the village where she lived people still made their own clothes and traded in llamas. One day she decided to return home to New Hampshire but the villagers of Peru said no. They said she must stay until the balloon man came home. She waited and knotted and knotted until he came.

One villager saw a circular speck in the endless blue sky. The speck grew until they all saw that it was, indeed, a balloon. When it landed the balloon man stepped out. He was thin and bony. He hugged one person after another. When he came to Julianna he hugged her to, so full of joy, and she felt that his bones were hollow like the birds. There was a grand picnic to celebrate and Julianna went to sell her macramé. She wore everything she had made in order to display her wares. The knots felt heavy and chaffed against one another as she walked. The day was hot, too hot. She finally fell down on the ground in exhaustion. The balloon man came and sat down beside her saying, “Oh, you wear beautiful ropes.” Julianna asked him about his balloon and he said he had many and that he would show her. So he helped her take off the jewelry, each piece falling to the ground into a pile around her. Then, when she was light, they walked off to the balloons. She mentioned which one was her favorite and the balloon man insisted on giving her a ride in it.

Soon, in the little village in New Hampshire the word was going ‘round. Julianna’s name rolled off every tongue saying, “She’s found a man.” And soon, in the café on the farm they said, “She’s having a baby.” And it was true. Together, Julianna the jeweler and the Peruvian balloon man had a son. The son’s eyes were like the sky viewed from a balloon in the air. His hair was soft as waxed macramé string before it is knotted. Julianna could hardly work anymore for she was so lost in her son’s blue eyes. She ran her fingers over his downy hair and was overcome with her joy. The balloon man felt the same but when he saw the blue sky in his son’s eyes he felt the need to be up there in the air. So one day, the whole family went up in a
balloon. They traveled far without knowing where they drifted. Down below in the tiny home villages the names were whispered, “Julianna and the balloon man and their son...”

They landed reluctantly on an island in the sea. The baby laughed and laughed at the way the water and the sky blended together so that he could not tell them apart. The island floated, as if alone in the blue nothingness. They were all happy for a time but then Julianna started to miss her string. She wanted to knot something to wear. She felt too light, too lost in the miracles of the world. The island was too free so they got back in the balloon and sailed away.

They returned to the village in Peru and Julianna got back to work with her macramé spread around her. She made a tiny little bracelet for her son but as she tied it to his wrist she felt that something was wrong. She ran out to the balloons and saw the balloon man preparing to leave without her. “What are you doing? We’re not leaving now!” He said he was. He said his bones were hollow like she had thought and that he could not live tied to the ground. He wanted to fly away and maybe visit that island of freedom once more. There was nothing she could say. She stood on the hill holding her son’s hand and watched the balloon rise and recede into the misty distance.

After some time wandering Peru, Julianna took her son and returned to her hometown. There she was welcomed by many people who hugged her and gazed into the windows of her son’s eyes. Some even touched his downy hair. To this day, the little café on the farm has macramé necklaces for sale and the people point them out to strangers saying, “Buy one. Wear it for Julianna. Wear it for her son whose eyes are full of sky.”