

# **HONEY BOX**

**By Jerold London**

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## HONEY BOX



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When they take away the trees,  
the child picks up a stick  
and says, this is a tree, this the house  
and the family....

Through a door  
of what had been a house, into the field  
of rubble, walks a single lamb, tilting  
its head, curious, unafraid, hungry.

– Linda Gregg, “The Lamb” from *Chosen By the Lion*, 1994.

**DAD enters Trinity’s bedroom, carrying his six-year-old in his arms  
and putting her down in bed. The light is dim. As he is covering her –**

**DAD**

Nighty night.

**TRINITY**

Tell me a story, please.

**DAD**

Oh, Sweetheart, it's too late.  
We got a late start tonight, and I'm tired.

**TRINITY**

You said that last night, Daddy.  
And promised me a story tonight.  
Remember?  
"Come what may. Come what might."  
Remember?  
*Please?...*

**DAD**

Did I?

**TRINITY**

Yes, you did. And it's a debt unpaid.  
And you know what you say about debts unpaid.

**DAD**

Okay, Sweetie. You win....  
[beat] Once upon a time ....  
*Not all that long ago*, actually,  
when your mother lived on a farm,  
before she and I met ...

**TRINITY**

It was Destiny, Daddy, wasn't it? Like you always say.

**DAD**

It was our debt unpaid to the world, to have you, who was our real Destiny.  
Lucky you didn't get named that.

**TRINITY**

Why if Destiny is destiny, isn't it always good and happy? Shouldn't it be?

**DAD**

Well, yes, you might say that. Anyway, when your mother was about your age ...

**TRINITY**

Six?

**DAD**

About six.  
Maybe seven.  
Maybe eight.

**TRINITY**

Which?

**DAD**

Eight.  
But that's close enough, for my story, okay?

**TRINITY**

Okay.

**DAD**

Near her farm, just a few fields and miles away, there was a lake.  
It was a most mysterious lake. Water like you'd never see anywhere in the world.  
Crystal clear. Like a clear blue icicle.

**Offstage, Bach's Goldberg Variations on piano (roughly two minutes) – akin to:**  
[Video from Bing.com](#)

**DAD**

Swans swam in it. And next to it was a meadow, and not far, a dark woods....  
There were scary stories about those woods. Kids were scared to go in.  
Tales how little people living there could turn you into rabbits and deer, and sometimes even snakes, if you ever found out where their hidden treasure was.  
Kids they said went in there, and never were seen again.  
Like a neighbor girl, who was eighteen when she disappeared.  
And they said she was lost forever, in those woods, and her boyfriend, too.

**TRINITY**

What happened to them? Did they ever get found?

**DAD**

I don't know, Pumpkin.  
Your mother told me once that she thought she saw them, in New York.  
But she wasn't sure. At a distance.

**TRINITY**

Were they bunnies? Or deer?

**DAD**

Let's ask her. Later. If she knows. When she's not at the piano.  
I don't like to disturb her. When she's in her piano thought.  
She's not so happy, right now, you know.

**TRINITY**

Daddy?... When we die, do we become people, again? In heaven?  
Or sometimes bunnies and deer?

**DAD**

I don't know where you come up with questions like that.

**TRINITY**

Dreams.

**DAD**

Whew! I was afraid you were about to say, "evolution."

**TRINITY**

That, too. Evolution.

**DAD**

Anyway, one day her friend, Mitsubachi [蜜蜂], which is Japanese for "Honey Bee," showed her a wooden box, that he said came from the woods.

**DAD**

She didn't believe him at first. It had moving parts inside. Like a watch.  
You know. Like one of those magic boxes in Harry Potter.  
But much more complicated and tricky to open.  
He called it his "Honey Box,"  
and told your mother that it could make gold out of pennies kissed by a girl.  
He made her pinky promise she would never tell a soul about it.  
Not until she was married.  
Of course, she didn't believe a word of it,  
even though she *did* kiss a penny for him.  
Not until she found a gold chain, in their secret hiding place.

**TRINITY**

What secret hiding place?

**DAD**

Oh, I guess I forgot to tell you.  
In the meadow by the lake there were a pair of swaybacked horses,  
who belonged to some farmer nearby.  
They were friendly enough, wandering about together in the meadow.  
She named them Charles and Lindbergh.  
Those weren't their real names, but they didn't care.  
Sometimes they got mud-spattered.  
Sometimes they drooled.  
But they never minded her being there, and sometimes would let her touch them.  
When she'd bring apples or carrots. Which she always did, of course.  
Watching her through their long eyelashes.  
And with them watching, your mother and her friend were ...

**TRINITY**

Honey Bee?

**DAD**

Yes, with the horses standing nearby, your mother and Hachi Mitsu were brave  
enough to go a little way into the forbidden forest, where there was a tree with a  
hollow place in it, that was their secret hiding place, where she found the gold  
chain.

**TRINITY**

Made from the penny she kissed.  
Did she kiss more pennies?  
And get more gold chains?

**DAD**

We'll have to ask her. But what she told me, just that one gold chain.  
And, okay, something else....

**TRINITY**

What? What else?

**DAD**

There was a gold charm on it that said,  
I will never forget you....  
[beat] You know, Hachi Mitsu's family moved away,  
and your mother never was able to repay the kindness.

**TRINITY**

A debt unpaid....



Photo by [Ketut Subiyanto](#) from [Pexels](#)

**[No one has ever become poor by giving. – Anne Frank]**

**TRINITY**

Tell me another story. Please.

**DAD**

About your Mommy?

**TRINITY**

[*pouting*] I don't know.

**DAD**

Your Mommy loves you, this I know.

**TRINITY**

'Cause some weirdo tells you so.

**DAD**

'Cause my heartbeats tell me so.

**TRINITY**

She's mean.



**DAD**

She loves you.  
And wants to do the best for you.

**TRINITY**

I'll be safe. I'm old enough, to go to a sleepover.  
I promise.

**DAD**

Give it a rest. For the night. And let me tell you a brand new story....

Once upon a time in Japan there was a great highway.  
It ran from Tokyo to Kyoto, and back.  
It was called Tokaido Road.  
Along the highway was a wonderful hotel, called Minaguchi-ya Inn.  
On Suruga Bay.  
At a small, old town called Okitsu.  
Many famous people stayed there.  
From wealthy travelers, to Princes, to the Emperor himself.

**TRINITY**

Did you ever stay there, Daddy?

**DAD**

No. Sadly. It was no longer in business when I first got to go to Japan.  
It's more of a museum now.  
But there was a wonderful painter who stayed near there.  
Maybe the best painter of all time in Japan.

**TRINITY**

What was his name?

**DAD**

His name would have been as famous Hokusai.  
But be patient, my Pocket Cookie Monster, that's my story.

**TRINITY**

Okay.

**DAD**

Up, behind Okitsu, rises Satta Mountain,  
one of the most beautiful places along Tokaido Road.  
Anyone who finds herself there will lose her breath away: It's so beautiful.

With the blue of the bay below, and the black sand of Miho Beach, and the pines.  
And, of course, most of all, the magnificent view of Mount Fuji.  
I can't tell you how majestic snow-capped Mount Fuji is in person.  
I have pictures; but when you stand in her presence, and look at her.  
Well, it feels like maybe the gates of heaven itself.

**TRINITY**

Is heaven on Earth?

**DAD**

It is in Japan.

**TRINITY**

Okay.

**DAD**

There's an old Buddhist temple at the foot of Satta mountain,  
where there's a statue consecrated to Jizo, the Buddhist patron saint of travelers,  
where many travelers used to stop over the years.  
Near the temple, almost next door to it, a hermit painter lived.

**TRINITY**

What's a hermit?

**DAD**

A hermit is a man ... or a woman, I guess,  
who lives out, away from other people.  
All alone.  
In the woods, usually.  
And fixes their own food.  
And hardly ever talks to anybody.  
Some hermits are like that so they can pray a lot.  
This hermit painted.  
Beautiful pictures, of trees, and water, and waves.  
And particularly of Mount Fuji.  
But only for himself.  
He never thought of even showing his paintings to anyone else.  
But one day a traveler fell, and hurt himself, close to where the hermit lived.  
And the hermit heard his cries, and went and helped him.  
And while the traveler was in the hermit's small hut, he saw the paintings.  
How magnificent they were, he said.  
They should be seen by the Emperor.

In Tokyo, he said.  
They were so wonderful.  
The hermit was surprised.  
He didn't know what to say.  
So the traveler told him:  
I know a man.  
His name is Yoshi.  
He lives only two days from here.  
I can tell you the way.  
Here, I'll draw you a map.  
Which he did.  
Tell him Tarō sent you.  
He knows me.  
Very well.  
Tell him I owe you a great favor.  
For how you've cared for me, when I was hurt.  
Go to him, so that he can show you how to go to the Emperor,  
to present your splendid paintings to him.  
The Emperor will surely become your patron.

**TRINITY**

What's a patron, Daddy?

**DAD**

A patron is a very wealthy person,  
like the Emperor,  
who gives help and money to an artist, or a writer, or a composer,  
to be able to live and do their art better.

**TRINITY**

Like you?

**DAD**

Like us?  
O no, not like us.  
Mommy and I are not patrons.  
We're parents....  
But, in a way, I guess you're right.  
You *are* an artist, aren't you? Pokemon?  
And we do give you a chance to create. Don't we?

**TRINITY**

My Halloween costume.

**DAD**

[*laughs*] Yes. Your Halloween costume.

But let me finish my story.

Our artist went to see Yoshi.

He told him Tarō had sent him, because of how he'd helped him.

And would Yoshi help him to speak with the Emperor?

Now, to talk to the Emperor is not like talking to your friends at school.

Or your teacher. Or even the principal.

Being in the presence of the Emperor requires you to know how to bow properly.

And when to speak. And how to speak. And especially how to direct your eyes.

When to look at the Emperor, and when to keep your eyes lowered.

To the ground.

Our hermit friend had made a terrible mistake.

When he went to Yoshi, to ask a favor to learn how to speak with an emperor, he failed to do the first most important thing.

It was an immense mistake. Because in Japan, you never, never ever forget to get a proper present for anyone you do serious business with.

And selecting the correct present itself can be almost as important.

For example, you never give a gift of something that has four or nine in it.

Like four roses.

Never.

**TRINITY**

Why?

**DAD**

Because “four” in Japanese sounds like the similar word for “death.”

It's just not simple.

It takes thought and consideration.

And when he neglected to get Yoshi any present at all, he shamed Yoshi.

Now, when a person in Japan is shamed, he won't tell you so.

Not in words, or questions.

But you'll find out.

What Yoshi did was to teach the hermit everything he would need to know.

Except for his eyes and one special phrase everyone seeing the Emperor must say.

When the hermit went to meet the Emperor,

and stared at him,

and never said the special words a person must say to the Emperor,

he was thrown out of the palace, and told never to come back.

Because he hadn't learned how to be polite.  
How to be polite to the Emperor.  
But before that, how to be polite, with a gift, to his teacher, Yoshi.  
It's so important to respect other people.  
Not just in Japan.  
And he went back to his hut.  
And burned all that he had painted.  
And no one ever learned his name.  
Or ever knew he was the greatest Japanese painter of all time.

**TRINITY**

Have I shamed Mommy?

**DAD**

Because you made her cry?

**TRINITY**

But she always says, No. And you always say, Yes.

**DAD**

Do I?

**TRINITY**

What should I do?  
Get her a present?

**DAD**

How about making her one?

**TRINITY**

Tonight?  
So she'll let me go to the overnight?

**DAD**

Because you love her.  
*And* because you respect her.  
*And* because she loves you.  
More than anything.

**TRINITY**

She doesn't always say no, does she?  
And you don't always say yes, do you?

**DAD**

No.

**TRINITY**

I'm going to give her a hug.

**TRINITY gets out of bed. And, as she is leaving her room:**

**TRINITY**

And a kiss.  
And tell her I'm sorry.  
And I love her.

**DAD sits on Trinity's bed, and waits. She returns, and he tucks her back into bed. As he is leaving her room:**

**DAD**

Night, night. Sleep tight.

**TRINITY**

Don't let the bedbugs bite.

**DAD**

Wish you may, wish you might,  
sleep in soft dreams through the night.

**TRINITY**

The moon is big. The moon is bright.  
The moon will keep me safe tonight.

**DAD**

Goodbye to goblins. Farewell to fright.  
Adiós to all that's not quite right.  
Have tender rest, my sweet delight,  
till morning comes on its morning flight.

**Exits.**

**END**



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