

KOKO-CHAN AND THE WOOD FAIRY

By Jerold London

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jlondon@deepweaversfaith.com**



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The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind.

– William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

KOKO-CHAN AND THE WOOD FAIRY

TIME AND PLACE

Present. A park.

Stage right or **stage left**: Kai's story of the wood fairy and the dragon can be pantomimed concurrently using actors in all black or all white, and puppets.

CHARACTERS

JACK DAWKINS, a child.

SIR, Jack's father.

KAI, a story-teller.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

SCENE – SUNDAY AFTERNOON

SIR and JACK are walking through the park together, when they see KAI sitting on his usual park bench. He appears to be nodding. They approach him.

JACK

Good afternoon, Mister Kai. How are you today?

KAI

Opening his eyes.

Oh, dreaming, my friend, Jack, just dreaming.

JACK

Dreaming of Japan?

KAI

Dreaming of a wood fairy.... Our word for them is Yōsei. ["Yo Say"]

JACK

Are they nice? Or are they mostly naughty in Japan?

KAI

Sit. With me. Both of you. And I'll tell you a story of one of them.

SIR

Gladly. Thank you, Sir....

So good to see you again.

**JACK and SIR sit down on the bench
next to KAI.**

KAI

My pleasure.
I hope the two of you are well.

SIR

We are, thank you.
And you?

KAI

Pensive.
The world's a strange world, John. It captures one's spirit in a bottle, sometimes.
And won't let it out no matter how much you squirm trying to get it free.

JACK

Are you missing your home in Nagasaki?

KAI

All sorts of thoughts, Jack. All sorts of memories knocking about.
At times I am so happy with people, my heart leaps to see them walk by me.
But sometimes people make me feel irritable.
Can you understand?

SIR

Some, more than others. Yes. And some you miss more than others.

KAI

Yes. Yes, indeed....
But ... a story I promised....
One evening as the sun was going down for a night's rest Koko-Chan
Do you remember her?

JACK

Yes, Sir. The girl with the kittens, who lived in Nagasaki after the war.
And nearly got drowned.

KAI

Ah yes, you remember.
So, one evening, when the sun was going down, Koko-Chan was walking by
herself in the hills and woods, not far from her home outside Nagasaki,
when she heard a fairy singing to the trees, thinking no one could see him:

KAI

Five windows light a life we feel and see:
At one, called Reverence, we stand and breathe.
Another brings us music of the spheres.
A third lends touch of rain like heaven's tears.
A fourth is nature looking through the glass.
The last lets spirits, when they're ready, pass.
But Man resists, for stolen joys are sweet,
and life seems incomplete when it's complete.

Koko crept close, softly as a cat, and caught the mocking wood fairy in the scarf she was wearing around her neck, like a butterfly.
“How do you know all this, Sir?” she asked him, wriggling at first inside her scarf.
“And where did you learn that song?”

The fairy, seeing he was utterly in her possession, answered:
“My mistress, I am yours. Command me as you will.”

“You say that life seems incomplete, when it's complete. Why?
And what does that mean?”

The fairy laughed.
“If you let me, I could write a tale your eyes have never seen.
On leaves of flowers. But only if you feed me.”

“Feed you what?”

“Love, thoughts, and kisses in the air at night.”

“You're strange.”

“So are you, gathering wild flowers the way you do.”

“How do you know about that?”

“You have a young, female, human heart, have you not?
And where else have all the flowers gone?”

She agreed.

“The first to bloom is the first to wither.
It is always the case.
First born and first consumed.
In flowers, bees, and dragons.”

KAI

“Dragons?!” she exclaimed.

“Do you like dragons, my young lass?
Do you know that dragons feel pain, too? And the loneliness of life?”

“Is that why they do the mean things they do?”

“Roaming dark and desolate mountains in awe of death.
Shrieking curses into hollow trees.
Waking up the thunders of the deep.
Arousing men’s thoughts of war.
Awakening fears of bloody revolution.
Of lies and little lies.
For great men lie great lies
while small men lie small lies.
But all men feel the weight of fear at one time or another.”

“You’re making me shiver.
Haven’t we suffered war enough?”

“War is its own dragon.
Many a dragon.
With fearsome horns.
Like lies.
For war is the evil child of dragons, fears, and lies,
which bears hard upon the innocent as they struggle.”

“Yes, so I have seen,” says Koko-Chan, choking a bit.

“There once was a dragon that dwelled in a great lake near an even greater forest. In that forest lived a woodcutter with his beautiful daughter he loved more than all the world. A rich woodcutter, who had collected gold secretly most of his life. One day the dragon caught sight of her, and followed her to their home. The woodcutter saw him coming, and grabbed his largest ax. Not wanting to fight that day, the sun being too bright, and not wanting to be cut, the dragon shapeshifted into a handsome young man, and asked the woodcutter if he could sit and talk with his lovely daughter. They agreed on gold instead, and the woodcutter sent the young man away with some. But he knew he would return soon enough as a thieving dragon.”

JACK

What did the woodcutter do?

KAI

Koko-Chan asked the same question.
And the wood fairy told her:
“The next morning the woodcutter left with his daughter.
They travelled to a temple many, many, many miles away,
where he told the monks living there what had happened.
The oldest monk, who must have been nearly a hundred,
said only one person in Japan might be able to help the woodcutter.
He was a giant of a young man, named Kento, who lived near Kyoto,
but was afraid to leave his house.”

“Afraid to leave his house?” The woodcutter groaned.
“What good is he, against a dragon who wants my daughter?”

“He needs only to defeat the dragon that holds him in his house,
and he will be more than enough to defeat your dragon.
He was the bravest lad I ever knew, but ruined by his shame.
He once borrowed a most precious gold bracelet from a friend,
and lost it, and never could face his friend, or the world again.”

JACK

I thought Japanese people forgave.

KAI

There are some things they forgive more easily than others.
And the hardest for them to forgive is themselves.
When they blame themselves for an insult or wrong to another,
or bad grades at school,
or some other shortcoming which they fear the world will never forgive them.
It may shock you, but as many as a million young people in Japan today are holed
up in their homes, terrified to go outside.
And for one reason.
Fear of shame and embarrassment. Fear of meeting people who will see it.
Fear of standing out as being different.
We have a word: hikiko mori. [“Hee Kee Ko More Ee”]
Everybody knows it.
It means seriously hiding away ... from everybody and everything.
Almost like paralysis.

JACK

Are they insane? Or sick? Or just being like hermits?

KAI

Fear indeed can be a dragon whose breath burns a person's sanity.
But they are actually more like modern-day hermits.
I have a good friend that has happened to.
For over ten years now....
But, back to my story.
I mean, the wood fairy's story.

The woodcutter and his daughter returned home just long enough for him to get his most valuable gold bracelet.
Then they left for Kyoto, to find the young man named Kento.
Which they did.
It was, at first, difficult.
But when the woodcutter explained the danger his daughter was in, and was able to show Kento the bracelet he could return to his friend, the door was opened, and they entered.

A plan was made.
First was for Kento to find his friend and return the gold bracelet.
Seeing Kento again meant more to that friend than any bracelet.
Nevertheless, he showed extreme gratitude for the one Kento returned to him, saying it was far finer than the one he had loaned.
He knew to say he didn't deserve it, but careful not to insult Kento by refusing it.
Next, was to collect sake bowls, a large tub, and enough sake to fill it.
When they returned to the woodcutter's home in the forest, Kento proceeded to set the tub out in an open space, and filled it to the brim with sake.
He left it standing there, with the bowls, as though a huge party was being planned, together with music and sounds of merriment.
All the noise attracted the dragon, who could not resist drinking the sake.
Nearly all of it, collapsing, asleep, on the spot.
Kento, who was waiting secretly in the woods, seized the moment and slayed the dragon....

JACK

Is that the end of the story?

KAI

Koko-Chan asked the wood fairy what happened.
And he told her what she already thought.
That Kento and the woodcutter's daughter were married, had several fine children, and kept her father company for the rest of his life.

JACK

And ...?

KAI

“Is not this the story of a great hero?” the wood fairy asked Koko-Chan.

Koko-Chan thought about it, and agreed.

“What more of me do you wish?” the wood fairy asked her.

“To remain friends,” she replied.

“I shall come back here every week until I am married,
and you can instruct me so I know when life that seems incomplete is actually
complete.”

And that she did.

JACK

It is a fine story, Mr. Kai. Thank you.

SIR

Yes, thank you, Friend. It’s always a joy, finding you here.

KAI

My pleasure, I assure you.

JACK

Mr. Kai?

Is it true that so many young men in Japan hide away, like you said, at home?

KAI

Unfortunately it is. The most real dragons in Japan are fear.

Fear of losing face. Fear of losing job.

And fear of losing honor.

Losing your reputation in Japan is the worst stigma a man can have.

JACK

“Losing face?” I’m not so sure, Mr. Kai, I know what you mean by that.

KAI

In Japan you never embarrass another person.

Because that would cause him to lose face.

You don’t openly disagree with people.

And you never bring shame on your family, or a friend, or a co-worker.

The people of my country believe in the group over the individual.

Do you understand?

JACK

You don't want to call attention to yourself.

KAI

You most assuredly do not want to call attention to yourself.
And especially not by doing something that embarrasses another person.
To disagree with someone in public is making them lose face.
And face is everything in Japan.
It's an offense that can ruin love and friendship for life.
The same as losing a valuable item put in your trust by another.

JACK

But if you tell the truth

KAI

Truth is not that important.
Not when correcting someone shows disrespect.
Truth is not, as Americans say, "black or white."
Truth is in the situation, and what the situation calls for.
And the situation always call for respect, and protecting another's face.

JACK

It's complicated, isn't it? And I have a lot to learn, don't I?

KAI

You may say so, but I'd never tell you that.

JACK and SIR both laugh, and then they stand. KAI likewise stands.

SIR

Time to go. Thank you; and a pleasure as always.

KAI

Thank you. It always helps me to talk to you.... Until we meet again.

As SIR and JACK exit, JACK turns and waves.

KAI bows, and then sits back down on the park bench watching them leave.

END