

KOKO-CHAN & THE NOAH'S ARK TRAP

By Jerold London

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jlondon@deepweaversfaith.com



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**I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.**

– Gerard Manley Hopkins, Sonnet

KOKO-CHAN AND THE NOAH'S ARK TRAP

TIME AND PLACE

Present. A park.

Stage right or **stage left**: A wooden ark.

CHARACTERS

JACK DAWKINS, a child.

SIR, Jack's father.

KAI, a story-teller.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

SCENE – ANOTHER SUNDAY AFTERNOON

SIR and JACK are walking through the park together, as they often do on Sunday afternoons, when they see KAI sitting on his usual park bench. He sees them, and bows his head. They approach him.

JACK

Good afternoon, Mister Kai.
So wonderful always finding you here.

KAI

I was hoping you would come today.
Some things I've been thinking to tell you.

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

JACK

Should we be excited?

KAI

A story, first.
And then my thoughts.

JACK

About Nagasaki? Are you going to visit Nagasaki?

KAI

Patience, Jack.
The story first.

JACK

Okay.

KAI

Koko-Chan? Remember her?

JACK

Of course.
The girl with the kittens and the wood fairy.

KAI

Yes. Who taught her many valuable things in life. Some that changed her life.

JACK

Like, you're *my* wood fairy, sort of.

KAI

A smile and brief touch on Jack's arm.

I believe I might have mentioned an ark Koko once found.

JACK

I don't think so. I don't remember an ark.... In Japan?

KAI

Yes. In Japan we had an ark, too.

For there were many, many arks around the world,
to fit in all the animals of the world.

All the wolves, and bears, and warthogs, and what-nots.

Just imagine the trouble they caused.

For example, I wouldn't be caught dead carrying a keelback snake on board.

Not only is their venom deadly, they can even poison a person through their skin.

Or blind a person with their spit. And they hate, absolutely hate boats.

Or Japan's giant hornets, and centipedes, and spiders.

Japan probably has a thousand different kinds of poisonous ones.

They give me shivers just thinking of them.

It's crazy to imagine loading and carting all those creatures around in a boat.

And feeding them, and the butterflies and bees. Keeping them all safe on board.

Much less on the African ark: the rhinos, hippos, crocodiles, and cape buffalo.

Or the kangaroo, wallabies, and platypuses on the Aussie ark.

JACK

You're not an ark-lover, are you, Mister Kai?

KAI

Arks give me claustrophobia of the bladder.

JACK

Where did Koko-Chan find one?

KAI

In a strange way.

You see, the wood fairy taught Koko-Chan two amazing secrets.

One was to stand so sill she could become invisible.

JACK

Invisible?!

KAI

Yes. Invisible.
[*pointing*] Like that girl, standing over there.

JACK

[*looking*] What girl?

KAI

By the tree.

JACK

I don't see any girl.

KAI

Exactly

JACK

Oh.

KAI

And the second thing he taught her was how to solve puzzle boxes.
Right up to the most complex and intricate Himitsu box.
Have you ever seen a wooden puzzle box?

JACK

No. But I've heard about them.
Some, they say, can take hours to open. Or maybe never.

KAI

That's right....
One day Koko-Chan was wandering through the woods when she caught sight of
a man walking in a strange way.
Furtively. Pulling a loaded cart behind with a suspicious air about him.

JACK

Furtively?

SIR

It means trying to avoid attention.
Being sneaky-like.
Sometimes so obvious it accomplishes just the opposite.

JACK

Oh.

KAI

And that's what it did.
It made Koko-Chan suspicious.
So she followed the man.
Invisibly.
All the way to an ark, sitting at the edge of the forest.

JACK

It was still together?

KAI

Still standing. Actually, it was new. A copy of the old ark.
And the man went up to the side of it, and opened it like a puzzle box.
He probably was the one who built the thing in the first place.
And when the door opened, Koko-Chan heard a woman cry out from inside.
The man quickly went in; pulled the cart after him;
said, "Yet I feed you, that you hate me"; and slammed the door shut.
After that Koko-Chan could hear nothing from inside.

JACK

The voice was hiding in there?

KAI

She was a prisoner.

JACK

What did Koko-Chan do?

KAI

She waited there. Invisibly. Until the man came out again, and locked the door.
And for a while longer, before she went up to the ark.
A person of less instruction and perseverance would certainly have failed.
But Koko-Chan, after a matter of a few minutes, opened the door.

JACK

What did she see?

KAI

A girl in a corner, wearing only torn and tattered clothes.
She was sitting at a small wooden table, eating like she was famished.
At first she didn't notice that it was someone different who'd come in.
The light inside being full of darkness, not day.

JACK

Did Koko-Chan say anything?

KAI

“Hello....”

The girl shrieked, “Who are you?”

“Koko.”

“What are you doing here?”

Has he captured you, too?”

“No one has captured me. I’m Koko, free as the wind.”

“Then run. Run!!”

The girl jumped from the table, and bolted out the open door.

“Run. Run,” she screamed, “before he comes back.”

Koko followed her out.

She was holding her eyes, because they couldn’t stand the sunlight.

Koko had to lead her into the woods, where the girl could see better.

Years of nighttime light in the ark had partially blinded her to the day.

JACK

How did she get in there?

KAI

She was kidnapped.

Many years before, maybe, five or seven, she’d been wandering through the woods, like Koko, and the man had grabbed her from behind, with a sack over her head, and dragged her into the ark.

She never knew how to get out.

JACK

How did she live?

KAI

The man would come and go, and bring her enough food not to starve to death.

SIR

What a horrible life!

KAI

As horrible as you could imagine.

JACK

How did she live?

KAI

She never gave up hope that her parents would never stop searching for her,
and someday save her. That hope kept her alive.
But it was Koko-Chan who was the angel of rescue.

JACK

What happened to her?

KAI

She went into a hospital for a month, to help her get back on her feet,
emotionally, after what she'd been through.
Then home to her parents, and a flood of tears.
After a while she went on to university, and then got a job.
In the end I heard she was married and had a family of her own.
And every day she would say, "I am free! I am free!"

SIR

Not so free, I'd wager, that she'd ever let a daughter walk in a woods alone.

JACK

What about the man? What happened to him?

KAI

He died of a guilty heart, fractured by his shame.
I think about that. A lot about that. What he did was unforgiveable.
But while he was doing it, it kept him from feeling it.
Only about not getting caught.

JACK

What *are you* thinking about, Mr. Kai?

SIR

[*with a caution in his voice not to ask personal questions*] Jack....

KAI

Jack ... and John, Koko-Chan's story was such a difficult story to tell you.
Because it makes me think of me.
And I've thought for days whether I should tell it or not.
But, because of my personal reason, I needed to.
Is that okay?

SIR

Of course, Friend. Anything we can do.

JACK

How can we help?

KAI

I came to America twelve years ago.
And not one day has passed that I haven't thought of my brother.
Back in Japan.
I've told you some about him. But not that he was my brother.
How he'd gone into hiding inside his house and won't come out.
Because I'd loaned him money he couldn't repay, for a new business idea.
And the shame made him become a hermit.

I made an assumption that proved so wrong.
I assumed he was like me. And he's not.
Not all brothers are alike.
Me, willing to sacrifice my whole personal life for my work.

In Japan you can hardly expect to succeed on your own if you don't give 100% of yourself to your work.
It's more important sometimes than family and friends.

[*beat*] I never got married or had my own family. And few, if any, real friends.
I worked night and day for my company.
No time for friendships, or, really anything else.
Except for music for an hour or so at night alone. That was my only love.

My brother never gave 100% of himself.
Not even 50%.
His idea was a good one. A very good one.
I could have made it into millions.
But my hands were full with my own company.

JACK

What made you leave it?

KAI

You are exactly right:
What made me leave it?
It was because one day I had all the wealth I cared to earn, and more.
And still all the shortcomings I'd had from childhood.

JACK

Like me?

KAI

Worse.
Far worse, I believe.

JACK

Inattention?

KAI

Selfishness.
Not in a greed for owning things.
But in a greed for always doing things my way.
And in Japan that can be a serious shortcoming.

JACK

Like a tooth.

KAI

What??...
Oh, you mean like a toothache.
Yes. Like a toothache.

JACK

When I get nervous, I have a tooth that aches.
My tongue goes around, inside my mouth, to feel each tooth as I count them.
And one always says it hurts.
On its own.

KAI

In Japan ... something else:
You won't find people less helpful if you want to know your shortcomings.
No one dares offend you.
I lost my brother over a debt he could never repay, and I would never ask him to repay.
No amount of money is worth that.
That's what I had to learn.
On my own.

JACK

I don't have a brother.

SIR

People are the way they are, Son.
Some have brothers, and some don't.

KAI

And some lose them.

SIR

All life is, is lessons, and opportunities, and losing someone you love.

KAI

It's left me with thuds in my heart and a boat to ride out to sea,
drifting on thoughts and dreams.

I feel as though *I've* been imprisoned in an ark.

Your Emily Dickinson.

And Howard Hughes.

And Germany's Nietzsche, when he had his nervous breakdown.

And our country's Yamabushi monks.

Isolated and alone, even with people all around.

SIR

Money is not the problem, I take it.

Nor a lack of love in your heart.

KAI

Pride, it is.

JACK

And face.

KAI

Ah, yes. Face.

JACK

Where can you go and find a brother?

KAI

Home. It's the only place.

If I could tell my brother in Japanese that my love for him is more important than
the self-esteem of his I helped shatter. And I am so sorry for doing that.

That it took me this long in America to discover *my* shame.

JACK

Home.

SIR

And hope.

[beat] I have an idea

JACK

What?

KAI

[beat] What's your idea, Son?

SIR

Your brother's idea.

JACK

What do you mean?

KAI

Buy your brother's idea from him.

JACK

What?

KAI

You said it was a good one. You could have made millions out of it...
Buy it from him.

JACK

Just buy it?

KAI

Life is complicated, isn't it?

JACK

Indeed. Complicated.
A brother for a life, here on a bench in this quiet park.
My freedom for his freedom....

KAI

Do you have to go, Mr. Kai?

JACK

I am afraid I must.

KAI

Will we see you again?

JACK

KAI

In time, maybe.

JACK

If time doesn't get spread thin like butter.

KAI

If time

JACK

And your stories?

KAI

I'm afraid my stories would become bad ones, if I stayed here.

JACK

I don't want there to be bad stories, and me not know them.

SIR

You're going?

KAI

It is time for me to go.

Thank you for all you've done for me. Thank you.

KAI stands. SIR and JACK do likewise.

KAI

Bows to them.

Until we meet again.

KAI, and SIR and JACK, exit separately.

END