

Kori and Alo

A play for three Bunraku
puppet artists and a narrator

By

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This is an excerpt from the last section of "Kori and Alo". The puppets enact the text below.

Section 3 – Kori's Return

NARRATOR

The hillside was strewn with twisted forks, pots bent in half, a piano disemboweled, books swelled like sponges, the cobbler's leather cramped and shrunken as a crone's fist. Wardrobes, cupboards, and trunks lay wrenched open, their contents flung for miles. A village that had valued privacy above everything lay naked and open to the world. It was the opposite of the biblical flood. The land was not clean after, there was no dove, there was no life at all. No wonder no one was here. Who could bear to see this?

Kori spent the night amid the rubble.

In the morning, by her palm lay a cup of berries.

"Alo," Kori said.

Close by, a can rolled down hill. "Alo, are you all right? Did they look after you? Did they feed you?" It felt to Kori as if Alo were waiting for something, so she said the thing that had settled in her heart. "Alo, it is I who should give you berries. I didn't mean to leave you in the house. I don't care if you never talk, I don't care what you want to collect, but I cannot bear to be without you. Alo, I'm sorry I let go of your hand."

Amid a grove of indigo plants nearby, Kori saw her brother's eyes. Kori stayed very still, but was happy she had figured out where to look for Alo. A cemetery of lost objects – where else would this child go?

"How long have you been here," Kori asked.

Alo crept out of the brush. She was thinner, but seemed unharmed.

"How did you escape?" Kori asked.

No answer.

She so longed to touch the child, but she knew to wait. She sat on her hands.

"Are you all right?" Alo stood and showed her she was fine.

"Did you eat?" Alo held out a scrunched pail filled with berries.

"Who else is up here?"

Alo shook her head.

It was too much. Kori reached for Alo, but the girl retreated behind the indigo plants.

"We have to go back down," Kori said. "They need things."

Alo shrugged.

Kori bit her lip. No, this was ridiculous. If Alo wanted to ignore her a little, fine. But the villagers who had done her no harm?

"Please," Kori said, "come with me. I cannot turn my back on them, but I don't want to leave you."

The child did not move, so Kori started out alone. Half way down, she turned and saw Alo. She had lost her shoes and her bare feet were swollen and cut from climbing on the mounds of clutter.

Things had disintegrated below. The crying had stopped, but the soothing had, too. It was sweltering. The high clouds did nothing to protect them from the sun. Poultry

Netti, Colm the fisherman, Madche the seamstress, Ott the carter were at each other's throats.

You who lived just across from me, did not call out until it was too late for me to gather my things.

You, to whom I gave so much bread had the opportunity to save my silver spoons, but just ignored it.

You, who could have carried the old people on your backs – I saw you weighed down by things you were picking up off the ground. I made a list of what you took.

You were supposed to have rung the bell.

You were responsible for water – where is it?

You are hoarding food, aren't you?

Why wouldn't you go look for survivors when we asked? What were you doing instead that you did not want us to find out about?

You climbed the fruit trees up in the hills, but didn't bring any fruit back for others?

Kori hated Alo to hear this. "Netti," Kori said, "we can't live like this."

But Netti barely looked at her. She who had never turned her eyes away no matter how hard it was to say her peace. "I need," Netti said. "I need, I need, I need." Kori thought of her father; sometimes she had actually found what he needed. Poultry Netti needed everything. And how could anyone get her *that*?

"Calm down, Netti," Kori said. "Whatever you need, I'll find for you."

"Alo," Kori called. Netti needed care, but Alo was already walking back up the beach toward the hills. This was preposterous. They had come to help, but had solved nothing. She wanted to slap the girl.

"You say nothing," Kori called after the girl. "Last night the first thing I did was to come find you, and I

apologized and still you do not understand how people are here. They saved you, they took care of you. Can you do nothing for them?

The girl walked on ahead, carefully picking up her feet as they were very cut up now.

Fine, Kori thought. Alo had made her bed, now she could lie in it. For her part, Kori was staying here to rock Netti back and forth. When Netti was quiet, Kori went up the hill.

On the way, she prepared a sermon about ingratitude. It dripped with sarcasm. By the time she arrived, a plate of fruit waited for her. She could hear Alo in the underbrush collecting objects.

What if she had not run out of the christening, Kori wondered. What if she had stayed long enough to ensure the child was safe. They certainly would not have been in this mess. These and many other such thoughts kept Kori up all night, accompanied by Alo's tinkering in the woods. When morning broke, and Kori looked at her hands, it seems she had woven a pair of slippers for Alo out of reeds and grass. When she found Alo asleep, she left the slippers by her.

That morning Alo appeared wearing the slippers and carrying two large sacks. She was setting off down the path toward the beach. Perhaps she had a change of heart. Kori followed.

Netti had ceased to talk; the others ceased to blame. What would they stop doing next, Kori wondered. They hardly noticed Kori when she spoke to them. She tried to get them to drink a little water.

Alo dumped her collection of junk on the beach and covered it with a cloth she had stitched from remnants. Clearly the bright red patches were from Madche the seamstress' shop, but Madche made no sign she recognized them.

When Kori next looked, Alo was on her way back up the hill. Kori followed in the late afternoon.

For Kori the days turned anonymous and featureless; they fed one into the other. She saw to the people, while Alo hauled more and more objects to the beach. Kori didn't have it in her to tell Alo the things no longer meant anything - however good her intentions were to return them to their owners. Maybe the girl was doing the best she could. Kori hoped she wouldn't be too disappointed. For now there was food and water and no one had died, but it was silent all the time now. Kori wondered if she would ever find someone to talk to again. Then she realized she, too, had said nothing for days.

One morning when Kori awoke there was no sign of Alo. Her bags were gone and so were her slippers. Then Kori heard the sound of a bell and ran down the path.

The peeling came from a saucepan the wave had flattened and which Alo played as a gong. She ended the fanfare when Kori arrived. Some of the people were standing,

In front of them were Alo's mounds, covered in their tarps. The piles had grown taller and elaborate. Still, the people noticed nothing beyond themselves.

Alo untied the tarps and folded them away. At first all Kori saw what she expected: piles of debris. But as she got closer, she saw each piece now had shape and purpose. During the last weeks, Alo had bolted, bent, fitted, and hammered the latches, bird cages, candlesticks, harnesses, flutes, coal scuttles, well buckets, drain boards, oilcloth, and a thousand other things into houses. A crate was now a simple window. A cart bed, now a door. Each of Alo's homes had a place to keep food, a place to eat and a place to sleep.

The people showed no sign they saw anything.

Alo guided Netti through the door of a house. She found Netti's husband and brought him in, too. Then she did the same with everyone until they all had houses and everyone was inside.

Then Kori and Alo waited.

That evening they stood outside the home Alo had made for them. The sun, low on the horizon cast the house in

silhouette and Kori noticed its true shape: a heron, legs bent as if about to take flight. Netti's house was a crude teepee made of wire; Colm's was like a spiral or a cyclone created by dozens of scrubbing brushes suspended on invisible lines.

It was not the next day nor the next, but soon after, when Kori and Alo were awakened in their home by talking.

"Shall we go find your cloth?" Madche's husband asked.

"No, no," Madche said, "I'll sew something else now. Maybe sails or covers for these homes. We'll need them soon.

In another house Colm the Fisherman discovered Ott the Carter's silver spoons holding up the mantle piece.

"Take them," Colm told Ott, "I hardly need a mantle piece."

"Oh," said Ott, "I'm not the kind to eat from silver spoons."

"I remember what kind you are," said Colm. Ott eyed him. Was Colm angling for a fight? Then Colm said, "You lent me your mule."

"And you gave me bread every other week," said Ott.

"And your wife brought me soup when I was sick."

"You climbed the fruit trees up in the hills and brought us apples."

"I still owe you for the spoons," Ott said.

"Then help me fish," Colm said. "It's not like a mule's going to appear anytime soon and what's a carter without a mule?"

"You told me many times I didn't have what it takes to be a true fisherman," said Ott.

"It takes nothing to be a fisherman," said Colm, "just some string and the desire to fish."

"Then I'm a fisherman!"

"Where did you learn all this?" Kori asked Alo. But she knew. She knew before Alo wrote her bother's name in the sand. So her fears for Alo's safety had been unfounded. Halle had cared well for her. After all, Alo was the chance Halle had waited for all his life.

Netti came out of her house and went in search of rabbits. They were in a new place, but there were plenty of them.

END OF THE PLAY