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DISORIENTALISM

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the movie dog

WHEN SOKOBON WAS FIVE, HE WANTED A DOG. Mamabon took him to a movie in which a herd of puppies were running around from beginning to end. He wanted that puppy in the movie, a black-spotted coach dog that ran after your carriage for miles and miles. A little pup you could take along everywhere.

Somebody told him that if you wanted a dog, you should not tell your parents because it would never work; you ought to keep telling them that you want a little brother until you get a dog.

But Sokobon knew the little brother thing did not work, either. His friend Paragon had tried that spell on her parents already. When she learned that they had arranged to adopt a Korean baby for lonely Paragon, it was too late to confess to them that what Paragon had really wanted was a fluffy mew-mew tumbleweed kitten to play with, not the ugly hairless roaring creature to compete with for parental attention.

So Sokobon thought it would be best just to be honest and say that he wanted a movie dog.

“A movie dog?” Papabon raised his eyes from the evening paper.

Sokobon nodded standing patiently in front of him. “I’ll be good. I’ll take care of the dog.”

Papabon stared at Sokobon for a while and then returned to his newspaper, saying, “You can have a video. Then you’ll be able to watch it a million times.”

“No!” Sokobon raised his voice. “I’m not talking about the dog movie. I’m talking about the movie dog. I want a puppy.”

Mamabon detected the noise and came out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. “Why not, Papabon? If he’ll be a good boy, we can get the movie dog for Christmas.”

Papabon unwillingly nodded. He looked bitter whenever he capitulated to Mamabon, for he loved her too much.

Sokobon circled around Mamabon jumping and waving. “Movie dog. Movie dog.”

Christmas came. Sokobon had been a very good boy: he had minded his evil babysitter; he had put his toys away by himself; he had never forgotten to wash his hands with soap whenever he came in from outside; he had gone to bed at eight sharp. Sokobon knew that Papabon and Mamabon had put his movie dog under their Christmas tree. There was a huge box nicely wrapped with a bow, quivering and quaking

occasionally. When Sokobon unwrapped the gift, his dream puppy would bounce out of the box, jump onto his lap and lick his sugarcoated face, wagging its tail like a propeller. It would be a boy dog. He would name it Bonbon.

Something rustled inside the box. His parents nodded at him and Sokobon rushed to the tree. When he opened the box, a dark furry thing sluggishly walked out like a somnambulant nutria. It was two feet long, almost a foot wide, and had a fat boxy trunk. Its round face lacked expression, and it was cross-eyed. It had a very short neck and legs like a wild boar, but it was covered with thick, blackish curly hair.

It sniffed twice looking at Sokobon. It was a dog, anyway.

Without a word, the three watched it shambling to the TV set in the living room.

“This is not the movie dog,” Sokobon mumbled and sat on the carpet cradling his knees in his arms. His eyes were cast down at his toes and grew larger and larger. He had to raise his face before water dropped out of them because he did not want to break his parents’ hearts as they had his.

Mamabon looked at Papabon.

“Why, Sokobon,” said Papabon jumping out of the couch and speaking briskly like a lying salesman, “This *is* the movie dog!”

Sokobon’s eyebrows gathered even closer.

“Look, Sokobon!” Papabon trotted to the dark creature that was staring at the blank TV screen. He grabbed the short stiff tail of the dog and twisted it counterclockwise.

Then its sleepy eyes turned vivid. Its jaws seemed almost smiling. As Papabon rotated the tail, its eyes glowed brighter like a bicycle headlamp with a dynamo on a wheel. Light radiated from its fully opened eyes, whose beams projected two round illuminations around the TV set. The creature sat so that the floodlights stayed on the white wall above the TV. As its eyes turned square, the two spotlights on the wall transformed into one big rectangle. There was a flat image of a lion roaring behind a circled ribbon on the wall.

“See?” Papabon looked at his son showing his teeth. “Fun, isn’t it?” But Sokobon looked even sadder.

“Oh, I know what you want,” Papabon said and began to twist the dog’s tail clockwise. The image on the wall stopped and the dog opened its jaws. Its mouth was torn up to its ears like a nutcracker or a snake swallowing an egg. The jaws opened so wide that its nose was above its eyes. The upper jaw turned over above its forehead and the lower jaw dropped to its forelegs with its lolling tongue. As Papabon kept twisting the tail, the jaws reached its trunk exposing its fleshy esophagus inside out. Steam rose. Still grinning at Sokobon, Papabon thrust his free hand into its stomach and exchanged video tapes. Then he rotated the tail counterclockwise again.

Soon the shades of those black-spotted coach dogs were dashing across the living room wall along with merry orchestra music.

But nobody paid attention to it anymore because Sokobon was crying like a fire alarm.