

Stories  Stage

Script

Jonah's Riddle

(Script adapted from the story)

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Illustrated by George Ulrich



Jonah's Riddle

Characters:

Paloma

Narrator

Papa, the storyteller

Jonah, the Islander

Sid, the sailor

Cowboy (plays the part of Papa when he was younger.)

Sydney (joins the cast for her important line at the end of the story)

Paloma: Papa, tell me the story of Jonah's riddle. PLEASE...just the way you always tell it.

Narrator: Paloma puts Papa's sea shell to her ear and Papa begins...just as always.

Papa, the storyteller: ONCE UPON A TIME...a cowboy was listening to the wind whispering on the prairie...and as his mare Calliope trotted along, he sang with the wind. (Note: you will find the song on the Jonah's Riddle CD.)

*"I have a horse to ride...
a bunk for lyin' on my side...
spurs to keep Calliope ridin'
far n' wide...
a hat to shade my eyes
from the prairie sun...
and stars to guide me home
when day is done."*

Papa, the storyteller: The cowboy smiled a smile of satisfaction as he sang.

Narrator: Paloma imagines that she is trotting along with her mare, Apple Loo, singing with the wind and smiling a smile of satisfaction as she sings.

Paloma: Tell the part about the sea.

Narrator: Papa goes on...

Papa, the storyteller: The cowboy smiled and sang as he rode his horse far n' wide...until one day...Calliope galloped as far as the sea, and the cowboy saw an ocean sunset and met a sailor named Sid. The cowboy tipped his hat that shaded his eyes from the prairie sun...and his eyes twinkled like the prairie stars that guided him home when day was done. He told Sid about listening to the wind whispering on the prairie...but Sid was not listening to the cowboy. He was listening to the song of the sea.

Paloma: Did Sid sing the song of the sea to the cowboy?

Narrator: Paloma always asks the same question...and Papa always gives the same answer.

Papa, the storyteller: Sid told the cowboy that he could hear the song of the sea if he listened to the shell...carefully. So...the cowboy put the shell to his ear and listened carefully.

Narrator: Paloma puts the shell to her ear and imagines the cowboy listening...carefully...until Papa's voice hushes the song of the sea.

Papa, the storyteller: Calliope neighed, but the cowboy was not listening to Calliope. He was listening to the song of the sea. The cowboy forgot about ridin' his horse far 'n wide...and Calliope trotted back to the barn on the prairie alone...while the cowboy gave up prairie stars for ocean sunsets.

Paloma: I like the part of the story about Jonah.

Papa, the storyteller: I'm coming to that. Sid and the cowboy sailed with the rhythm of the sea beneath their feet until one day...they anchored in the cove of a faraway island...and an islander named Jonah welcomed them ashore. (Note: Jonah waves them ashore.) The cowboy told Jonah about putting the shell to his ear and Sid talked about listening to the song of the sea.

Narrator: Jonah sighs.

Jonah: (sighs)

Sid, the sailor, and the cowboy: Why do you sigh, Jonah? We have sailed with the rhythm of the sea beneath our feet. We have listened to the song of the sea!

Jonah: Ah! Always, the waves lap a lullaby and a shell sings the song of the sea. But your song sleeps in your imaginations...mute as a mermaid...lulled to sleep in a coral cave. Your song is destined to a fate such as befalls a tree toppled in a deserted forest.

Cowboy: What is the fate of a tree that topples in a deserted forest?

Jonah: (sighs) Is there a plop if a coconut drops in an empty grove? Is the milk of a coconut sweet if no one tastes it?

Sid, the sailor: You talk in riddles.

Jonah: (laughs) Then...enough cajolery. I'll tell you a secret...my secret of 'wholery'. A storyteller trills the words and taps a beat. A listener catches the call...high or low...and hears the roll...fast or slow...loud...or soft 'n sweet. Ah! A storyteller who sings like a bird can soothe a listener with every word. Sing your

song of the sea. Save it from the silence that can befall a tree.

Narrator: As Sid and the cowboy sail away from the island, they rave about Jonah's riddle. They race the boat home to share the songs humming in their heads...to find someone to listen to the stories that have come to them from the wind and the sea...to make them come alive...make them whole.

Paloma: Did they forget about Calliope?

Narrator: Paloma wants Papa to get on with the story about the cowboy. And Papa's eyes light up...he likes this part of the story, too.

Papa, the storyteller: Just as Sid and the cowboy were pulling the sailboat into the dock, Calliope galloped down to the shore. And the cowboy called out, "Whoa there, Calliope! You nearly took the wind out of my sails!" (Note: Papa uses the young cowboy's voice for the cowboy's line.) Since the cowboy still had his spurs to keep Calliope ridin' far 'n wide...he headed back to his bunkhouse on the prairie. Clippity cloppin' along, the cowboy smiled and sang with the wind.

(As Papa is remembering his adventure, he sings the song in the young cowboy's voice. Tune: 'The Muffin Man.')

*"Oh, I have met a riddleman,
a riddleman, a riddleman,
Oh, I have met a riddleman...
who lives far out to sea.
Oh, yes, I know the riddleman,
the riddleman, the riddleman.
Oh, yes, I know the riddleman...
'n his riddle of the tree."*

Jonah's Riddle

Papa, the storyteller: To this day,
the cowboy listens to the wind whispering
on the prairie...as he rides Calliope
far 'n wide...but he shares his song
with a cowgirl riding at his side...
as he tips his hat that shades
his eyes from the prairie sun and
the cowgirl listens to his stories
when day is done.

Narrator: Papa's eyes twinkle like
the prairie stars as he thinks of Paloma,
the cowgirl, riding at his side.

Paloma: And to this day, Sid puts
his shell to his ear and listens to the song
of the sea.

Narrator: Paloma remembers the end
of the story exactly.

Paloma: But a girl named Sydney stands
at Sid's side, listening to his stories...
carefully. And they will live ever after,
happily!

Narrator: That's how Paloma thinks
every story SHOULD end.

Papa, the storyteller: Hang on
a minute. Nowadays, when Calliope
gallops as far as the sea...Sid and
the cowboy meet and listen to each
other's stories...make them come alive...
make them whole...and Sid and the
cowboy share a smile of satisfaction.

Paloma: (chimes in, with a little laugh)
AND...they will live happily ever after!
Loo and I like to ride along with you
and Calliope to see Sid and Sydney.
Sydney and I listen to each other's
stories, and laugh, and share a smile
of satisfaction, too. (Note: Sydney and
Paloma share a smile and some simple
lines.)

Sydney: I like listening to your stories,
Paloma.

Paloma: I like your stories, too, Sydney.

Narrator: Paloma puts Papa's shell to
her ear and listens to the song of the
sea.