

The Rope That Binds
A Short One-Act Guide Out
of the Aokigahara Forest
written by
Conrad A. Panganiban

Contact:
conradap@gmail.com
@consplayspace

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PAOLO: 40s. Male. A forest Yūrei (spirit) seeking redemption to escape the world he trapped himself in. Filled with anger, frustration, and guilt.

NEMI: Early 20s. Female. A young rebel left with nothing left to rebel against after a tragic event led her to Japan's Infamous Suicide Forest.

TIME

This morning. 7:12 am.

PLACE

In Aokigahara Forest, Mt. Fuji, Japan near a large rock at the base of a tall tree.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

The rope used in this play should NOT be tied into a noose. Thanks.

A '/' denotes an overlap of dialogue.

SYNOPSIS

THE ROPE THAT BINDS is a One-Act Horror/Drama about a Yurei, a ruined spirit, named PAOLO whose only chance to break free from this world is to convince NEMI, a brash young person on a mission, that he's frightening enough to scare her into not only leaving Japan's Suicide Forest, but to also teach her how to escape the guilt caused by a tragic accident.

Lights up as NEMI, a woman in her 20s, dressed in black, is unsuccessfully trying to throw a rope over a branch above her. The other end is tied to a rock behind her. After a couple of failed attempts, she stands on the rock for more height and continues her feeble throws. Her backpack is leaning against a side of the rock.

As she stands there, a dark figure with long hair and a white mask enters and stands behind her saying in a guttural low groan...

PAOLO

Koko ni nokosu. [Leave here.]

NEMI nonchalantly turns around to see the figure, turns back and throws the rope back up in the air and watches it fall back to earth. As NEMI steps off to retrieve the rope, PAOLO, dressed as a Yūrei [ghost], moves from behind her with his hands outstretched...

PAOLO

Koko ni nokosu. [Leave here.]

(Pause.)

Wakarimasu ka? Koko ni nokosu! [Do you understand? Leave here!]

PAOLO gestures into the air which causes the wind to howl and the light to change color.

PAOLO

J'ai di, fiche moi le camp!
¡Fuera!
BEAT IT! SCRAM!

NEMI, annoyed, pushes past Paolo and again stands atop the rock.

NEMI

Cool light show, but I'm trying to do something here. And you're starting to piss me off. So Go. Away!

In frustration, PAOLO pulls back his hoodie and rips off the wig and mask he's wearing to reveal a man in his 40s.

PAOLO

Piss you *off*?!

Piss *you* off?!

I said

(Does another gesture to make the lights change and hear lightening!)

Get Off My Land!

NEMI

Okay Boomer, but not until AFTER I'm done!

NEMI again tosses the rope in the air only to see it hit the ground. PAOLO grabs the fallen end.

PAOLO

I said, go away!

NEMI

Hey! Let go!

PAOLO

No!

NEMI

Let it go!

PAOLO

Leave this place!

NEMI

Why should I? I was here first!

PAOLO

No. *I* was here first!

NEMI

It's my end of the rope. Not yours.

A standstill occurs as both struggle over control of the rope.

During a lull of this “stare-down tug-o-war”,
PAOLO looks up at the branch above them.

PAOLO

You know, that branch up there isn't gonna hold you.
Go ahead.
Take a look.

NEMI

Nice try. But I'm not falling for the "Ooo, What's that up in the air?" trick while you pull the rope away from me!

PAOLO

I'm serious. You picked a bad time to come here — end of the rainy season. Bendy wood.

NEMI

I'm not here to enjoy the weather.

PAOLO

Trust me. You throw this over that branch and you'll come-a crashin' down. I've been there and done that.

NEMI

Me. Trust you? I don't think so. Especially from someone pretending to be a Yūrei.

PAOLO

Who's pretending?

Pause.

NEMI

Then, what's up with the fake hair and mask?

PAOLO

It's to scare people away.

NEMI

Has it ever worked?

PAOLO

Not yet.

NEMI

So, I win.
Let go.

PAOLO

Didn't you hear me? I'm a Yūrei. An honest to God, Ghost. Ooooooooooooo....

NEMI

Ooooooooooooo... I'm so scared. If you're a real ghost, then how can you be pulling on this?

NEMI gives the rope a tug.

PAOLO

Have you seen the movie, Ghost? It wasn't that far off. And yes, this (Paolo tugs on the rope) happens when someone gets us annoyed. Really. Annoyed.

NEMI

Well... I still don't believe you.

PAOLO

Okay. Fine. How many ghosts do you know?

NEMI

None. Because ghosts aren't real.

PAOLO

Hi. I'm Paolo. Your first real ghost.

NEMI

Hi. I'm "I Don't Care If Your Name Was Brad Pitt." I'm still not done yet. And there's nothing you can do to make me leave.

PAOLO

If I can't, then that branch would. I told you, that wood's not going to hold you.

NEMI

Did I ask you for your advice?

A counter bell, 'DING!' is heard.

NEMI

That's not the answer I wanted to hear.

PAOLO

Goddamn it!

PAOLO moves to a side of the stage, pulling NEMI with him and making sure that he doesn't cross an imaginary line on the floor.

NEMI

What was that?

PAOLO

I swear, if that was Hiro... Hiro? Hiro!!! Koko ni imasu ka? [Are you there?]
Hiro!
Damn it!
Look, you really have to leave. Like now!
I'm not playing!

NEMI

Who said this was a game?

PAOLO

It's not! I just don't want to be the last one here, so go!

NEMI

You think I wanna stay here?

PAOLO

Perfect! Leave! The edge of the forest is right up that path!

NEMI

I wasn't planning on leaving that way.

PAOLO

Oo!!! You know what?! Fine! Here! Have fun playing jump rope!

Paolo drops his end of the rope.

PAOLO

Damnit, Hiro. How'd you get out of here?

NEMI, still holding on to her end of the rope, looks up at the branch above them.

NEMI tosses the rope up and watches it as it falls down again. PAOLO crosses his arms and watches her shaking his head.

Stop that.

NEMI

Stop what?

PAOLO

Stop looking at me and doing that thing with your head.

NEMI

You mean this?

PAOLO

Yes! Stop doing that!

NEMI

NEMI tosses the rope up and watches it as it falls down again. Paolo just looks at her.

NEMI

You're so annoying!

PAOLO
(mockingly)

You're annoying.

NEMI

Whatever. Now I see why Hiro left you!

PAOLO

Oh, if he met *you*, he would've been sprinting out of here!

NEMI

Ghosts have legs?

PAOLO

I thought you didn't believe in ghosts?

NEMI

I don't. But just in case I ever bump inot him, I'd tell him that I don't believe in him or his legs.

PAOLO

Well, you won't have to worry about that...
cuz looks like he's gone.

(MORE)

PAOLO (CONT'D)

Like all the rest.
Except for me.

NEMI

Because of that bell?

PAOLO

You heard that?

NEMI

Ding!
It's the last thing I'd expect to hear in a place called The Sea of Trees.

PAOLO

The Ocean of Lost Souls.

NEMI

Made from tidal waves of tears

PAOLO

filled with regret

NEMI

Guilt and pain.

PAOLO

Hoping for that last crest to break onto a beach of calm...

NEMI

peace...

PAOLO

And forgiveness.

NEMI

Yeah...

Well, all I know is that I'm not gonna to find any of those things here in the middle of the Aokigahara Forest while you're jibber-jabbering about it. So, if you'll excuse me...

NEMI picks up the rope, measures it, and looks up at the branch above them.

A pissed off Paolo glares at NEMI as she tosses the rope up and watches it fall again.

NEMI

Urgh!
Seriously! All that negative energy you're carrying, isn't helping.

PAOLO

I'm not trying to help.

NEMI

No shit, Sherlock.
(She tosses the rope up. It falls.)
So, how *did* you...? You know.

PAOLO

Ooo... now, you're *asking* for help?

NEMI

Well, not with that attitude.

PAOLO

My attitude—?

NEMI

You know what, you can just keep your "help"! I'll find my way out of here with or without you, so *NO* Thank you very much!

PAOLO

Well, You're *NOT* welcome very much!

NEMI

Hey! I'm not forcing you to be here! Why don't you just float away?! Isn't that what you people ghosts things do?

PAOLO

You want me to go? Fine! I'm gone! Bad luck in the next life!

In a huff, Paolo begins exits, but as he steps past an imaginary line near the edge of the stage, he drops to his knees to let out a—

PAOLO

Aaaghhhhh!!!
Damn it, that smarts! Stupid!

Who you calling stupid?

NEMI

Stupid barrier.

PAOLO

What barrier?

NEMI

You'll find out soon enough.

PAOLO

If a spirit tries to leave the space where they off themselves, then we get a little *hurtful* reminder of why we're still here.

NEMI has a moment of realization.

Crap. Awe, crap!

NEMI

You're one of those stuck souls, aren't you?

Yeah, you is! You must've done something royally messed up to be trapped here! It's kinda like your punishment, right?

No, *you're* my punishment.

PAOLO

So, did you like rape little kids, or become a politician or worse... become a politician who raped little kids?

NEMI

If I did any of those things, then at least I'd know why I'm still here.

PAOLO

Can't you just ghost out like your friend?

NEMI

That's what I've been trying to do... but you're still here!

PAOLO

Hey, I am trying to leave, but your jibber-jabbering's keeping me here!

NEMI

My jibber-jabbering?! You're the one who's supposed to get scared and then run off! That's how it supposed to work: A Yūrei scares someone off, and then you hear a scream, "Ahhh!!!" and then you hear a Ding.

PAOLO

(MORE)

PAOLO (CONT 'D)

"Ding!"

And just like that, we don't hear from either of them ever again.

So, it's like by saving one soul-

NEMI

You get to save your own?

PAOLO

Ding.

And hopefully send my ass on up to Heaven.

NEMI

Or Hell.

PAOLO

No. *This* is Hell - being stranded in the Eternal Space Between the Bells.

NEMI

So then uh... you're telling me that your post-existence fairytale hinges on a theory established by some Christmas movie?

PAOLO

It's a Wonderful Life.

NEMI

(Sarcastically)

Ha! Yeah. Sure it is.

PAOLO

Well, that "Bell Theory" is the only thing that makes sense. Hear a "Ding," another Yūrei makes the ascent...

NEMI

Or descent.

PAOLO

You're a real downer, you know that?

NEMI

Isn't that why we're all here?

PAOLO

Touché.

At any rate, and in either direction, it'd still be better than being stuck here.
Why couldn't that person Hiro scared off wander in this direction? Instead, I get Ms.
Congeniality.

NEMI

Thanks. I'll take that as a sad compliment.
As enlightening as this whole conversation is, I got stuff to do, so... scare me.

PAOLO

I tried that already.

NEMI

I can't help it if you suck at it, but practice makes perfect. So, try it again.

PAOLO

To scare you?

NEMI

SCARE ME!!!!

PAOLO

(Scared)

Daymn!

NEMI

I'm trying to help you, you big baby! Now Scare Me!

PAOLO

Okay... hold on. I just need to get into character.

Get out of here!

NEMI

Still sucking.

PAOLO

LEAVE THIS PLACE!

NEMI

Less Yelling. More Scaring!

PAOLO's eyes catch fire as he extends his hands up and outward causing all the lights to flash and the electrical cracks of a lightning's whip echo through the room!

PAOLO

GET OUT!

NEMI

Okay. Uh... I believed you that time. See ya...

Good luck.

NEMI exits.

PAULO lets out a breath, and patiently waits...

And waits...

And waits.

No Ding.

Frustrated and disappointed, PAOLO sits down on the rock and lets out a long exhale.

NEMI reenters.

NEMI

Sorry.

PAOLO

I guess we're not supposed to be in cahoots with each other for it to work.

NEMI

But, that was pretty scary though.

(Acts like Scary Paolo)

GET OUT!!!!

PAOLO

Maybe not scary enough.

NEMI

Scary enough for little kids.

PAOLO
But none that I would rape.

NEMI
And that would be a good thing?

PAOLO
Uh, Yeah! Ew! That'd be a great thing!

NEMI
Of course it is. I'm just making sure cuz you're the one stuck here and that would be a very cursable punishment.

PAOLO
I didn't rape any kids!

NEMI
All right! I believe you.

PAOLO
And I'm not a politician either.

NEMI
I didn't say you were.

PAOLO
Good.

NEMI
Good.

For what it's worth, you could've been stuck in worse places. It looks really peaceful here.

PAOLO
That's what I was looking for.
Hidden.
Out the way.
Perfect place to... you know.

NEMI
Yeah, I do.
Paolo, right?

PAOLO
Yup. And you're...

NEMI

Nemi.

PAOLO

Hey, Nemi.

NEMI

So, Paolo, how'd you do it? I mean, if that branch was bendy, then how did you...?

PAOLO gets up from the rock and circles around behind it to remove several branches. NEMI goes for a look at the surprise behind the rock.

NEMI

Woah! That must be like eight feet down there.

PAOLO

Ten. I had to keep covering it because animals would occasionally fall in. How sad is that? I felt worse for those little critters than I did for the people that came here.

NEMI

Why are you showing me this?

PAOLO

I don't know. Maybe because I'm just tired of feeling alone. Being alone. So, if you were to... then I wouldn't be.

NEMI

That was pretty honest.

PAOLO

Lying isn't much worth out here.

NEMI

Right.

I killed my little sister—

PAOLO

You don't / have to

NEMI

And that's the truth I can't live with that anymore.

(MORE)

NEMI (CONT'D)

I got into a fight with my parents about...

Shit.

I don't even remember.

Why can't I remember?

Why can't I fucking remember the stupid reason that made me jump into the car and peel out in reverse?

What the fuck was she doing back there anyways?

I thought it was just...

I thought it was just a wagon or a toy or a...

but I didn't know that she'd be there, you know?

“NEMI STOP!!!”

And that was the last thing I remember hearing...

It was like that... It was like that scene from Saving Private Ryan, you know where they land on Normandy Beach and then everything just felt like it went in slow motion.

Mom

Dad

Running

Yelling

Crying

Mouths moving with no sound

I swear I didn't know that Tess was back there.

Why... why was she...?

I opened the door and there was just so much...

PAOLO

It was an accident. You didn't mean to...

NEMI

I killed her.

It was *my* fault.

My guilt.

PAOLO

It's not yours to hold on to.

NEMI

No one else was driving that fucking car!

It was me.

And I killed her.

My parents haven't said a word to me since that day.

(MORE)

NEMI (CONT'D)

And I followed that silence here.
To my punishment.
To my deserved End.

PAOLO

Killing yourself is not the end.

NEMI

And, you've set a mighty fine example of that.

PAOLO

That's exactly my point.
You want the pain to stop? Guess what?
The part of you that hurts, never dies.

I tried to leave this world because I was supposed to be on the same flight as my wife and kids.

I just needed one more hour...

One... fucking... hour...

Just to finish up a stupid work report and I would've been found with them on that mountain side.

Work's work but why did I put that above my family?

So being here was my punishment...

it was my rope - the rope I used to tie around all the guilt, all of the anger, and all of my pain I didn't want to let go of...
because I lost everything else.

NEMI

What if holding on to all of those feelings in this world is what's keeping you from being with your family in the next?

A Ding! pierces the air.

After a shared look, NEMI walks past "the line."

NEMI

Are you ready to let go of that rope?

PAOLO slowly moves towards her until he is fully over the line, and nothing. Nothing has happened. He jumps back in and jumps back out. Waits. And then jumps back and forth.

PAOLO

It worked. It WORKED!

(PAOLO gives NEMI a hug.)

Thank you.

NEMI

You're the one who had to do let go.

PAOLO

Thanks.

NEMI

So, where's that light that you need to walk into?

PAOLO

As cliché as that sounds, Hiro said that after we're able to cross our lines, we have to make our way to the Shiraito Waterfalls. And right behind the water wall is where we can, as you call it, "ghost out".

NEMI

Great! Well, congrats. Hope you find it okay.

PAOLO

Aren't you coming with me?

NEMI

Um...

PAOLO

Didn't you hear what I said? Doing what you came here to do isn't going to solve anything. It'll just keep you trapped.

NEMI

Right. I just...

PAOLO points to the hole.

PAOLO

You're still not thinking about going through with that are you? After everything I said would happen to you? And after everything you said about—

NEMI

I know what I said.

PAOLO

Then you can't—

NEMI

No. No. You're right.
I just never really thought about what I would do if I didn't go through with it.

PAOLO

Well, now you have your whole life ahead of you to figure that part out.

NEMI

No, what I meant was, I didn't have a plan on how to get back home if I didn't do it. I only bought a one-way ticket here, so...

PAOLO

Oh! Ohhh... I got you.

Paolo goes behind the rock to do a little
searching...

PAOLO

Still here!

PAULO pulls out a bag and hands it to NEMI.

PAOLO

This was insurance just in case I chickened out. There should be enough money in there to get you back home.

NEMI

Thanks.

PAOLO

Great. Shall we?
The main road heading back into town is right near the falls, so I can show you the way.

NEMI

Sure.

PAOLO holds out his arm with a crook in it for
NEMI to slide her arm through so as to leave.
She does, and as BOTH start to exit, NEMI
stops.

NEMI

Shoot! I forgot my backpack with all my stuff. I'll catch up.

PAOLO

I can wait.

NEMI

Nah, it's all good. I'm just going to grab it real quick, but you should catch the view from that crest before the sun comes up. It's something to live for.

PAOLO

Oh my God, you're right! I've always wanted to see the sun rise from there! You'll be right behind me, right?

NEMI

Sure. Right behind you.

PAOLO runs out.

NEMI walks over to her backpack and pauses to check if Paolo is watching her. She then goes to the space behind the rock and looks down into the hole.

NEMI picks up the rope.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY