

### ***The Duck***

Thousands of years ago, far away in a little village in the deep mountains of China, lived a little boy named Emmett. He was seven years old.

Only on special occasions the villagers only went to town those days. Intrigued by new adventures, Emmett always wanted to go along whenever one of his neighbors made the day trip.

On one such trip, when Emmett was walking around in town, he met a little duckling. The duckling followed Emmett around all day, telling him that he had lost his family: He was only born a few days ago. Naturally he followed his mother and older sisters and brothers everywhere. A whole day ago they all went for a little swim. He had a grand time, being the natural swimmer he was. But by the time he came up from one of his deep dives in the little stream, nobody was anywhere to be seen. Nobody he knew anyway. He searched up and down and around. He even gathered up his courage and asked the busy earthworms who worked by the stream. Nobody could tell him where his family went. He thought perhaps Emmett, being a long journey-goer, could tell him where they were. Feeling sad for the duckling, and short of knowing where his family was, Emmett decided to adopt him.

They both arrived at Emmett's home at twilight.

When Emmett lied down to sleep on his cot, the duckling did the same at his feet. Weeks went by, Emmett and the duckling grew close to each other. Emmett told the duckling the secrets of his heart and was sure that he was understood. The duckling always looked at Emmett intently when he talked and he often stroked Emmett's hand with his wings in order to comfort him when Emmett was distraught. He was a duck of few words - always listened more than he talked, and talk only when it was absolutely necessary.

One evening, there was a heated discussion at dinner table about the duckling, now almost a grown duck. Emmett's father insisted that they either kill the duck for spring festival or sell it to buy a bag of rice.

That night, Emmett took the duck for a long walk and told him about his fate. "This is really not your home, my friend," Emmett said to him, "you have to leave, otherwise, you will be killed either by my family or by the family who buys you in exchange for their bag of rice." It was a custom in these regions that families made roasted ducks or duck soup for the spring festival, the Chinese New Year.

With lots of tears and a wave of hand, the seven-year-old walked away from his friend.

The duck, after watching Emmett disappear from view, went to the little stream by the mountain village and wept.

"Hey, my handsome little one, why are you so sad?" A voice croaked.

The duck looked around, and there, on top of a lotus leave, sat an old "wise frog", as they were called, for their uncanny "wisdom."

"Oh, when I was a baby, I lost sight of my mother and my brothers and sisters. For a whole day, I had no idea of what to do or where to go. I was completely lost from the inside. Then I saw this little boy, wandering around town, taking in all the new things he had not seen before. So I followed him and he made me his friend. He was the only family I knew and I was at home with him. And I just lost him. I am now a real orphan," the duck sniffled.

"Oh, my dear, you may come live with me," the frog replied, "The whole stream is ours. My home is your home and we will be family. And better yet, I will be your new best friend, in order to mend your broken heart."

The frog's words made the duck very happy. They had a merry life together through the spring and the summer. With the arrival of the early fall, a beautiful swan descended to the stream from some remote region and he soon became the frog's new best friend.

The day soon came for the duck to leave, "I still love you," the wise frog said to him, "it's just that three is a crowd. And the swan is proud. He doesn't think that there is room enough for him and you, in this stream, my home." So the duck said good-bye to his friends and went wandering deep into the great mountains.

He met many people, learned many skills and made many friends.

Once, taking the advice of an intelligent fox, he even built a house for himself, right above the fox's hole - it was as if they were living in the same place. But even that didn't help, he still felt like an orphan.

So the duck kept wandering. While walking around through the forest and sea, he often pondered on what the wise frog said to him ages ago when he told him to leave. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that for some reason, whenever his friends were facing a difficult dilemma, he was the one who would be out of a home or a family. He couldn't quite understand why. He also couldn't figure out why it was that the frog seemed to be "blaming" the swan for a decision the frog himself had reached. "It would be much better if he had said that he chose the swan over me and that he had to hurt me this way," the duck said to himself....

One very hot summer evening, the duck encountered an enormous roc\* near the great Indian Ocean. "They said that you are kind and wise because you are both a fish and a bird. And they said that you know many things," the duck spoke up, to be sure that the roc could hear him, "May I ask you a question?"

The roc waved his wings, which were miles long, and the wind under the wings carried his response, "Please ask your question, my child."

The duck felt a little irritated, "Well, you can't really call me your child, I'm an orphan, which means I am nobody's child. Do you think I'll ever find a home?"

The roc smiled, "It depends on what you mean by home."

The duck contemplated on the question, "Not just a place to live, that's for sure. I did that and it felt just like an empty house. Not just sharing living space with people who don't want me either, I suppose. I did that with the frog and the swan and they told me to leave...." He thought some more and then said, "I guess it's a sense of where I belong, both in my heart and my spirit, with my friends who enjoy being with me. Then I wouldn't feel like an orphan anymore. Is it possible?"

It was the roc's turn to ponder.

After a long while, he asked the duck, "Do you believe you would not be content until you find that home and family? Is it worth the struggle?"

"Are you saying giving up is not an option even though the struggle is painful? That I will have to keep on looking without knowing whether or not I will be able to reach my goal?" The duck became a little sad.

"Well," the roc said, very slowly and gently this time, "yes, basically. And if it's any consolation, over the last hundred years there were more than a few people like you who asked similar questions. I guess you'll just have to find the others, don't you think?"

And that was when the duck said goodbye to the roc and went on searching.

*\*A roc is an enormous fish, taking up the entire Indian ocean, that can transform itself into a bird with immense wings, and lives for a very long time. It is known for its wisdom.*