

Freedom

Emmett's father James was a fine hunter.

Every spring and fall he went to the forest to hunt in order to feed his family. Once after months of hunting, he brought home some deer, wild ducks, rabbits, birds, and, a live fawn who could hardly stand up. "He is only a day old," James said to Emmett, "I accidentally shot his mother. So now you will have to bring him up like your own little baby brother."

Emmett, having lost his duckling the year before, felt he was going to die of joy. He built the deer a little shelter in the backyard, with hay on the floor. And he let the tall grass grow all around the "dear house" so that his fawn would feel right "at home" in the yard, even though more often than not, the deer came in through Emmett's window in the middle of the night and lay down right next to him.

He gave the deer milk, from their cow in the barn. He played with him. He named him Angelo.

A year went by, Angelo became a beautiful adult deer and was restless around the house. Emmett started taking Angelo for long walks. On one such walk, Angelo told Emmett that he wanted to be free.

"What do you mean by free?" Emmett was perplexed, "Don't you like our home?"

"I love you and your home," Angelo tilted his head adorably to the right, which always made Emmett smile, "But my home is in the forest. There I will have the sky as my roof and the whole earth as my bed."

"But I'll miss you terribly!" Emmett sat down and told Angelo about his duckling, "A very long time ago, before you were born, I had a duckling, or a little duckling had me, I am not sure which way...".

Emmett proceeded in telling Angelo how he had to make his best friend leave the only home he knew in order to save his life. Angelo cried over the duckling and Emmett's loss. He decided to stay with Emmett for another year.

"Tomorrow morning when you wake up, I'll be gone," Angelo said one evening, a year later, "please don't insist that you will watch me leave. Because then both of us would cry and I wouldn't want to remember you that way." Grudgingly, Emmett obeyed his friend's wish. He thought to himself, "I'd really want to spend the last night with him, every minute of it. But I shall do what he wishes."

They hugged each other goodnight, just like any other night, and Emmett went to sleep. That night, Emmett dreamt of walking deep in the forest alongside Angelo, telling each other their innermost secrets. He experienced great joy in his sleep and when he woke up, he could swear that Angelo gave him a goodbye kiss that still felt wet on his nose.

Days turned to months, and months turned to years.

Right before Emmett's 20th birthday, he finished building his own house at the very edge of the forest, just in case Angelo decided to drop by one day.

Another few years went by, but Angelo did not turn up.

One day, Emmett went for a walk in the forest and ran into a wild rabbit. The rabbit said that he knew a deer named Angelo. "He was a little odd, to say the least. He claimed to have lived with humans. And he talked fondly about them. Boy, that deer loved to travel. He went all over the place. He also told the most amazing stories. One of them went like this: He was walking by a campfire once. Fireflies circled around it. And then one by one, they jumped in the fire and died. Just before the last firefly flew into the fire, the deer stopped him and asked why they all jumped in, knowing that they would die. 'We don't die, dear. We believe that in the brilliant light of the fire lies the secret to our freedom, so we jump in to find it.' After the firefly explained this to him, he hurried in to join his friends...."

The rabbit rambled on. When he finally got thirsty from talking so much, he stopped to take a drink of water from the little stream. Emmett took his opportunity to ask his question, "Do you know where I might be able to find Angelo?"

"Oh, that," the rabbit said, now short of breath from drinking so much water all at once, "nobody knows. Nobody knows. He is a free spirit. He moves with the wind." Sensing Emmett's sadness, the rabbit promised that if he heard of Angelo's whereabouts, he'd send the word to Emmett.

Hence Emmett waited, his heart filled with hope.

One night, while going to bed, Emmett whispered to the sky, "Goodnight and sleep tight, Angelo." He then closed his eyes and imagined hugging the deer, just like what he used to do when Angelo still lived at his parents' house.

In his sleep, Emmett saw Angelo, floating in the air, with wings. "Emmett, I just want to thank you," the deer said, "you are the one who granted me my freedom. It is because of you I could wander around and learn about freedom, about all the different forms of freedom. I want to give you a gift, a token of my gratitude. When you wake up and open your door, you shall find a little duckling. For him freedom means that he has you and is attached to you, that he has a place he can call home." With a wave of wings, Angelo floated away.

Emmett woke up and was content with the dream.

It was not entirely surprising to him then, when he went to open the door of his house, a duckling was looking up at him. Emmett, who didn't quite understand how Angelo managed this, named the duckling Angelino, after his beloved deer.