

Tradition

After months of travelling, Angelo, the deer, arrived at the edge of a forest, in front of a little stream. Just as he bent down to take a drink from the stream, Angelo noticed the markings, which warned him that he had stepped into someone's territory.

Angelo looked around and found two foxes sitting, silently, right on the roof of what looked like their den, one with a rather despairing look and the other an angry appearance, both absorbed in his and her own world, oblivious to Angelo's presence.

Tired and thirsty, Angelo gently cleared his throat and asked, "I am sorry to interrupt you, but would you kindly let me drink from your stream?"

Startled by his voice, both foxes looked at Angelo and replied simultaneously, "Oh, yes, of course! Please do."

Later that day, they invited Angelo to their house and told him that he could rest there. As soon as Angelo woke up from his nap, the whole family gathered for dinner, each fox presented him a kind of food that Angelo might want to eat. There was a rabbit, three chickens, some little frogs, wild berries, crab apples, and carrots. Angelo looked at their fresh kill and smiled. He explained to them he was a vegetarian and took some carrots and wild berries.

A few minutes into dinner, Rob, one of the foxes that Angelo had first run into, said, "Angelo, you are a learned traveler. You must know many things. We would like to know what you think about our family conflict."

He proceeded to tell Angelo the whole story:

When Angela - the other fox that Angelo ran into earlier that day - was a baby, she got lost in a nearby village and was adopted by Alex, a fisherman, and his family. During the few months that she lived with Alex's family, their baby rabbit Tammy became her friend. When Angela was a year old, Alex took her to the forest and asked Rob if he and his family could adopt her. "And we did, knowing that it would be difficult for Alex or anyone to find her biological family," Rob said, "and we treated her as one of our own but that's when the trouble started."

Angela, having grown up with Tammy, not only had a taste for vegetables, but also could not bear the thought of leaving Tammy for more than a few days at a time. She would become sad in Tammy's absence. "Once she almost got killed by a black bear because she was so preoccupied, thinking of Tammy," Rob became more agitated as he went on, "Angela has been with us for four years. I admit we have all grown very fond of her. But just a few days ago, she asked if Tammy could come live with us. I mean, she should have known better than asking *that*. This is against all rules. We are foxes. We don't live with other beasts. We even get rid of all our boys before they are a year old. There are good reasons why we have these traditions. We simply need to obey them. I mean, can you imagine having a rabbit in our midst when we are hunting?" Rob stopped, short of breath from his steaming anger.

Angelo pondered what he heard in silence.

When he looked up, Angelo turned to Angela directly, "Do you understand that if your family does not agree to have Tammy living with them, you will have to choose between staying with your family and being left alone with Tammy?"

Angela nodded, "I know it's a difficult decision for them, and for me. Being with Tammy is terribly important, and my family may not feel the same way and -", using her white tail tip to wipe her tears away, she had to stop talking.

It was only then that Angelo noticed that all the other foxes in Rob's pack had black tail tips. He looked over at Rob and motioned to Angela's tail tip.

"Yes," Rob answered, obviously understood Angelo's unasked question, "She is a child of another pack, an enemy pack at that. We knew that all along. We talked it over when we had to decide whether or not to adopt her. The enmity between our packs comes from one of the old wars that our ancestors fought that has since lost all its meaning. All this generation knows, or even the generation before us knew, is that these two groups used to kill each other while fighting for territories. But Angela was just a baby. She wasn't our enemy. So we took her as our own."

Completely stunned by Rob's words, Angelo fell back to his reverie.

Promised the family that he would give the matter some serious thought, Angelo went for a long walk. When he returned a few hours later, the whole family was still up waiting for him. Angelo sat down, and told them how Emmett, against all rules, and against his own heart's desire, set him free, "I don't know the answer to your problem. Whether to keep the tradition of not having one of another kind in your midst and risk

losing your beloved Angela; or break the tradition and try to establish new rules, you are the ones who have to consider what is more important in this case, at this point."

Early next morning, the family sent Angelo on his way after a hearty vegetarian breakfast. They told him that they understood what he was trying to convey and they were still in the process of thinking things through.

Years went by.

Angelo often wondered what became of Rob's family and Angela. But he had traveled far and nobody seemed to know anything about a little white-tip-tailed fox named Angela. Then one day, Angelo had just arrived in a rain forest, when Abbey, an old deer friend of Angelo's, showed up. Angelo knew that Abbey once lived in Rob's region. Having heard Angelo's inquiry, Abbey immediately replied that he knew of a fox named Angela, who lived with a rabbit named Tammy and their friends - Emma, a deer, and Sally, another fox.

"They formed a pack? I mean, a pack of two female foxes, a rabbit and a deer?" Angelo asked, flabbergasted.

"Well, yes, as far as I know," Abbey smiled, "and there is more to it than that, they proposed that all packs, not just those of foxes, might want to re-examine their rules of what can or cannot be called a family."