

A New Way

Angela, the fox, died.

Tammy, her best friend throughout her life, mourned her deeply, desperately, and then fell into a deep depression. She couldn't sleep. She lost her appetite. She stared at the ceiling of their house vacantly. She became thinner as days went by.

A few weeks later, Emma, the deer, and Sally, the fox held a secret conversation just outside their underground house.

"We've got to do something for her," Sally said.

"Maybe we'll do the official public mourning thing," Emma said, looking at Sally sadly, "Why didn't we think of this before?"

The next day, they informed everyone in the forest about the memorial service, including Alex and his villagers. At the service everyone spoke highly of Angela. But after everyone went home, Tammy went right back to her bed.

Another week went by, Emma and Sally got restless again.

"This time we ask Alex," Emma decided.

She went to the village, talked to Alex, and Alex said that he would go to town and get the priest. Three days later, the priest came. He blessed Angela's body, made a speech about how Angela's spirit was alive in everyone's heart, told Tammy that she should now feel better, and then left.

Again, as soon as the priest disappeared from view, Tammy went back to her corner of the house and stared at nothing in particular.

A second month came and went quickly, but Tammy's condition did not improve. During the month, Emma and Sally tried talking to her, explained to her that they understood her sorrow because they too had both lost loved ones, at one time or another. Tammy simply looked at them with teary eyes when they talked.

Then one morning, Tammy suddenly got up from her corner and started picking vegetables outside the house. Though her face still looked sad and her body terribly thin,

she conveyed a sense of calmness that made Emma and Sally feel that she was somehow better, although they had no idea what made the change.

During the next year, Tammy went to a deep forest stream often, even though they had a stream right by their door.

Uncertain of Tammy's recovery, neither Emma nor Sally said anything about her odd behavior.

The second spring had come and gone.

On one of the hottest summer evenings, when all three were sitting outside, watching the stars, Emma, the impatient deer, couldn't contain herself anymore, "Tammy, I don't mean to pry, but what happened?"

Tammy gave both Emma and Sally a bittersweet half smile, just the thing that rabbits did when they were sad and happy at the same time, and told them what happened -

When everyone was trying to help her, telling her that they understood her, Tammy felt the most alone. "It's like being completely alone in a crowd. Everyone feels that he understands you because he experienced loss in his past. But everybody is too busy trying to teach you how you should feel so you feel more 'walled in'. It's very alienating," Tammy said, tears falling like a spring rainstorm, "then one night, I finally managed to get some sleep, out of exhaustion, I suppose. And Angelo, the deer, came to my dream. He told me that there was no way he could know how I felt simply because he experienced similar losses. He said everyone experiences things, including losses, differently. And that the only way for him to even begin to know about how I felt was for me to start telling him about Angela. So I did. I told him whatever came to my mind. I talked about how lonely I felt without her and how lost I was. I expressed to him that it was as if my heart was broken in half, not that I couldn't live or have my own identity without Angela, just that it felt like there was something special missing in my heart.

"To my surprise, Angelo gave no lectures about why I should not feel that way. He only said that even though he couldn't really experience it with me, he saw my pain. He gave me a long and tight hug and vanished.

"I woke up from that dream, felt much calmer about things. Not that Angelo brought Angela back or anything, just that he listened and didn't pretend that he had already understood before I told him. And I knew that if I went to the little stream in the

deep forest, I'd be able to talk to Angelo, even though I couldn't see him when my eyes were open. And that was what I did.

“We had long talks about Angela. Well, mostly, it was me telling him about how Angela and I shared thousands of magic moments of our lives together, about how sometimes we fought with passion, and about how much I regretted that I never had a chance to make up with her after our last fight.... All sorts of things, big or small, significant or trivial. Angelo always listened with his full attention. From time to time he'd say something, like an interpretation of how I felt or what I was trying to say, or something like that. And most of the time he'd be right on the mark. And occasionally when he was off, I didn't mind. It was like he had this huge invisible hand that held me from falling down to the bottomless pit. And the more I talked to him, the stronger I felt. I am still quite sad that Angela is gone. But Angelo understood my loss and by knowing my pain emotionally, he mended my heart. It was like I found an emotional home in this gentle deer's heart, after a great loss. I may never feel the same way as before, but at least I don't feel completely alone anymore.”

Emma and Sally looked at each other.

This time, it was Sally who couldn't hold her words inside anymore, "So are you saying that all our efforts in trying to make you feel better only made you feel worse?"

With another half smile, Tammy nodded.

Emma continued Sally's thought, "But it was our tradition. We had always been doing things like that. It was the only way we know how and it had always worked...".

There was a long silence and all three were pensive.

Sally said at last, "Well, I guess we've learned that our old ways don't always work, and now we know a new way, Angelo's way. So perhaps we ought to try it sometime."