

Of Readiness

In a deep forest where leaves richly layered the ground, there lived Sarah, the rabbit and Luke, the deer. Sarah had a little hole that she called home just under the ground. Luke, being nomadic in spirit, had no house of his own.

From time to time he would visit his good friend Sarah.

When they first became friends, everything seemed fine. They traded stories of their lives, they laughed, and they shared food with each other. Then one day, Sarah asked Luke, ever so tentatively, "Why don't you build a house for yourself?"

Luke, startled by the question, answered in haste, "Well, I'm a wanderer. I go from one place to the next. I don't see the need for a house." Sarah looked stunned. But she said no more.

After a little while, she felt that she had to bring up the matter again, "You know, Luke, once my great-great-great-great-great grandmother had a vision, a vision of an all-mighty king. He didn't have a rabbit form or a deer form or any form we had ever known, but he was an almighty king without a doubt, for my great-great-great-great-great grandmother was a seer, a prophet, if you may. And this king said to her: 'Be prepared, for the day will come that I will arrive, and then the whole world will change.' Since then, my ancestors have been preparing themselves for his arrival—we built houses, we fed the hungry and gave shelter to the weak and homeless. We tried to be good so that the almighty king would respect us because we listened and acted."

Luke, smart and keen in intellect, got the message, "I heard about the king as well. And look at me, I pass on the good news of the arrival of the king to different places, I gain knowledge from my travels and when the occasion calls for it, I even help resolve family quarrels when I am a guest in their house. The king will recognize my supreme status by my deeds as well."

Upon these words, Sarah went on with her life, thinking that she was well prepared for the king's arrival and Luke, in turn, continued his journeys, feeling that he would be well received by the king on the day of his coming.

Both secretly thought that she or he might even be chosen to be in the king's council. Not only that, Sarah was convinced that she was the one more prepared than Luke, and Luke was certain that he was the one who would be judged more aware of the king's message than Sarah.

They remained friends. Each safeguarded her or his sense of superiority, and yet both anxiously waited for the king's appearance.

Winter grew into spring, and spring burst into humid and hot summer, but the king didn't come. Indeed, the leaves fell quite a few more times, adding more and more layers to the ground, and still there was no news of the king's arrival.

Luke, being an impatient soul, could stand the pressure of waiting no longer, he went to pay Emmett a visit. When he arrived he hugged Angelino, the duck, in greeting, and went into the hut.

"Emmett, are you ready for the king?" he asked, "I have been ready for so long that I can't wait any more. Plus, Sarah is so conceited. She feels that only she is truly ready and I can't wait to see her being set straight by the king."

Emmett was pensive and said not a word. After a long while when Luke was about to take his leave, Emmett finally communicated that he could not help him in this matter, for he had no knowledge of the time of the arrival of the king.

A few days later, Sarah, followed by all her relations and friends, also came to see Emmett. Emmett was not surprised when Sarah said virtually the same things about Luke and how she was the one who was ready, "Only the king will convince that deer that I am the chosen one." The proud rabbit left, barely touching Angelino when she quickly hugged the duck goodbye, went home and got even busier with her good deeds to show her readiness.

Early next morning, Angelino came in the hut and touched Emmett's face with his wings, "Emmett, Emmett," he whispered gently, "come with me!" Emmett, still confused from having just been wakened, followed Angelino to the deep forest. On the way, Angelino, out of character, ignored all Emmett's questions about where they were going, what they were doing and why they were going somewhere this early in the morning....

Finally, they arrived in front of Sarah's house. A whole group of animals were in the middle of an intense dialogue. "I was wrong," they heard Luke say, "we were both not

ready. I mean, the real message was that we accept, respect and love each other, and only if we start from there, may we even think of ourselves as being prepared."

Sarah, looking a little sad, took over, "I thought I knew the way because my great-great-great-great grandmother was the seer. But I was so mistaken. I didn't even understand the basics of what it means to be aware."

"What's really going on here?" Emmett turned to Angelino. The duck smiled, brushed Emmett's feet with his wings and replied softly, "Let's go home and I'll tell you."

Upon Emmett's insistence, Angelino spilled the beans on the way home, "Well, you see, I had a dream where a messenger appeared, who claimed that he had a few words from the king. He got everyone together and revealed that according to the king, neither Sarah nor Luke was ready for the arrival. And in my dream, both Sarah and Luke asked him to explain the message. He said that he was not sure but it seemed to him that they not only did not accept each other's different ways, but also they could not even respect their differences. And then, poof! he was gone. I apologize that I didn't tell you any of this earlier, I felt I didn't have the time to then. I had a feeling that I wasn't the only one who had this dream, and we had to hurry to the deep forest to see if it was true and if the dream had made a difference."