

Betrayal or Self-Discovery?

It was the first time that Angelino, the duck, went to town without Emmett. Telling Emmett that he just wanted to experience things differently this time, he set out on his own on a hot summer's morning from the very edge of the forest, where both he and Emmett lived.

Midway to town, he ran into Gordon, the deer-fox, who then lived deep in the forest at Sarah's Place. They finished the rest of the journey together and Gordon told Angelino his troubles.

"Do you still remember Emma, the deer?" Gordon asked.

The simple question brought tears to Angelino's eyes, "Yes, of course. And I miss her terribly."

Gordon went on to tell Angelino that he, too, had been thinking that perhaps Sarah's Place was not for him and that he would like to try and go live by the little stream, "just to be near Emma," he said.

"Have you talked to Sarah about it?" Angelino asked. "Well, that's where the problem comes in. I have been helping Sarah with a series of lessons on how to help the poor. She needs me there. I am also very attached to some of the residents who live at Sarah's Place. I still remember that only here in this forest was I accepted as who I was - nobody ever called me names and nobody here made me feel unwanted or alien, the way I was treated when I was growing up. For all this I am very grateful and I want to help Sarah and everyone here. Plus Sarah has devoted her life to the poor, which is why she still has not forgiven Emma for abandoning her mission. So I can't even start thinking about telling her that my heart is only half there. I feel guilty already by thinking this way," tears came to Gordon's eyes and he had to stop talking.

Angelino felt helpless, so he invited Gordon to go home with him to see Emmett when they both completed their visits to town.

A few days later, Gordon showed up at Emmett's door.

Emmett asked Gordon that if he could not find an answer that would make him happy in his current situation, whether or not a solution could be found that would make him feel the "least unhappy". Gordon said that then he would have to go with being with Emma and leaving Sarah.

Another few days later, Gordon came to say goodbye to Emmett and Angelino. Angelino and Hans, the tiger, prepared a feast for the farewell.

Midway through the meal, Emmett asked, "How did Sarah take your leaving, Gordon?"

Dead silence followed, as all eyes were on Gordon, and all the deer-fox did was play with his food on his plate. He finally looked up with teary eyes and choked on every single word he then uttered, "She said that she could not understand why I was not happy with helping the poor and why I had to go astray. She told me that I was ungrateful to the mission, which also provided me with a home and food. She was convinced that I was following Emma's wrong path...."

No one knew what to say and everyone set out to make the most comfortable bed for the deer-fox for the night. They still remembered Gordon's old habits - no straw, just a thick towel. In the old days, they used to joke about Gordon's "near-humanness."

When dawn broke the next day, Angelino, Emmett and Hans all hugged the deer-fox goodbye in tears.

Months later, as the snowflakes started to fall, Gordon arrived at Tammy's little stream right in the middle of a heated discussion among a whole group of beasts.

A fox named Richard was talking, "I am sure he would be much happier if he could just stop hiding his true self from others. I told him that being a vegetarian is no shame for a tiger but he wouldn't listen to me. I even said that once my best friend came to Tammy and learned that I was no danger to the whole pack, and that I wouldn't make them vegetarians, and they all accepted me as who I wanted to be. But my dear tiger friend wouldn't listen...."

At this moment, Jack, the tiger, took over, "Well, I understand Richard's views. I also know that he is happier that he made it known that he is a vegetarian. But I have something else in mind. I have been putting all my life's effort into making tigers stop eating rabbits. Now a peace pact was reached and if I suddenly declare myself a vegetarian, all tigers there will think that I had an ulterior motive, and that this hidden

agenda made me push for the peace agreement. It would be a long time before I could convince them otherwise. Meanwhile, a great deal of rabbits' lives would be lost. And that would not make me any happier about myself. In fact, I have never pretended to kill a rabbit or ate meat in my entire life and when others saw me eating vegetables, I offered no explanations so that they may draw their own conclusions."

Gordon, Emma and Tammy were all quiet listeners in the discussion. Afterwards, there was much catching up to do between Gordon and Emma.

After a long while, ever so tentatively, Emma turned to Gordon and asked how it was for him to leave Sarah, "Well, she was convinced that I was on the wrong path. And I was not sure either when I left. Emmett said that I should look for 'the least unhappy' solution so I came here, because I felt that to be near you was more important to me. I cried most of the time on my way here. But then listening to the fox and the tiger today, I realized that even happiness and honesty can be seen from different angles. Sarah has a kind heart and she does great work. But perhaps a subtler and less visible way to be helpful would be more natural for me...."