

Angelo's Secret

"It was not simply because I wanted freedom that I left Emmett," Angelo began when Tammy finally settled with the notion of listening to him, "I was also terribly restless and I knew there had to be something wrong with me. I wanted to tell Emmett about it but I couldn't, partly because I myself didn't want to believe that there was anything wrong. I talked myself into thinking that I was born a free spirit and I needed to roam the whole world to suit my nature."

"I left Emmett and immediately went into a long and dark sadness that almost cost me my life. During that period, everything made me sad and anything I encountered was a reminder of death, not just the death of my parents, but death as the end of all, period. It got to the point where the only thing I could think of was to kill myself in order to be rid of the misery. Then slowly, very slowly, my mood got a little brighter and I experienced a rather level-minded period. I traveled around, climbed the mountains, crossed the rivers and even the oceans, met beasts and fowls who became my friends and learned a great deal about life. Then gradually, I slipped into the restless high again, far higher than the first time I experienced it when I was living at Emmett's house. I slept next to none and was full of energy. I could travel and talk for days or weeks nonstop and felt fabulous about all things around me.

"Then one day, I was in the middle of a conversation with a fox friend of mine. All of a sudden in one split second, I saw sitting in front of me an eight-legged beast who had my friend's head but with dripping blue blood all over a lion's body. In another second, he transformed into a tiny purple fairy that flew away. Silently and painfully, I realized that I had just completely lost my mind...."

Tammy was shaking inside now. She had never heard anything like this and she was not sure that she understood what Angelo was experiencing at all. Yet learning from her own experience with Angelo years ago, she sat still and kept quiet. And Angelo went on -

"I then set out to find a cure. After years of traveling and searching, one day a herbalist handed me a bunch of roots of unknown origin. I ate the roots and lay down at the herbalist's backyard. In a few days, the frightening images disappeared but I got violently ill over the roots - vomiting, shaking and seeing double. The herbalist adjusted the amount of roots I was to eat and was of the opinion that I had to keep taking the roots

in order not to see the images again. I didn't believe him. Plus I missed my highs. It was part of me - the energetic deer who never tired of running and listening...."

For some reason, Tammy thought she understood this last bit. So she said, "It was like what I missed about the moments with Angela, magic and surreal and it seemed worthwhile to give up everything else in order to have these moments back, even for a brief second."

Nodding, Angelo continued, "Well, soon after I stopped taking the roots, they were back all right. The high period elated me but not for long. In another few days some more horrifying images and the dark sadness followed, this time they lasted longer than the time before. It was so despairing that I did not see anyway out but to kill myself. One grim winter evening, I jumped into an icy lake after taking ten times more roots than the herbalist recommended. A wolf cub saw me disappear into the lake and got his mother and siblings, they dragged me out and carried me to the local healer, a man who was known to be wise. I drifted in and out of coma and sleep in the healer's hut. When I was well enough to talk, he listened to me with undivided attention. After months, he said that with the roots and an empathic listener, I could not only survive and cope with my moods but also thrive at listening. It was he who first listened to me and trusted me. It was he who first gave me the idea of listening to people as a method of healing. After knowing him, I used my *self* more fully when I listened to people. Years later, when I ran into the un-named duck, and then when I ran into you while you were mourning for Angela, I had a much better idea of how I was going to not only be an empathic listener, but also consciously use my own sensitivity and vulnerability as a tool to be helpful...."

Taking a drink of water, Angelo waited, as if to let his words sink in, both for Tammy and himself. Tammy simply looked at him and waited, but in her heart, she felt a deep sense of dread for no apparent reason.

"I stayed at the healer's place whenever I was nearby and talked to him. I learned more and more about how he listened day after day, year after year. He saw me through all the highs and lows I was experimenting at the time I was not taking my roots. He never passed judgments, and yet he made known in no uncertain terms that he was of the opinion that the roots were the only thing that could help me stay sane and calm me enough to learn to cope with life again. Slowly, I settled with the notion that in order for me to stay alive, I needed the roots and in order for me to make sense of life and thrive at what I do best, I needed to be listened to...."

"Then five years ago, one spring morning, I showed up at his hut, only to find the wolf cub who saved my life - then a grown wolf with his own pack - in deep mourning. My healer had just died. I felt completely lost. And here I am...."