

My Heart, or my Mind?

It was almost festival time again in the forests. Everyone prepared food for the pack or the family, all beasts and fowls alike, all, except Gordon.

"I promised Sally. I promised Sally...." Gordon murmured to himself as if saying a mantra, sitting, again, by the quietest part of the stream. He was so distraught that he didn't even notice the little duck who had already been sitting just a foot away from him.

"I love Emma. I love Emma...." Gordon continued his "mantra".

"Emma, the deer, who told me to stop dreaming and get a realistic grip on life, that Emma?" A gentle voice asked.

"Huh?!" Gordon was startled. "Wow! Excuse me. I didn't know there was anyone else here. I was just talking to myself."

The little duck smiled, "I'm sorry. You looked so dazed, I didn't want to bother you. But then you mentioned the name Emma -"

Gordon, at a loss at what to say, simply stared at the duck. The duck, in turn, felt that he had to say something. "My name is Hope. I came here because I have been quite distraught myself and I thought with the center's reputation, I may get some help...."

Hope went on telling his story to Gordon - he began with how he had to leave Emmett and the frog and went on to how he ran into Angelo and eventually named himself Hope, and after all these years, how he finally made a new friend, Jack, the tiger, but he, too, told Hope to leave the forest because Jack's new buddy Jan did not want Hope around.

"And so I came here. After listening to my story, Emma told me that perhaps it is time for me to be realistic, she said, 'if you want a home, build a house; if you want a friend, keep looking until you find someone who would want you as well. Stop wondering why Jack did what he did!' It all sounded so easy for her. But I still wonder about Jack," Hope said.

"Tell me about Jack," Gordon, intrigued by the little duck, got out of his own misery temporarily. He knew that he could reveal nothing of what he knew of Jack, not

even the fact that Jack was ever in the healing center, yet at the same time, he would like to help Hope.

"Oh, he was my best friend. I told him my life story and he told me his. We enjoyed each other's company. And more than that, we understood each other. Well, at least I thought we did, until, until - " Hope choked up with tears.

"Did he say that he didn't want to be your friend anymore?" Gordon asked softly, after letting the silence set in for a while.

"Well, he never did. He said the opposite. He said that he'd always want to be my friend. But then he told me to leave the forest, 'with Jan feeling insecure at the moment, I need to make sure he understands that he is important to me as well. I'll tell you to come back when Jan feels safe with our friendship' was what Jack said." Hope answered, wiping tears away from his face.

Gordon was a little puzzled, "Why do you think he doesn't want your friendship then?"

"Well, you see, he knew that I had always been chased away from places and my friends always abandoned me, " Hope looked up, as if expecting Gordon to say something.

Still a little lost, Gordon asked, "So you expected something more from him then? What was it that you expected?"

"I thought he could have said that he would spend a little time with me before I leave, or visit me a little when I am near by, or something, nothing much, just so that I may feel that he would like to be around me as well, still," Hope was sobbing again.

"And he said that he couldn't do that?" Gordon ventured, feeling that things were more complicated than he had first imagined.

"Yes, he said that he could not manage any of it when Jan still felt insecure about their new friendship and he said that I should be the one to understand, " Hope answered, his words barely audible.

"Is there a possibility that he may have trouble balancing everything and he would like you to understand that and trust him?" Gordon, not knowing how the duck would react to this, asked ever so tentatively.

"Of course there is a possibility. My mind tells me this is exactly what it is. But my heart is so broken for so many times that it tells me that just for once, I would like someone who knows me to show me a little more than just, just - " Tears dropped down Hope's cheeks while he tried desperately to control his sobbing.

Sitting in silence with Hope, Gordon thought about his own situation with Emma. "Isn't that what it is now? I would like Emma to show me that she still loves me and she is not showing me that. So I become unsure whether or not I am able to love her just the same. Do I really need her to love me back to want to help her, to stand by her? This little duck just taught me something. My mind says one thing and my heart says another. Perhaps this time I follow my mind and try to be there for her, whether or not she even appreciates it...."

Putting his paw on the little duck's head, Gordon whispered, "Hope, only you can decide whether or not following your mind is something cost too high for you right now."

After that, Hope and Gordon sat in completely silence, deep in his own contemplation, under the steel dark blue sky, where no stars were to be seen.