

Individual Listening

It had been so long that Peter, the leucrotta, felt that he had lost count of how long he had been travelling. He remembered crossing the deserts, the oceans, the mountains and the rivers, and now all he cared to remember was his last night's struggle in the snow. Dawn just broke. And he finally arrived at the healing center by the little stream.

In the mountain range, everything seemed soundly asleep. Peter sat by the stream, dipped his paws in the icy water, drank a bit, then lay down on his side and closed his eyes, "I won't go to sleep, I'll just rest a bit and then..." he said to himself.

The next thing Peter knew, someone was shaking him gently, "Hi, aren't you cold here?"

Opening his eyes, Peter was still unsure whether or not he was dreaming. The being he saw in front of him was unlike any he had ever seen before, and Peter had prided himself in seeing many things and understanding even more....

He thought to himself, "Gee, I wonder if this is a sign that I'm getting old and rigid-minded, if I can explain to people that I am a leucrotta and expect them to accept me, then why am I so surprised to meet a creature unknown to me?"

With that thought, he swallowed, and spoke politely, "Hi, I'm a leucrotta. My mother is a hyena and my father a lion. I'd never met anyone who looked like you before, what are you?"

Smiling, Gordon thought to himself, "This is one fine leucrotta. I like him already." Out loud, he replied, "Oh, my mother is a fox and my father is a deer, although I had never met my father. For lack of a better word, people around here call me the deer-fox."

After the brief introduction, Peter told Gordon why he came to the center. "This healing center has a great reputation in my forest and all beasts and fowls there thought that it would be beneficial for me to come and learn the method, especially listening individually."

Gordon's face fell as Peter uttered these enthusiastic words. After what felt like an eternal silence, Gordon said, "Well, Peter, I don't want to discourage you, but the center has not done individual listening for years."

Gordon went on explaining to Peter why Emma and Cassandra thought that not only listening individually was a waste of time and resources but it was a somewhat dangerous thing to do as well. "Well, especially Cassandra, she felt that when two people were alone together in a corner, nobody else would ever know what they were saying to each other and great damage could be done without anyone else's being aware of it. The practice was then forbidden."

"Such mistrust must have come from somewhere else deeper and it has to be more personal than just a theoretical stand," Peter said to himself.

Unsure of his speculations, Peter kept his thoughts to himself. After having breakfast with the deer-fox, he only asked if he could be brought to Cassandra and Emma, the healers-in-chief of the center. Gordon nodded and motioned Peter to follow.

After introducing Peter to Emma and Cassandra, Gordon left, a little worried what would become of the leucrotta, like Peter's hyena siblings, Gordon had fallen deeply in love with Peter, not simply because of his good looks.

Peter told both the deer and the wolf of his intentions to be in the center. As soon as he finished, Cassandra said, with a finality that Peter had not expected, "You are welcome to learn all we have to offer. But we no longer practice individual listening so that is not an option anymore."

Feeling that there was nothing much he could do at the moment, Peter settled in learning all the other healing methods the center was actively practicing. Throughout the year, Peter learned that the center's founder Tammy was healed by Angelo, the deer, who listened to her individually, and Emma even admitted that once Angelo himself came to the center to be listened to individually....

"Interesting, all except Cassandra. She was the only one who had not been listened to individually and yet she was the one who was adamantly against the method. There is a wound somewhere deep in this wolf's heart, I am sure of it. Only if I can reach her heart...." Peter often wondered to himself.

When fall came again in the forest, everyone was, again, preparing for the feast, Peter and Gordon both went to help with Emma and Cassandra's dinner for the whole forest.

The dinner was a great success, after an overnight feast, everyone fell asleep after cleaning up—everyone, except Peter and Cassandra. The wolf and the leucrotta simply disappeared. They were only seen again forty days later, while even Emma got a little worried about their safety.

Upon returning to the center, Cassandra approached Emma and told her that she had changed her mind about individual listening, she now believed that it could do a lot of people much good to have it available to them.

"What did the handsome leucrotta said to you that made you change your mind?" Emma teased the wolf.

Smiling, Cassandra replied, "Let's just say that I have personally benefited from the method. As for the risks I saw before, well, I still see them, but we'll just have to set up a system where negligence and other damages are controlled to the minimum."

There was a big ceremony in restoring the center's individual listening as a method when the snow was falling again. Afterwards, when everything seemed quiet again in the darkness of the forest, Cassandra, lying on her side and looking at the stars above, said to herself, "That leucrotta certainly built a bridge to my heart, a special one I did not care to admit to anyone, including to Peter himself...."