

The Lesson

Gordon let the others tie stones to his legs and carry him to the lake. He then told them that it was time to drop him in.

He took one last glance at the crowd. Everyone around thought that he was looking at him or her, including Emma, Cassandra, Peter and Richard.

A few hours later, the beasts and fowls gradually went away from the site - after all, throwing killers into the lake was not an uncommon event, and there was not much to see after the last bubble of air came up.

Many did not know that Gordon was not even a killer, nor would it seem that they wanted to find out anything about the deer-fox who had been condemned to die.

Emma overheard one deer say to another while walking away together, "Well, at least we know we have one less murderer in our forest today. It makes me feel safer than I was yesterday." If it had been any other time, Emma would have set them "straight" but at that moment she felt completely exhausted from the event. She just couldn't make herself speak.

A few weeks later, Cassandra left the healing center because the animals in the center - the healers and the wounded alike - still did not trust her.

Rumor had it that she threw herself in a far away lake in order to purify her soul of her past killings. Peter was the last one who had talked to Cassandra before she left. He did not want to believe the rumor, he thought to himself, "I think she realized that killing herself was not going to make things any better. And it would not help us learn the lesson from Gordon's death, although none of us is sure of what that lesson was, exactly." And yet somehow the rumor cast a dark shadow in the leucrotta's heart.

In the meantime, the healing center went about its "business" as usual, as if nothing had happened. It seemed that Emma and Peter were the only two that were even bothered by Gordon's death, everyone else seemed to have forgotten all about it as soon as Cassandra was out of sight.

The leucrotta and the deer finally paid a visit to Sally, the old fox. The three sat for days, trying to make sense of why the animals wanted so much to kill Cassandra, even though it was proven that she had no intention of further killing.

What puzzled all three more was why they wanted Gordon's life in order to prove that he trusted Cassandra and then went on not trusting her, anyway. It seemed to have been all to no avail.

They understood nothing, even after all the contemplation and discussion. Sally was visibly depressed, missing the deer-fox terribly, holding on to her promise not to ever mention her conversation with Gordon, some years ago, to Emma, or anyone. She felt quite alone, mourning Gordon. Peter and Emma returned to the center, barely functioned as healers.

Desperate, Emma decided that she had to get her group together in order to understand the event. It took her another few weeks to accomplish getting everyone to the center. In the meeting, she asked everyone to think about the event and why it was that Gordon had to die and what, if anything, they learned from his death.

Richard said that he felt bad about taking Gordon's life but he did not regret asking for Cassandra's life, "The deer-fox volunteered, none of us wanted to kill him. It was as if we executed the wolf. And there is not much to be learned from the event, as far as I'm concerned."

Jack, the vegetarian tiger, begged the differ, "I've been feeling quite sad about Gordon and Cassandra. It seemed that it was in the heat of the moment, we asked for the deer-fox's life, even though it makes no sense to me at all at this point. Even for the wolf, if we did not believe that repentance would make us turn to 'goodness' instead of maintain our 'evilness', then why should we even believe in healing and redemption in the first place? And since we all believe in healing, in order to prevent us from doing the same thing again, we have to at least figure out what will make us stop in the heat of the moment and be calm enough to ponder."

Some felt that the tiger had a good point, and they added that perhaps it was introspection and empathy that were missing, a few months ago. Others said that it was courage as well, since none of the others stood up like Gordon. And the rest of the group held on to the belief that if Cassandra, Emma, Peter and Gordon didn't make such a big fuss, the deer-fox would not have had to die at all.

Jan, Jack's new best friend, represented the last view, "Why are you all still brooding? The wolf should have died and it seems that she did choose to die after all. I still believe that she was a killer. As for the deer-fox, well, he seemed to be a kind soul, but it was hardly worth it for him to give up his life that way."

Emma and Peter sat motionless after the other group members left for dinner, feeling unable to move. Peter look at Emma, "I think some of them made good points, perhaps we still need to learn introspection, empathy and courage. Perhaps we simply need to remain calm in the heat of the moment in order to think. But all these do not solve my problem: How do we get from loving someone to wanting to kill him or her?"

It took Emma a long time to respond, "Perhaps what we are missing is the sense of true understanding and the integration of that understanding into our emotions. If we go by emotions alone, love may easily turn to hate when we feel deceived. But I'm not entirely sure."

They sat together for another while. Feeling quite stuck with their unresolved dilemma of why we kill and how to prevent it from happening again. Just then three figures suddenly showed up in front of them. The fox and the leucrotta jumped up and hugged Tammy, Emmett and Angelino, the duck.

All five disappeared deep in the forest, following a mysterious guiding star.