

Hope's Peace and Sorrow

Hope, the duck, arrived at the stream the night that Emma, Peter, Emmett, Tammy and Angelino left for the deep forest.

He had no knowledge of the whereabouts of the five. He did not even know that Tammy, Emmett and Angelino were in the forest.

Far, far away, where he was travelling, he had only heard that a group of beasts and fowls killed Gordon because of Cassandra's past killings. He immediately started to make his way to the healing centre and it had taken him a few months to get there, because of the great distance he had to cover.

The sole purpose of this trip, he thought, was to understand why they killed Gordon, and if there was any way to prevent such things from happening again.

Hope first searched for Cassandra, but was told that the wolf left the centre a few weeks after the deer-fox died for her and might even have killed herself in a far away lake. Then he asked about Emma and Peter but was informed by the current group leaders and individual healers that the deer and the leucrotta first disappeared to visit the old fox Sally, came back after a few days, functioned poorly on their "jobs" and then vanished on the night Hope arrived.

Disappointed, Hope found the spot on which he and Gordon sat when he first encountered the deer-fox. He sat down quietly, closed his eyes and gave himself away to his reverie. His thoughts went to Gordon, to Jack - the focal point of their discussion - and then back to how Gordon was trying to help him decide whether he should follow his heart or his mind....

"The deer-fox never said what was the best for me. But I know he would follow his heart and continue to love," Hope said to himself after a while, "not just love, but to trust. I myself have no trouble loving Jack. I can't help it. He let me 'know' him, his innermost fears and desires, his utmost joys and sorrows. And once I get to know someone that way, my heart cannot stop feeling a deep care for him. I know that I will always be there for him. I would even drop everything and go to him whenever he needs me. But after he told me to leave the forest because of his new friend Jan, a little part of me died, the part where true hope resided. The hope that I, too, could count on him to do

the same for me. Do I still trust him, like Gordon would have wanted me to, even though the deer-fox was too polite to ask that of me?"

He meditated for a very long time, with his own question. He could find no answer. Then he remembered his second encounter with the roc, the wise magnificent fish-bird.

"Do you think I should still trust my friend, the vegetarian tiger?" Hope had asked the roc after he told the roc his experience.

"My dear little one," the wind carried the roc's deep and gentle voice, "Do you know exactly what your tiger friend meant when he said that he believed that he would always be your friend?"

Hope was speechless. He only knew that if he himself had said these words, he would mean just that - their friendship would last forever. But he realized, upon the roc's questioning, that he had no idea at all what Jack really meant.

In haste, he had said to the fish-bird, "I guess the only way to find out is to ask him." But in his heart, he knew that it might take him a very long time to accomplish that, since the tiger had no intention of seeing him any time soon.

Sitting all alone and contemplating, Hope remembered it all clearly now. It all happened years ago.

When he suddenly felt a soft breeze blow over him, he opened his eyes. And there, in front of him, stood his long lost friend Jack.

"They told me you are around here somewhere, " the tiger smiled, "and it took me a whole day to find you. Just like in the old days, you really know how to hide." Completely shocked, all Hope could do was to stare at his friend.

When he regained his ability to speak, he managed to ask Jack the question the roc once asked him.

"Well," Jack replied quickly, obviously having thought about it well before it was posted to him by the duck, "I think I meant that I have all the intentions to be your friend, as long as I can manage it. And that I will always love you. Although at the time when I said such words, I thought that I could actually be able to maintain our friendship as it was. But with new friendships came new responsibilities, which I had not taken into account. I now understand that I can only reasonably promise a kind of willingness, not

the actual accomplishment of an unchanged friendship. But I still think about you often, you know. And I do miss what we used to be able to share together."

Nodding, Hope said nothing in reply.

After a long pause, Hope and Jack talked about Gordon's death. The two agreed that it made no sense that the deer-fox had to die, but they also could not figure out how they could stop anyone, even themselves, from acting in the heat of the moment.

After another long while, Jack left to find Jan.

Hope sat motionless by himself, feeling profoundly sad and yet there seemed to be some minute change within him, as though some small turbulent part of him had found a little peace.

"So I didn't find out why the deer-fox had to die or how we could prevent similar things from happening again, " He said to himself out loud, "but I found out what Jack really meant when he said that he'd be my friend, always. It was not at all what I had believed he meant, or what I mean when I say such things. But I now understand his view and I've found a little peace because of that. Just like the roc said I would. Even though a bigger piece of me died."