

The lonely tree

Ohad Livne Bar-On

December 1, 2014

Once upon a time, there lived a tree. Ever since it was a little sapling, it has lived alone, and had no friends nor playmates, and so its days passed in gloom and loneliness.

“Ah,” thought the tree, “if only I were a carefree dandelion, I too would spend all day, every day, swaying gently with my fellow flowers, and when the wind came, let it carry me whither it may please. Were I a freewheeling dragonfly, I could live in idle thoughtlessness, and fly about, sparkling beautifully. Nay, ’twould even be fine were I a cherry tree, and then some kind grandfather passing by could sprinkle ashes on me, that I may prettily blossom. But I am not a dandelion, nor am I a dragonfly or a cherry. I have not the Susuki’s grace, nor the young grass’ softness, nor the nightingale’s delicate singing voice, nor even the maple’s splendid autumn leaves. For I am merely the plain fig. I have no flowers. Though occasionally I may bear fruit, usually I merely scatter leaves, that they may rot on the ground.” So said the tree to itself, and shook a bough in dejection. Though, on second thought, it might have been nothing but the wind.

And so continued the lonely tree’s gloomy days. The new year has come; the Hina dolls were brought out and again stowed; up went the flying carps, then down again; and the heat came, and then let up.

And then came one day, on the brink of Autumn. A cool breeze was blowing gently, and you might imagine that you could feel some faint hint that it will soon be turning cool; but looking at the scenery about you, it would seem that nothing at all has changed. Amidst all this, a small bird, flying hither. It seemed not to know where it was, let alone where it is going, and was wandering to and fro in confusion. Before long, the little bird noticed the lonely tree, and landed on it.

“Why, hello there.” said the tree. “You don’t look too well. Is something the matter?”

“Oh, hello. I apologize for suddenly appearing and bothering you like that. To tell the truth, I have been separated from the flock and lost my way. You did not happen to see any passing birds around here, did you? Or know the way to Australia, by any chance?”

“Sadly, I do not. Though I did see several birds, I have not seen any flocks. Also, being a tree I do not get around much, so unfortunately I do not know the way to Australia.”

“Oh, you have a point. Well, I have no choice, then. I have to continue looking for everyone.”

“If you want, you can stay here and rest awhile. You look exhausted.”

“Is it really all right? Thank you.”

“Sure, I don't mind. You may remain here until you meet up with your friends. By the way, if you don't mind my asking, what is it like to fly? What sort of place is Australia?”

“Well. . . When you fly, crossing the sky, you feel as though you have become the wind. Rather than you moving, it feels as if the world itself is moving, and you can go anywhere you want. However, about Australia I can tell you nothing. You see, this is my first time going there. We birds can always return to a place we've been too, even just once; but new places are a different matter. It is for that reason that getting separated from the flock is such a problem.”

Having said that, the little bird flew away at once in search of its friends. The lonely tree hoped that the little bird meet up with its flock. And yet, not knowing why, when it saw the little bird receding into the distance, it had a vague sense of sadness. And when the bird returned worn-out in the evening, the tree felt sorry for it, but some part of it was relieved as well.

And so, the bird set out daily in the morning to look for its flock, and returned to the tree in the evening; and the tree watched over the sleeping bird during the night. Every day the bird told the tree about the view from the sky and about various places; and the tree told the bird about being rooted to the ground and about the silent, slow stories of the Earth.

In time, as the days grew cold, the little bird began to realize that it will not join with its companions. “Welcome back,” said the tree. But this time the little bird did not reply. “My, you look depressed. Don't worry, the flock is definitely looking for you, and you will no doubt meet them soon enough.”

“No. I have already been searching for many days, and not only can I not find my own flock, but I can't even find another bird of my feather. Undoubtedly, this means that everyone has already moved on to Australia.”

“But they can't possibly leave one of their own behind.”

“You just don't understand. While they might wait for several days, they can't keep waiting forever. We are going to the South because it is growing cold. Everybody used to tell me that over there it is always warm, but I never realized what this means until now.”

“It is really that cold? I was always fine in the Fall and Winter.”

“You're a tree, so you're fine. I, on the other hand, have never experienced such cold weather. Besides, those drenching water from the sky. . .”

“Rain.”

“Yeah, that rain is awful. I can no longer go with the flock, and I can't go by myself. So. . . I know I was only supposed to stay here until I could join with the flock, but would you mind spending the Winter with me?”

“Eh? you want to stay with me? But I'm not graceful.”

“But you are sturdy. You will not shake in the wind. I can build a safe nest here.”

“But I don't have pretty flowers.”

“I will be more concerned about practical matters. You have fruits, don't you?”

“But my leaves are unsightly.”

“They are broad leaves, and will make good shelter from the rain. Anyway, you have never once complained about my intrusion, and have always been a reliable friend. I will never judge you for such things.”

“Well, if you're fine with me, I will gladly agree, of course.”

Soon, Winter came. The fig tree did its utmost to shelter the little bird from the wind and the rain. And eventually, the days grew warm, and Spring arrived. Every which way you looked, there were flowers blooming; small animals were scuttering about on the ground; and insects were buzzing about in the air. The world seemed to be full of vitality. The little bird, too, was no longer cold and seemed to regain its former liveliness. The fig tree, on the other hand, became somewhat uneasy.

“It seems it’s no longer cold, and doesn’t rain hard,” said the tree.

“Yeah, I can go flying again. I sure miss flying.”

“Right. There are pretty flowers and pleasant scents everywhere...”

“True. Well, I’ll go see this new scenery,” said the little bird and flew away. Following the bird in its flight, the tree let fall one leaf. But when the sun was about to set, the little bird returned. Excited, it began telling the tree about all it has seen. However,

“Oh, but *I* don’t have any pretty flowers or pleasant scent. There is no reason for you to remain with me.”

“This place has become like a home to me. I have no intention of leaving.”

In time, it grew even warmer, and on the horizon flocks of birds could sometimes be discerned. Whenever that happened, the little bird always flew in that direction. One day, it did not come back. The tree waited one day, and then another. It was worried. Could the little bird have been injured? Or was it perhaps caught by some predator? No matter how long it waited, the little bird did not appear.

The Hina dolls were brought out and again stowed; up went the flying carps, then down again; and the heat came, and then let up. The lonely tree kept waiting for the little bird to return. That year, it did not bear fruit, and when Winter came, it scattered all its leaves to rot on the ground.

Spring came once more. The world seemed to be full of vitality, but the lonely tree was listless and depressed. Nevertheless, every which way you looked, there were flowers blooming; small animals were scuttering about on the ground; and insects were buzzing about in the air. Amidst all this, a small bird, flying hither. Actually, looking closely you could see that there was not only one bird, but several. Before long, the little birds reached the lonely tree, and landed on it.

“Little bird? You suddenly disappeared one day, and I had no idea what happened.”

“I’m sorry. That day, I met my flock unexpectedly. I realized that if I lost them then, I would have no chance of meeting them all year, and remain separated. I didn’t even have the time to return and tell you I’m leaving. And then, when I reached my home in the North, every day was so busy.”

“Then are you going North to your home now too? Is that what you came to tell me?”

“Not at all. This year, I went to Australia with the flock, so I know the way myself. I came here to start a new flock—A flock of my own.”

“What do you mean, ‘a new flock?’”

“After going North, I paired up with this lovely bird here, and we have been raising nestlings ever since. As I told you, I was busy.”

“So, you intend to stay here?”

“Of course. I told my family all about you, and they were all anxious to meet you. So, if it’s all right by you, we will build a nest here; we will set out

South from here every year come Autumn; and we will come back here every year when Spring arrives. What do you say?"

The tree was delighted and agreed. From that day forward, the little bird's family lived in the fig tree, and multiplied every year. After the migration, the little bird always came back full of stories of distant lands. The young fledglings would fly and play among the branches. And the fig tree was never lonely again.

The End