



# *Drifting Away*

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Retold Fairy Tales

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Once upon a time, there was a young boy who lived in the land of Elpida. Elpida was a magnificently beautiful place engulfed by brimful trees which held many a sweet fruit. There, many creatures lived out their lives with their families. Among those creatures was Earl Grey, the owl. Earl had long flowing, silver feathers, with black streaks and dots scattered throughout. His eyes, wide and deep, colored a vivid grenadier red, only intensified by his snow-white face. Earl lived alone in a small treehouse-hut. Along with Earl Grey, there lived Becks, who was tall and sprightly for his age. He would wake up every morning and go whizzing through the air for an early morning flight. His dark, anthracite feathers looked blacker than grey up in the air and his wingspan reaching 33cm, as he soars up toward the glorious morning sun. Earl appreciated this about Becks. No matter how many years passed them by, Becks would never stop flying high. Lastly, there was Florence, the fox. She had been friends with the Earls and the Becks for as long as she could remember. Her slight body made her hard to notice, but what would always give her away was her colossal ears. They were the staple of her look, even more so than her luxuriously full, sand-colored tail. She lived in a very comfortable burrow in the ground, close to the center of Elpida. Since she was the only girl of the group, she found it difficult to deal with the guys, but it was worth the love they all extended to one another. It had been them, and only them for years. Living together in their home of Elpida, happy and content, until one day, a strange creature was welcomed into the fold.

One beautiful morning, the sun was beaming down on Elpida, piercing through the trees. The band of friends was sitting perched upon Mother Willow, the tallest and most magnificent tree in Elpida. She was also the oldest and most distinguished of the bunch, and always let Earl, Becks, and Florence have breakfast settled beside her. This morning, when Becks reached Mother Willow, Earl was all alone. This was unusual since Florence was always waiting alongside Earl, bright eyed and bushy tailed, ready to start breakfast as soon as

Becks touched down. However, as they would soon realize, today was no typical day.

“Where is she?” Becks asked in a whistling tune.

“No idea. I thought maybe she was late, but then she never showed up,” replied Earl.

“Well, I’m starving,” whined Becks, “If she’s not here then I guess we eat without her.”

“NO!” Earl expressed definitively, “We haven’t eaten without her in a decade, and I won’t let us start now.”

“Fine. Well, then I guess we better go get her,” Becks said annoyedly.

As Earl, prepped his wings to fly toward Florence’s burrow, and Becks murmured frustratingly under his breath, Mother Willow began to wake. The folds of her willow face began to unfurrow, revealing her soft, familiar face. Looking at her always seemed to make you feel at home. It was like a perfectly milky marshmallow filled cup of hot chocolate on a cold, rainy day.

“Good morning, my lovely flower children. Where are you rushing off too in such a huff?” Mother Willow inquired.

“Good morning Mother Willow. We are off to find Florence. She seems to have skipped out on breakfast today,” answered Earl.

“Well, I guess you’d better hurry along then!” she exclaimed, with a sense of urgency in her tone. Becks and Earl began to spread their wings, ready to dart away as if they were fleeing from a crime scene. But as their talons gently rose from the forest’s ground, Mother Willow warned, “Just beware of what you might find. As you rush off to grasp hold of your friend, she may be grasping hold of something else.”

Earl and Becks watched as Mother Willow retreated into her original form, and they turned slowly toward one another. Though they said nothing, the trepidation in their eyes spoke volumes. They abruptly began to fly as quickly as their bodies would allow, toward Florence’s burrow.

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As they touched down on the damp forest floor, the first thing they saw was Florence lying down beside the luscious bush near her burrow. She seemed content and without a care in the world. To Becks and Earl, it looked as if she had no idea, she was expected to be anywhere other than where she was in that moment.

Though Earl had been dubbed the clam one, who stays cool and collected, he beat Becks to the punch this once, confronting Florence immediately.

“Oh, well it’s nice to see that you’re comfortable and satisfied with lying her as your friends waited and worried warmheartedly for a fox who’d never show!” exclaimed Earl. “Apparently lying beside a bush is more important than our age-old breakfast tradition!”

Florence peered up at her friends, with a look of confusion and responded matter-of-factly, “Calm down, it’s

not that big a deal. I miss one breakfast in a decade, and you go ballistic!” Though Florence didn’t mean to sound as aggressive as she did, that’s just the way it came out. She would later regret it, as it was the kickoff to an even more aggressive response from Becks.

“You know what, we came here because we were worried about you and that’s the thanks we get?! I told Earl we should just have breakfast without you, but NO! He stood by you and made me see that breakfast without you was no breakfast at all. Now, we’re here and you don’t even seem to care that you’ve upset us and blown us off!” Florence looked as if she’d just watched Marley and Me for the first time. There was a mutual look of melancholic dread on every face. Florence began to speak in a tone so low and pensive, it rivaled that of Mother Willow.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t realize how not coming to breakfast might hurt you. I made a new friend and they wanted to pick berries and hang out today. I didn’t think to tell you or cancel my plans. It was careless and selfish. It won’t happen again.”

Earl and Becks exchanged knowing looks. Earl focused his wide, grenadier eyes on Florence, pouring out, “We love you, more than you know. But not showing up for us, after we’ve shown up for you all these years, is not okay. You must think about us, just as much as we think about you. Okay?”

“I know, and I’m really sorry,” Florence avowed, slumped over herself with head hung low.

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For the next couple of weeks, Florence never missed breakfast. She was there, at the branching base of Mother Willow, waiting with Earl for Becks to touch down like a plane arriving smoothly on a tarmac. Though she was always physically there, she was never the same around them. What happened weeks earlier still trailed behind them every morning. When Florence arrived early for breakfast Earl and Becks were only reminded of how hurt they were when she never showed up. And during conversations reminiscing about their past adventures together, Florence was reminded of the morning she had with her new friend and how annoyed she was that missing one breakfast could mean so much. The time they spent together was no longer counted as some of the best days of their lives. It was an ever-present reminder of how bad things had become and how different that one fight had made everything.

Mother Willow once again unfolded into the mother we all dream of. She awakened with soft features and a signature melodious voice.

“Hello, my lovely flower children. What seems to be the matter now?”

“Nothing,” Earl stated intently. It was hard to tell whether he was trying to convince Mother Willow or himself.

“Well, if nothing’s the matter than I guess I’ll just keep my thoughts to myself,” teased Mother Willow.

“No, no, no!” they all screamed. It was the first time in nearly a month they had all agreed on something.

“Okay, okay, hold your horses,” she said like a mother whose children were ready to rush into the house and grab unissued popsicles. “All I’m gonna tell you is to remember that nothing happens in a vacuum. There are rarely ever unmeaningful isolated events. Be clear and selective with your decisions and don’t drag on what you are no longer committed to. The people around you will thank you in the end.”

“Always so cryptic,” huffed Becks as he turned to fly off toward Florence’s burrow once again.

Earl extended a brief, “Thanks as always Mother Willow,” before doing the same.

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Once again arriving as quickly as a cheetah moving in on its prey, Earl and Becks came to the burrow they knew all too well. This time Florence was not lying alone basking in the light of the sun by a luscious bush, but instead lying with someone new. Earl immediately recognized the fox as Tod. Tod was jaunty and slightly arrogant. The same age as Florence – though younger than both Earl and Becks – but less sagacious in Earl’s opinion. Florence was enamored with him. Her mammoth ears were pointed straight up toward the cloudy sky, which seemed ready to burst into tears, as her full tail trailed along the base of a tree. As Becks and Earl approached Florence, Tod jerked his beige head toward them.

“Oh hello,” Tod spouted at them. “I didn’t know anyone would be joining us.”

“Yeah well, that makes two of us. I might even add that there shouldn’t be anything to join in the first place,” squawked Becks ferociously.

Florence quickly replied, “Wow Becks, calm down! Why are you two even here?!”

This question both baffled and angered Earl. He felt as though a knife had just pierced his heart. “Why are we here? We’re here because you never showed up to breakfast again!” shouted Earl.

At this point, Florence’s face shifted from slightly annoyed to conscience-stricken. She picked her head up and moved her eyes woefully from Earl to Becks.

“I’m so sorry. I completely forgot. It wasn’t intentional, I just wasn’t paying attention,” she pleaded.

“I would say it’s okay, but that would be a lie,” Becks keenly stated. This seemed to offend Florence as well as Tod, but he appeared to know better than to jump in on this note.

“Come on guys, it’s been years and I missed a couple of breakfasts. That can’t possibly be worth an entire fight,” Florence fought back.

“You’re exactly right Florence. It isn’t worth a fight, it’s worth everything. And the fact that after all this time you still don’t know that, well, it says way more about you than us,” Earl said with the look of a mother whose child they just caught in their first lie.

Florence wanted to object, to raise her voice and shout about how wrong they were to place so much significance on a silly breakfast tradition, but she couldn't bring herself to. They all stood there looking deep into one another's eyes with the same hope and yearning. When they each realized there was nothing more to be said, Earl and Becks turned slowly as if afraid turning too quickly would disrupt the truth they were all feeling. As the clouds burst open like fire hydrants, over the forest of Elpida, Earl and Becks began to fly away like balloons drifting from the wanting hands of a young child. No more was said, just mutually understood. Time would be the ultimate determiner of the rest of their lives. The next day as Becks arrived from his early morning flight, he would touch down looking to Earl's deep, mesmerizing eyes before checking the base of Mother Willow for the final answer of how important breakfast really was.

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