

The Gamble

Was he just being self-centered? After all, most of the galvanizing moral support Yew had got in the last ten years had come nominally from his tutor, Serena. It felt like a total shame to bear any sort of grievance with her. And yet, Yew the deer was supposed to finally meet with her today, after two cancellations since the past few weeks. The first one because she'd come down with food poisoning, the second because someone had broken into her car. Now, there was a death in her family. She objectively had it worse than he did.

But this wasn't the first series of cancellations she'd had to report. Serena, over the last 5 years, had cancelled more appointments than she'd kept. This was agony. She was just about the only person who'd been able to get through to him. She always knew just what to say - if he'd had trouble at school, with teachers, with friends, or his parents, she'd done more than her job of teaching him math and language arts. She'd turned her life around. She'd convinced him not to give up on life.

Now it was tempting to give up on their relationship. He had to ask himself - did the joy of finally seeing her really outweigh the disappointment he felt when she had to cancel? Easily, it did. But joy was a rare gem among a stream of continual disappointment. Scheduling an appointment with her was a gamble, and one with terrible odds.

Chills trickled down his skin. He sensed a courtroom arising, a jury of stern, angry people. All of them took sides. "How can you be so possessive of one person? Can't you find anything to do if you can't hang out with her?" said one half. The other turned on Serena. "Why even set up appointments if all you do is cancel them? Does 'honoring your word' mean nothing to you?"

This was not good. He didn't want to live in a world with "good guys" and "bad guys." He wanted a solution. And right now, the only solution seemed to binge watch online videos, something that would give him some sense of closure.

The truth was, he loved Serena. She was as good as family. There weren't a lot of people with no blood ties he felt he could open up to, and that's why Serena's cancellations were devastating. Nobody's perfect, but Serena's one imperfection was her unavailability. Dammit. How could he fix this?

He didn't realize he'd fallen asleep until his printer began acting up.

It wasn't paper and ink coming out of it, it was something cloudy and cottony, stuff that looked like it should be coming out of his pillow or mattress, not the printer. It was late evening, and the computer had gone to sleep, so he couldn't really see it at first. But the more of it that left the printer, the more recognizable it became, for it wasn't the only thing creeping out - Two overgrown bugles and a quartet of split avacados came out with it, until it was clear that the thing coming out was wool all along.

It spilled out, and it didn't stop spilling. Everything that was out so farstacked up and assembeled itself into a frothy, snowman shaped ewe wearing a bonnet and ribbons.

"Ahoy!" she said. "I can't help but notice you aren't subscribed to my channel."

Talk about disregard for privacy. And yet, his privacy was now somehow the least of his concerns. His printer was not only suddenly capable of printing 3D objects, but living, breathing, talking 3D objects.

"If you aren't subscribed to my channel, you will likely miss out on all my latest content. There's even more to be seen if pledge to my pawtreon. Exclusive content for just one dollar a month. Think about it. Welp, just popped in to say..."

Yew had been staring at her absentmindedly. At first, it was mere disbelief, but the more she talked, the more he realized that the weirdness over the situation wasn't enough to quell his disappointment in Serena. Here, a complete stranger could barge into his room and coerce him into forking over more attention, and he couldn't even get the attention of the closest person in his life.

Yew knew the Ewe from Ewe-Tube; her name was Taffita. He'd often turn to her videos when he just needed a pick-me-up, but he needed far more than that now. He needed salvation.

"What's the matter? My videos are meant to make people happy, not woeful."

"I..." Yew hesitated. He needed someone to divulge his feelings to, but would doing so be a betrayal to Serena? He loved her with all his heart, but he had a problem with her. A long-standing one. One he would have to get off his chest if he expected to get anything else done.

He sat down, and turned around. It took every ounce of his venison strength to keep his head screwed on straight. Don't do it, he thought. Don't defile your relationship with Serena... one wrong word about her... no, you used to gossip about people, he thought. Don't go back to that place. Don't let all her work go to wasted.

Taffita put her forehoof on his shoulder. "Honey? Is something the matter?"

Yes. But I can't confide in you. You're just a stranger from the internet who showed up in my room without asking. He shook his head, no, there's nothing wrong.

And yet, he had some sense of familiarity with Taffita. He'd seen her videos, her social advice, he'd taken sound refuge in her. And this might be the only chance he had to see her in person. He knew what was going to happen. She'd obey social protocol, accept the answer that he gave, despite the fact that he was obviously upset. And once she was gone, he'd crumble into a sobbing mess.

But Taffita didn't leave. "Listen. Honey. I'm sorry I barged into your room without asking. I just like to pay visits to the people who watch my videos. If I caught you at a bad time-"

"Don't leave!" Yew blurted it out before he realized he'd conflated her with Serena. Taffita looked taken aback, but not scared.

"Honey... come. Sit beside me. Tell me what's bothering you."

Yew couldn't hold back his tears any longer. He couldn't deny his resentment over Selena's constant cancellations. And he couldn't sanely balance his love for her with the sense of betrayal. "A family friend... she's the most important person in the world to me, but she's never available. Any time we agree to meet-up, she has to cancel. And... I'm sick of that."

"Oh dear. Is it because she has so many appointments that she can meet none of them? If so, it might be that none of them hold the level of importance to her that she does to you. Some cancellations can't be helped, but at that frequency? You're setting yourself up for disappointment."

That did it. That was the push he needed to unleash the torrent of tears. Tears of anger, resentment, confusion. How could he be so angry at someone he loved so much? Was he just so spoiled and entitled that he didn't care about anyone else's time?

"Oh hon." Before long, Yew found himself sinking into blanket layers of warm white wool. "Listen. None of this means she's a bad person. It doesn't mean you're a greedy person. It means that no one had a back-up plan for any of these situations."

That was it, the epiphany he needed to hear - the much needed solution to their age-long problem.

"I want to talk to her about it," said Yew. "But if I tell her I've been so upset, she might not like me anymore. I can't let her think I'm self-centered."

"Aw, little deer. Being sad isn't the same as being self-centered. Your friend might be sad to know you've been upset with her, but sadness isn't a bad thing. Sorrow is a bit of news to let someone know a change might be needed.

"I know you're not self-centered. I hear you considering the time and energy of the person you need to have a talk with. Things are never as simple as a good-bad absolute. What you need to ask is what you can do to avoid making the same unfortunate situation."

Finally, hearing these soothing words, Yew held tight to Taffita's wool. Her arms passed over him and squeezed him tight.

"I'll talk to her about it. I'm still afraid of losing her... she's one of the only people who know how to get through to me... but you really did get through to me today."

"Honey. You just need to diversify your support circle. Lots of people out there know how to get through to you. You just have to find them."