

Return to Eden

by Travis Woronowicz



It was a beautiful spring day. The birds were chirping, the flowers were in full bloom, and Aggie, like usual, was having fun by herself outside.

Sitting on a red checkered blanket, Aggie giggled with delight as squirrels scurried into their squirrel holes, as chipmunks stuffed their cheeks to overflowing with seeds, and as one husky groundhog poked his head in and out of his hole.

In what seemed like another ordinary afternoon, Aggie noticed something very peculiar taking place. One by one, the animals from her backyard would approach a grove of trees. As they got to the edge of it, they would look left, then right, then proceed to walk into the trees.

“What are these silly animals up to?” Aggie wondered. She wanted to find out for herself.

As she got to the edge of the woods, she felt compelled to look left and right herself. She wasn’t quite sure what she was looking for, but seeing no apparent danger, she pressed on.

The further Aggie walked into the grove of trees, the more alive she felt. It was as if the air got crisper, and the colors more deep and vibrant. Aggie wasn’t sure what was happening—but she liked it.

Ahead of her by a considerable distance, Aggie saw where all the animals ended up. There was a large flat rock and the animals were gathered together in front of it. All sorts of animals were there:

birds and owls and deer and squirrels and chipmunks—even the husky groundhog was there!

As Aggie got closer, she could swear she heard some of the animals talking but she convinced herself that she must be hearing things.

“No, Aggie, animals don’t talk,” she said to herself, “but I could swear I heard them. I just need to get a closer look.”

Now if you were trying to sneak up on a group of talking animals, you’d probably mind where you were walking. Aggie was too excited to remember this, though, and stepped directly on a branch in her path. *SNAP!*

At that, the animals did a most curious thing. All at once, almost like they had practiced it before, they dropped on all fours and resumed their normal, expected, animal-like behaviors.

When Aggie saw them drop, a surge of excitement flowed through her. Maybe these really are talking animals! She had to know. But how would she get them to talk?

Aggie remembered something she saw in the foster system: if you stare at someone long enough, they usually either look away or they talk. She figured she would give it a try with the animals.

As Aggie walked around to each animal, another curious thing happened: as she looked them in the eyes, the animals wouldn’t scurry away (like normal animals would), but it did look like they were trying to avoid eye contact with her! Aggie was onto something here!

Aggie felt empowered. She was no lightweight when it came to staring contests. With her hope on the line, she locked eyes with a nervous little squirrel.

As Aggie looked into its eyes, the squirrel made eye contact, but then quickly looked away. The squirrel started to blink rapidly, trying not to look at Aggie. A bead of sweat started to drip down its forehead.

As Aggie kept its gaze, the squirrel finally broke. “Alright! Alright! You got me! You got me!” the squirrel said, defeated.

“You can talk!” Aggie said in amazement.

“Of course we can talk!” the squirrel said. At this, all the animals let out a heavy sigh.

“Nuts, you blew our cover!” said the husky groundhog in a huff.

Nuts shot back, “What?! She had this look in her eyes! It was like she was peering right into my soul!”

Aggie couldn’t believe it—the animals were actually having a conversation!

A wise looking owl was the next to speak: “Nuts, this is no laughing matter. We’ll have to bring this matter before Shiloh for further counsel...”

The second the owl said the name Shiloh, a glorious feeling came over Aggie. It was the kind of feeling you get during the holidays when all is right and you wish you could live in that moment forever.

“Who’s Shiloh?” Aggie asked.