

THE FLY SWATTER MADE OF GOLD THREAD

Once upon a time, many, many years ago, so many that even numbers get dizzy, there was a girl of six bright summers, whose eyes were as blue as the mid-August, calm and joyful sea; she was beautiful and had a vivid imagination, and she had been given the name of the Virtue that redeems all of Mankind, Hope.

Hope was looking forward to her seventh birthday. When she was asked what she wanted to celebrate such a crucial date, she answered that her greatest wish was to visit her grandmother in the place where she lived, the Village of Dreams, as she had heard that on that spot there were sun-drenched beaches and beautiful woods overflowing with all kinds of vegetation, all of which endowed the area with a vast, astonishing colour palette, whose most important quality was the power to open our eyes to the Beauty of the World, both the beauty you find in tiny details, and the one that shines in stunningly huge landscapes. She was promised that that would be her present, and she set off for the town she so much longed to visit.

When Hope finally arrived, she stood open-mouthed before the magnificent display of wonderful scenes and felt elated to be able to see the place. She was also very happy to meet her grandmother again.

One day, walking down the street, she happened to overhear the conversation between some local people with serious faces and frowning expressions. They were talking about what they described as “**Gigantic Mosquitoes**”, which they said showed up from time to time, possibly attracted by the natural exuberance of the location and by the enviable health of its inhabitants. Hope decided to question her neighbours, a couple of children she had made friends with, and indeed, they confirmed that, unfortunately, the threat of the Mosquitoes was real.

- “Hi, Paul! Hi, Laura! I want to ask you a question. I’ve heard that some *Gigantic Mosquitoes* sometimes come here. Is that true?”, Hope inquired.
- “Hi, Hope! Yes. They are huge mosquitoes, and if they bite you, you get a weal as big as a potato omelette, but as if you had added *chorizo* to the omelette, because it goes red. You can’t stop scratching yourself, and sometimes you even feel pain and burning at the same time. It’s horrible!! What’s more, if you have an allergic reaction, it can be really serious, and you have to be taken to hospital and stay there for a long, long time. One of my mother’s friend’s cousins almost died!!”, Laura replied.
- “Is there anything we can do to fight them?”, Hope asked.
- “I’ve been told it’s pointless to use insecticides, no matter how toxic they seem to be. Some older people tell stories about a special *fly swatter* we could use to get rid of them”, answered Paul, “But I don’t know what it looks like, or where one could be found; as a matter of fact, I’m not completely sure the story is true. It’s just something people say...”
- “Well, I’ll ask Grandma to see if she can tell me more about that gadget or

whatever it is. I'm sure she must know something.", said Hope with conviction.

No sooner said than done. Hope set up for her Grandma's to ask her questions. Grandma confirmed that swarms of mosquitos plagued the region in mid-summer, scaring away the visitors that had looked forward with excitement to visiting that privileged place and its surroundings.

- "Grandma, is there anything we can do to get rid of those dangerous bugs?", Hope wanted to know.
- "Well, yes, but it's a very complicated task, with many conditions to be fulfilled. First of all, you need to have a *fly swatter* on hand, but not an ordinary one.
- "What's a fly swatter, Grandma? I'm not sure what one looks like. I don't think I've ever seen one in my life."
- "It's a device used for killing flying insects, which consists of a meshed flat piece attached to a handle. The meshed flat piece lets the air through so it's more difficult for insects to detect its presence when you wield the swatter to kill them. But the one we need is very special; it is known as ***the fly swatter made of gold thread***, since the meshed piece is made of pure gold thread."
- "Where is that fly swatter? I'm ready to hunt for it so that we can fend off those terrible Mosquitoes."
- "You'll find it in the furthest depths of the *Tiny Witches' Wood*, which is an overgrown forest where trees and huge bushes hold sway, making it an extremely dark place, thick with so much rampant foliage. It is also fraught with dangers, because the Tiny Witches dwell there. The Tiny Witches, in spite of their size, are truly wild and wicked, and they like to snatch people – especially children – away to their Realm of Darkness, never to return. If you want to go through the Wood, you'll need a **Magic Song**. You will have to sing that song continuously, without ever stopping. The song will protect you from the witches' attacks."
- "How can I learn that song?", asked Hope, her blue eyes wide with amazement
- "Well, you have to fulfil a series of conditions, and once you've completely finished, you'll have to call the Magic Song saying these words: <<*Come, oh Music, come to me!*>>. The melody and the lyrics will immediately pop into your head. Then you have to learn the song by repeating it over and over again."
- "Tell me, Grandma, what are the conditions? What am I supposed to do?"
- "They have to do with your daily chores: A. Lending a hand at home; B. Cleaning up your bedroom, and putting away your toys; C. Eating up all kinds of food without complaint; D. Finishing all your school homework and regularly revising the content of your lessons. If you succeed in doing all this, the song will enter your head."
- "I mean to do it, Grandma. I'm determined to free this place I like so much from those evil mosquitoes.", declared Hope, fervently.

- “All right, my dear Hope, but you must be very careful and follow my instructions precisely, because the dangers that may lie in wait for you are many, and unpredictable. You must always be on the alert so that nothing catches you by surprise, lost and unprepared.”

From that very moment, Hope began to accomplish all the requirements her grandmother had listed, displaying great tenacity and determination to achieve her goal. She helped with all the housework that she could do at her young age, such as clearing the table, dusting the furniture with a funny feather duster her grandmother kept in the kitchen, switching off the room lights as she went out, putting away her clothes and the laundry in the hamper ...She put away all her toys after playing with them, instead of leaving them scattered around the house as she used to do in the past, before she decided to finish with the Mosquitoes. She didn't even object to the food they made her for lunch or dinner, which helped her to realize she actually enjoyed many of those dishes, and she therefore had to acknowledge that she had been a fool for rejecting them, as they were delicious, as well as healthy and nutritious. She discovered, for instance, how nice green beans were, when she tried her grandmother's delicious vegetable stew, which had become one of her favourite dishes. Finally, Hope threw herself heart and soul to the school homework she had left unfinished, and she even made up some games and puzzles to revise her lessons systematically, but in an entertaining way so that she enjoyed her exercises instead of feeling bored and tired.

Every night, before going to bed, Hope recited the magic words her grandmother had taught her to summon up the Magic Song: <<Come, oh Music, come to me>>, and at last, on a warm summer's night, when the teasing twinkle of the stars caressed her hair through her bedroom window, a curious melody came and tickled Hope's ears, singing these words:

***I'm walking through the Wood,
I'm so happy nothing I'll fear,
Since I have finally learnt
The things I must do right here.***

Then, after repeating the song several times to ensure that the melody and lyrics were firmly ensconced in her head, Hope got up and started to walk decisively towards the Tiny Witches' Wood.

It was not too difficult to find the entrance to the Wood. She had followed her grandmother's instructions carefully. The immense mass of deep green was situated on the outskirts of the town, quite close to Manolo's Farm, where cows grazed peacefully, paying no attention to the strange universe far down the South Path which had no bearing on their daily routines. Hope had just left behind the quiet night-time yellow of the farm and its tranquil cattle and walked through the first shadowy patch

that announced the thickness of the Wood. She started singing the Magic Song:

***I'm walking through the Wood,
I'm so happy nothing I'll fear,
Since I have finally learnt
The things I must do right here.***

The melody sprang forth from her mouth without a break, exactly as her Grandma had advised her. The dense greenwood was getting thicker and thicker until the boundaries of the path could no longer be seen, creating a cloying dark atmosphere, like the stickiness of spider webs, but with the looming shapes of huge tree trunks and big, menacing roots forming unexpected bulges on the ground, ready to trip you up as soon as you stepped on them. There were also innumerable branches that seemed to chase her in a subtle and cunning way, like angry skeletons. She noticed the presence of something else, something that hovered around the tangled ceiling sculpted by the impenetrable tree tops. Hope suddenly felt overwhelmed by a sticky, warm fear that began to wet the palms of her hands and the braided hair on her neck. She was only a six-year-old girl whose nerves were on edge in these gloomy, lugubrious surroundings, pricked by the treacherous needles of terror. This sensation made her forget for an instant the song that she had to sing without stopping, and at the same moment she stopped singing the magic melody, she sensed the presence of some minuscule, thin and intangible wisps of black shadows, watching her from above, not too far from her hair, with the nimble, startling flight of ghosts. They were like smoky forms, crawling in the air like furry worms, closer and closer to the girl's body. But luckily, she reacted fast, and started singing again:

***I'm walking through the Wood,
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Since I have finally learnt
The things I must do right here.***

As soon the notes started to emerge from her throat, barely audible, her voice trembling, the writhing wisps of black smoke began to disperse, flying up into the compact fabric of the tree tops, until they vanished into the darkness. Under the immense mantle of the wood, a little less menacing now that the Tiny Witches had been sent back to their hidden branches, Hope continued on her way, looking around carefully in case she happened to come across the object she was looking for.

All of a sudden, she saw a dim light through the lush vegetation, right in front of her, at the end of the re-emerging path; the flickering glare increased as her feet carried her closer to the light that the flashes were coming from, and finally she arrived at a big mass of bushes where she could see an object with a long red handle and a golden meshed flat piece, which was the source of the powerful glow. She immediately

understood that this was **the Fly Swatter Made of Gold Thread**, and so, full of new energy and enthusiasm, she grasped it firmly to take it with her to the village so that her mission could be accomplished.

Her way back seemed shorter to her in the radiant glow of the Fly Swatter. She resumed singing the magic melody to avoid being attacked by the Tiny Witches, but this time she felt much more self-confident and less frightened. She easily reached the threshold of her house, and she went in. As soon as she entered her bedroom, she carefully placed the Fly Swatter next to her bed. She put on her pyjamas as fast as she could because she was very tired after the strain of the adventure she had just experienced, and for that reason, she fell fast asleep almost immediately with one hand gently touching the crimson handle of the Fly Swatter, just in case.

Over breakfast she told her grandma the vicissitudes of the previous night, and shared her delight at having succeeded in her strange mission. Once had she quickly swallowed the toast with butter and honey, almost choking on her glass of fresh milk in her excitement, she showed her grandma and the rest of her family the precious Fly Swatter made of gold thread, and they all stared in amazement, stunned by the glare of the magic metal and by the fabulous story that Hope had told them. Her grandmother advised her to watch over the Fly Swatter as if her life depended on it. She had to make sure that the magic device never be lost or damaged and always remained at hand, above all at night, so that she could use it if necessary to protect herself and everybody else from the Gigantic Mosquitoes.

One night, dusk came with denser and denser heat, and while sleepless crickets chirped their tunes at the Moon, Hope sensed an unpleasant buzzing from the comfortable, fluffy raft of sleep where she was snuggled up, dreaming. She woke up, quite startled, and instinctively grasped the handle of the Fly Swatter. As she looked around, she saw four or five colossal mosquitoes hovering over her head like enemy planes loaded with evil weapons, swarming around her from above. At that very instant they made a turn and began to plunge towards her as fast as they could. Hope brandished the Fly Swatter at them with determination and started to hit the mosquitoes with the magic device. Two of the huge insects were killed and fell to the floor, and the others fled away out of the window the moment they became aware of the terrible fate of their fellows who had died in battle. The room was suddenly filled with small pulsating stars, and the dead mosquitoes vanished in an unexpected twinkle of colour, turning into multiple golden specks.

The girl stood there motionless, absorbed by the scene she had just witnessed as an improvised protagonist. Little by little, the outline of a smile of satisfaction formed on her lips; she felt proud in her heart when she finally realised that she had fought against the monstrous mosquitoes and scared them away. As if propelled by a spring, she began to run to tell her whole family about the events that had just taken place.

When her parents and her grandmother heard her story, they started clapping their hands, congratulating the girl in a great explosion of joy. Hope received so many kisses that her ears went numb. She had never been so happy!!

The next morning, when Hope and her grandmother told some friends and neighbours about the incidents of the past few days, from the start of the adventure right through to the final battle against the Mosquitoes, everyone began jumping for joy, cheering Hope for her great courage and her determination to achieve her goal. She was invited to eat a huge piece of the fabulous chocolate cake prepared by Mrs. Aurora Smith, John the Baker's mother, and she was also given tickets for the whole summer season at the open-air cinema that was set up in the main square of the town. Soon, word spread about the fantastic feat Hope had performed, and everybody in the Village of Dreams decided to have a big party to show the girl their appreciation for scaring the Gigantic Mosquitoes away forever. The Mosquitoes, for their part, spread the story through practically all their colonies, and made up their minds never to return to the village they now called an ***“Unsafe Area for Mosquitoes”***. For our beautiful protagonist, the experience was a unique lesson, and that seventh birthday, that summer, became one of the best memories of her life.

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