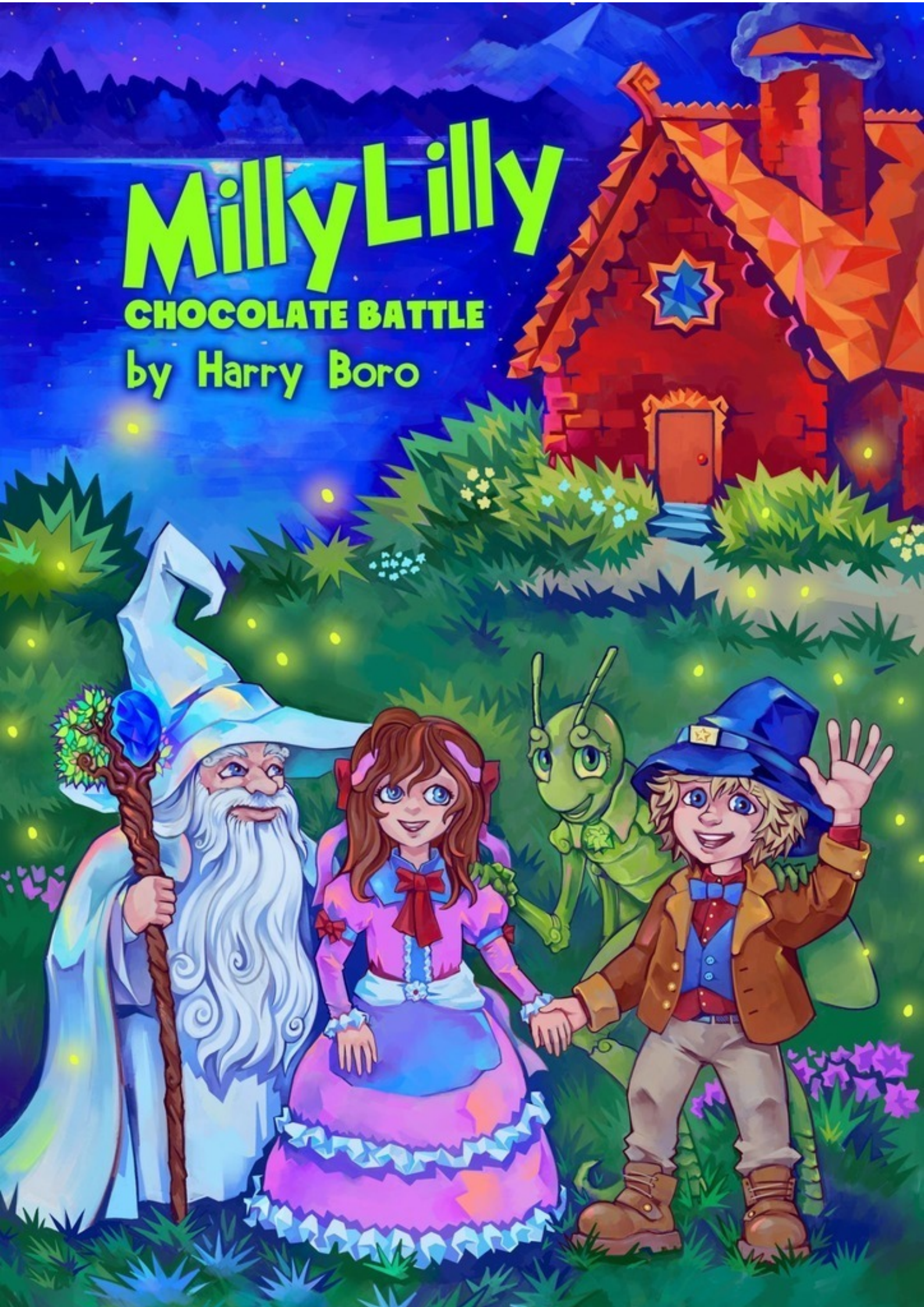


Milly Lilly

CHOCOLATE BATTLE

by Harry Boro



Harry Boro

MillyLilly. Chocolate Battle

«Издательские решения»

Harry Boro

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Nole is a sweet milly without a talent other than blowing pretty amazing bubbles. His grasshopper friend Chaps often leads him astray as Nole hunts for a skill, and Chaps's attempts to make Nole feel like he has a purpose only add to Nole's growing lack of confidence. When their city is attacked by bullies, it's up to Nole to finally discover his self-esteem and his purpose. It will take all Nole's bravery and wits and quite a few bubbles to save his friends and their peaceful community.

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MillyLilly Chocolate Battle

Harry Boro

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My little friend...

I hope you are not offended by my calling you little. I'm so old now that no matter how old you are, you are still little compared to me. But notice, I also call you friend, which means I think about you as a friend, no matter how little you are.

And because I think about you as a friend, I feel compelled to share this story with you. I've heard this story from someone I can trust completely. His name is...

Well, I cannot tell you his real name yet because he asked me not to. Maybe, one day he will change his mind. Until then, let's call him Chuck. I can trust Chuck because he was part of the story. And because I can trust him, I know it's true. And because I know it's true, now you know that the story, I'm about to tell you, is true....

CHAPTER ONE: Sweetland

Somewhere on the Earth, far away from any known towns and countries, surrounded by the Great Ocean, there are five mountains that stand in a circle as if protecting something inside. These mountains are the highest mountains in the world. They are so high that if you walk up to the base of any of these mountains and look up, trying to see the top, you will have to lie on your back and even then you still won't see the tops of the mountains.

If we could measure the height of these mountains in elephants, we would have to place thousand or ten thousand elephants on top of each other, and only from the back of the highest elephant could we barely see the tops of the mountains.

Imagine how many turtles or cats we would use instead of elephants to climb up and see the mountains' tops? A million? Ten million? Well, if you use dragons for measuring heights, most likely it would be less than ten thousand because dragons are bigger than elephants, but still, it will take a lot of dragons! How many elephants in one dragon? Two, three, five? I don't know, but what I do know is that even in dragons, these mountains are super high.

Why are these mountains so high? What are they hiding? They are hiding, or better to say—protecting – a very beautiful and very special country, Sweetland.

In this country, there is always a summer, and, because of that, Sweetland is always covered with the bright green fields and meadows of flowers. In between fields, there are cool woods with a lot of brooks in the shades of the lush trees. The water in these brooks is crystal clean and so tasty that anybody who ever tries it forgets about any soda forever. He or she wants to drink only this amazing water.

Under the trees, one can find all kind of berries: strawberries, huckleberries, blackberries, raspberries, blueberries. You name it. There are so many berries that the squirrels and chipmunks who live in the woods don't even bother to hide some berries in their hollows. What for? When they are hungry, they just go down, eat as many berries as they can, roll over on their backs, and take naps, filling the woods with their whistling snores.

You might be wondering why the squirrels and the chipmunks are so carelessly napping? Why they don't worry about people who may pass by and try to catch them while they are sleeping? Well, people in this country are very small, maybe six inches tall at most. Six inches is about the size of the mom or dad's ring finger. Look at their fingers! Can you picture for yourself a person that small? It's kind of close to the height of the regular squirrel. By "regular" I mean a squirrel which stands on its four legs, not on the two rear ones.

If some of these people were living among us, we wouldn't see them because we rarely look underfoot. They would have to be very careful and to hide from us all the time. Nobody wants to be stepped on, right?

So, Sweetland, protected by mountains, is the only place where they can live safely. In all other places, their lives could be very difficult. Not only because someone big, like you, could step on them, but because even our regular wind, the one that playfully gusted in your face the other day, would not let them walk around, meet each other, and talk to each other.

But how do you make friends, if you cannot visit anybody? How do you make friends if nobody can visit you? How do you make friends if you cannot share your secrets with someone special and that someone cannot share secrets with you? I don't know.

You can say what about the phone? Everybody can always call or send a message. True. But in Sweetland, they don't have phones. They have never even heard about the phones. I tried to explain to Chuck how convenient a phone is, but he asked me, "Does the phone give you the same happy feeling as your mom's kiss before you go to sleep? Or can your phone substitute for a good friend?"

I said what I thought, "No."

And Chuck said, “Why would we need your phones then?”

Luckily, for the people in Sweetland, protected by mountains, they never had very strong winds. The strongest one would blow off someone’s hat, but nothing more serious than that. Rain, of course, sometimes can cause a problem for them; with their sizes, even a single raindrop looks like a bucket of water for us. Imagine how you play with your friends outside or have a birthday party in the backyard of your house, and, all of sudden, someone starts pouring buckets of water on your heads? That’s how people in Sweetland would feel caught in the rain.

Maybe because of their sizes or maybe because they’ve never heard about us, boys and girls in Sweetland are called differently from our world. Boys are called millies ([ˈmili: s]), and girls are called lillies ([ˈlili: s]), and as people all together, they are called MillyLilly. It may sound strange to us, but to them, boys and girls would sound strange too.

“Why boy or why girl?” they would say. “It’s milly and lilly; you’re silly!”

There are ten or fifteen cities in Sweetland. Nobody has ever really counted them.

A milly or lilly who lives in one city, may have friends or relatives in some cities not far from his or her city. So, they visit them from time to time, but don’t go on the trip any farther. Their relatives may go to visit friends and relatives in some cities which are on the other side of their cities, but also don’t go any farther than one city away.

That’s why nobody knows about the total number of cities in the country. MillyLilly just never go farther than one city away. Why? They don’t have cars and planes like us. Without cars and planes, long trips can take months or even years. But they cannot leave their homes for months. They have some important things to do, and they have to make sure that their cities are always full of life and up to their reputation and fame.

You may ask, what reputation and what fame? Each city in Sweetland is famous for a particular kind of sweets their residents are making better than anybody else; Chocoville is known for the best chocolate in the world, Cookiestown’s fame comes from their secret of making unbelievably tasty cookies. There are also cities Muffinado, Cakeburg, Candy York, and others. The name of the city where our story begins is Ambia. Never heard about the ambia? Never – never? Are you serious?! Let me immediately explain!

CHAPTER TWO: Ambia

The ambia, the word that gave the name to the city, is a sort of the syrup made from the first nectar of the flowers mixed with an aerial like ice cream that is churned, using only the sweet waters of the Sacred Springs. The ambia comes in hundreds of different flavors, but it's very important for making fantastic ambia to use exactly the first nectar of the flowers. With the second nectar, the ambia still tastes good but not as great as with the first nectar. So, if someone ever offers for you to try the ambia, ask them, what nectar of flowers they were using – the first one or the second. You can always tell the difference.

With the first nectar, ambia is so delicious that MillyLilly had to set up the rules on how much ambia can be eaten at one meal time. They do not eat more than two portions of ambia in the morning for breakfast. During the lunch, they can eat three, but no more than that. For dinner they can relax and eat five, but that's it. More than five scoops of ambia can make you switch to ambia completely and forget about all other sweets. But if you live in Sweetland and don't eat other sweets, it's not polite.

Say, for instance, you go to visit your relatives or friends in Chocoville, and they offer you to try their chocolate, what are you going to say? Like, no, I want only ambia? It's not nice. If you are a guest, you should show that you respect the hosts and appreciate their efforts to make your stay with them as pleasant as possible. And isn't it pleasant to get a bar of delicious chocolate after a long trip? Yes, it is. So, appreciate the hospitality and munch on the sweets you are given.

Ambia, the city, was built and is stretching along the shore of the Quiet Lake. The water in the lake is as clean as the water in the wood's brooks; one can see the fish playing in the lake's depths far away from the shore.

The fish are not afraid of MillyLilly because MillyLilly don't eat fish. The fish and MillyLilly were always friendly to each other. Fish help MillyLilly to get on the other side of the lake where the Sacred Springs are hidden in the big caves.

Do you remember what I said about the Sacred Springs? MillyLilly use the Sacred Springs to make the ice cream that is needed for making ambia. Since the fish had been helping MillyLilly for very long time, almost every milly and every lilly has a fish friend. The little MillyLilly – I mean kids – love to play tag in the lake. They would sit on the back of their fish friends and swish all day long until their moms call on them to go home.

Frankly speaking, MillyLilly are friendly with almost all the creatures who are leaving around Ambia: grasshoppers, chipmunks, butterflies, hummingbirds, mice, and many-many others. When you eat only sweets and have ambia, it's easy to be friends with everybody.

MillyLilly in Ambia, like in all the cities of Sweetland, love everything colorful. Millies wear colorful hats. Lillies wear colorful ribbons in their hair. MillyLilly live in colorful houses with small gardens where they grow marshmallows. You've heard me right: they GROW marshmallows. Don't be surprised. It is in our world, the marshmallows are whipped from sugar and water, but in Sweetland they grow like giant flowers. And since they are flowers, their first nectar is used for making ambia too.

But MillyLilly grow marshmallows not only for ambia. In Sweetland, MillyLillies' babies are born in marshmallows! How? One day, some marshmallow flower opens its petals that protect the marshmallow from the rains and birds, and boom! Instead of a marshmallow, there is a baby inside.

Of course, it doesn't happen to anyone and every day. Babies are a huge responsibility and a gift that must be deserved. This gift is way – way bigger than any Christmas or birthday gift. What do you normally need to do to get a Christmas gift you wish? Just to behave during the entire year, right? Not too much; piece of cake. But for a marshmallow in a MillyLilly's garden, the good behavior during the year is not enough to bloom with a baby.

In order for MillyLilly babies to be born, one milly and one lilly should come to the big Love Tree in the central square of Ambia and say to each other: I love you.

For people in our world, it is not always easy to find out whether someone truly loves them. Everybody can say, 'I love you'. But some people may say that because they want to get the toys or sweets from other people, or to sweet talk them into sharing their school homework. They don't really love.

The Love Tree always knows when the words about love are true and when they are not true. If the words are not true, the Love Tree remains silent. If the words are true, then the Love Tree gives out a huge salute of confetti and rose petals and, in night, it launches a firework in the shape of a heart with the name of the milly on one side of the heart and the name of the lilly on the other side of the heart. The heart stays in the sky long enough to let every resident of Ambia know that there is a couple that fell in love.

Once the Love Tree confirms the true love between two people, they can marry. Before the day they wish their baby to be born, the couple needs to say the Sweet Promise. In the Sweet Promise, the milly and the lilly promise to be always together and make the life of their child as sweet as their own life and the lives of millies and lillies before them. Only after that, one of the marshmallows blooms with a MillyLilly's baby. So, all the babies in Ambia and Sweetland are protected by the Sweet Promise. That's why all the babies in Ambia and Sweetland are happy.

CHAPTER THREE: Milly Nole and His Friends

The reason I'm talking about Ambia so much is not only because the city is worth it, but also because my story happened in this beautiful place of Sweetland.

Once upon a time, there was a milly who lived in Ambia. His name was Nole. Nole lived alone in his blue house on the lake's shore. The farther side of his garden met the lake. Because Nole lived on the shore, one of his best friends was Dell, a small dolphin. Nole often would go to the lakeside of his garden and talk to Dell while working on something or just sitting in the chair.

Even though Dell was small – smaller than Nole and other MillyLilly – he was very proud dolphin; he demanded everybody, but his friends, to call him Df. Dell. It is a sort of dolphin's version of mister (Mr.), but Df. Stood for dolphin. If you called on him and didn't add Df. to his name Dell, he wouldn't even turn around. It was as if you didn't exist for him.

If you said, "Hey, Df. Dell!", then he immediately would turn to you and say, "How can I help you?"

He was a very proud dolphin.

Nole's best friend was a big, green grasshopper, Chaps. Like every other grasshopper in the city, Chaps was a postman.

In Sweetland, MillyLilly didn't send letters. If they wanted to send a message to someone, they sent a grasshopper. In fact, this way of communication was much faster, and, as you can guess, the messages were never lost as it may happen to the post services in our world. For similar reasons, MillyLilly didn't have regular newspapers. The news was being spread by dragonflies, which made perfect sense, taking into account how fast dragonflies could fly, that was how fast they could spread the news.

Chaps visited Nole almost every day. In fact, Nole couldn't remember even one single day when Chaps didn't visit him. Nole didn't know where exactly Chaps was living as Chaps never invited guests to his place; he loved to visit others, especially Nole, and to visit especially around breakfast, lunch, and dinner times. One may think that Chaps was choosing the visit times on purpose to use the famous hospitality of MillyLilly to his advantage and get free food. What can I say to those who think so about Chaps? You're right. But Nole didn't mind sharing the breakfast or lunch with his friend Chaps. After all, what was more delightful way of having a breakfast than adding a good chat with your best friend?

Overall, Nole was a happy milly. He had a blue house with a green roof, and he had good friends. But he was not as happy as majority of MillyLilly. Sometimes, he would become sad and remain sad for two or three minutes.

What made him sad? Only one thought: He could do nothing useful but blowing the soap bubbles.

Okay, in the art of blowing the bubbles, he was the best. Nobody else could blow the bubbles as big and colorful as his. One bubble could be the size of a tall milly. These bubbles could last for long time; they could flow in the air, roll on the grass. The fish in the lake could play with them like with air balloons. But not too many MillyLilly believed that blowing bubbles was really useful.

Say, for instance, some MillyLilly made shoes. That was useful because someone always needs a new pair of shoes.

So, that someone who needs shoes could come to the shoe master and ask him, "Hey, could you make me a new pair of shoes, please?"

And the master would say, "Sure". He might then add, "I've heard you are very good at making hats? Could you please, make me a new hat? Mine is pretty old."

And, of course, the hat master would agree to make a hat for the shoe master. And this was how MillyLilly from a young age learned that they needed each other.

But if Nole would ask for a new pair of shoes, and the master would ask him for something back, what would Nole say?

“Sure, give me some water and soap, and I blow for you a good bubble....”

That was a little bit of a strange exchange.

Of course, MillyLilly in Ambia knew that Nole could do nothing but blow bubbles. So, if he really asked a shoe master to make a pair of shoes for him, the master would do that without asking anything in return. MillyLilly were very kind, and never left anybody without shoes just because someone could do nothing but blow bubbles. But Nole was disappointed that nobody was asking him to blow some bubbles. Why not? They were so beautiful!

“Don’t worry,” Chaps used to tell Nole. “They probably envy you and that’s why they don’t ask you to blow your bubbles.”

Nole wanted to believe Chaps, but Chaps wasn’t MillyLilly; he was a grasshopper, a green, boastful, careless grasshopper who just wasn’t able to worry about anything. Once Chaps started worrying about something, he could just make a couple of good jumps and forget what he was worried about. Nole couldn’t jump like Chaps, but Chaps’s optimism always made Nole think that everything was just fine.

Or it did until that Friday night, when, traditionally, all MillyLilly of Ambia gather around the Torch of Life to listen to the great stories of the city’s Sage Keon.

CHAPTER FOUR: Torch of Life

On that Friday night, Nole waited at home for his friend Chaps so that they go together to the Torch of Life.

Knock-Knock! Knocked someone at the door.

“Who’s that?” asked Nole from the armchair where he was sitting and thinking deeply about the world, life, and the pair of his favorite orange socks he couldn’t find anywhere.

“Chaps!” said Chaps.

“Come in! The door is not closed.”

“I know. I am here.”

Nole raised his eyes to find Chaps sitting right across him. “You were here?”

“Yes,” Chaps said. “I walked in; you were deeply thinking. I waited for very long time, maybe a minute or something, but you kept thinking. So, I had to get up, go back to the door, and knock to get your attention.”

“Why didn’t you shake me to get my attention?” asked Nole.

“Well,” Chaps scratched his head. “Last time I shook you, you weren’t happy.”

“Maybe, it’s because you shook me upside down holding me at my ankles? It’s a little bit unusual way to wake up someone in the morning.”

“Nah,” said Chaps. “You probably don’t know but I used to work as a shaker – in fact, I was the best shaker. They taught us that if you want to wake a person as soon as possible, put him in a position he never sleeps in. Do you ever sleep upside down?”

“No,” said Nole, confused.

“You see?” said Chaps proudly.

“Where did you work as a shaker?” wondered Nole.

“In the Shaking Company, of course,” responded Chaps and jumped to the window, obviously uncomfortable with the Nole’s question.

“We don’t have the Shaking Company in Ambia.”

“It’s not in Ambia,” said Chaps without turning from the window. “It’s... Have you ever been in RaspberryJamville?”

“No.”

“It’s in RaspberryJamville.”

“Okay,” said Nole.

Chaps immediately jumped back to Nole.

“I have a little suggestion before we go...”

“No!” Nole interrupted his friend firmly. “We are not going to eat ambia before the Torch of Life ceremony. Remember what happened last time when you ate just two scoops of ambia?”

“What?”

“You fell asleep and started snoring, and everybody, including Sage Keon, was looking at you.”

“That was long time ago. I’m a different grasshopper now. I can control myself,” said Chaps.

“It was last Friday,” reminded Nole.

“Okay... Okay...” agreed Chaps reluctantly. “You’re right. What about one scoop?”

“No,” said Nole. “Only after ceremony”.

And they went to the ceremony. For many years, the Torch of Life ceremony had been set on the lake’s shore; it was arranged so to let fish be part of the ceremony too and, thus, to support the peaceful coexistence of MillyLilly and fish. You probably don’t know, my friend, but some of the statesmen in our world of people were dreaming about peaceful coexistence with fish for long time. But while they were and are dreaming, MillyLilly made the dream come true.

The Torch of Life is actually Sage Keon's staff, with the small lantern on the top. Once all residents of Ambia gather around Sage Keon, and lake fish stick out their curious heads out of water, Sage Keon rubs the lantern and the whole area around gets filled with the amazing bluish light of the stars and the warmth of friendship and love. You can say that Sage Keon was a kind of wizard, but he didn't entertain MillyLilly with a lot of miracles. He loved to say that too many miracles make us forget about the main miracle – life. And the Torch of Life ceremony was all about this – praising the life in all its forms.

CHAPTER FIVE: Sage Keon and Mela

Alright, alright, I've mentioned this name, Sage Keon, several times now, and didn't really explain who he is. Actually, nobody knows where Sage Keon came from, and nobody knows his age either. Normally, MillyLilly live about two hundred MillyLilly years. The birthday records of Ambia don't trace ages beyond thousand years because nobody can be that old. But Sage Keon's birthday was not recorded back in thousand years. Was he older than that? Maybe. Who knew?

Nothing could be concluded from his appearance also. Yes, Keon had the snow-white long hair, typical of a very old person, but, at the same time, he had a baby face as if he was a baby that was scared in the middle of the night and his hair turned white. Was Keon's baby face due to his healthy diet or because of some other natural explanations? It was difficult to verify. The only certain thing about Keon was rumors. And the rumors held that Keon visited all the cities of Sweetland, and that was definitely impossible to do in the average lifetime of an ordinary MillyLilly.

When Nole and Chaps came to the ceremony, the whole city was already there, and the fish was sticking out of water, waiting. Nole and Chaps squeezed in the middle of the crowd, trying to make sure that Sage Keon didn't notice that they were a little bit late which was as usual for them.

"Cool," whispered Nole to Chaps. "He didn't see us."

But when Nole raised his eyes, Sage Keon was looking right at him. Nole blushed and turned aside, and when he turned aside, he saw HER for the first time. SHE was just ten feet away, a beautiful lilly with amazing curly hair of the caramel color, big green eyes, and with two older MilliLillies – most likely her parents – at her sides.

She stared at Sage Keon who was preparing to rub the lantern, and she seemed completely absorbed in what was going to happen.

And it happened: Keon rubbed the lantern, stuck it out in the air, and the night sky, the lake, the city behind – everything was lit by the magical bluish light.

"Good MillyLilly of Ambia!" said Sage Keon. "We are here to say thanks to each other, to grasshoppers, to chipmunks, to fish, to dragonflies, to birds, to everybody who crawls, flies and runs, for being kind and caring neighbors. We are here to say great thanks to our ancestors for making the first ambia. We are here to say thanks to the stars, moon and sun."

And everybody was nodding and saying "thanks," "thanks," "thanks."

"Now, find at least three neighbors, give them a hug and say thank you!" offered Keon.

Nole decided that it was a great opportunity to get to know the new beautiful lilly he'd noticed earlier. Nole made a move towards her, but Chaps grabbed him from behind in a smothering hug.

"Thank you! Thank you!" Chaps kept saying in a voice, cracking with tears.

"Okay," Nole barely could manage to say due to the force of the hug. "Thank... you... too."

Grasshoppers were harmless, emotional, but actually pretty strong creatures. They were strong, probably, because of the constant jumping that make them very muscular. Nole had to catch his breath when Chaps finally let him go. The beautiful lilly was still not far from Nole, and he ran towards her. But when Nole was just steps away from the beautiful lilly, and even opened his arms to embrace her, the milly Grilly sprouted right in between and hugged Nole.

Grilly was on the chubby side and very sweaty; he was so sweaty that Nole's face that got buried for a quick moment in the Grilly's chest, immediately became wet.

"Thank you for finding me to give me your hug," said Grilly.

Nole wanted to say that he didn't actually look for Grilly, but chose not to say anything.

"Thank you, thank you," quickly said Nole.

Grilly moved aside, and here she was, right in front of Nole, smiling and looking straight in his eyes. Nole blushed again.

"So," she said in amazing gentle voice. "Any hugs left?"

“Y-y-es,” squeezed out Nole and, secretly making sure that Grilly is not around, opened his arms again. They hugged with Nole’s heart beating as if he was running a marathon.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Thank you,” said Nole. “Are you new in our city?”

“Yes,” she said. “We just moved here a week ago from Muffinado.”

“Was it boring in Muffinado?” asked Nole.

“Not really,” said she. “My mom’s health requires her to live close to lakes, and, of course, everybody knows about the healing qualities of ambia.”

“What’s your name?” asked Nole.

“Mela. And yours?”

“Nole.”

Mela smiled and said, “Nole, may I ask you to do me a small favor?”

“Anything you want!” readily agreed Nole.

“Could you please unlock your hug? I do enjoy your passion, but it looks a little bit strange now.”

Only then Nole realized that he’d kept hugging Mela all the time they were talking. What’s more, everybody around had stopped hugging some time ago and now were watching Nole and Mela.

“I’m so sorry!” said Nole and hastily stepped back.

“It’s okay.” Mela smiled. “We can meet up and talk later.”

Mela returned to her parents. Nole turned around to look for Chaps and found him right behind.

“I’ve heard everything,” said Chaps, sweeping tears of joy off his face. “It’s so beautiful. When you two are getting married?”

“Married?” exclaimed Nole. “I don’t even know her! She might be married already.”

“It’s not a problem,” said Chaps. “I can easily divorce her if you two love each other.”

“And why would you divorce anybody?”

“Because I’m a master of divorce,” humbly said Chaps. “I used to work as a divorcer.”

“Where?”

“In a divorcing company.”

“We don’t have a divorcing company,” objected Nole. “Nobody ever divorces here.”

“The company is in RaspberryJamville,” said Chaps quickly.

“I see this RaspberryJamville has a lot of interesting companies,” said Nole. “And what did you do exactly when you were divorcing couples?”

“Nothing much. I would stand in front of a couple who wants to divorce, and say, for instance, ‘Nole and Mela, with the power of a handsome grasshopper, I declare you divorced. You can spit at each other now.’”

“Spit?” repeated Nole, instantly forgetting about “the power of a handsome grasshopper” which he’d wanted to question Chaps about first.

“Of course. When a couple is getting married, they kiss each other; when they divorce, they spit at each other.”

Nole wanted to say that he’s never heard about the spitting tradition, but Sage Keon raised his staff again and said, “MillyLilly of Ambia!”

He looked around, making sure that everybody was listening, and everybody was listening.

CHAPTER SIX: Love is Sharing

“MillyLilly of Ambia,” said Sage Keon again. “Today, I was walking in the meadows, just outside Ambia, and met the respectful chipmunk, Buru. You all know Buru, he’s been supplying peanuts to all candy shops of Ambia for many years. We had a chat and walked together for a while as we were heading in the same direction. Then, when we were about to part our ways, Mr. Buru asked me, ‘Sage Keon, may I bother you with a simple question?’

I said, ‘Sure, I love simple questions.’ And Mr. Buru goes, ‘What is love?’ And that question was not simple at all. But since he asked, I was thinking about his question for the whole day. We all have different answers to this question. Say, for instance, you!” Sage Keon pointed at Grilly who turned out to be closest to Sage.

“Me?” asked Grilly, caught by surprise.

“Yes, you, Grilly,” confirmed Sage Keon. “What, do you think, is love?”

“Well...” Grilly hesitated. “I’m... not sure... Maybe, love it’s when you want to see someone all the time? Even when you have a dinner?”

“Maybe,” said Keon. “What about your opinion, Chaps?”

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