

# The Way of Hope

or: A fairy tale written by life

Once upon a time, many, many years ago, I was sitting in my room. I didn't want to go outside, as I knew that outside, I was Nobody. No-one liked me, lots of people would mock me, and even I couldn't stand a lot of my behaviour at the time. I was very unhappy and said to myself: "I don't want to be a Nobody. But nor do I want to become like all the other people."

Suddenly there was a knock on my door. It knocked three times - knock, knock, knock.

"Stay out whoever you are!", I shouted.

But the knocking resumed, this time much louder. Knock, Knock, Knock.

"Stay out, I said! Can't you listen to me?!"

Then it knocked again, even louder than before. KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

I feared the door might be damaged, so I decided to give in.

"Okay, okay, take it easy. I'm coming."

When I opened the door, I encountered a perfect stranger. He looked like a true nobleman, was well-built, wore an expensive suit, apparently taylor-made, with gold linings, and on each of his fingers glistened a huge golden ring with diamonds and other precious stones.

"Good evening, sir.", he pronounced with a dark voice in best Oxbridge English. "May I introduce myself: my name is Glory. You have called me and here I am, ready to be at your service."

I was puzzled and replied: "Excuse me, but I can't remember to have called you."

"Didn't you say that you don't want to be a Nobody any longer, nor become like all the other people, sir?"

"Yes, I did. But how do you know?"

"How I came to know this is a minor detail that should not matter in these circumstances. What does matter is that you have called me, sir, and here I am. If you would like me to be your personal advisor, I would feel most honoured to take on such a duty."

"Eh, right.", I said. His remarks made me suspicious, so I added: "If you don't mind me asking: How much do you charge for - eh, undertaking this - duty?"

"Nothing, sir.", he replied. "My only reward shall be the honour of leading you to heights of fame and wealth unreached by anyone before you, which I deem to be more valuable than

any material compensation for my efforts."

I hesitated for a while, but eventually agreed. And so, Glory became my personal advisor.

Over the next few years, Glory taught me a lot of things. I learnt all the etiquette required to enter high society, all the rules of being polite, how to eat exquisite meals in posh restaurants without embarrassing myself, and how to wittingly converse about any topic regardless of my knowledge about it. I also learnt how to be a ruthless negotiator, hundreds of ways to eliminate rivals on the way to the top, and how to hide my ruthlessness and corrupt dealings behind a facade of superficial anthropilie.

Glory kept his promise. I became the richest and most famous person all around. I bought a splendid castle that was restored and modernized for millions of pounds, had my own chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce, dozens of domestics and a never-ending supply of the best and rarest wines and single malts. I even had my own personal army, directed by a German General called Schrecken whose loyalty to me was matched by his cruelty to my enemys.

One day, I was sitting at dinner, enjoying some delicious vintage port together with Glory, when my butler came in to announce the arrival of General Schrecken.

"I cannot recall to have asked for his presence.", I said.

"The General tenders his apologies for his intrusion, but insists that it is very important."

Moments later, General Schrecken entered the dining hall. Until then, I had only known him as the most correct character. Should you ever have wondered what half a millimeter is like, you only would have had to look at the gaps between the medals on General Schrecken's chest. But not so on this fateful day. His medals were all over the place, the uniform was creased, his hair was standing up and uncombed, and his face had an expression that I previously only encountered in the faces of my enemies when they recognized the General's troops.

"What's the matter with you, my dear General?", I asked.

The General's mouth opened, but it took a long time before he finally managed to speak, and when he did, he stuttered: "The - the- T-t-t---Truth - i-is in t-t-t---town."

The next sound I heard was the crashing of Glory's port glass that had slipped through his hand and was torn into thousand pieces on the marble ground of the dining hall. I looked at Glory and noticed that he had turned pale as death.

I was getting angry: "What's going on here, gentlemen? - Together we have defeated many an army, removed many an obstacle on the way of previously unheard of fame and wealth - and now you are scared of this woman - this - what's her name?"

"Truth, mylord. Truth is her name. And she is stronger than all of us.", Glory said with resignation in his voice.

His speech only made me more furious. At once I called for my chauffeur, determined to drive to the place where General Schrecken had seen the Truth. Chauffeur Pride attended to

the Rolls without hesitation, and minutes later we were on our way.

As we came nearer to the point where we suspected Truth to be, I encountered a strange light I had never seen before. First I thought of it as just an unusually dazzling kind of sunlight, and so I took out my sunglasses. But they only helped for a brief moment. Then it became brighter - and also hotter - than before. As the light increased, so did the heat, and both became completely unbearable, until it was replaced by an instantaneous blackness, as I fell unconscious.

When I recovered my senses, I found myself lying on the bare ground. My clothes, best fabric from the world's best designers, were torn and smoke-damaged. All around me was fog, a very thick fog that concealed everything else, except for some strange silhouette that I eventually recognized as the burnt-out remains of my Rolls. Glory, Schrecken, the town, the castle - no-one and nothing was to be found, and no trace whatsoever from chauffeur Pride. Surrounded by this merciless fog, I had no idea where to go, and I started to wonder if the life of unheard of fame and wealth had only been a dream.

At last the fog began to clear. And a woman came to me. She wore a plain long dress in most immaculate white. I looked at her and asked: "Are you the Truth?"

"Yes.", she said. "And I will show you where to go."

I was overjoyed when I heard that she would show me a way, for this was what I was most desperately looking for. She handed me a book - it was the Bible - opened it and pointed at the Sermon on the Mount, saying: "Read this, and you will know."

I read the Sermon on the Mount, felt deeply inspired by it and was most grateful. For now I knew what to do with my life.

"Thank you.", I said and prepared to go on my newly found way.

"Wait.", she replied. "First you must read the whole New Testament. Then you will know."

"But I already know where to go.", I protested.

"No, you don't.", she insisted. "You don't know everything."

So I gave in and read the entire New Testament. I found some of it rather confusing, especially the last chapter, but it still left me with a clear enough idea of what to do with my life. And so, after having finished it, I wanted to go on my way.

Truth held me back another time, insisting that I should now read the Old Testament as well. There was no debating with her, and so I read the Old Testament as well, becoming rather more confused. And after finishing the Old Testament, she held me back again. And so it went on and on and on. I read apocryphal literature, books about Judaism, the Dhammapada, the Bhagavadgita, Gandhi's autobiography, books on Martin Luther King, War and Peace by Tolstoi, writings from Dostoyevsky, Sartre, Descartes, Spinoza, Camus, Einstein, Simone de Beauvoir, Aung San Suu Kyi, and many more. I also learnt about relativity, quantum mechanics, black holes, microbiology, Stephen Hawking's theories of time and Douglas Adams' invaluable advice for space travel, amongst many other things.

At last I said to Truth: "When I first met you, I wanted to know from you and from all these books what good and evil is. Now I know so many different theories of good and evil, and yet I have come to the conclusion that, after all, there is no such thing as good nor evil. There is only one big Oneness. Everything is one and the same, all the distinctions are only delusions. Everything in this world follows an eternal law of becoming and vanishing. This is all there is: Becoming and vanishing. Birth and death. Birth carries death, and death carries birth in itself. If I look at the world as a whole, there is no such thing as good nor evil."

Truth replied: "Well observed, my friend. In fact, you have recognized my true nature, and I shall reveal myself to you."

Then she took off her long white dress and displayed her most beautiful body. "Henceforth you shall no longer call me Truth. You shall call me Freedom. And I will lead you to my land - the land of absolute liberty."

I felt happy as never before in my life. Still struck by the sight of Freedom's beauty, I had now, at last, the prospect of going somewhere, of getting on my way again. And so I followed her.

We went to a desert. It was a very strange desert. For it was always night. A clear night with plenty of stars. The stars never changed their position, nor was there a moon to be seen. All around us was sand, without the slightest sign of life - not even an insect anywhere. It must have been many days that we were walking around in this desert, although I could not tell how many days, as the night sky was always above us. After a while, I became impatient and I asked: "Is this really your land, the land of absolute liberty?"

"Of course it is. I'm sure you like it here, don't you?"

"No, I don't. I don't know what I should do here."

"You don't have to do anything in my land."

"But I need to do something. And I need some life around me."

"In my land, there is nothing to do. And there is nothing to live for, nor to die for."

"But I want to live!", I shouted. "I'm human! You hear: human! And I need to live!"

Freedom gave me a disapproving look and went away, leaving me on my own in this endless desert with its eternal night sky.

I was looking around me, trying to remember the way we had come, so I could find a way back to where I was before. But I had spent too much time in this desert to remember. I sat down. With tears stuck in my eyes, I thought: 'If I had only a knife or a gun, then I could put an end to this evil game.'

As I was thinking this way, I suddenly saw a young woman approaching me. She wore ragged dirty clothes and had filthy uncombed hair. When she came nearer, I said in a fairly

disinterested way: "Hello. Who are you?"

"I'm Hope.", she replied and went straight past me without stopping even for a short moment.

"Nice to meet you, Hope.", I murmured.

It took me a while until I realized who she was. And as I did, I ran after her and asked: "Excuse me, Hope. Do you know where I should go?"

"If you think that my way is good for you, you're welcome to join me.", she replied. All the while she kept walking, not even looking at me.

"Hang on, you should first tell me where you're going. - And why don't you stop when I want to talk to you?"

"I'm going my way, and if you want to talk to me, you should go with me during that time. - And don't ask me where I'm going. I'm not the Truth. I'm Hope."

I caught up with her, keeping a little distance because of her filthiness and said: "Alright, so you don't know where you're going, and I should follow you blind."

I looked back around me at the desert and the eternal night sky and added: "Okay, I'm coming with you. After all, it can't be any worse than this."

And so I joined Hope on her unknown way. We left the desert behind, and by dawn - the first dawn I had seen for a long, long time - we encountered the first bushes, trees, insects. Soon birds were singing and a bright sun above us.

"Hope, I have to say, I like your way so far. I'm curious where you will lead us next."

"So am I.", she said and drew closer to me. Despite the fact that she still wore the same ragged clothes and still had not combed her hair, I had the impression that she had become almost beautiful. In any event, I didn't regard her as filthy and unattractive anymore.

We reached a little mountain stream where we decided to sit down. My eyes rejoiced at the stunning landscape, my nose breathed in fresh air, and my ears were listening full of joy to the birds' melodies and the splashing of the little stream.

"We have been together for a long time now.", said Hope to me. "Tell me where you want to go, and I will lead you there."

I thought for a while, but didn't know what to say.

When Hope noticed my hesitation, she prompted me: "Would you like to become rich and famous?"

"No, not at all.", I protested, and I began to tell her my life with Glory - how I acquired a castle, had my own army led by General Schrecken, my own Rolls driven by chauffeur Pride - and how it all ended in disaster.

"I see.", she said. "Rich and famous is not for you. Maybe you want to see the Truth."

"Oh no!", I cried, violently shaking my head. And I began to tell her my life with Truth - how I read all these books, got more and more confused, until I thought that I had found a way, and followed her - now transformed to Freedom - to the land of absolute liberty - only to find that it is no more than a dreadful wasteland with nothing to do.

"So you don't want to become rich and famous.", she summarized. "And you don't want to see the Truth, nor do you want to be absolutely free. - So tell me: Is there anything you want to do with your life?"

I thought for a while and said: "I just want to stay with you. I want to go wherever you go. I trust you."

After I had spoken in this way, she took me in her arms and gave me a passionate kiss. When I looked at her again, I didn't see the filthy young woman I had met in the desert, but instead the most beautiful creature I had ever seen - with a dress much brighter than that of Truth and eyes more sparkly than all of Glory's diamonds. I was stunned and said: "But you - you are not Hope. You are - Love."

"I'm still the same.", she replied. "It is you who has changed. Keep these eyes that you now have, and nothing shall ever separate us."

**Charlie Blackfield**