

It was a beautiful relaxing day in Lagoon city, but Mr. John Angelo and his nine-year-old daughter, Josephine Angelo was preparing to move to a small village called Mills Village at the edge of the city Mr. John wanted to move there was because the city was so polluted and noisy and he wanted to live in a peaceful area where he could commemorate his wife, Mrs. Amelia whom passed away in a car accident eight years ago Because Josephine was the only child with a very beautiful appearance, the people in her house pamper her too much. As a result, she becomes a spoiled and nasty little girl.

In Mills Village, where they lived, Mr. John's house was the biggest house anyone could find in that village. In fact, it was as so big that Mr. John employed many people such as: five securities, ten drivers, five chefs, thirty servant, and five governesses.

One day, Josephine went out of her house to go to the city to visit her wealthy friends. When she came out of the house, she saw a very dirty boy, working as a street sweeper. Josephine felt disgusted when she saw his boy because of his ragged clothes, dirty face and scrawny body. Instead of greeting him or offering him some food, Josephine barked right in front of the boy's face,

"Who are you? And what are you doing here? Don't you know that you do not need to sweep the street in front of my house? My maid Katherine cleans it better than you do!"

"I'm Steve Williams, the village street sweeper. I'm an orphan, and I live at the edge of the village. Previously my parents stayed with me too, but they died four years ago due to cancer.

"I don't care whatever you say, Williams. I'm not here to listen to the story of your life, and thanks to you, I'm late now! Goodbye! Hope I'll never ever meet you, anymore!"

After she barked at the boy, Josephine went away in one of the cars, without saying another word. Meanwhile, Steve hoped that one day, he must change Josephine to a nice person.

After several years, Josephine turned seventeen. Noticing that his little girl has already grown up, Mr. John made a contest called 'Be My Husband' for young men.

He announced, "Dear young men of Mills Village, my daughter is seventeen already, and I suppose that it will be a good idea if she's getting married. So I'm holding a contest called 'Be My Husband'. The purpose of the contest is to produce someone who would be Josephine's husband by giving me Josephine's half-hearted necklace."

All the young men in Mills Village were eager to hear this news due to Josephine's beauty. All the men in the village applied to this contest, however most of them failed because

Josephine was so particular about the physical appearance and social status of the man. After hearing about the sad news, Steve became quite worried, recalling his mind years ago.

One day, Steve realized that to change Josephine to a better person, he should set a good example and act kind to her. So, from that day, Steve worked harder, helped other people, and turned out to be a friendly young man. Afterwards, his boss eventually raised Steve's wage because of his hard work. Seeing this, Mr. John realized that it would be good to have Steve as one of his servant. The next day, Mr. John met Steve to offer him a part time job at his house since he knew Steve only works in the evening as a street sweeper. Steve agreed looking forward to this opportunity to pursue his goal. Steve got employed as a housemaid in the Angelo's house. His job is swept the gardens and clean Josephine's room.

Two months had passed since Steve first worked in the Angelo's. One day, Josephine accidentally bumped Steve on her way to the garden. When their eyes met, Josephine noticed the kind-looking eyes. Finally she realized that she had been a very bad person and she wanted to change. Suddenly Josephine recalled her memories when she first met Steve and she felt really bad. After Steve finished cleaning her room, their eyes accidentally met. Realizing this, Steve smiled and hurried past. But Josephine held him back, saying;

“Steve I need to talk to you!”

Steve replied, “Yes, but don't take too long. I need to clean the gardens, sorry.”

“I'm the one who is sorry. Steve... I'm sorry for what I have done last time. I really was not supposed to bark at you like that.”

“Well, it is okay, Josephine. I... um... uh... Well, sorry but I really need to go now.”

“No, no, um... I'll ask maiden Mary to clean it. Steve, there is just so much to say to you. By the way, can we take a walk? I mean like, together?”

Steve hesitated at first, but because it's very unusual, Steve thinks something really important to say, and he answered, “Okay then...”

Finally, for the first time in forever, people saw Josephine walk with an unknown stranger. They kept on walking, chatting, and laughing till they eventually reached the end of the village leading to the woods.

They continued and they did not realize their walk eventually reached the middle of the woods. It was not before Steve noticed a raccoon passing by. He lifted up his head and realized,

“This is the Magical Forest, and we’re not supposed to be here... I heard that you’re greeted by a raccoon passing by when you come.”

Frightened, Josephine shrieked, “How are we ever going to get back! I’ve never heard about it”

Ignoring what Josephine said, he replied boldly, “Don’t panic. I’m sure there is a way out.”

Thanks to Steve’s words, Josephine re-gained courage to find their way out of the Magical Forest. Yet, their hard effort seemed to fade as they kept on getting lost.

“Steve, I thought I had already seen that funny looking rock before!” Josephine mentioned on their millionth effort to find their way out.

“Well, you’re right. It’s getting dark now and we are all exhausted. Why don’t we sleep here overnight?”

“There is no other choice so, let’s just sleep and continue tomorrow.”

Before a bird could swallow a worm, both Josephine and Steve were already fast asleep. They slept all night through. But, when both Steve and Josephine were fast asleep, a pair of gnomes appeared.

The female gnome said, “Who do you think they are, Bobby?”

The male correlated, “I don’t know, Courtney. Who do you think they are?”

But before the female could answer, Josephine was up already and she freaked out, “Steve! Steve! Who are they? Oh no! Help! They’re going to capture us, and then we’re never going to get back!” Then Josephine started to cry. Meanwhile, Steve calmed her down, “Don’t worry, please. We don’t know who they are yet, so I bet they won’t do any harm. Don’t panic.” Subsequently, Steve turned around to the gnomes, “Hi! I’m Steve Williams from Mills Village and this is my master’s daughter, Josephine Angelo.”

The male gnome retaliated, “Hi, Steve and Josephine. I’m Bobby and this is my fiancée Courtney. Are you looking for the way out?”

“Yes. We entered this forest just yesterday evening and wondering if you could show us the way out.”

Then Courtney answered first, “Ah, the way out. It is on the top of Rookie Mountain, Far East of the Gnome Village, however we gnomes couldn’t reach it since the way to the top is too steep.”

Bobby added, “True, but before let us show you to Daddy Gnome. Every visitor should report to him”

“Uh...thank you. You guys are so kind.” Josephine said hesitantly.

“We fly to Gnomes Village using powder made from the leaves of the Magical Tree. Don’t you worry; we will be there within a second. Be ready in, three-two-one. Bobby, throw the powder.” Courtney commanded.

While Bobby threw the powder in the air; Steve and Josephine were amazed at how magical the forest is. True, within a second, they were in a village where houses were planted in the tree trunks. Afterwards, Bobby announced, “Dear Gnomes Village residents, there are two visitors here. They come from another world and they want to get out. So let us help them to Rookie Mountain.”

Another gnome, called Lucy offered, “We’re ready to help, but let us hear from Daddy and Mommy Gnome. They’re better in decision-making.” All of a sudden, a pair of old gnomes appeared. “Hello visitors. I bet you want to know the way out, huh. There are two choices once you get here actually. All visitors so far choose the first choice where you will transform into a gnome within 24-hours. We call them ‘Border Gnomes’. Half of the females here are borders knowing most gnomes born are males. The second choice is you are given a week to reach the top of Rookie Mountain and by 11 pm; you should get out of here. Or else, you’ll... die. That is why I advice both of you to pick the first choice because Rookie Mountain could only be reached within a week by foot. Because, I love you and I don’t want you to die.”

Steve replied, “We’d pick the second choice. I know it takes a week just to the foot of Rookie Mountain, but don’t you gnomes have the powder made from the Magical Tree?”

“Good point. We never even thought of it. Oh, mind us gnomes. We’re sorry, but thanks to you, we can go to Rookie Mountain within a second.” Mommy Gnome answered.

Daddy Gnome was not at all happy, he was sad. He said, “The only problem now is that it takes one-thousand footsteps to the top and without any stairs. You need extra time and effort to reach there.”

However, Bobby had an idea, “Hoi Daddy, don’t worry! We can build a long, long stairs leading to the top. Then Steve and Josephine could visit us, and we could visit them.”

“What you said is Bobby. It is possible, however we need to work extra fast in building the stairs. Or else, Steve and Josephine would die, my dear” Mommy Gnome contradicted.

“Don’t worry Mommy. All of us will work 24 hours in shifts. There’s day shift and night shift. Like that, we’ll be done in no time!” Lucy said excitedly.

“I think that’s great! Come on gnomes, let’s prepare the materials. Okay it’s ready already? Brought enough food for a week? Now, everyone hold hands. Bobby, throw the powder!”

“Ready, Daddy! Let’s go to Rookie Mountain!!” Bobby said as he threw the powder in the air. Within a tick of a clock, they were all at the side of Rookie Mountain. Before the gnomes could even see the lovely scenery, Daddy and Mommy Gnome had already commanded everyone, “Divide yourselves into two groups and when it’s done report to me immediately.”

“Now, while they’re all busy with the preparation, I’d like to tell both of you something. It won’t take long.” Daddy Gnome said to Steve and Josephine. “Now you know right, that if you don’t get back to your world within seven days, you’ll die. My question is that, would you two change your minds or just stick with that choice? Daddy continued.

Steve thought for some time and he came up with this answer, “I think we’ll stick with our choice. It’s okay, don’t worry Daddy. We have faith in the gnomes, and they will not trick us. We can do it all together. I’ll work in the night shift then.”

“I’ll work in the day shift, to speed up work.” Josephine added

“Okay, I understand. Now gnomes! Have you all split into groups? Day shift, let’s work! Our target is 150 steps at the end of the shift! Night shift, prepare the food for dinner! By sunset, you’re working with the same target, 150!”

All the gnomes chorused, “Aye, Daddy! We’ll not disobey you.”

The day shift then started building the stairs. They put in their best effort to build the stairs. After several exhausting hours, they were making progress, yet everyone felt that they couldn’t continue anymore. Seeing this, Josephine uplifted the team’s spirit, “Come on guys! We can do this.”

Courtney started to regain her spirit and continued Josephine’s words, “Let’s do this! We’re doing this for Steve and Josephine, and we only have six days left!”

Even though the sun was shining hot and they felt exhausted, it didn’t stop the day shift from working. They finally regained their spirit with Courtney’s and Josephine’s motivation. By sunset, they even managed to build 200 steps which are much more than the target.

“I’m proud with you all. It’s a good start after all. You can eat dinner afterwards take a rest. It’s another big day tomorrow.” Daddy Gnome said when he summoned the day shift after sunset. Afterwards, the day shift prepare the equipment used for the next day went to bed.

Same like what happened to the day shift, the night shift were having problems. Especially at keeping awake and reaching the target. Seeing that the team wasn’t making much progress, Steve encouraged them, “We can do this! I know we’re all sleepy, but... (yawn) let’s reach the target”. However Steve himself found it hard to keep wide awake. Just then, Mommy Gnome passed by and she noticed the shift could not really make progress, “Hmm. There must be a way to make them not sleepy. I wonder...” Like its name, Magical Forest, of course it has magic. Mommy then remembered something, “Oh, yes! Mommies and Daddies do have magic wands. Let me give them an ‘anti-sleeping when working spell’! Abracadabra, make them not sleepy when working!” just in a flick of a wand, the night shift was once more energetic. They all thanked, “Thanks Mommy Gnome! Now we can go far beyond the target.” Mommy Gnome just smiled.

Thanks to the spell Mommy casted on the night shift, they managed to do 200 steps, which made Daddy Gnome very happy. “Keep up the hard work! If this continues, we can finish this less than a week.

The gnomes kept up their hard work. They worked faster and faster. On the fourth day, the day shift finished the last step.

“There goes the last step. Finally, it’s all done now.” Jesse, another gnome said as he put the last step leading to the top.

“Now what we need to do is just search for the door leading to the outer world. According to my ancestors, the door is a rock at the east and it has a gnome shape. But only 5 people at a time can be on the top. Or else, we won’t be able to get out. It’s an unbreakable rule made by the first generations. Okay, Steve, Josephine, Bobby, Courtney, and I will go up. Mommy, stand at the last step and find which direction is east.”

“Let’s see. The sun sets at the west and rises at the east. Luckily, its sunset so east is that way, the opposite of the sun.” Mommy said.

“Okay, so let’s go to the eastern part. Steve, you go with Bobby to that part, Josephine and Courtney, search this part. I will search in between you.”

It took about an hour to search for the gnome shaped rock among many rocks in assorted sizes and shapes. It was Bobby who found it, “Got it! Now finally Steve and Josephine, you can go home. We will miss you, but we understand there’s nowhere else like home.”

“Good job Bobby! It looks like we finally accomplished our mission, for the first time. However, you only could exit at sunrise. So tonight, we’re having a farewell party.” Daddy Gnome responded.

Courtney replied, “Great! Now let’s go down and tell all the gnomes. Afterwards, we will prepare everything at the foot of the mountain.”

There the five of them went. They climbed down the stairs leading to the crowd of gnomes. They said, “Dear gnomes. We have found the door to the outside world. So tonight we’re having a farewell party with Steve and Josephine.”

The party was very simple. It was just a fireplace surrounded by gnomes, Steve, and Josephine forming a circle. They sang farewell songs all night. The following morning at dawn, Steve and Josephine were ready to climb the mountain and said bye to the gnomes.

“Goodbye! We’ll miss you all!” Both of them shouted.

Just before they left, Courtney approaches Josephine saying, “Josephine, let me tell you something. I hope you could continue this message to my mother. I used to be a human until I came here three years ago. In the human world I was Cornelia Smith, one of your servant’s daughters. Please tell mother that I’m still alive and don’t worry about me.”

Josephine was shocked. She also got the answer why her father never let her out of the house without anyone. It was because of servant Katherine’s daughter, Cornelia whom is nicknamed Courtney. She replied, “Oh, Courtney. Of course I’ll tell this to your mother. Maybe one day you could even visit her since we already found the door.”

“Thanks a lot Josephine. Well, see you one day. Goodbye!”

Josephine and Steve then stepped out of the door which leads to the edge of the village where they lived.

“Isn’t it lovely to go home?” Steve asked.

“Well, of course. Father must have been wondering where we have been. Oh, Steve. I forgot to give you something as a gift for many things I have learned from you. Here, take it and bring it to father.” Josephine said as she gave Steve her half-hearted necklace.

“Does it mean that you want me to be your husband? Well, I’ll bring it to your father then, just as you requested.” Steve was very surprised and he couldn’t believe it. He then sprinted to the Angelo’s house and found Mr. John. He gave the beautiful looking jewel to me after telling him what had happened to them for the past few days. Finally, Mr. John announced that Steve won the contest.

Two days after Steve won the ‘Be My Husband’ contest; Mr. John arranged a big wedding party and invited the whole Mills and Gnome Village to come to the party. They were all happy to see that Josephine had changed. Now Josephine has officially become Steve’s wife. They held a wedding party in the Angelo’s house and at the end of the party, Mr. John, Steve, and Josephine announced that their house would be transformed into an apartment enough for the villagers. In addition, Mr. John and Daddy Gnome were planning to open a tour company to the Magical Forest so tourists could come and see the beauty of the forest. The villagers’ old houses would be transformed into a school for young villagers.

After their marriage, Steve, Josephine, and Mr. John lived in two flats in the Mills house. Mr. John is working as the managing director in the Mills Tour while Daddy Gnome as the co-director, Steve works as a tour guide, while Josephine is a principal in the new school they just build in the village, Mills School. In addition, Courtney finally returned to be a human and lived with her mother once more. So now the people in the Mills Village and the gnomes live happily ever after.