

# Teresa the Brave Hoopoe



On a warm morning of June, Teresa, a young hoopoe, woke up to the first lights of dawn.

First, she stretched the feathers of her pretty, colorful crest, then she began to groom her wings to fix them up after her night's rest. She was enjoying the coolness and the shade provided by the foliage of the London planes, as she contemplated the sun rays shining upon the leaves moved by a gentle breeze.

Suddenly, she took flight really fast and leaned on the branch of an alder nearby. The day had just begun and little Teresa, lost in her thoughts, was peering at the dragonflies from above as they glided on the water, not scared at all by her presence: they knew the hoopoe preferred other insects, even though she didn't have breakfast yet.

A soft gurgle was propagating nearby... In fact, Teresa had her home on the bank of a resurgence and the sound that she was hearing was coming from the water that, as it spilled out of the ground, was forming the spring that filled the spring well itself, producing waves which then dispersed into concentric circles.

Teresa felt she was a very, very lucky hoopoe. There, on the banks of the resurgence and along the watercourse, the canal that conveyed the water along the fields, she had everything she needed at her disposal: shade and shelter by the vegetation, some hollow trunk to make her nest in, water always at a constant temperature and food at will.

She often stopped to talk with her friends and among them there was Sebastiano, a green frog. The tiny amphibian and Teresa enjoyed gossiping, even if sometimes Teresa had to struggle to find Sebastiano, who used to camouflage himself among the duckweed, thriving and prosperous thanks to the stillness of those waters.

Suddenly, Teresa heard some unusual noises: a rumble, followed by two stomps - bam!, bam! - and the trampling of busy feet on the gravel path leading to the resurgence. They were not the light steps of Toni, the farmer that in summer, in his very rare moments of

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rest, could be seen taking a nap under the foliage and drinking fresh juices made with black elder flowers, or gathering willow branches to be woven into baskets for carrying lumber.

They were the quick steps of two men dressed in grey, their shiny black shoes covered in dust. They didn't care about disturbing the inhabitants of the resurgence.

A shiver ran on Teresa's back as she saw that even Attila, the crested newt, was running to hide... Teresa heard the two men talking loudly. She understood only a part of what they were saying but everything became more clear when one of them unwrapped a big white paper sheet where black marks depicted the project of some buildings, so very different from the farmers' small houses to which she she usually saw when flying around.

Teresa had guessed just enough: those tall, grey, sad buildings would be built right there, close to her home, surrounding the resurgence and scaring away the animals. The young hoopoe was able to understand that because the two grey men, all busy with their business talk, did not pay attention to the beauty of that place: they didn't see the elegant yellow iris that flourished along the banks nor they stopped to smell the scent of the grass, as Toni usually did.

The confirmation came later, when the two men pulled out of their jeep a white sign full of colored marks that they planted in the ground, close to the resurgence. «Ouch Ouch», sadly thought Teresa, «I can't read the human language, sigh!» But her keen sight had already noticed that the sign displayed the same projects she saw on the paper sheet held by the two men. Once they were done, the men got in the car and left, leaving a thick cloud of dust behind. The inhabitants of the resurgence felt so relieved.

Teresa left the branch she was perched on and reached the newt Attila, who had been listening to everything from his hiding spot. Attila, who was one of the most clever animals of the resurgence, was so angry that his crest was standing upright more than usual. In fact he too had understood that, instead of the fields that surrounded the spring well, a hotel and a shopping center would have risen, as well as something never heard before: a multiplex cinema!

Teresa, puzzled, looked at him, as she was trying to understand better. When Attila realized that she was confused, he said: «These are all places made to entertain humans who don't care about nature and dislike staying in the open air!». «We need to do something», said the small amphibian. «We need to ask Amilcare, the wise grey heron, what we can do to save the ecosystem!» «But I», continued Attila, «can't reach him and also... his beak scares me so, so much!».

Teresa didn't waste any time. She knew where the wise Amilcare lived, even though, a little timid, she had never reached to talk to him. She took flight and, going up the watercourse, she immediately spotted the majestic heron, who was observing the fishes swimming on the bottom, with his legs dipped in the water.

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The news, indeed, had already spread among the inhabitants of the resurgence and Tito the pike, who wasn't afraid of anything, had already his way of telling what had happened, after hearing it from Dagoberta, the Lataste's frog.

The hoopoe perched on a low branch close to the ear of the majestic bird and she timidly said: «Amilcare, I am here to ask you what we can do to save our ecosyst...» but her mind was already forgetting that new word, so she said «to save our home!».

Amilcare squinted his eyes as he pondered. Teresa was very agitated, she feared that there would be no solution to the problem. The minutes passed slowly and eventually, after a long wait, she heard Amilcare's powerful voice: «There is only one thing to do: Ruggero, the kingfisher, must be called and he should be invited to visit our resurgence».

«He is such a beautiful bird, so rare and difficult to observe that, if those two men see him, they would not dare to destroy our ecosystem!». «Oh, well», said Teresa, relieved, «I'll call him right away. Where does he live?» «You little hasty hoopoe», said Amilcare, «how can you think the solution to the problem would be so easy? Very few know where Ruggero lives», continued the heron, «otherwise it would be much easier to spot him! Also, Teresa, our is only one of the resurgences on the territory, there are many others around here, as you already know quite well! I saw you as you glided above them!»

«That's true, there are many resurgences like ours, but I was so nervous that I forgot», thought Teresa, and she immediately recalled when she went on a vacation to the resurgence which was three hundred wing flaps and a long glide away, hosted by her friend the moorhen. «Fine, Amilcare», said Teresa, «I'll fly from resurgence to resurgence to ask if anyone saw Ruggero».

Teresa took flight and after three thousand wing flaps she reached the resurgence where her friend Amalia the moorhen lived. She found her by the creek, quite noticeable thanks to her yellow and red beak, as she was busy taking care of her unruly chicks that were swimming around erratically.

The young hoopoe asked without hesitation to her friend if by any chance she knew the address of Ruggero. Amalia promptly answered: «Dear Teresa, the kingfisher lived in our resurgence Lirosa for a whole month, last year, but now I don't know exactly where he is». But then, distracted by her chicks, she had to move away and Teresa only grasped the words “Tazio, the fastest skater” and “resurgence Castellaro”. So she understood that she had to look for a very fast skater within the resurgence Castellaro.

The hoopoe didn't waste any time and she immediately went to the other resurgence, even though she didn't know exactly who she was looking for. Then she had a sudden intuition... the skaters... of course! It had to be the water skippers, insects that, thanks to their long legs, can move on the water as if skating on its surface.

She spotted them gathered in small groups, as they twiddled idly on the clear water surface. Teresa reached the shore to talk with Tazio (even though, under different circumstances, she would have eaten him in one bite). But how could she identify him?

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Then she had another bright idea! From the shore Teresa cried out «Ready, set... go!» Immediately the tiny water skippers started to skate at great speed on the clear surface. The first one to reach the other side was... Tazio, the fastest skater, of course.

Teresa got close to him and Tazio pressed himself against the water surface, half stunned by fear. But Teresa didn't have time for a snack and she promptly asked him «Tazio, do you know where Ruggero, the kingfisher, lives? I need him to come with me and save my resurgence Tergola!».

Tazio was so agitated that he was babbling (he also was out of breath because of the run), nevertheless he was able to say «Resurgence Din-din-din... Dindarello until May la-la-last year, spotted within resurgence Bo-bo-Bojeroni in Sep-sep-September... ask madame Abigaille the water vole, third tunnel to the ri-ri-right», before he ran away at the speed of light.

Once again, Teresa took flight to reach the spring well, as Tazio indicated. She glided on the resurgence, flying around its perimeter, and she quickly noticed the third tunnel on the right (Tazio had proven himself to be very meticulous) but madame Abigaille was taking a nap, enjoying the freshness of the tunnels underground.

Teresa could only wait for the sunset, when Abigaille would come outside. To appease the shy water vole she gathered some dry weed and some fur, with which she could line her nest to welcome her babies.

At twilight, when the sun sat low on the horizon, the young hoopoe heard a dull thud on the water and so she knew that Abigaille was out of her den for some fresh air among the horsetail plants. She approached her quietly, careful not to scare her and said almost whispering: «Madame Abigaille, I have a question for you. Can you tell me where Ruggero the kingfisher lives?».

The water vole, intent on eating a piece of kelp, said «I don't, but I'm sure that Gianna, my third cousin, knows it» (water vole families are known to be quite large). «Since you asked so kindly and you brought me such a precious gift, I'll go ask her right away». Shortly after, Abigaille came back with the answer. «Ruggero has been spotted close to the springs of river Tesina» and with a thud, as she first came out, she disappeared.

The night had already fallen and Teresa decided to sleep in the resurgence she had just reached. But later at night there was a storm: the violent wind shook the trees, thunders and bolts followed one after the other and the rain poured down profusely to quench the already thirsty ground.

It was a short-lasting storm and the morning after, the little hoopoe, still a little shaken by the difficult night, finally saw Ruggero. He was different from how she expected him to be. He wasn't large and elegant like Amilcare, the grey heron. He was a small bird whose belly was covered with rusty red feathers, while his back had an incredible shade of blue.

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Teresa could barely believe her eyes: she had never seen such a singular bird, not even the mallards, with their emerald green head feathers, could compare!

She approached him immediately and, from bird to bird, she explained to him the situation and begged him to come with her to her resurgence Tergola, in order to be spotted and so to try to save her home. It wasn't so difficult to convince him: Ruggero, well aware of his good looks, was indeed a vain bird and, whilst carefully and only for a few seconds, he loved being looked at.

The two eventually took flight to reach resurgence Tergola. In the distance, a massive rumble anticipated the arrival of the grey men, who came to check whether the board had been torn down by the storm, as in fact was.

As she got close to the resurgence, though, Teresa noticed that it wasn't the men she saw before. Only one of them was present, followed by a smaller being, a "human puppy", thought Teresa, as she remembered when Toni, the farmer, took his nephew for a walk during his summer holidays.

Immediately Teresa said: «Quick, Ruggero, this is your moment» and the kingfisher, with his sky-hued feathers, dove into the water. The result was amazing: a rainbow of water sprays, preceded by a blinding azure bolt, mottled with rusty red.

The nephew, attracted by the show, exclaimed: «Look, Grandpa! What was that?» and the grandfather, astonished as well, said «It is the diving of a wonderful bird called kingfisher. I used to love watching them as a kid, when I used to run happily around the fields and then, tired, I used to rest by the rivers.»

And then, something special happened, a miracle, one could think: the tired eyes of the man rested on the circles on the water, on the yellow iris and the buttercups. His ears heard the buzz of the bees, the rustle of the leaves moved by the wind and the gurgling of the spring. His nose smelled the clean air, scented of weed and moss.

The grandfather understood that he could not let his nephew lose such a spectacular place and so, instead of putting the board back in place, he put it in his car, abandoning his project.

Since then, every time Teresa comes back to her resurgence, she finds it improved: the banks are in order and some little bridges allow the passage from one side to another, the animals live in harmony and the vegetation thrives.

Every now and then, on the weekends or during summer holidays, a grandfather sits with his nephew on the shore to rest, after a long run in the fields nearby.

**THE END**