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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Lazy Bee

Once upon a time in a hive, there lived a bee who didn't want to work. She would visit the trees one by one to gather the nectar from flowers, but instead of saving it to make honey, she would drink it all up.

She was, therefore, a lazy bee. Every morning, as soon as the sun warmed the air, the little bee would peek out from the hive's entrance, see that the weather was nice, groom herself with her legs like flies do, and happily take flight, delighted by the lovely day. She buzzed joyfully from flower to flower, entered the hive, went out again, and spent her entire day like this, while the other bees worked themselves to exhaustion filling the hive with honey—because honey is the food for newly born bees.

Since bees are very serious creatures, they began to grow displeased with their lazy sister's behavior. At the hive's entrance, there are always a few guard bees who ensure no intruders enter. These bees are usually very old, with great life experience, and have bare backs because they've lost their hairs from rubbing against the hive's door for so long.

One day, the guard bees stopped the lazy bee as she was about to enter and said:

"Comrade, it's necessary that you work, for all bees must work."

The little bee replied, "I fly around all day, and I get very tired!"

"It's not about getting very tired," they responded, "but about working a little. This is the first warning we give you."

And with that, they let her pass.

But the lazy bee didn't change her ways. So the next afternoon, the guard bees said to her:

"You need to work, sister."

And she immediately replied, "One of these days, I will!"

"It's not about doing it one of these days," they responded, "but tomorrow itself. Remember this."

And they let her pass.

The following evening, the same thing happened.

Before they could say anything, the little bee exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, sisters! I remember what I've promised!"

"It's not about

remembering your promise," they replied, "but about working. Today is April 19th. Well then, make sure that tomorrow, the 20th, you bring at least one drop of honey. Now, go in."

And saying this, they stepped aside to let her enter.



But April 20th passed in vain like all the others. The difference was that as the sun set, the weather turned bad, and a cold wind began to blow.

The lazy little bee hurried back to her hive, thinking about how warm it would be inside. But when she tried to enter, the guard bees blocked her way.

"No entry," they said coldly.

"I want to come in!" cried the little bee. "This is my hive!"

"This is the hive of hard-working bees," the others replied. "There's no entrance for the lazy."

"Tomorrow, without fail, I will work!" insisted the little bee.

"There is no tomorrow for those who do not work," the bees responded, who know much about philosophy.

And with that, they pushed her outside.

Not knowing what to do, the little bee flew around for a while longer, but night was falling, and visibility was low. She tried to cling to a leaf but fell to the ground. Her body was numb from the cold air, and she could no longer fly.

Dragging herself along the ground, climbing over tiny sticks and pebbles that seemed like mountains to her, she reached the hive's door just as cold raindrops began to fall.

"Oh, dear God!" exclaimed the helpless bee. "It's going to rain, and I'll die of cold!"

She tried to enter the hive again.

But once more, they blocked her path.

"Please forgive me!" the bee whimpered. "Let me in!"

"It's too late," they replied.

"Please, sisters! I'm sleepy!"

"It's even later."

"Comrades, have mercy! I'm cold!"

"Impossible."

"For the last time! I'm going to die!"

Then they said to her:

"No, you won't die. You will learn in a single night what it means to rest earned through work. Go away."

And they pushed her out.

Shivering from the cold, with wet wings and stumbling, the bee crawled and crawled until she suddenly tumbled into a hole—she rolled down, landing at the bottom of a cavern.

She thought she'd never stop falling. At last, she reached the bottom and suddenly found herself face-to-face with a snake—a green serpent with a brick-colored back—who looked at her coiled and ready to strike.

In truth, that cavern was the hollow of a tree that had been transplanted some time ago and which the snake had chosen as her lair.

Snakes eat bees and are quite fond of them. So when the little bee found herself before her enemy, she murmured, closing her eyes:

"Goodbye, my life! This is the last time I'll see the light."

But to her great surprise, the snake not only didn't devour her but said:

"Well, little bee? You must not be very hardworking to be here at this hour."

"It's true," murmured the bee. "I don't work, and it's my fault."

"If that's so," added the mocking snake, "I'm going to remove a bad creature like you from the world. I'm going to eat you, bee."

Trembling, the bee exclaimed:

"That's not fair! It's not fair that you eat me just because you're stronger than I am. Humans understand what justice is."

"Ah, ah!" laughed the snake, coiling swiftly. "You think humans, who take your honey, are more just, you silly thing?"

"No, that's not why they take our honey," replied the bee.

"Then why?"

"Because they're more intelligent."

That's what the little bee said. But the snake burst into laughter, exclaiming:

"Well! With or without justice, I'm going to eat you; prepare yourself."

And she pulled back to lunge at the bee. But the bee exclaimed:

"You're doing this because you're less intelligent than I am."

"Me, less intelligent than you, you little runt?" laughed the snake.

"That's right," affirmed the bee.

"Very well," said the snake, "let's see about that. We'll do two tests. Whoever performs the most remarkable trick wins. If I win, I'll eat you."

"And if I win?" asked the little bee.

"If you win," replied her enemy, "you have the right to spend the night here until daylight. Does that suit you?"

"Agreed," answered the bee.

The snake laughed again because she'd thought of something a bee could never do. And here's what she did:

She stepped outside for a moment, so quickly that the bee had no time to react. She returned carrying a eucalyptus seed pod from a tree next to the hive that provided shade.

Children spin these seed pods like tops and call them eucalyptus tops.

"This is what I'm going to do," said the snake. "Watch closely, pay attention!"

Wrapping her tail swiftly around the top like a string, she unwound it at full speed, so fast that the top started spinning and buzzing like crazy.

The snake laughed, and with good reason, because no bee has ever been able to spin a top.

But when the top, which had been spinning and humming like those made from orange wood, finally fell to the ground, the bee said:

"That trick is very nice, and I'll never be able to do that."

"Then I'll eat you," exclaimed the snake.

"One moment! I can't do that, but I can do something no one else can."

"And what's that?"

"Disappear."

"How?" exclaimed the snake, jumping in surprise.

"Disappear without leaving here?"

"Without leaving here."

"And without hiding underground?"

"Without hiding underground."

"Well then, do it! And if you don't, I'll eat you immediately," said the snake.

The thing is, while the top was spinning, the bee had time to examine the cavern and had seen a little plant growing there. It was a tiny shrub, almost a weed, with large leaves the size of a coin.

The bee approached the plant, careful not to touch it, and said:

"Now it's my turn, Mrs. Snake. Please turn around and count to three. When I say 'three,' search for me everywhere—you won't find me!"

And that's exactly what happened. The snake quickly said, "One... two... three," and turned around, opening her mouth wide in surprise: there was no one there. She looked up, down, to the sides, searched every corner, the plant, probed everything with her tongue. It was useless—the bee had vanished.

The snake realized then that while her top trick was very good, the bee's trick was simply extraordinary.

What had happened? Where was she?

There was no way to find her.

"Well!" she exclaimed at last. "I admit defeat. Where are you?"

A barely audible voice—the voice of the little bee—came from the middle of the cave.

"You're not going to harm me?" said the voice. "Can I count on your promise?"

"Yes," replied the snake. "I swear it. Where are you?"

"Here," answered the little bee, suddenly appearing from within a closed leaf of the plant.

What had happened? Something very simple: The plant in question was a sensitive plant, very common in places like Misiones, where this story takes place. It has the peculiarity that its leaves close at the slightest touch. Since the vegetation there is lush, the leaves of sensitive plants are quite large. So when the bee touched the leaves, they closed, completely hiding her. The snake's intelligence had never grasped this phenomenon, but the bee had observed it and used it to save her life.

The snake said nothing but was very irritated by her defeat. The bee spent the whole night reminding her enemy of the promise she'd made to spare her.

It was a long, endless night that the two spent pressed against the highest wall of the cavern because the storm had unleashed, and water was pouring in like a river.

It was very cold, and darkness reigned inside. From time to time, the snake felt the urge to lunge at the bee, and the bee thought her end had come.

Never had the little bee imagined a night could be so cold, so long, so horrible. She remembered her previous life, sleeping night after night in the warm hive, and silently wept.

When day came and the sun rose—because the weather had cleared—the little bee flew and wept silently again before the hive's entrance, built by her family's efforts. The guard bees let her pass without a word because they understood that the bee returning was no longer

the wandering lazy one but a bee who had undergone a hard lesson in life in just one night.

And so it was, indeed. From then on, no one collected as much pollen or made as much honey as she did. And when autumn came, and her days drew to an end, she still had time to give one last lesson before dying to the young bees that surrounded her:

"It's not our intelligence but our work that makes us so strong. I used my intelligence only once, and it was to save my life. I wouldn't have needed that effort if I'd worked like everyone else. I've tired myself just as much flying around aimlessly as I would have working. What I lacked was a sense of duty, which I gained that night.

"Work, my friends, remembering that the goal toward which our efforts strive—the happiness of all—is far superior to the fatigue of each individual. This is what humans call an ideal, and they are right. There's no other philosophy in the life of a human or a bee."