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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Maya the Bee and Puck the Fly (6/17)

Maya, feeling drowsy from the afternoon heat, flew leisurely along the garden towards the cool shelter of a large chestnut tree. On a flat piece of grass in the shade beneath the tree, chairs and tables were set up, likely for an outdoor meal. A little further on, the red-tiled roof of a farmer's cottage glistened, and thin blue smoke columns rose from the chimneys.

Now, thought Maya, now she would finally see a human. Had she reached the heart of the human realm? The tree must be his property, and the strange wooden contraption in the shade below had to be a Beehive. Then something buzzed, a Fly landed on the leaf next to her. The little creature ran up and down the green leaf in small jerks. Its legs couldn't be seen moving, and it seemed to be shuffling around excitedly. Then it flew from one broad leaf to another, but so fast and unexpectedly that you would think it had not flown but rather jumped.

Apparently, it was looking for the most comfortable spot on the leaf. Occasionally, for no apparent reason, it flew briefly and buzzed violently, as if something terribly unpleasant had happened, causing the world to stand still. Then it dropped back onto the leaf, as if nothing

had happened, and started running again. Finally, it sat very still, like a motionless statue.



Watching its antics, Maya went over to the Fly and politely said, "How do you do? Welcome to my leaf. You are a Fly, aren't you?"

"What else do you take me for?" said the little Fly. "My name is Puck. I'm very busy. Do you want to chase me away?"

"Why would I? Not at all. I'm pleased to make your acquaintance," said Maya.

"I believe you," was all Puck said, and then he tried to pull his own head off his body.

"Goodness gracious, what are you doing?" exclaimed Maya.

"I have to do this. You don't understand. It's something you as a Bee know nothing about," said Puck, now calm again. And he slid his legs over his wings until they curved around the tip of his body. "Besides, I'm more than just a Fly," he added somewhat proudly. "I'm a Housefly. I've flown here for the fresh air."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Maya cheerfully. "Then you must know everything about humans."

"As well as I know the pockets of my pants," snorted Puck disdainfully. "I sit on humans every day. Didn't you know that? I thought you Bees were supposed to be smart. You certainly act like it."

"My name is Maya," said the little Bee, rather shyly. She didn't understand where the other insects always got their self-confidence from, not to mention their audacity.

"Thank you for the information. Whatever your name is, you're a fool. You must be careful and cautious," he said. "That's the most important thing of all."

But in the meantime, a wave of anger rose in little Maya. The insult that Puck had hurled at her was too much. Without really knowing why she was doing it, she rushed at him, grabbed him by the collar, and held him tightly.

"I'll teach you how to be polite to a Bee," she shouted. Puck began to cry hard, "Please don't sting me," he wailed. "It's the only thing you can do, but it's lethal. Let me go, please let me go, if you still can. I'll do anything you say. Can't you understand a joke? It was just a joke. Everyone knows that Bees are the most respected of all insects, and the most powerful and numerous insects. Don't kill me, please. There'll be no one to bring me back to life. Good gracious! No one ever appreciates my humor!"

"Fine," said Maya, "I'll let you live on the condition that you tell me everything you know about humans."

"I'll gladly do that," exclaimed Puck. "I would have told you anyway. But please let me go first."

Maya released him. Her respect for the Fly and any trust she could have had in him had disappeared. What value could the experiences of such a low being have? What would he know about people? She would have to learn more about humans herself. However, the lesson

had not been in vain. Puck was now keeping himself calmer. But muttering and grumbling under his breath, he straightened out his antennae and wings, and the tiny hairs on his black body that had been horribly crumpled because Maya the Bee had caught him so well.

"Everything in my body is out of joint, it's gotten completely out of hand!" he muttered in a pained tone. "That's because of your excited way of doing things. But tell me, what do you want to know about humans? I think the best thing I can do is tell you a few things from my own life. You see, I grew up among humans, so you'll hear exactly what you want to know."

"You grew up among humans?"

"Of course. It was in the corner of their room where my mother laid the egg that I came out of. I made my first attempts to walk on their sunshade and I tested the strength of my wings by flying from Schiller to Goethe."

"What are Schiller and Goethe?"

"They're statues," explained Puck in a very superior tone, "statues of two men who distinguished themselves from others, apparently. They're under the mirror, one on the right and one on the left, but no one pays any attention to them."



"What's a mirror? And why are the statues under the mirror?"

"As a Fly, a mirror is good for seeing your belly when you crawl on it. It's very amusing. When people go to a mirror, they either put their hands on their hair or pull their beard. When they're alone, they smile in the mirror, but when there's someone else in the room, they look very serious. What its purpose is, I've never been able to figure out. Seems to be a useless game of theirs. I myself, when I was still a child, had a lot of trouble with the mirror. I wanted to fly into it, but of course was thrown back with force."

Maya asked Puck more questions about the mirror, which he found very difficult to answer.

"Look," he said finally, "haven't you ever flown over the smooth surface of water? Well, a mirror is just like that."

The little Fly, who saw that Maya was listening to his experiences with great respect and attention, became much friendlier and more polite. As for Maya's opinion of Puck, although she didn't believe everything he told her, she regretted thinking so disdainfully of him in their earlier meeting.

Puck continued his story: "It took me a long time to understand their language. Now I finally know what they want. It's not much because they usually say the same thing every day."

"I can hardly believe that," said Maya. "They have so many interests and think about many things and do many things. Cassandra told me that they build cities that are so large you can't fly around them in one day,

towers as high as the bridal flight of our Queen Bee, and houses that float on water. And then they also have houses that glide over the land on two narrow silver wheels and go faster than birds."

"Wait a minute," Puck said energetically. "Who is Cassandra, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"Oh, she was my teacher."

"Teacher," repeated Puck contemptuously. "Probably a Bee.

Who else but a Bee would overestimate humans like that? Your Miss Cassandra, or whatever her name is, doesn't know her history at all. None of those cities, towers, and other human contraptions you speak of are good for us."



Puck made a few zigzag movements on the leaf and pulled at his head again, to Maya's great concern.

"Do you know how you can tell that I'm right?" Puck asked, rubbing his hands together as if he were tying them in a knot. "Count the number of humans and the number of Flies in a room. The result will surprise you."

"You could be right. But that's not the point."

"Do you think I was born this year?" Puck suddenly asked.

"I don't know."

"I survived a winter," Puck announced proudly. "My experiences go back to the Ice Age. In a sense, they take me through the Ice Age. That's why I'm here too, I'm here to recover."

"Whatever you are, you're certainly a spunky creature," observed Maya.

"That's what I would say," Puck exclaimed, and he made a light jump. "Flies are the boldest race in creation. We never run away unless it's better to run away, but even then we always come back. Have you ever sat on a human?"

"No," said Maya, looking at the Fly suspiciously from the corner of her eye. She still didn't know quite what to make of him. "No, I'm not interested in sitting on humans."

"Ah, dear child, that's because you don't know what it's like. If you had ever seen the fun I have with the man at home, you would turn green with envy. Let me tell you. There's an old man in my room. He often falls asleep on the sofa and starts making strange noises. For me, they are a sign that I should come down. I fly there and sit on the sleeping man's forehead. The forehead is between the nose and hair and is used for thinking. You can see it in the long wrinkles from left to right. They must move when something valuable needs to come out of his thinking. The forehead also shows if people are irritated. But then the folds move up and down and a round hollow forms above the nose. As soon as I sit on his thinking wrinkle and start running back and forth in the wrinkles, the man reaches into the air with his hands. He thinks I'm somewhere in the air. That's because I'm sitting on his thinking wrinkle and he can't quickly determine where I actually am. Eventually, he starts muttering and hitting me. Well, Miss Maya, or whatever your name is, you have to be smart about

this. I see the hand coming, but I wait until the last moment, then I fly skillfully aside, sit down, and see what he does next. We often played the game for a full half hour. You have no idea how much endurance that man has. Finally, he jumps up and spouts a series of words showing how ungrateful he is. But a noble soul like me does not seek reward. By that time, I'm already sitting on the ceiling, listening to his ungrateful outburst."

"I can't say I like it very much," Maya remarked. "Isn't it rather pointless?"

"Do you expect me to put a honeycomb on his nose?" Puck exclaimed. "You have no sense of humor, dear girl. What do you do that's useful?"

Little Maya turned completely red, but quickly recovered to hide her embarrassment from Puck.

"The time will come soon," she buzzed, "when I will do something big and beautiful, and also good and useful. But first, I want to see what's happening in the world. Deep in my heart, I feel that it's almost time."

As Maya spoke, she felt a flood of hope and enthusiasm overwhelm her being.

But Puck didn't seem to realize how serious and deeply moved she was. He zigzagged around for a while in his restless way and then asked: "Do you happen to have any honey with you, dear girl?"

"I'm sorry," Maya replied. "I would love to give you some, especially after you entertained me so pleasantly, but I really don't have any honey with me. Can I ask you one more question?"

"Ask whatever you want," Puck said. "I will answer, I will always answer."

"I would like to know how to get into a human's house."

"Fly inside," Puck said cleverly.

"But how, without getting into danger?"

"Wait until a window is opened. But make sure you find your way back out. Once you're inside and can't find the window, the best thing to do is to fly towards the light. In every house, you'll always find plenty of windows. You just have to notice where the sun shines through. Are you leaving now?"

"Yes, I'm leaving," answered Maya, as she reached out her hand. "I have some things to take care of. Goodbye. I hope you recover well from the effects of the ice age."

And with her delicate, self-assured buzzing that also sounded a little anxious, the little Maya lifted her shining wings and flew into the sun, on her way to gather some food from the flowery meadows.