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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Maya the Bee and the Lost Leg (9/17)

In the tree hollow where Maya had settled for the summer, there also lived a family of beetles. Fridolin, the father, was a hardworking beetle who made great efforts to take care of his large family. He was very proud of his five energetic sons, who had all dug their own twisting tunnels into the trunk of the pine tree. One early morning, as he often did, Fridolin came to wish her good morning and asked if she had slept well. "Aren't you flying today?" he asked.

"No, it's too windy."

It was indeed windy. The wind howled, tossing the branches up and down and blowing the leaves off the trees. After every gust of wind, the sky cleared, but the trees became more bare. Even the pine tree where Maya and Fridolin lived creaked and groaned in the wind. Fridolin sighed. "I worked hard all night. You have to do something to get somewhere. But I'm not happy with this pine tree at all, another tree would have been better," he said to Maya. Fridolin sighed and said with concern, "Ah, life would be really beautiful if there were no woodpeckers."

Maya nodded. "Yes, indeed, you're right. The woodpecker eats up every insect he sees."

"If that were all, if he only ate the careless creatures, then I would say a woodpecker also needs to live. But that he follows us deep into our tunnels in the tree is really inappropriate," observed Fridolin.

"But he can't do that. He's too big, right?"

Fridolin looked at Maya with a serious expression, raised his eyebrows, and shook his head two or three times. He seemed to feel really important because he knew something she didn't. "His size doesn't matter, my dear Bee, we are afraid of his tongue."

Maya looked at him with wide eyes. Fridolin told her about the woodpecker's tongue: it was long and thin, round like a worm, and like barbed wire and sticky. "He can stretch his tongue ten times my length and then stick it deep into all the cracks and crevices of the tree in the hope of finding something there. That's how he gets into our homes too."

"I'm not easily frightened," said Maya, "but this is scary."

"Oh, you don't have to be afraid, you have a stinger," said Fridolin, a little jealous. "But it's different with us beetles."

Maya sat listening with a pounding heart, thinking of her own adventures in the past and the accidents that could still happen to her. Suddenly she heard Fridolin laughing. She looked up in surprise. "Look who's here," he exclaimed.

Maya saw a remarkable creature climbing up the trunk slowly. She didn't know such creatures existed.

"Shouldn't we hide?" she asked, when fear overcame her amazement.

"Don't be silly," answered the beetle, "sit still and be polite to him. He is very learned and also kind and funny. Look what he's doing now!" "He's struggling with the wind," said Fridolin and laughed. "I hope his legs don't get tangled up."

"Are those long threads really his legs?" asked Maya, her eyes wide open. "I've never seen anything like it." Meanwhile, Maya could see the newcomer better. His body, on his long legs, seemed to sway in the air and it looked like he had to hold on to all sides. He cautiously stepped forward, the small brown ball of his body moving up and down, and he clung to the tree with all his legs. Maya clapped her hands. "Well, have you ever, even in your dreams such delicate legs would not exist. They are as fine as hair and you can use them just like that. I think it's amazing, Fridolin."

Then the stranger joined them and looked down at Maya from his high, pointy legs.

"Good morning," he said, "what a wind," and he clung to the tree as hard as he could.

Fridolin turned around to hide his laughter, but little Maya politely agreed with him and explained that she did not fly because of the wind. Then she introduced herself. The stranger peered at her through his legs.

"Maya, of the Bee People, I am glad to meet you. I myself belong to the family of spiders, the spiders with long legs. My name is Hannibal."

Spiders have a bad reputation among small insects and Maya could not hide her fear completely. She thought back with fear to her adventure in the web of the

spider Thekla. But she thought, "I can always fly away, he has no wings and his web is somewhere else."

"If you don't mind, I'll come and sit on your big branch too."

"Well, of course," said Maya, making room for him.

"There are so many different kinds of animals in the world," she thought. "A new discovery every day."

Suddenly she exclaimed, "Hannibal, you have one leg too many."

"You finally noticed," he said sadly. "But actually, I am missing one leg, not too many."

"Why? Do you usually have eight legs?"

"We spiders have eight legs and we need them all. I lost one of my legs, really too bad, but I make the best of it."

"It must be terrible to lose a leg," said Maya sympathetically.

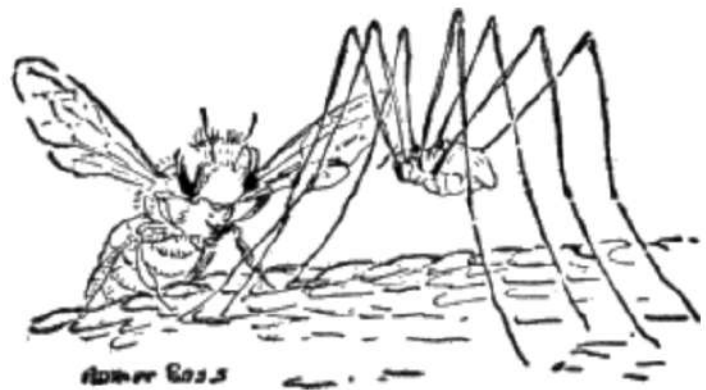
Hannibal rested his chin on his hand and arranged his legs under him so they were not easy to count. "I'll tell you how it happened. Of course, a human was involved. We spiders are careful, but humans are careless."

"Oh, please tell me the story," said Maya, settling in.

"Listen," said Hannibal.

"We spiders hunt at night. I lived in a garden shed where I could easily crawl in and out. One night, a

man came with a lamp, paper, and ink because he



wanted to write down his thoughts. He wrote about insects, but humans really know very little about our insect people. One evening, as usual, I was sitting on a windowsill and the man was sitting at the table. It irritated me terribly that a swarm of small flies and mosquitoes, which I depend on for my livelihood, was sitting on the lamp and looking into it. They would be better off outside under the leaves where they would be safe from the lamp and where I could catch them. On that fateful night, I saw a few mosquitoes die under the lamp. The man left them there, so I decided to go and get them myself. That was my downfall. I crawled up the table leg and carefully walked to the lamp. But when I passed the bottle, the man grabbed me. He lifted me up by one of my legs and swung me back and forth while laughing hard. And I just stared into his big eyes."

Hannibal sighed and little Maya remained very still. Her head spun from the story. "Do humans have such huge eyes?" she finally asked.

"Please imagine what it was like for me," Hannibal cried angrily. "I was hanging there by one leg in front of those big eyes."

"Terrible! Really terrible!"

"Fortunately, my leg broke off. Otherwise, something much worse would have happened. I fell on the table and ran as fast as I could. He put my leg, which was still moving, on a white piece of paper."

"Did your leg still move?" Maya asked incredulously.

"Yes. Our legs always move when they are pulled off. My leg ran, but because I wasn't there, it didn't know

where to run." "Impossible," Maya said, "a leg that's pulled off can't move anymore." "You're still too young to understand, but our legs keep moving even when they're detached from our bodies," said the spider angrily. "I can't believe it without proof." "Do you think I would cut off a leg just to satisfy you?" said Hannibal, even angrier. "I never want to see you again. Nobody has ever doubted my words." Maya didn't understand what had upset the spider so much or what terrible thing she had done. "It's not easy to deal with strangers," she thought. "They don't think like us and don't see that we mean no harm." She looked sadly at the angry spider. Hannibal had apparently mistaken Maya's kindness for weakness. Now something unusual happened to the little bee. Suddenly she became very brave. She stood up, raised her beautiful, transparent wings, buzzed her high, clear buzz, and said with a sparkle in her eyes, "I am a bee, Mr. Hannibal." "I beg your pardon," he said, and without saying goodbye, he turned and ran as fast as someone with seven legs can run to the tree trunk.



The wind was almost calm, and it promised to be a beautiful day. Maya thought of the meadows full of flowers and sunny slopes behind the lake. And she flew, like a happy bee, high through the air, heading for meadows with their cheerful carpets of flowers, and was glad to be alive.