



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Adventures of Maya The Bee (Chapter Book)

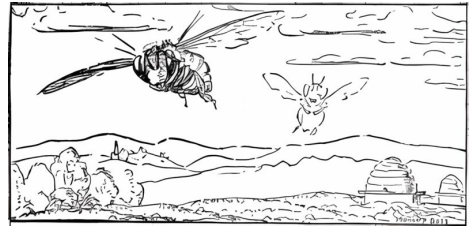
Waldemar Bonsels

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Chapter 1: Maya the Bee Learns to Fly

Maya is a small, cheerful and headstrong bee who is very curious. She experiences many adventures, and that starts right from her birth.

Maya the bee is born as the last bee in a large beehive near an abandoned ruin in the forest. She has many brothers and sisters. Miss Cassandra is a smart beekeeper who helps with the birth of the many new bees. It immediately becomes clear that Maya is a terribly curious little bee. The first thing she asks Miss Cassandra at her birth is, "Why did you name me Maya?" to which Cassandra replies, "For no reason, everyone just needs a name."



On the day Maya is born, half of the bees in the beehive are supposed to swarm out, otherwise there won't be enough space for all the bees. Maya learns a lot from Miss Cassandra on the first day of her life. She meets Willie, a bee who is very sweet, but not so smart. He is in the class for the second time.

"We bees are hard workers," Miss Cassandra explains. "We collect honey every day, so it's good to know which flowers are most suitable for that. I will teach you everything, and it's important that you know who your enemies are. Take the hornet, for example, that's our biggest enemy."

The next day when Maya wakes up, panic breaks out in the hive. Too many bees have stayed in the hive, and the commotion causes the hive to become too warm and the honey to melt. This is, of course, a big disaster for the new eggs laid by the queen. The heat from the hive can only be cooled by the up and down movement of the wings of all the bees. Maya also does her best and notices that by moving her wings up and down, she is getting higher and higher in the air. It looks like flying! But she only gets her first flying lesson that afternoon.

She tells the whole beehive excitedly that she's going to learn how to fly, and Miss Cassandra is going to teach her.

Then it's time for Maya to learn to fly on her own, and she loves it. She collects honey and meets Flip the Grasshopper. Flip can't stand still and has to jump around all the time. "That's just what grasshoppers do!" he explains to Maya. He promises to help her if she gets into trouble. "And that's definitely going to happen, because you're so headstrong!" he adds.



As Maya flies around from poppy to tulip, she realizes that it's much more fun to be outside and decides that she won't go back to the hive.

"Why should I go back?" she asks herself. "I don't find it at all pleasant there, and I don't see the point of all that hard work. I'll stay outside and have fun."

It gets late and dark.

"There's a beautiful flower where I'm going to sleep tonight."

Flying around has made her so tired that she falls asleep right away and sleeps like a log.

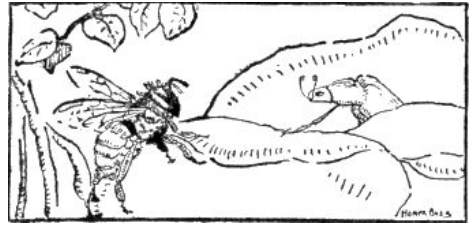


Chapter 2: Maya the Bee in the House of the Rose

The sun had been shining for quite some time when Maya woke up in the flower where she had fallen asleep the night before.

The petals swayed gently in the light breeze. "It's like they're dancing!" exclaimed Maya, still excited from all the adventures she had experienced the day before. "I definitely won't go back to the beehive!" And when she thought of Miss Cassandra, her heart beat faster. How clearly she had shown how terrible it is to have to fly in and out of the hive forever to collect and carry honey. No, that was certainly not a life for Maya. She wanted to enjoy her freedom, no matter what!

Meanwhile, her stomach started to growl a little. It was time to eat something. In the distance, she saw a beautiful red flower. She flew towards it and in doing so, she caused a large drop of water to fall from the leaf, splashing onto the ground in dozens of glistening water droplets. What a beautiful sight it was!



The red flower spread a delicious, sweet smell. At the lower edge of the flower, at the entrance to the cup, was a beetle. He was slightly smaller than herself and had brown wings and a black chest. He looked at Maya seriously and undisturbed. Maya greeted the beetle with a friendly greeting.

"What are you doing here?" asked the beetle.

"What kind of beautiful flower is this?" asked Maya, not answering the beetle's question. "Would you be so kind as to tell me the name of this flower?"

The beetle laughed, which bees wouldn't find very polite if there was a serious question asked. "You must be new here," said the beetle. And he meant that he understood that she was just born and couldn't know much yet.

"It's a rose," said the beetle. "Now you know."

Although the beetle didn't have the best manners according to Maya, she thought he was a good-natured man.

"We moved here four days ago," said the beetle. "Do you want to come in and take a look?"

Maya hesitated but overcame her doubts and took a few steps forward. The beetle pushed a clear petal aside to let Maya in. They walked together through the narrow rooms with their muted light and fragrant walls.

"What an enchanting house!" exclaimed Maya, "and it smells so heavenly in here!"

The beetle was pleased with Maya's admiration.

"Knowing where to live takes wisdom," he said, smiling kindly. "Tell me where you live, and I'll tell you what you're worth," says an old saying. Would you like some nectar?"

"Well, yes please!" exclaimed Maya, realizing how hungry she was by now.

The beetle left Maya alone for a moment to get the nectar. Maya pressed her nose into the red petal to take in the scent completely. "Life is so wonderful here," she said, "it's so much better to be here than in the hustle and bustle of the bees who only fly back and forth, and worry about collecting honey. The

silence is delightful!"

Suddenly, there was a loud noise behind the walls. It was the beetle growling excitedly in great anger. It seemed like he was pushing someone roughly. A moment later, she heard the sound of someone running outside. The beetle returned and grumpily threw some nectar down. "It's a shame!" he said. "You can't escape those pests anywhere. They don't give you a moment of peace."

Maya was so hungry that she took some of the nectar without thanking the beetle. "Who was that?" mumbled Maya with her mouth still full.

"It was an ant," he burst out angrily. "They have it in their heads to go straight into the pantry without a thank you. They take without asking. It makes me furious. If I didn't realize that these ill-mannered creatures actually don't know any better, I wouldn't hesitate for a moment to call them thieves!"

At this point, he suddenly remembered his own manners. "Sorry," he said, turning to Maya. "I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Peter, of the rose beetle family."

"My name is Maya," said the little bee shyly. "I'm delighted to meet you." She looked at Peter attentively; he bowed repeatedly and spread his antennae out like two small brown fans. Maya thought it was beautiful.

"You have the most fascinating antennae," she said.

"Thank you," Peter said flattered. "Would you like to see the other side?"

"Yes, please," replied Maya.

The rose beetle turned his fan-shaped antennae aside and let a ray of sunshine glide over them.

"Great, isn't it?" he asked.

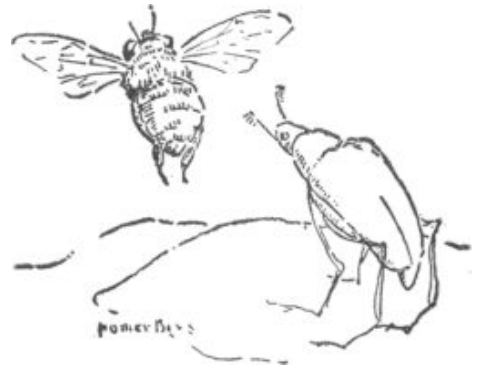
"I think it's very special!" Maya exclaimed. "Mine aren't as remarkably beautiful."

"Oh," said Peter, "everyone has their own special characteristics. For example, you have very beautiful eyes, and the golden color of your body is very attractive."

Maya beamed. Peter was the first to tell her that she looked good. Life was wonderful.

She took some more nectar.

"Excellent quality honey," she noted.



"Take some more," said Peter, rather surprised by his little guest's appetite. "There's also some dew if you're thirsty."

"Thank you very much," said Maya. "But now I have to fly again, if that's okay with you."

The rose beetle laughed.

"Fly, always flying," he said. "It's in the blood of you bees. I don't understand such a restless way of life. It also has an advantage to stay in one place, don't you think?"

Peter held the red curtain aside politely.

"I'll come with you to our observation leaf," he said. "It's an excellent place to fly from."

"Oh, thank you," said Maya, "but I can fly from anywhere."

"That's an advantage over me," Peter replied. "I have some trouble unfolding my hind wings." He shook her hand and held the last curtain aside for her.

"Oh, the blue sky!" Maya exclaimed. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye!" Peter called out, staying on the top petal to see Maya rise up in the golden sunlight and the clear, pure morning air. With a sigh, he returned to his cool rose home and sang a morning song for himself.



Chapter 3: Maya the Bee and the Dragonfly

With high spirits and a lot of enthusiasm for a new adventure, Maya flew over the green meadows. On the way, she had already encountered many other insects who often greeted her cheerfully. She loved enjoying her freedom, but sometimes she also felt a little guilty, knowing that her bee colony accomplished their busy work every day.



At the edge of a pond, Maya landed to rest under the leaf of a water lily. She was just smoothing her wings when a blue fly landed on the leaf next to her.

"What are you doing on my leaf?" asked the blue fly grumpily. Maya was taken aback and shouted in a louder tone than she had intended, "Is it so bad if I rest

here for a while?"

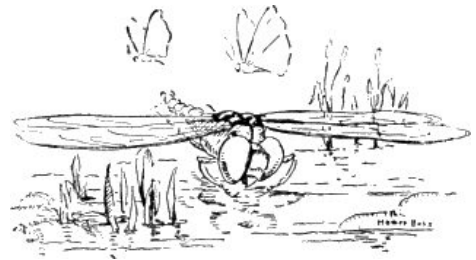
Miss Cassandra had told her that bees were seen as important in the insect world and were treated accordingly. Now she could see if that was indeed true. The blue fly did indeed seem uncomfortable. She could see that clearly. He hopped from his leaf to one above Maya and said, "You should be working. As a bee, you should certainly be doing that. But if you want to rest, that's fine. I'll wait here for a while."

"There are plenty of leaves, aren't there?" Maya remarked.

"They're all rented out," said the blue fly. "These days, you're happy to be able to call a piece of ground your own. If my predecessor hadn't been eaten by a frog two days ago, I still wouldn't have a decent place to live. It's really not pleasant to have to look for a new place to stay every night. Not everyone has such an organized life as you bees. But let me introduce myself, my name is Jack Christopher."

Maya fell silent and thought about how terrible it must be to fall into the claws of a frog.

"Are there many frogs in the lake?" she asked, moving towards the middle of the leaf to avoid being seen from the water.



The blue fly laughed. "The frog can see you from underneath when the sun shines, because then the leaf is transparent. He can see you perfectly sitting on my leaf."

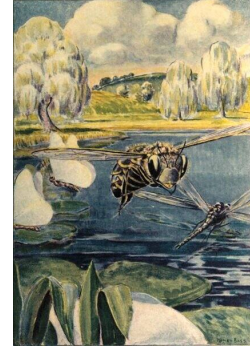
Suddenly Maya didn't feel very comfortable on the leaf. She was about to fly away when Jack Christopher was picked up by a large, sparkling dragonfly. Without thinking, she shouted, "Let the blue fly go immediately! You have no right to want to eat someone at random!" The dragonfly turned to Maya. She was startled by her large size and shook like a reed. "Why not? What's going on, child?" asked the dragonfly in a surprisingly friendly tone.

"Please let him go," Maya cried, tears welling up in her eyes. "His name is Jack Christopher." The dragonfly smiled. "Why, little one?" Maya stammered helplessly. "Oh, he's such a nice, charming gentleman, and he's never done you any harm, as far as I know." The dragonfly looked thoughtfully at Jack Christopher. "Yes, he's a sweet little guy," answered the dragonfly and SNAP! Jack Christopher went down her throat. For a moment, Maya didn't know what to say. She listened in horror as the dragonfly nibbled and gnawed. She looked at the dragonfly, stunned.

"Don't be so sensitive," said the dragonfly. "Your sensitivity doesn't impress me. You bees aren't any better. What are you doing here? Apparently, you're still very young and don't know much about life. Everyone here in nature has their own place and their own task. You probably have a lot to learn. So stop lecturing me."

"Don't you dare take a step closer," Maya shouted, "because if you do, I'll use my stinger on you." The Dragonfly gave her a stern look and spoke slowly and menacingly, "Dragonflies and bees get along well and don't threaten each other."

"Well, that seems very wise," said Maya.



The Dragonfly prepared to fly away, spreading her crystal wings to fly over the lake. The sunlight on the water created a glimmer on her wings and it was such a beautiful sight that Maya momentarily forgot her friend Jack Christopher and her fear.

"How beautiful!" she exclaimed.

"Do you mean me?" the Dragonfly asked, surprised, but quickly added, "Yes, I know I look fantastic. Recently, I was spotted by people on the riverbank, and they talked about my beautiful appearance."

"People?" Maya exclaimed, because she was very curious about humans. "Have you seen people?"

"Of course," said the Dragonfly. "But you're probably more interested in my name. I'm called Lovedear."

"Oh, tell me more about people instead," Maya interrupted the dragonfly. "Do humans have stingers too?"

"Oh no, definitely not," replied the Dragonfly, settling on the leaf beside Maya. "No, humans have worse weapons against us. They're very dangerous. There's not a soul who isn't afraid of them."

"Do they try to catch you?" asked Maya excitedly.

"Yes, don't you understand why?" Miss Lovedear glanced at her wings. "I've rarely met a human who hasn't tried to catch me."

"But why?" asked Maya, trembling.

"Well, you see," said Miss Lovedear with a modest grin and a sidelong glance, "there's something attractive about us dragonflies. That's the only reason I

know.”

“To eat you?” asked Maya.

“No, I don't think so,” said the Dragonfly. “As far as I know, humans don't eat dragonflies. It's more of a sport. Humans are bloodthirsty. They do it for fun. But I can see from your face that you don't believe me?”

“Of course I doubt it,” Maya exclaimed indignantly. Miss Lovedear shrugged her glittering shoulders. “I'll tell you a terrible story. My brother had a promising future ahead of him, but one day he was caught by a child. He was put in a jar with the lid on. My poor brother soon ran out of air and died. That's such a terrible way to die, don't you think?” A tear rolled down the Dragonfly's cheek. “I think about him every day.”

“Terrible,” whispered Maya, feeling miserable from the sad story.

“Have you ever had sadness in your life?” asked the Dragonfly.

“No,” said Maya. “Actually, I've always been happy until now.”

“Then you should be grateful to heaven,” said Miss Lovedear. “But now I must go. If you want, I'll tell you more another time. Goodbye, Maya!” And then she flew away.

Maya heard her singing a song. Then Maya thought it was time to fly away herself and lifted her own wings to continue on her own path.

Chapter 4: Maya the Bee meets Effie and Bobbie

Maya had slept wonderfully in the crown of a beautiful blue flower. She woke up to the sound of light tapping on the flower petals. It was raining! It was the first time in Maya's young life that she had seen rain. She thought it was beautiful, but she also knew that rain was something to be careful of for a Bee. Miss Cassandra had warned her early on about rain. With wet wings, it was much harder to fly, and the rain could also be very cold on the body. She stuck her head between the flower petals to see what was happening down in the grass.



Slowly her thoughts drifted to the Beehive, and she began to feel a little homesick for the protection it provided. The rain would mean that there would

be no work for a while. The Queen Bee would make her rounds to greet all the Bees and lay an egg here and there. She began to feel a little lonely, and she was also getting cold. "I hope it stops raining soon," she thought, "because as beautiful as this flower is, it doesn't have much nectar."

Then she realized that the sun was of great importance in the life of an adventurer. "Without the sun, almost no one would go on adventures," she thought, and she felt proud that she had the courage to start a life on her own. She had already experienced so much, much more than the other Bees would ever experience in their lives. Experience was the most precious thing in life and worth any sacrifice, she thought.

A troop of ants marched by, singing a song together as they moved through the grass. Suddenly a dandelion was brutally pushed aside by a large blue beetle. It looked like a half-sphere of dark metal with blue, green, and occasionally black lights glittering here and there. Its hard shell looked like nothing could destroy it. The song of the ant soldiers had apparently awakened him from his sleep. He looked very angry and shouted, "Make way! I'm coming! Make way!"

He probably thought the group of ants would move out of his way. "I'm glad I'm not in his way," thought Maya, and she withdrew further into the flower's bell. The beetle moved with a swinging motion through the wet grass and stopped still under Maya's flower. On the ground, she saw a withered leaf that the beetle moved aside. Underneath, Maya saw a hole in the ground. Maya kept very still. The only sound was the soft pattering of the rain.

Then she heard the beetle call through the hole, "If you want to marry me, you must decide now to get up. It's already day." Several moments passed before the answer came. Then Maya heard a thin, chirping voice rising from the hole.

"For heaven's sake, close the door up there. It's raining inside."

The beetle obeyed. He stood in an expectant posture, his head a little to the side, and peered through the crack.

"Please hurry," he grumbled.

A brown insect slowly crawled out of the hole. It had a chubby body, extremely thin, slow-moving legs, and a frighteningly thick head with small, upright feelers.

"Good morning, dear Effie," said the beetle. "Did you sleep well, my dearest?"

"I'm not going with you, Bobbie," she replied. "People are talking about us."

"I don't understand," stammered the beetle.
"Must our newly found happiness be destroyed by such nonsense? Effie, think about it. What do you care about what humans say? You have your hole. You can crawl into it whenever you want. And if you go deep enough, you won't hear any of the gossip above ground."



"Bobbie, you don't understand. I have my own ideas about this. Besides, you took advantage of my ignorance. You let me think you were a rose beetle, but yesterday a snail told me you're a dung beetle. And that's quite different, isn't it?"

Bobbie was stunned. When he had recovered from the shock, he shouted angrily, "No, I don't understand. I can't understand. Love is something you feel for each other, no matter who you are, isn't it?"

"Well, it matters to me," Effie replied. "If you're a creature that likes to roll around in manure, then I have to tell you that such behavior doesn't suit me. So, goodbye!"

And... POOF...Effie crawled into her hole as if a gust of wind had blown her away. Effie was gone, and Bobbie stared in astonishment at the empty, dark opening. It looked so silly that Maya had to laugh. The beetle shook his head, and his antennae drooped down. "People don't appreciate the strength of character anymore, and respect for each other is hard to come by," he sighed. "I can't admit it to myself, but she's absolutely heartless. But even if she doesn't have the right feelings for me, she should be wise enough to marry me and be my wife."

Maya saw the tears welling up in his eyes, and her heart was filled with pity.

"Goodness gracious," she thought, "there is indeed a lot of sorrow in the world."

Then she saw the beetle bite off a piece of a worm and eat it. And the rest of the worm just kept on wriggling?!! "How incredibly strange," Maya thought. She wanted to ask the beetle about it and called out, "Hello there!" The beetle was startled. "Move over!" the beetle cried.

"But I'm not in your way," Maya said.

"Where are you then? I can't see you," said the beetle.

"I'm up here in the blue flower," Maya called out.

"Okay, but I can't see you. Why did you call me?"

"The other half of the worm is getting away," Maya said.

"Yes," Bobbie said, "they are very lively creatures. But I've lost my appetite." Then he threw away the piece of worm he had bitten off, and even this part of the worm scurried away, but in the opposite direction.

Maya was completely confused. But Bobbie seemed to be familiar with this peculiarity of worms.

"Don't think I always eat worms," the beetle remarked. "I prefer roses, but you don't find those everywhere."

"Tell the little piece of worm which way its other half went," Maya called out excitedly.

Bobbie shook his head and spoke in a serious tone, "Those torn apart by fate are never reunited. And who are you?"

"Maya, of the Bee People."

"I'm glad to hear that," the beetle said. "I have nothing against the bees. Why are you sitting there? Bees usually don't sit still. Have you been there long?"

"I slept here," Maya said.

"I hope you slept well," Bobbie said, sounding angry. "Just woke up?"

"Yes," said Maya, who had cleverly guessed that Bobbie wouldn't like it if she had eavesdropped on his conversation with Effie the cricket.

"I'm Bobbie, from the family of the rose beetles," said the beetle.

Maya had to laugh to herself, because she knew very well that he wasn't a rose beetle, but a dung beetle. But she didn't say anything about it because she didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"Are you not bothered by the rain?" she asked.

"No, I'm used to the rain, through the roses, you know. Where roses grow, it usually rains."

Maya thought to herself, "Now he really has to stop with all these lies. I won't let him fool me any longer."

"Bobbie," she said with a mischievous smile, "what is that hole under the leaf?"

"A hole? A hole, you say? There are many holes here. It's probably just a hole. You have no idea how many holes there are in the ground."

Bobbie had hardly finished speaking when something terrible happened. In his attempt to act like it didn't bother him, he lost his balance and fell over. Maya heard a desperate cry and the next moment she saw the beetle flat on his back in the grass. His arms and legs were waving in the air.

"Oh goodness!" squeaked the beetle. "I'll never be able to stand on my legs again. I'll die. I'm going to die in this position. Have you ever heard of a worse fate?"

And Bobbie kept trying to touch the ground with his feet. But every time he managed to grab a bit of earth with difficulty, he fell back on his high half-sphere of a back. The situation looked really hopeless. Maya began to worry seriously. He was turning very pale in the face and his cries were heart-rending.

"Wait!" she shouted. "I'll try to turn you over. If I try very hard, I'm sure I can do it. But you have to stop screaming and listen to me. If I bend a blade of grass forward and bend the tip toward you, can you use it to get yourself in the right position?"

So little Maya flew, despite the rain, from her protective spot in the flower to a thin green blade of grass next to Bobbie and clung to it at the tip. It bent under her weight and sank right above Bobbie's wriggling limbs.

"Hold on to it," she shouted.

Bobbie quickly grabbed it, first with one hand, then with the other, and finally with his legs. Little by little, he pulled himself along the blade of grass until he reached the thicker and stronger part of the grass. Now he could hold onto it better and turn himself over with it. He let out a huge sigh of relief.

"Thank heavens!" he exclaimed. "That was terrible!"

"Are you feeling better now?" Maya asked.

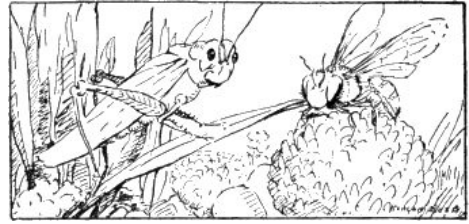
Bobbie grabbed his forehead. "Thank you, Maya. Thank you very much. When my dizziness is over, I'll tell you everything about myself."

But Maya didn't hear anything more. A field mouse came hopping through the grass looking for insects. Maya hid and lay very still on the ground until the bird was gone. When she looked around for Bobbie, he was gone. So she decided to go on her way too, because the rain had stopped and the day was clear and warm.



Chapter 5: Maya the Bee and the Acrobat

Maya had made herself comfortable in a hole in a tree. It was safe and dry. To protect herself from all creatures with evil intentions, she had partially sealed the entrance of the tree hole with beeswax. She had also stored some honey there, so that she wouldn't have to go hungry on rainy days.



Today, it was dry and she could fly out again.

"Today, I will meet a human," she exclaimed cheerfully. "On days like this, people must surely want to be outdoors to enjoy nature."

She had never seen so many insects in one day. They were coming and going. In the air, the cheerful buzzing of different insects could be heard. In the grass, she saw clovers and decided to take a sip of nectar from the flowers. On top of the flower that was leaning over Maya, she suddenly saw a skinny green creature sitting. She found the creature terrifying and was so afraid that she couldn't move. It had a strange bulging forehead and long, fine antennae growing from its eyebrows. Its body was slim and green all over. Even its eyes were green. It had graceful forelegs and thin, inconspicuous wings that, according to Maya, wouldn't be of much use. The strangest thing about it was its hind legs, which protruded like two hinge-like stilts over its body.

"Are you done looking?" said the creature. "Have you never seen a grasshopper before? Or are you laying eggs at this moment?"

"What are you talking about?" Maya exclaimed in surprise. "Laying eggs? It wouldn't even cross my mind. Even if I could, I wouldn't do it. Then I would take over the queen's task. She is the only one who can and may do that!"

The grasshopper lowered its head and made such a funny face that Maya had to laugh at him.

"Madam," said the grasshopper. "You're quite a character!" Then the grasshopper had to laugh too.

"Why are you laughing?" Maya asked. "You can't seriously expect me to lay eggs here in the grass?"

Then the grasshopper said, "Hopla!" and with a leap, he was gone. Then he came back to Maya with another "Hopla!" The grasshopper looked at Maya from top to bottom, from all sides, from front and back. "No," he said. "You definitely can't lay eggs. You're not equipped for it. You're a wasp, aren't you?" Being called a wasp! Maya found it a huge insult. "How dare you call me a wasp?" she cried angrily.

"Hopla!" said the grasshopper, and he was gone again.

Maya flew away, offended. How dare he call her a wasp? She thought wasps were useless creatures. It made her very angry.



"Hopla!" there he was again.

"Madam," said the grasshopper. "I beg your pardon for occasionally interrupting our conversation. But it's just in me that I have to hop occasionally. I can't help it. Occasionally I have to jump, wherever. Can you jump too?"

He grinned from ear to ear and Maya couldn't be angry with him anymore and had to laugh.

"Who are you?" Maya asked. "I would like to know."

"Well, everyone knows who I am," said the grasshopper.

Maya could never tell if he was joking or serious.

"I am a stranger in these parts," she replied kindly, "otherwise I would certainly know you. But keep in mind that I belong to the Bee family and am absolutely not a wasp."

"My goodness," said the grasshopper. "You do look very much alike."

"You've obviously never been to school," she burst out. "Take a good look at a wasp."

"Why should I?" replied the grasshopper. "What good would it do to perceive differences that exist only in the imagination of humans? You, a bee, fly around in the air, sting anything you encounter, and cannot jump. The same goes for a wasp. So where's the difference?"

"Hopla!" And he was gone.

"But now I'm going to fly away," Maya thought.

There he was again.

"Madam," said the grasshopper, "I would like to invite you to a jumping contest in which I myself will participate, in the forester's garden."

"I'm not interested in acrobatics," said Maya. "Someone who flies has higher interests."

The grasshopper grinned, a grin you could almost hear.

"Don't think too highly of yourself, my dear young lady! Most creatures in this

world can fly, but only a few can jump. I have known grasshoppers, members of my own family, who can jump up to three hundred times their own length. Three hundred times their own length! Imagine that. Even the elephant, the largest animal in the world, cannot jump that high."

"Hopla!" And he was gone again.

Maya found him to be a strange guy, that grasshopper who called himself Flip the grasshopper. But in the brief conversation she had with him, he taught her many new things. Although she didn't agree with his ideas about jumping, she found him very interesting. He knew the names of many different kinds of creatures. Would he understand their language as well? If he came back, she would ask him. And she would also ask him what he thought about coming near a human or going inside a human's house.

"Hopla!" There was the grasshopper again.

"My goodness! Where do you keep coming from?" Maya asked.

"From the surroundings," said the grasshopper.

"But tell me, do you just jump out into the world without knowing where you want to land?" Maya asked again.

"Of course. Why not? Can you read the future? Nobody can do that. Only the tree toad knows, but he never tells!" said the grasshopper.

"The things you know! Wonderful, simply wonderful!" exclaimed Maya. "Do you understand the language of humans as well?" Maya asked curiously.

"That's a difficult question to answer, Maya, because it hasn't been proven whether humans have a language. They make sounds and seem to understand each other. I once heard two boys blowing into a blade of grass. The result was a whistle that could be compared to the chirping of a cricket, although much less in tone quality. Apparently, humans make an honest attempt," replied the grasshopper.

And once again, the grasshopper took off. But this time, Maya waited in vain for him. She looked around in the grass and the flowers. He was nowhere to be seen.

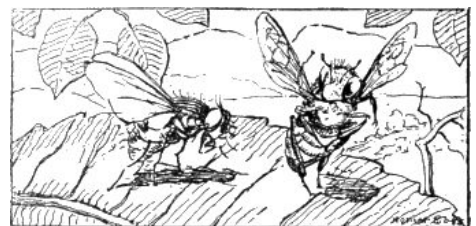


Chapter 6: Maya the Bee and Puck the Fly

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.

Chapter 7: Maya the Bee gets into trouble

After meeting Puck the fly, Maya was not very happy. She simply could not believe that he was right about everything he had said about humans or that everything he had experienced with humans was true. She had a much nicer and more beautiful image of humans in her head. She did not want that image to be changed by believing in all these ridiculous ideas about humanity. However, she was still a little afraid to enter a house. How was she supposed to know if the owner would like her visit or not? But she would make sure that nobody was bothered by her. She thought back to the things Cassandra had told her.

"People are good and wise," Cassandra had said. "They are strong and powerful, but they never abuse their power. On the contrary, wherever they go, they bring order and prosperity. We bees, knowing that they are friendly to us, we put ourselves under their protection and share our honey with them. They leave enough for us for the winter. They offer us shelter from the cold and protect us from other hostile animals. There are few creatures in the world who have entered into such a friendship with humans and willingly work for humans. Among insects, much evil is often spoken of humans. Do not listen to them. If a bee city ever foolishly tries to return to the wild and try to do without humans, the city quickly perishes. There are too many animals that crave our honey, and often an entire bee city, all its buildings, and all its inhabitants, are ruthlessly destroyed. A pointless act, just because an animal wants to satisfy its hunger for

honey."

That's what Cassandra had told Maya about humans, and until Maya convinced herself otherwise, she wanted to maintain this belief in humans. It was now afternoon. The sun was setting behind the fruit trees in the large vegetable garden where Maya was flying through. The trees had long ceased to bloom, but the little bee still remembered the radiant splendor of countless blossoms. The delicious scent, the shine, and the glittering - oh, she would never forget how beautiful that was. As she flew, she thought about how all that beauty would return in the spring, and her heart beat with delight and joy that she was allowed to fly in such a beautiful world. At the end of the garden, the jasmine was in full bloom with large plumes. The flowers had yellow faces with a crown of pure white. They smelled deliciously sweet as Maya floated by on a soft breeze.

She flew between the stems of the blackberry bushes that produced green berries and blossoms at the same time. But when she took off again to fly further, something strange suddenly fell on her forehead and shoulders, and it also quickly covered her wings. It was the strangest sensation ever, as if her wings were crippled and she was suddenly being held back in her flight and she helplessly fell down.



An invisible, malevolent force seemed to be holding her feelers, her legs, and her wings. But she didn't fall. Although she couldn't move her wings anymore, she still hung, swaying, in the air. She went up a little, then down a little, then she was thrown there, then the other way. It was as if she were a loose leaf in the wind. Maya was distressed, but not really terrified yet. Why would she be? She didn't feel any pain or discomfort of any kind. It was just very peculiar, so peculiar, that something dreadful seemed to be lurking in the background. But she had to keep flying. If she tried very hard, she could certainly do it.



But now she saw an elastic, silvery thread over her chest, finer than the finest silk. She grew cold with fear and quickly grabbed it. But it clung to her hand and she couldn't shake it off. And there was another silver thread over her shoulders. The thread lay over her wings and bound them together, her wings were powerless. And there, and there! Everywhere in the air, and above her body and

under her body were those peculiar, glistening, gluey threads! Maya screamed with horror. Now she knew! Oh, oh, now she knew! She was caught in a spider web.

Her terrified cries echoed in the quiet summer air where the sunshine turned the green of the leaves into gold, and insects flew back and forth, and birds flew merrily from tree to tree. Nearby, the jasmine sprinkled its delightful scent through the air, the jasmine she had wanted to reach... Now it was all over. A little bluish butterfly, with brown spots gleaming like copper on its wings, flew by.

"Oh, you poor soul," exclaimed the butterfly upon hearing Maya's screams and seeing her desperate condition. "May your death be an easy one, dear child. I cannot help you. One day, perhaps even tonight, I will suffer the same fate. But in the meantime, life is still delightful for me. Goodbye! Don't forget to think of the sunshine during the deep sleep of death." And the blue butterfly fluttered away, rejoicing in the sun, the flowers, and its own joy of life.

Tears streamed from Maya's eyes and she lost her composure. She tossed her captive body back and forth, buzzed as loudly as she could, and screamed for help. But the more she moved, the tighter she became entangled in the web. Now, in this great misery, Cassandra's warnings ran through her head:

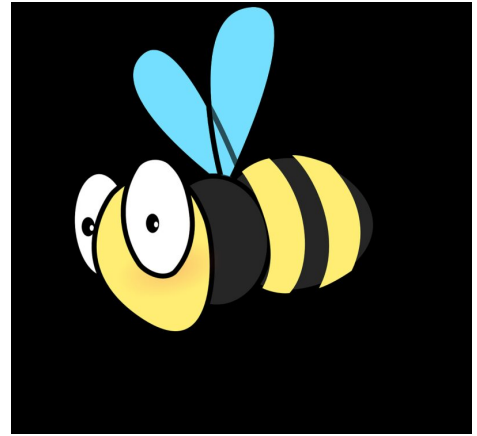
"Be careful of the spider and its web. If we Bees fall into the power of the spider, we undergo the most gruesome death. The spider is heartless and cunning, and once it has someone in its web, it never lets them go."

In her terror, Maya made one last desperate attempt to break free. And somewhere, one of the long, heavier threads snapped. Maya felt it break, but at the same time, she felt the terrible spider web everywhere. That's how a spider web works, the more one struggles in it, the more effective and dangerous it becomes. So she gave up, completely exhausted. At that moment, she saw the spider itself, very close by, under a blackberry leaf. Upon seeing the large monster, still and serious, crouched as if ready to strike, Maya's horror grew even greater. The wicked, shiny eyes looked, with cool patience, at the little Bee.

Maya let out a loud cry of fear. This was the worst of all. Death itself could not look worse than that gray, hairy monster with her wicked fangs and raised legs under her thick body. The spider would come running at her and then everything would be over. Suddenly Maya became terribly angry, worse than ever. She forgot her great fear of death and focused on only one thing, to sell her life as dearly as possible. She let out a loud, clear, alarming battle cry that all creatures knew and feared.

"You will pay for your cunning with death," she shouted at the spider. "Come and try to kill me, go on, you will soon discover what a Bee can do."

The spider did not flinch. She had scared bigger creatures than little Maya. Strong in her anger, Maya now made another violent, desperate attempt to break free and...one of the long hanging threads above her broke. The web was probably meant for flies and mosquitoes, not for such large insects like Bees. But Maya only became more entangled in the web. In one sliding movement, the spider came very close to Maya. She swung her agile legs on a single thread and hung with her body straight down.



"What gives you the right to break my web?" she rasped at Maya. "What are you doing here? Isn't the world big enough for you? Why are you bothering a peaceful recluse like me?"

That was certainly not what Maya had expected to hear.

"It wasn't my intention," she cried, but with a glimmer of hope. However ugly the spider was, she did not seem to be planning any harm. "I didn't see your web and got caught in it. I'm so sorry. Please excuse me."

The spider came closer.

"You have a funny little body," she said, letting go of the thread with one leg, then the other. The thin thread shook. How extraordinary that such a thin thread can support such a large creature!

"Oh, please help me out of here," Maya begged. "I would be so grateful."

"That's why I'm here," said the spider, smiling strangely. Despite all her smiles, she looked mean and deceitful. "Your struggling is ruining my whole web. Just be quiet for a second, and I'll set you free."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you in advance!" Maya exclaimed.

The spider was now very close to her. She carefully examined the web to see how Maya was entangled.

"What about your stinger?" she asked.

Oh, how mean and hideous she looked! Maya shuddered at the thought of the spider touching her, but replied as kindly as she could: "Don't worry about my

stinger. I'll pull it in, and then no one can hurt themselves on it."

"I hope not," said the spider. "Now, be careful! Be quiet. Otherwise, it's a waste of my web."

Maya remained quiet. Suddenly she felt herself being tossed back and forth in the same spot, until she became dizzy and nauseous and had to close her eyes. What was going on? She quickly opened her eyes. She was completely entangled in a fresh sticky thread that the spider must have had with her.

"My dear God!" little Maya cried softly, in a trembling voice. That was all she said. Now she saw how mean the spider had been. She had fallen for it and now there was absolutely no chance of escape. She couldn't move any part of her body. Her end was really near now. Her anger was gone, there was only great sadness in her heart.

"I didn't know that there was so much meanness and wickedness in the world," she thought. "The dark night of death is waiting for me. Goodbye, dear bright sun. Goodbye, my dear Bees. Why did I ever leave you? I wish you a happy life, but unfortunately, I am going to die."

The spider was on guard, a little to the side. She was still afraid of Maya's stinger.

"Well, well, what now," she jeered. "How are you feeling, little girl?"

Maya was too proud to answer the false creature. After a while, she only said, when she felt she couldn't take it anymore: "Please, just kill me now."

"Really!" said the spider and tied a few torn threads together. "Really! Do you think I'm as crazy an animal as you are? You'll die anyway, if you hang around long enough, and that's when I'll suck the blood out of you, when you can't sting me. If you could see how terribly you've damaged my web, then you'd realize that you deserve to die."

She dropped to the ground, placed the end of the newly spun thread around a stone. Then she ran back up, grabbed the thread to which little trapped Maya was hanging, and dragged her captive along.

"I'll put you in the shade, dear," she said, "so you don't dry out in the sun here. Besides, hanging here, you look like a scarecrow. You scare other mortals who aren't paying attention to where they're going. Sometimes sparrows come and raid my web. By the way, my name is Thekla, I'm related to cross spiders. You don't have to tell me your name. It doesn't make a difference. You're a nice, fat Bee, and you'll taste deliciously tender and juicy."

So there hung little Maya in the shadow of the blackberry bush, close to the ground, completely at the mercy of the cruel spider, who wanted to let her die

by a slow death of hunger. With her head down - an anxious position to be in - she soon felt that it wouldn't take many more minutes. She whimpered softly, and her cry for help grew weaker and weaker. Who could hear her now? Her Bee colony knew nothing of this disaster, so they couldn't come to her aid. Suddenly she heard someone growling down in the grass: "Move over! I'm coming."

Maya's heart began to beat fast. She recognized the voice of Bobbie, the dung beetle.

"Bobbie," she cried as loudly as she could, "Bobbie, dear Bobbie!"

"Move over! I'm coming."

"But I'm not in your way, Bobbie," Maya shouted. "No, I'm hanging above your head. The spider has caught me."

"Who are you?" asked Bobbie. "So many people know me. You know that, don't you?"

"I'm Maya - Maya, the Bee. Oh please, help me, please!"

"Maya? Maya? - Ah, now I remember. You met me a few weeks ago. You're in bad shape, if I may say so. You certainly need my help. Since I happen to have a little time, I won't refuse."

"Oh, Bobbie, can you tear these threads?"

"Tear? Those threads? Don't insult me." Bobbie flexed his arm muscles. "Look at muscles hard as steel. I can do much more than smash a few spider webs. You'll see."

Bobbie crawled onto the leaf, grabbed the thread on which Maya was hanging, clung onto it, and then let go of the leaf. The thread broke and they both fell to the ground.

"This is just the beginning," said Bobbie. "But Maya, you're trembling. My dear child, what are you so afraid of death for? You must look death calmly in the eye, just like I do. So I'll get you out now."

Maya couldn't speak. Tears of happiness rolled down her cheeks. She would be free again, fly in the sun, fly wherever she wanted. She would live again! Bobbie freed Maya from the spider web. But then she saw the spider come down along the blackberry bush.

"Bobbie," she screamed, "the spider is coming!"

Bobbie continued calmly and just laughed to himself. He was truly an exceptionally strong insect.

"She'll think twice before coming closer," he said.

But then the mean voice sounded above them: "Robbers! Help! I'm being robbed. You fat bump, you fatso, what are you doing with my prey?"

"Don't worry, madam," said Bobbie. "If you say another word that I don't like, I'll tear your whole web to shreds. Now, tell me, why are you suddenly so quiet?"

"I am defeated," said the spider.

"You better leave here now," remarked Bobbie.

The spider threw Bobbie a look full of hate and venom but reconsidered when she looked at her web, and slowly turned away, angry, cursing and grumbling. Fangs and stings were of no use. They wouldn't even leave a trace on the thick shell that beetles carried. With violent muttering about the injustice in the world, the spider hid in a withered leaf, from where she could spy and watch over her web. Meanwhile, Bobbie had freed Maya. He tore the threads around her legs and wings. The rest she could do herself. How happy she was! But she had to move slowly, as she was still weak from the shock.

"You just have to forget what you've been through," said Bobbie. "Then you'll stop trembling. Now see if you can fly. Try it."

Maya rose up with a soft buzz. Her wings were still working perfectly, and to her great joy, she felt that no part of her body had been injured. She flew slowly to the jasmine flowers, drank eagerly from the deliciously fragrant honey sap and returned to Bobbie, who had left the blackberry bushes and was sitting in the grass.

"I thank you with all my heart and soul," said Maya, deeply moved and very happy with her regained freedom.

"A word of thanks is in order," said Bobbie. "But that's just me: I always do something for other people. Now fly away quickly. I advise you to go to bed early tonight. Do you have a long way to go?"

"No," said Maya. "I don't have to go far. I live on the edge of the beech forest. Goodbye, Bobbie, I will never forget you, never, never, as long as I live. Goodbye!"

Chapter 8: Maya the Bee and the Butterfly

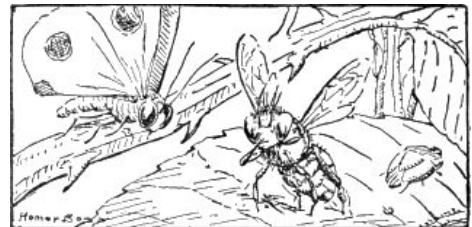
Her adventure with the spider gave Maya something to think about. She resolved to be more careful in the future and not to act so recklessly and hastily. Cassandra's warnings to be cautious of the great dangers that threaten the Bees, she had to take seriously. And there were plenty of opportunities to

discover, the world was such a big place. There was so much to do and see for a little Bee.

Especially in the evenings, when dusk fell and Maya was all alone, she thought about this. But the next morning, when the sun shone, she usually forgot everything she had worried about. Her desire for new experiences drove her back into the happy rush of life.

One day she met a very curious creature. It was angular but flat like a pancake. Its shell looked rather neat but whether it had wings, that was not entirely clear. The strange little creature sat completely still on the shady leaf of a raspberry bush with its eyes half closed, seemingly lost in meditation. The delicious scent of raspberries filled the air. Maya wanted to know what kind of animal it was. She flew to the nearby leaf and asked, "How are you?" The stranger did not answer.

"Well, how are you?" And Maya tapped his leaf. The flat object opened one eye, aimed it at Maya and said, "A Bee. The world is full of Bees," and closed its eye again.



"What a strange creature that is," thought Maya, and she was determined to uncover the secret of the stranger. It piqued her curiosity more than ever! So she tried with honey. "I have plenty of honey," she said. "May I offer you some?" The stranger opened one eye and looked at Maya pensively for a moment or two. "What will it say this time?" Maya wondered.

But this time there was no answer at all. The one eye just closed again and the stranger sat very still, tight on the leaf, so that you couldn't see its legs. You could almost think that the creature had been flattened with a thumb. Of course, Maya realized that the stranger wanted to ignore her, but - you know how the little Bee is - she doesn't like to be ignored or snapped at, especially if she hasn't yet discovered what she wants to know.

"Whoever you are," Maya called out, "I can tell you that insects have the habit of greeting each other, especially when one of them happens to be a Bee." The insect sat still without moving and didn't open its one eye. "It's certainly sick," Maya thought. "How awful to be sick on a beautiful day like this. That's why it stays in the shade." She flew to the leaf and sat next to the creature. "Are you not feeling well?" she asked, as kindly as possible.

On this, the funny creature began to move away. "Move" is the only word to use because it didn't walk, run, fly, or hop really. It went on as if pushed by an

invisible hand.

"It has no legs. That's why it's so angry," thought Maya.

When it reached the stem of the leaf, it stopped for a moment, then continued and to Maya's amazement, she saw that it had left a small brown droplet on the leaf.

"How strange," she thought. But then she quickly put her hand in front of her nose and held it tightly. A huge stench came from the small brown droplet. Maya almost fainted. She flew away as fast as she could and sat on a raspberry, where she still held her nose closed and trembled with disgust and excitement.

"Why would you touch a stink bug?" someone above her called out and laughed.

"Don't laugh!" Maya yelled.

She looked up. A white butterfly had landed on a thin, swaying branch of the raspberry bush and slowly opened and closed its broad wings. It sat still and content in the sunshine. The butterfly had black corners on its wings and round black spots in the middle of each wing. Oh, how beautiful, how beautiful! Maya forgot her annoyance. And she was also happy to talk to the butterfly. She had never met one before, although she had seen many flying by.



"Oh," she said, "you're probably right to laugh. Was that a stink bug?"

"That's what it was," he replied, still smiling. "The kind of creature to stay away from. You're probably still quite young?"

"Well," Maya remarked, "I wouldn't exactly say that. I've been through a lot. But that was the first specimen of that kind that I've ever encountered. Can you imagine doing something like the stink bug did?"

The butterfly laughed again.

"You know what it is," he explained, "stink bugs like to keep to themselves. They're not very popular, so they use the fragrant drop to draw attention to themselves. Without that drop, we would probably forget about their existence fairly quickly. It serves as a reminder. And they want to be remembered, anyway."

Maya continued to talk to the butterfly: "Your wings are beautiful, really so gorgeous," Maya said. "May I introduce myself? Maya, of the Bee people."

The butterfly folded its wings together and it looked like only one wing standing

straight up in the air. He made a slight bow.

"Fred," he said casually.

Maya stared at the butterfly in amazement.

"Fly a little," she asked.

"Shall I fly away?"

"Oh no. I just want to see your big white wings move in the blue sky. But never mind. I can wait until later. Where do you live?"

"Nowhere special. A fixed abode is too bothersome. Life only became really delightful when I turned into a butterfly. Before that, when I was a caterpillar, all I did was sit in the cabbage all day and eat and quarrel."

"What do you mean exactly?" Maya asked, bewildered.

"Before, I was a caterpillar," Fred explained.

"That could never have been possible!" Maya exclaimed.

"Well, well," said Fred, pointing both his antennae straight at Maya, "everyone knows that a butterfly starts out as a caterpillar. Even humans know it."

Maya was completely perplexed. Could something like that really happen?

"You really have to explain it more clearly," she said. "I couldn't just take what you said for granted. You can't expect that from me."

The butterfly sat down next to the little bee on the slim swaying branch of the raspberry bush, and they swayed together in the morning breeze. Meanwhile, he told her how he had started life as a caterpillar and then, one day, when he shed his last caterpillar skin, he emerged as a chrysalis.

"After a few weeks," he continued, "I woke up from my dark sleep and broke through the shell of the chrysalis. I can't tell you, Maya, what a feeling comes over you when you suddenly see the sun again after such a long time. I felt as if I was melting into a warm golden ocean, and I loved my life so much that my heart started pounding."

"I understand, completely," said Maya. "I felt that way too when I first left the everyday life of our Bee city and flew into the bright, fragrant world of blossoms." The little Bee fell silent for a moment, thinking about her first flight. But then she wanted to know how the Butterfly's large wings could grow in the small space of the chrysalis.

Fred explained it to her.

"The wings are completely folded up, just like the petals of a flower in the bud.

When the weather is clear and warm, the flower has to open, it can't help it, and the petals unfold. So my wings were first folded up and then unfolded. No one can resist the sunshine when it shines."

"No, no one can resist the sunshine," mused Maya, as she looked at the Butterfly sitting in the golden light of the morning, pure white against the blue sky.

"People often accuse us of being frivolous," said Fred. "But we are truly happy - just that - simply happy. They wouldn't believe how seriously I sometimes think about life."

"Tell me what you think about."

"Oh," said Fred, "I think about the future. It's very interesting to think about the future. But now I would like to fly. The meadows on the hills are full of yarrow and other beautiful flowers, everything is in bloom. I would like to be there, you know."

Maya understood this very well, so they said goodbye and flew off in different directions. The white Butterfly swayed quietly as if driven by the gentle wind. And little Maya flew, with the buzz of the Bee around a flower. The sound we hear on beautiful days and that we always think of when we think of summer.



Chapter 9: Maya the Bee and the Lost Leg

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.



Chapter 10: Maya the Bee and the Wonders of the Night

In the summer, little Maya happily flew around and had many adventures. Yet, she missed the other bees and the kingdom. She longed for useful work. Bees are restless creatures. However, little Maya was not yet ready to live in the bee kingdom forever. Not every bee can adapt well, just as with people. We must be careful not to judge them but give them a chance to prove themselves. Beneath their peculiar behavior lies a deep longing for something more beautiful than everyday life.

Little Maya was a pure and sensitive being with a genuine interest in everything the world had to offer. Yet, it is difficult to be alone, even if you are happy. And the longer Maya experienced her adventures alone, the more she longed for companionship. By now, she had grown from a small bee into a beautiful creature with strong wings and a sharp stinger. And she was a true adventurer.

She wanted to do something with everything she had learned along the way. Sometimes she wanted to return to the beehive and ask the queen for forgiveness. But her desire to get to know humans was greater. According to her, no one was more intelligent or powerful than humans. One day, she saw a

sleeping girl among the blossoms. Maya stared at her in amazement and found her very sweet. She immediately forgot all the horrible things she had heard about humans.

After a while, a mosquito passed by and greeted her. "Look at that girl over there. See how good and beautiful she is," exclaimed Maya delightedly. The mosquito threw a surprised glance at Maya, then slowly turned around and looked at the object of her admiration. "Yes, she is a good human. I just tasted her. I stung her. Look, my body is shining red from her blood."

Maya was shocked. "Will she die? Where did you injure her? How could you do that? You are a predator!"

The mosquito giggled: "Oh, I just stung through her stockings. Your ignorance is truly amazing. Do you really think humans are good creatures? I have never met anyone who voluntarily gave me a drop of blood."

"I don't know much about humans, I admit," said Maya.

"But of all insects, you bees have the most to do with humans. That is a known fact."

"I left our kingdom," Maya confessed shyly. "I didn't like it. I wanted to learn more about the outside world."

"And how do you like the outside world? I admire your independence. I would never agree to serve humans."

"But humans also serve us!" said Maya, who couldn't stand the mosquito's criticism.

"Maybe. Which tribe do you belong to?"

"I come from the bee tribe in the castle park."

"I've heard of that. I respect your kingdom, where there was a recent uprising, is that correct?" the mosquito said.

"Yes," said Maya proudly. And deep in her heart, she felt the homesickness for her people and the urge to serve the queen. She didn't ask the mosquito any more questions about humans. She thought the mosquito was a cheeky lady.

"I'm going to get another nice sip," the mosquito exclaimed as she flew away. Maya quickly went away. She couldn't stand to see the mosquito hurting the sleeping girl. And how could she do this and not die herself? Hadn't Cassandra said, "If you sting a human, you'll die?"

Despite this event, her desire to get to know humans well was not satisfied. She vowed to be braver and never stop until she achieved her goal. Her desire to get

to know humans would come true, in a more beautiful way than she could have ever dreamed.

On a warm evening, she went to bed early and suddenly woke up in the middle of the night. When she opened her eyes, she saw that her bedroom had a silent bluish glow. The glow came from the entrance, and it looked like a silver-blue curtain. At first, Maya was afraid to look. But along with the light came a delightful calmness, and a harmonious sound could be heard. She looked outside, and the whole world seemed to be under a spell. The trees and the grass were covered in a silver veil, and everything was wrapped in this soft blue glow.

"This must be the night," whispered Maya as she folded her wings.

A silver disk hung high in the sky, and a beautiful glow streamed into the world. Maya saw countless small lights in the sky. Everything was so quiet and beautiful. She saw the night with the moon and the stars. She had heard of them before but had never seen them. Then she heard the sound that had awakened her again. A fine chirping. She could no longer stay in her room and flew out into the beautiful night.

Just as she was about to fly further into the silver night, Maya saw a winged creature land on a beech leaf. It raised its head and wings to the moon, and there came the silver chirping that Maya had heard earlier that night. "How beautiful, it sounds heavenly," whispered Maya. She flew to the leaf, but when she touched the leaf, the chirping stopped. There was a deep silence that was almost eerie.

"Good night," said Maya politely. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but the music you make is so beautiful that I had to find out where it came from." The cricket asked in surprise: "What kind of crawling creature are you? I've never met anyone like you."

"I am not a crawling insect. I am Maya, from the bee people."

"Oh, from the bee people. You live by day, don't you? I heard about your race from the hedgehog. He told me that he eats dead bees thrown out of the hive in the evening."

"Yes," said Maya somewhat fearfully, "I have also heard about the hedgehog. He comes out when dusk falls and eats dead insects. But are you friends with that creature? He is terribly rough."

"We snowy tree crickets get along just fine with him. Of course, he tries to catch us, but he can never succeed. We always tease him with great pleasure."

"So you are a tree cricket," said Maya.

"Yes, a snowy tree cricket. But now I have no time to talk. I really have to make music. It's a beautiful night with a full moon."

"Midsummer night is the most beautiful night of the year," said the cricket. "That's all I can tell you, listen to my music, and you'll hear it." And the cricket started chirping again.

The little bee sat quietly in the blue summer night, thinking deeply about life. Then the silence fell. There was a soft buzz, and Maya saw the cricket fly into the moonlight.

"The night makes a bee sad too," she thought. So she quickly flew to her beloved flower meadow. On the way, she saw beautiful irises along the stream that gleamed in the moonlight. She landed on one of the blue petals.

"Where does all that water from the stream go?" she wondered. "I know so little about the world."

Suddenly, a delicate voice rose from the flower next to her. It sounded like a clear bell and was unlike any sound Maya had heard before. "What could this be?" thought the little bee. Then, a small creature emerged from the flower with a glowing body, dressed in a white garment.



The creature raised its arms to the moonlight and its face began to radiate with bliss. Then, two white wings unfolded. Maya had never seen anything so beautiful. The glowing creature began to sing a song about the soul of things that always remains, which deeply touched Maya's heart. She even started to cry.

"Who is crying?" asked the white creature.

"It's just me," Maya stammered. "Sorry for disturbing you."

"But why are you crying?"

"Maybe just because you're so beautiful. Oh, tell me, you're an angel, aren't you?"

"Oh no, I'm a flower elf. What are you doing here so late at night?" asked the elf, looking kindly at the bee.

Maya told her about her adventures and what she still longed for. When she finished, the elf stroked her head and looked at her warmly and lovingly. "We, flower elves," she explained, "live for seven nights, but we must stay in the flower in which we were born, or we will die at sunrise."

"Hurry up, hurry up! Fly back into your flower!" cried Maya in alarm.

The elf shook her head sadly and said, "It's too late. But most flower elves are happy to leave their flower because great happiness is associated with our departure. Before we die, we can fulfill the dearest wish of the first creature we meet. So we make someone very happy."

"How wonderful, then I would leave the flower too." It didn't occur to Maya that she was the first creature the elf met. "Do you die then?" asked the bee.

The elf nodded, "We live until dawn, then we are carried away in the gossamer veils that float above the grass and flowers. It seems like a white light shines from these veils. Those are the flower elves. When it becomes day, we turn into dew drops. The plants drink us and we become part of their growth and bloom until we come back as flower elves from the flower petals after a while."

"So you were once another flower elf," Maya asked, with great interest.

"That's right, but I've forgotten my past existence. We forget everything in our flower sleep."

"Oh, what a beautiful fate!"

"That's actually how it goes with all earthly creatures," said the elf.

"Oh, I'm so happy now," exclaimed Maya.

"But don't you have a wish?" asked the elf. "I have the power to fulfill your dearest wish."

"Me? I'm just a bee. No, that's too big. I don't deserve that you're so good to me."

"No one deserves the good and the beautiful. The good and the beautiful come to us like sunshine," said the elf.

Maya's heart was racing. Oh, of course, she had a wish, but she didn't dare to say it. The elf seemed to sense it and smiled wisely.

"I would like to learn about people at their best and most beautiful," said the little bee, shyly.

The elf stood up and looked at her with eyes full of trust. She took Maya's hand and said, "Come, let's fly together. Your wish will come true."

Chapter 11: Maya the Bee flies with the Flower Elf

And so, Maya and the Flower Elf set off together on a clear midsummer night.

Little Maya was so happy that she could trust this beautiful white being to lead her wherever they were going. She wanted to ask the Flower Elf a thousand questions, but she didn't dare. As they flew through a row of trees, a dark moth buzzed above them, as large and strong as a bird.

"Wait, please," called the Flower Elf. Maya was surprised to see how quickly the moth responded.

All three of them settled on a branch, overlooking the moonlit landscape. The moth flapped its wings as if creating a cool breeze. Bright blue, slanted stripes marked its wings. Its head seemed to be made of velvet with a face like a mysterious mask with dark eyes. How wondrous are these creatures of the night! A cold shiver went through Maya, who thought she was dreaming the strangest dream of her life.

"You're really beautiful," said Maya, who was very impressed, to the moth.

"Who is your traveling companion?" the moth asked the Flower Elf.

"A bee. I met her just as I left my flower."

The moth seemed to understand what that meant. He looked at Maya almost jealously. "You're really lucky," he said in a serious and thoughtful tone, shaking his head back and forth.

"Are you sad?" asked the warm-hearted Maya.

The moth shook his head. "No, not sad." And he gave Maya such a friendly look that she would have liked to become friends with him right then and there.

"Is the bat still abroad, or has he gone to rest?" This was the question for which the Flower Elf had made the moth stop.

"Oh, he's been resting for a long time. You want to know because of your traveling companion?"

The Flower Elf nodded. Maya wanted to know what a bat was, but the Flower Elf seemed to be in a hurry.

"Come on, Maya," she said, "we have to hurry. The night is so short."

"Can I carry you part of the way?" the moth asked.

"Another time, please," called the Flower Elf.

"Then it will never happen," Maya thought as they flew away, "because the Flower Elf must die at dawn."

The moth remained lost in thought on the leaf. "I've heard so many times that I'm gray and ugly," he said to himself. "And that my pattern cannot compare to the splendor of a butterfly. But the little bee saw something beautiful in me! And she asked if I was sad. No, I'm not sad," he decided.

Meanwhile, Maya and the Flower Elf flew through the dense bushes of the garden. The cool breath of the dew and the dim moonlight made the flowers and trees look enchantingly beautiful. Maya was amazed by it all. She squeezed the Flower Elf's hand and looked at her. A light of happiness shone from the elf's eyes.

"Who could have dreamed this!" whispered the little bee.

At that moment, she saw something that gave her a shock. "Oh," she exclaimed, "Look! A star has fallen! It's wandering around and can't find its way back to its place in the sky."

"That's a firefly," said the Flower Elf, without a smile.

Now Maya knew why she liked the Flower Elf so much - the elf never laughed at her when she said something wrong.

"Fireflies are strange creatures," said the flower elf. "They always carry their own lamp and light up the darkness under the bushes where the moon doesn't shine. Later, when we are among people, you will also get to know a firefly."

"Why?" asked Maya.

"You'll see soon enough."

By that time, they had almost descended to the ground in a bower of jasmine and apricot. There was a faint whisper and the flower elf beckoned a firefly.

"Would you be so kind," she asked, "to give us a little light in this dark foliage?"

"But your glow is much brighter than mine."

"I think so too," Maya exclaimed excitedly.



"I have to wrap myself in a leaf," the fairy explained, "or else people would see me and be afraid. We elves only appear in dreams to people."

"I understand," said the firefly. "I'll do what I can, but will that big creature you have with you hurt me?"

The elf shook her head, and the firefly believed her. Then the elf wrapped herself in a leaf. She plucked a small bell from the grass and placed it as a helmet on her shiny head. Only her tiny face was visible, but no one would notice. She asked the firefly to sit on her shoulder and to dim his light on one side with his wing.

"Come now," she said, taking Maya's hand. "We'd better climb up here."

As they climbed up the vine, Maya asked, "Do people dream when they sleep?"

"They dream when they sleep, but sometimes even when they are awake. Their dreams are always more beautiful than their lives."

The elf now put her little finger to her lips, bent a small flowering twig of jasmine aside, and gently pushed Maya forward. "Look down," she said softly, "you'll see what you've always wanted to see now."

Maya and the fairy saw two people. On a bench, in the shadow of the moonlight, a boy and a girl sat. The girl's head rested on his shoulder, and the boy held his arm protectively around her. They sat in complete silence. Maya stared at the girl with golden hair and red lips. She seemed melancholy but also very happy. Then she turned to the boy and whispered something in his ear, which brought a magical smile to his face. Maya thought that only an earthly creature could look like that. Pure happiness radiated from his eyes.



"Now I have seen the most beautiful thing in my life," she whispered to herself. "I now know that people are at their most beautiful when they are in love."

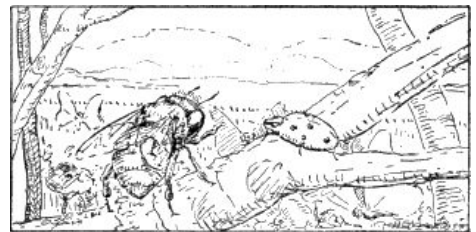
She didn't know how long she sat there, but when she turned around, the firefly's light had gone out and the flower elf had disappeared. In the distance, daylight was dawning.

Chapter 12: Maya the Bee and Elvis the Ladybug

The sun was already up when Maya woke up in her refuge in the forest. The moonlight, the cricket, the midsummer night, the forest elf, and the boy and girl in the arbor seemed like a wonderful dream. Yet it was almost noon now, so it had all been real.

The sun was shining bright and Maya heard the mixed choir of a thousand insects. What a difference there was between what those insects knew and what she knew! She was very proud of her adventures and everyone would surely be able to see that. But the sun shone the same as always and nothing had changed. The insects came and went and birds and butterflies frolicked around in the flower meadow.

Maya suddenly felt sad. There was no one in the world to share her joy and sorrow with. Instead of joining the others, she decided to go to the forest. The forest, with its many trees and dark paths, suited her mood better.



The forest has its own mysteries that no one suspects as they walk on the paths. You have to bend the branches of the undergrowth aside and peer through the bushes over the thick moss. The secrets of the forest are found under the leaves and in the holes of the tree trunks. There you find happiness and sadness, joy and danger.

Maya understood very little of this as she flew between the trees. One moment she flew in the shade, the next moment in the glow of the sun, which shone brightly on the ferns and blackberries. After a while, she flew out of the woods and a large field of grain appeared, bathing in the sunlight. She sat on a branch of a birch tree at the edge of the field and stared breathlessly at the sea of gold. The grain waved gently in the wind. Under the birch tree, a few small brown butterflies played with some leaves. Maya watched them for a while.

"That must be really fun," she thought, "the children in the hive could play like that too. But Cassandra wouldn't allow it, she's always so strict."

Now that she thought of home, Maya felt sad again. She was about to get very homesick when she heard someone say next to her, "Good morning. You're a really dangerous creature, I think."

Maya turned around startled. "No, I'm not," she said, "I've decided not to be a dangerous creature."



On her leaf sat a small hemispherical creature in a red/brown color with seven black dots and a tiny head with bright eyes. Maya saw that the creature had thin legs as fine as threads. Despite its strange appearance, Maya liked it immediately.

"May I ask who you are? I myself am Maya, of the bee people."

"Do you mean to insult me? You have no reason to do so," said the creature.

"But why am I insulting you? I don't even know who you are," Maya cried upset.

"It's easy to say that you don't know me. Well, let me refresh your memory." And the little thing began to spin slowly.

"Do you mean I have to count your dots?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Seven dots," said Maya.

"Well, don't you know yet? Our family name is Septempuncta. This means seven points in Latin. But we are better known under the family name Ladybugs. My name is Elvis and I am a poet by profession."

Maya, afraid to hurt his feelings again, dared not say anything more.

"Oh," he said, "and I live on the sun, on the tranquility of the day, and on the love of mankind."

"But don't you eat anything?" Maya asked in surprise.

"Of course. I eat aphids. Don't you?"

"Well, no. That is..."

"What is it?"

"Not normal," Maya said, embarrassed.

"Well, of course," exclaimed Elvis. "As a good citizen, you only do what is normal. But we poets are different. Do you have a moment?"

"Yes, of course," said Maya.

"Then I'll recite a poem for you. Sit still and close your eyes so that nothing distracts you. The poem is called 'The Shape of the Man' and is personal. Listen: 'You haven't done anything wrong to me. You've found me, but that doesn't matter. Round and long. With a shield. That moves as fast as light. Round and pointed at the top. It's firmly attached at the bottom.'"

"How do you like the poem?" Elvis asked after a short pause. There were tears in his eyes and his voice trembled.

"'The Shape of the Man' really makes an impression," Maya replied, somewhat shyly. But she knew much more beautiful poems.

"How do you like the form?" Elvis asked with a melancholic smile. He seemed overwhelmed by the effect he had produced.

"Long and round. That's what you said in the poem."

"I mean the artistic form, the form of my verse."

"Oh, yes. Yes, I thought it was very good."

"What you mean to say is that it's one of the best poems you know. The first requirement in art is that it must contain something new. Do you think so too?"

"Definitely, definitely," said Maya. "I think..."

"Your faith and trust in me overwhelm me. But I have to go now, because loneliness is the pride of the poet. Farewell."

"Farewell," repeated Maya, who really didn't know what the little creature was looking for again. Then she thought, "Maybe he's not fully grown because he's still very small." She watched him hurry over the branch. His little legs were barely visible. And Maya stared again over the golden field of grain where the butterflies played. The field and the butterflies gave her much more joy than the poems of Elvis, the ladybug.



Chapter 13: Maya the Bee in the Hornet's Fortress

Maya had learned something remarkable. It happened one afternoon by an old rain barrel. She sat among the fragrant elderflowers and a robin flew above her head. The bird was very sweet and cheerful, and Maya regretted that they

couldn't be friends. The problem was that they were too big and they would eat her. She had hidden in the heart of the elderflower when suddenly she heard someone sigh. When she turned around, she saw the strangest creature she had ever seen. He must have had at least a hundred legs on each side of his body, she thought. He was about three times as big as she was, and he was slim and had no wings.

"Goodness gracious," exclaimed Maya in shock. "You can certainly run very fast."

The stranger gave her a pensive look. "I doubt it," he said. "I doubt it. There's room for improvement. I have too many legs. You see, before all my legs can be set in motion, too much time is lost. I didn't realize this before and often wished I had more legs. And my wish came true. But who are you?"

Maya introduced herself. The other nodded and moved some of his legs.

"I am Thomas, of the Centipede family. We are admired by everyone in the world. No other animal has as many legs. Eight is their limit as far as I know."

"You're tremendously interesting. And your color is so strange. Do you have a family?"

"No, why should I? What use is a family to me? We centipedes hatch from the egg and then that's it. If we can't stand on our own legs, then who can?"

"Of course," said Maya thoughtfully, "but don't you have any friends?"

"No, dear child. I earn my bread and I doubt."

"Oh! What do you doubt?"

"I was born doubting. I have to doubt."

Maya stared at him in amazement. What did he mean by that doubting? She wanted to know, but didn't want to ask impolite questions.

"Firstly, I doubt if you've chosen the right place to rest. Don't you know what's in that big willow over there?" said Thomas.

"No."

"You see, I doubted if you knew. The hornet fortress is there."

Maya became a little pale and almost fell off her branch in fright. She asked where the hornet fortress was exactly.



"Do you see that old nesting box for starlings, at the base of the willow? The door of that birdhouse is not facing sunrise, so no bird comes. So the hornets

have moved in. The hornets are real villains that have their sights set on the bees. I've seen it all."

Maya looked a little afraid of the hornet fortress. "It's better if I leave," she said. But it was too late. She heard a wicked laugh behind her and felt that she was being grabbed by the neck.

Thomas let go of all his legs at once and tumbled head over heels, through the branches, into the rain barrel. "I doubt you'll get away," he called. But poor Maya didn't hear him anymore.



At first, Maya couldn't see her attacker, but suddenly she saw a large head with long pincers above her. At first, she thought it was an enormous wasp, but then she remembered that it was a hornet. The hornet was beautifully black and yellow striped and was at least four times larger than she was. Maya, who was very frightened, softly called for help. "Call for help, little girl," said the hornet in a honey-sweet tone. "But I have no idea if anyone will come," he said, while he smiled ominously.

"Let me go," Maya cried. "Let me go or I'll sting you in the heart."

"Straight in my heart? Very brave. But there will be time for that later."

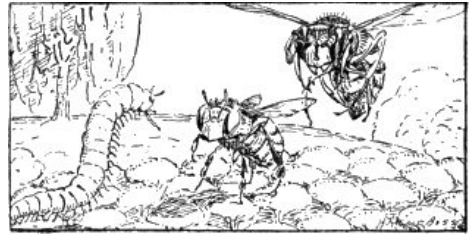
Then Maya became angry. She gathered all her strength, and while she let out a loud battle cry, she aimed her stinger at the middle of the hornet's chest. But to her surprise, the stinger bent and did not go through the hornet's chest. His armor was too hard for her stinger. Now the hornet also looked angry.

"I could punish you and bite you in the head, but I prefer to bring you to our queen."

So the hornet flew with Maya into the air and went straight to the hornet fortress. Maya found it so scary that she fainted on the way. When she came to, she was in the half-darkness in a place that smelled bad. She was in the hornet prison. She wanted to cry, but the tears wouldn't come.

"Fortunately, I haven't been eaten yet, but that could happen," she thought, trembling.

Outside, she heard voices, and a little light shone through a narrow slit. Hornets don't make their walls out of wax, like bees do, but out of a dry mass that looks like some kind of paper. She was very worried about what would happen to her and started whimpering softly. Again she heard voices on the other side of the wall. She peered through the slit. She saw a huge hall, full of hornets, which was brilliantly illuminated by a number of captured glowworms. In the middle sat the hornet queen on a throne. An important meeting was being held. If she hadn't been so afraid of the hornets, their power and grandeur would certainly have impressed her. It was the first time she had seen this type of insect.



A hornet sergeant walked around and ordered the glowworms to give as much light as possible. Then Maya heard the queen say, "Good, we will keep to the agreements we have made. Tomorrow our warriors will march for an attack on the bee city in the castle park. The beehive must be plundered and the bees must be captured. Whoever captures Queen Helen VII alive and brings her to me will be appointed a knight. Be brave and bring me the rich booty. The meeting is adjourned."

The hornet queen stood up from her throne and left the room accompanied by her bodyguards.

"My land," sobbed Maya, "and all my dear bees." She was desperate and wanted to scream. "No one can warn my people. They will be attacked while they sleep. I hope a miracle happens."

In the hall, the lights of the glowworms now went out, and gradually it became quiet in the fortress. No one seemed to be thinking of Maya anymore. Outside, she thought she heard the night song of crickets, but she was locked up in the dark, in the hornet prison.

Chapter 14: Maya the Bee and the Sentry

The despair of the little Bee gave way to determination. She remembered again that she was a Bee.

"I'm whining as if I have no brains and can do nothing. That's not how I honor the bee colony. They're in danger, and so am I. If I have to face death, I might as

well be proud and brave and at least try to save my people."

Even though she had been away from home for a long time, Maya felt one with her people. There was a great responsibility on her now that she knew of the hornets' plot. "Long live, my queen!" she sobbed aloud.

"Silence, please!" The hornet sentry came by on his evening round.

As soon as the sentry was gone, Maya made the gap through which she had been peering larger and wormed her way into the hall. There was loud snoring. A dim blue light shone in. She saw the moonlight, and in the distance, a glittering star shone. She heaved a deep sigh. "Freedom!" she thought. She started crawling toward the exit.

"If I fly now," she thought, "I'll be out in one go." Her heart pounded as if it was about to burst. But there, in the shadow of the doorway, stood a sentry, leaning against a column.



Maya was rooted to her spot. All her hope of escaping was gone. She might as well go back now that there was such a hefty sentry. He was staring at the moonlit landscape, and his armor gleamed in the light. Something about the way he stood there moved the little Bee.

"He looks sad, but also proud with his beautiful shield. He is always ready to fight or die," she thought. Oh, how often had the goodness of her heart and the beauty of something made her lose all sense of danger. Suddenly, a golden arrow of light shot out from the sentry's helmet.

"Goodness gracious," whispered Maya, "this is my end." But the sentry said calmly, "Just come here, child."

"What!" cried Maya. "You saw me?"

"Of course, you made a hole in the wall and crawled through until you got here. Now you lost your courage. Am I right?"

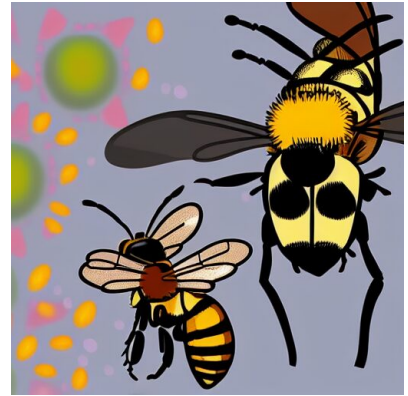
"That's true," said Maya, trembling with fear. The sentry had seen her all along. She remembered how keen hornets' senses were.

"What are you doing here?" he asked cheerfully. But Maya still thought he looked sad. His mind seemed to be far away and not concerned with what was going on.

"I want to get out, and I'm just scared. You looked so strong and handsome with that armor. But now I will fight you."

The sentry smiled in amazement. Maya was enchanted by him.

"We will not fight, little Bee," he said. "Your bees are powerful as a people, but we hornets are stronger as individuals. You can stay here and talk for a while, but not too long, because I have to wake up the soldiers soon, and then you have to go back to your cell."



Maya was filled with admiration, and with great sad eyes, she looked up at her enemy and followed the impulse of her heart: "I have always heard bad things about hornets. But you are not bad. I cannot believe that you are bad."

"There are good creatures and bad creatures everywhere," he said seriously. "But you must not forget that we are your enemies and will always be your enemies."

"But must an enemy always be bad?" Maya asked. "When I saw you in the moonlight, I forgot that you were dangerous and cruel. You seemed sad. I always thought that sad beings cannot be bad."

The guard said nothing, and Maya continued bravely, "You are strong. You can put me back in my cell and I will die, or you can set me free, if you want to."

At this, the guard stood up. His armor rattled and the arm he raised shone in the moonlight. "You're right, I could do that," he said. "But my people and my queen have entrusted this power to me. No bee that enters this fortress will leave it alive. I will remain loyal to my people."

After a pause, he added softly, "I learned through bitter experience how disloyalty can hurt, when Lovey left me..." Maya was moved by his feelings and his words. Love for her own kind, loyalty to her people. Everyone did their duty, yet everyone remained an enemy of the other. Lovey was a beautiful dragonfly who lived on the shore of the lake among the water lilies. Maya trembled with excitement. Here was perhaps her salvation. But she was not entirely sure. So she said cautiously, "Who is Lovey, if I may ask?"



"It doesn't matter, little one. She's not your concern, and she's lost to me forever. I'll never find her again."

"But I know Lovey," said Maya as nonchalantly as possible. "She's the most

beautiful of them all."

The guard's attitude suddenly changed. He jumped to Maya and cried out, "What! You know Lovey? Tell me where she is. Tell me right now."

"No." Maya spoke calmly and resolutely.

"I'll bite your head off if you don't tell me." The guard came dangerously close.

"That's going to happen anyway. I won't betray Lovey. She's a good friend of mine, and you want to lock her up."

Maya saw that the guard was struggling and having an inner conflict.

"Goodness, it's time to wake up the soldiers. No, little bee, I don't want to harm Lovey. I love her with all my heart. I would give my life for her. Tell me where I can find her."

Maya was smart. She hesitated deliberately before saying, "But I love my life."

"If you tell me where Lovey lives, I'll set you free." Maya saw that the guard was having a hard time saying these words.

"Will you keep your word?"

"I give you my word as a guard," he said proudly.

Excitedly, Maya realized that she might be able to save her people in time.

"I believe you," she said. "Lovey lives in a cove of a large lake, under the lime trees near the castle. You'll find her there every day, at noon when the sun is high in the sky, among the white water lilies."

The guard had both hands pressed against his pale forehead. He seemed to be struggling with himself. "You're telling the truth," he finally said softly. "She told me about a place with white flowers. Those must be the flowers you're talking about. Fly away now. Thank you."

He stepped aside, freeing the way out. The day broke.

"A guard keeps his word," he said.

He did not know that Maya had overheard the meeting and believed that a little bee, more or less, made little difference.

"Goodbye," Maya called out, breathless with haste, and flew away without a word of thanks. There was no time to lose.

Chapter 15: Maya the Bee warns the queen

Little Maya gathered all her strength and flew lightning-fast through the purple dawn to the forest where she could hide if the hornet guard would come after her. The fine veils of mist hung over the land and the cold threatened to paralyze Maya's wings. It seemed like everyone and everything was still asleep on earth.

Maya flew high in the sky as fast as she could to the threatened beehive. She had to warn her people so they could prepare for the attack. If the bee colony had a chance to prepare their defenses, they could fight the stronger opponents. But if it was a surprise attack, they would have no chance. Maya was very worried.

As she thought about the strength, energy, and courage of her people, and their dedication to their queen, the little bee felt an enormous anger towards the hornets. She was proud of her people. It wasn't easy for her to find her way through the forest because she didn't remember the route she had taken. The cold was hurting her and she could barely see the world below her.

"Oh oh, how will this continue? Which way should I go? Now I could pay for my disloyalty to my people," Maya thought. Suddenly a secret force sent her in a certain direction. Maybe it was the homesickness for her land that guided her. She surrendered to instinct and flew on quickly. In the distance appeared the mighty lime trees of the castle park.

"There I have to go," she exclaimed joyfully. She descended towards the earth. Thicker strands of mist hung over the meadows than over the forest. She thought of the flower spirits who cheerfully went to their death in the morning dew. That gave her confidence again and her fear disappeared. The bee colony could expel her from their kingdom and the queen could punish her, as long as the bees were spared from the invasion of the hornets.

She was now close to the long stone wall that protected the bee city from the west wind. And in the distance, she saw her homeland between the blue and green firs. Her heart was pounding and she was out of breath, but she continued to fly quickly towards the entrance. At the entrance stood two sentries who shouted "halt." Maya couldn't say a word, and they threatened to kill her. That's just what happens when a stranger enters the bee city without the queen's permission.

"Back off, you," shouted a sentry, pushing her roughly. "If you don't, we'll kill you. What's wrong with you? I've never seen anything like this before."

Then Maya spoke the password that all bees know. The sentries immediately let her go.

"What!" they exclaimed. "You're one of us and we don't know you? How is that possible?"

"Let me go to the queen," begged the little bee. "Right away, quickly! We're in great danger."



The sentries still hesitated. They couldn't comprehend the situation.

"The queen cannot be awakened before sunrise," said one of the sentries.

"Then the queen will never wake up alive," Maya desperately exclaimed. "Death is following me. Bring me to the queen as quickly as possible." Her voice sounded so angry that the sentries became scared and obeyed.

The three hurried together through the old familiar streets and corridors of the bee city. Maya recognized everything and, despite all her excitement and haste, her heart trembled with joy at the sight of the dear familiar scenes.

"I'm home," she stammered.

In the reception room of the queen, she almost collapsed. One of the guards supported her while the other hurried to the queen's private quarters. The first bees were already awake and stuck their heads curiously out of the openings. The news quickly spread. Two bee officers came out of the queen's private chambers. Maya recognized them immediately. In solemn silence, without saying a word to her, they took their positions, one on each side of the doorway: the bee queen would appear soon.

She came without her courtiers, only accompanied by her assistant and two ladies-in-waiting. She hurried straight to Maya. When she saw the condition the child was in, the stern expression on her face relaxed a bit.

"You have come with an important message? Who are you?"

Maya managed to utter two words: "The hornets!"

The queen turned pale, but she remained calm.

"Mighty queen," Maya sobbed. "Forgive me for not fulfilling my duties. Later I will explain everything, I have remorse in my heart. But not long ago, as if by a miracle, I escaped from the hornets' fort and the last thing I heard was that they

were planning to attack and plunder our kingdom at sunrise."

The consternation of the ladies-in-waiting, the guards, and the assistant was indescribable. Everyone wanted to flee in all directions. But it was extraordinary to see how calm the queen remained when she received this terrible news. She stood up tall and regal, inspiring both awe and confidence. She felt that she had never experienced anything so superior since becoming queen.



The queen beckoned the officers next to her and issued some commands.

"Oh, my queen!" said Maya.

The queen bowed her head to the little bee and looked at her with love and tenderness, saying: "Our gratitude is great. You have saved us. Whatever you may have done before, you have made it a thousand times better. But rest now, girl, you look very miserable, and your wings are trembling."

"I would like to die for you," stammered Maya, trembling.

"Don't worry about us," the queen replied. "Among the thousands who inhabit this city, there is not one who would hesitate to sacrifice their life for me and for the welfare of the country. You can rest now."

She leaned forward and kissed the little bee on her forehead. Then she beckoned the ladies-in-waiting and told them to take care of Maya. Maya was moved by the queen's words and let herself be carried away. As if in a dream, she heard distant sounds and saw all the important bees gathering, and she felt the beehive shaking on its foundations.

"The soldiers! Our soldiers!" whispered the ladies-in-waiting next to her.

The last thing Maya heard before falling asleep was the sound of soldiers marching past her door and shouting orders with a cheerful, determined voice. And in her dreams, she heard the old soldier's song of the bees:

"Oh, sunlight with your golden rays and golden shine, Through your glow, our lives are illuminated, Bless our labor, bless our queen, Let us be united forever."

Chapter 16: Maya the Bee in battle

There was great excitement in the bee kingdom. The hive rumbled and buzzed.

All the bees were angry and ready to meet their old enemy in battle until the bitter end. However, there was no disorder. Everything was made ready according to the rules and every soldier knew their duty and was in the right place at the right time.

At the call of the queen to defend the entrance, a group of bees offered themselves. Some of them were ordered to see if the enemy was approaching. The hornets were on their way. The whole hive was silent. Soldiers stood in a row at the entrance, proud and composed. Nobody spoke. The whole hive seemed to have fallen into a deep sleep. At the entrance, the layer of beeswax was so thick that the hole was almost halved.

The queen took an elevated position from which she could oversee the battle. Her assistants flew back and forth. The third messenger returned. He sank exhausted at the feet of the queen.

"I am the last to return," he shouted with all the strength he had left. "The others are killed."

"Where are the hornets?" asked the queen.

"At the lime trees, listen," he stammered fearfully.

"How many are there?" asked the queen sternly. "And answer in a soft voice."

"I counted forty."

Although the queen was shocked by the number of the enemy, she did not show it. With a loud, confident voice she said: "Not one of them will see his home again."



Her words about the downfall of the enemy had an immediate effect. All the bees felt their courage increase. Then a loud hum was heard outside the beehive. The hornets were getting closer and the bees were a little scared now. Then the composed voice of the queen sounded, clear and calm, from her high place: "Let them come in one by one until I give the order to attack. Then we will attack with hundreds of bees at once and block the entrance. Remember that the fate of the entire hive depends on your strength, endurance, and courage! Don't be afraid, the enemy doesn't know we are prepared!"

Then she stopped her speech. The first hornet head came through the door. The bees trembled but they remained silent. The hornet quietly withdrew and outside they heard him say, "They are in a deep sleep. But the entrance is half-walled and there are no guards. I don't know if this is a good or a bad sign."

"A good sign!" was heard. "Forward!"

Then the hornets jumped in and made their way through the beehive. But the queen bee still did not give the order to attack. Could she not speak from shock? The hornets did not see that there was a row of bees lined up on the left and right, ready to fight. Finally, the order came from above: "In the name of eternal justice, in the name of your queen, defend the kingdom!"

Then there was a loud battle cry and there were only buzzing heaps to be seen. A young bee, who wanted to attack first, had not waited for the queen's order. He was also the first to die. He stung the hornet, but his enemy caught him. The other bees, emboldened by his brave act, only became more eager to fight and launched a fierce counterattack. The hornets had a hard time. But hornets are an old breed and trained to fight. They were confused by the attack of the bees, but bee stings don't go through hornet shields and they were many, and a hornet is many times larger than a bee.

But the bee queen had been right with her tactics. They made it difficult for the enemy and the hornets succumbed. On the side of the bees, there were also many injured and dead bees. The bees that still lived became angrier and fought even harder. Gradually, the tumult of the battle became calmer. The loud call of the hornets outside was no longer answered by the intruders inside. Their number was halved.



"We have been betrayed," said the leader. "The bees were prepared."

The hornets were gathered on the silver fir. Pale and trembling with battle rage, the warriors stood around their leader, who was in terrible inner conflict. What should he do? Be cautious or give in to his urge to plunder? He chose caution. His entire tribe was threatened with destruction, and he reluctantly sent a messenger to the bees to demand the return of the captives. But there was no response.

The leader, now very afraid that everyone inside was dead, quickly sent another messenger. "Be quick!" he shouted, while placing a white jasmine leaf in the messenger's hand. "The people will come soon, and then we will be lost. Tell the bees that we will leave them alone forever if the captives are handed over to us."

The messenger ran away, waving his white signal at the entrance. The bee queen was immediately informed, and she sent her assistant to negotiate. And she sent this answer back:

"We will hand over the dead to you. There are no captives. All hornets who have entered our territory are dead. We do not believe your promise never to return. If you want to continue the fight, we are ready to fight until the last bee."

The leader of the hornets hesitated. He preferred to take revenge, but reason prevailed.

"We will come back," he said. "How could this happen to us? Are we not a more powerful than the bees? How do I tell our queen about this defeat? There must be treachery somewhere."

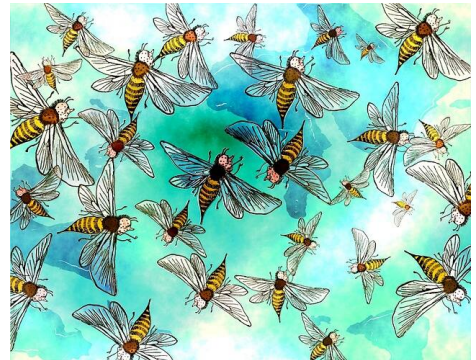
An older hornet, known as a friend of the queen, answered: "It is true that we are a more powerful race, but the bees are a united people, unshakeable and loyal to their state. That is a great source of strength, and it makes them irresistible. None of them would ever become a traitor. They think of the welfare of all and not of themselves."

The leader hardly listened. "I do not care about the wisdom of a simple bee. I am a bandit and will die as a bandit. But it is useless to continue the fight now." And he sent this message to the bee queen:

"Give us back our dead. We will withdraw."

"We must be wary of deception," said the bee queen when she heard the hornets' decision, but she had twenty-one dead hornets removed from the city. The battle was over, the bees had won.

But at what cost? Not a single bee could enjoy the delightful summer morning full of fragrant blossoms. But when it was noon, all the bees resumed their usual tasks. The bees did not celebrate their victory and did not spend time mourning their dead. Every bee carried their pride and sorrow quietly in their heart and went back to work.



Chapter 17: Maya the Bee Becomes Friends with the Queen

The noise of the battle woke Maya from a short sleep. She wanted to go outside immediately to help defend the city, but she realized that she was still too weak. A struggling heap of bees and a hornet came rolling towards her. Eventually, the exhausted hornet fell down. He fought as long as he could, without complaining, but then had to give up the fight. The bees hurried back to the entrance.

Maya's heart was pounding. She flew to the hornet who lay curled up but still

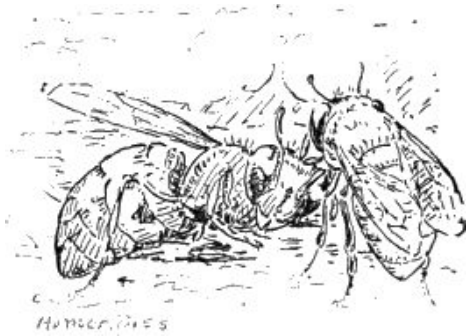
breathing. When Maya saw that he was still alive, she brought him some water and honey. But he shook his head and waved her away with his hand.

"I take what I want," he said proudly. "I don't care about gifts."

"Oh," said Maya, "I just thought you might be thirsty."

The young officer-hornet smiled at her and then said, not sad, but with a strange seriousness: "I must die."

The little bee couldn't think of a reply. For the first time in her life, she seemed to understand what it meant to have to die.



"If only there was something I could do," she said and burst into tears. But the hornet did not answer anymore, he was dead.

Maya never forgot what she had learned from this brief farewell. She now knew that her enemies were creatures like her, who also loved life. She thought back to the flower elf who had told her about his rebirth when spring came. She now wanted to know if that was true for other creatures as well. "I'll just believe it is," she said softly to herself.

Then she was called to the queen. Maya was very shy and trembling on her legs. There was a solemn atmosphere because some of the queen's officers had not survived the battle. Yet there was also joy. The queen stood up, walked to little Maya, and took her in her arms. Maya had never expected this, and she was so deeply touched by this gesture that she burst into tears.

All the bees were moved. They were all very grateful for the brave act of this little bee. Now Maya had to tell how she had learned about the hornets' plan and how she had managed to escape from the terrible prison. Maya told about the dragonfly with her glistening wings, about the grasshopper, about Thekla the spider and Puck, and how Bobbie had helped her so much. When she talked about the flower elf and the humans, it became very quiet in the beehive.

"Ah," said the queen with a smile, "who would have thought flower elves were so beautiful? Their song is also wonderful."

Maya continued her story about the hornets, and all the bees listened breathlessly.

"Terrible," said the queen, "truly terrible..."

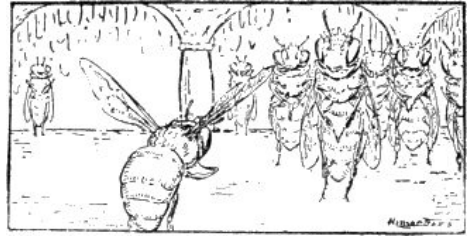
"And so," Maya concluded, "I came home. And I ask Your Majesty for forgiveness."

But no one blamed the little bee for running away from the hive.

"You did not forget your home and your people," said the queen kindly. "In your heart, you were loyal. So we do not banish you. From now on, you will stay by my side and help me with state affairs. In that way, you can use everything you have learned during your adventures for your people and your country."

Then there was an approving cheer.

So ends the story of the adventures of Maya the Bee. They say she did a lot of good work for her bee colony and was very beloved. She now lives as an old lady on her pension honey. Sometimes, she goes to talk to the young bees in the evening, who like to listen to all the adventures she has had.



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