



Why Mole Moved Underground

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Animals

Mole was laboriously climbing up the tree trunk to get to the bees' nest as there was nothing he liked as much as baby bees for breakfast – with a little, sweet honey on top. His long sharp front claws hooked into the bark holding up his heavy rump and useless hind legs. The big, flat paddles on his back feet scrambled to keep his body compacted. He knew that once the bees discovered him, he would want to present as small a target as possible.

Finally, he heard buzzing above him and saw the beautiful sponge-like structure of the beehive. Soon he could smell breakfast. His tummy rumbled.

Without warning his right claws slipped, and he hung by only the left paw. His breathing raced and he pressed himself against the trunk, the rough bark making impressions in his cheek. He scrambled to get a grip and finally managed to catch hold. For a few minutes he just hung there trying to steady his heart rate. Once it had slowed from hunting cheetah to walking deer pace, he started inching his way up again driven by his rumbling tummy. Now, he could smell the hive and knew from experience he would soon be discovered.

In the beehive, the queen was receiving reports of the approaching mole.

'Not again,' she spat. 'Every few weeks he crawls up here and we fight him. He is costing us many good bees as well as all the babies he eats – and the work to repair the hive.' She gnashed her mandibles together. 'Make ready for battle,' she called to the fighter bees.

‘Wait!’ A young drone came forward. ‘I have an idea of what we can do to get rid of him – once and for all.’

The queen pinned the young bee with her stare, she did not like being interrupted, but the young drone continued. ‘Please your majesty,’ he bowed low in front of the queen waving his antennae in supplication. ‘Please may I speak to him. I have an idea.’

The queen chewed quickly but she wanted to get rid of the pesky mole and held her temper. Beckoning him closer, ‘tell me,’ she barked.

‘I must be getting stealthier,’ Mole thought to himself as he was almost at touching distance without being attacked. He was studying the changes to the hive construction since his last visit when a young bee crawled out of the entrance door. Mole starred at him. He had never seen a bee close-up and took note of the beautiful stripes. This was certainly strange, even more so when the bee crawled towards him instead of taking flight. Before he could decide what to do the bee started.

‘You’re up high, my friend.’ He pointed towards the ground. ‘See how small everything looks.’ Without wanting to Mole turned his head and looked down. His stomach lurched. The flowers were now a sea of yellow and he had to strain his eyes to pick out one individual flower.

His mouth went dry as a bird’s dust bath while all his muscles tensed and he pressed himself into the bark. Sweat sprang onto his face making his snout wet and his claws slippery. He quickly looked up at the bee, but the damage was done. He felt fear.

‘Now, friend,’ continued the bee. ‘Now you see how high up you are – and you don’t even have wings. Very brave.’ He flexed his own wings in front of the terrified mole.

The mole shook his head slightly. ‘But I must eat or I will starve,’ he whined.

The bee crawled closer and whispered, ‘I know where there’s an abundance of food for such one as you. Down there.’ The bee pointed but this time Mole kept his eyes firmly upwards.

While they had been talking a whole swarm of bees had slowly crawled out of the entrance and had lined up on the trunk behind the one bee. Eighty wide and ten deep.

With a sigh Mole realised that he had to climb through all those bees to get to his breakfast and he could not

even eat the ones he passed. As fighter bees they had a very bitter taste and his tongue burned when he bit into one.

‘Tell me more,’ he said with a sigh and nodded to the bee.

‘If we climb down I can show you,’ said the bee, slowly moving into the face of the mole forcing him to awkwardly climb down backwards. The bee matched him step by step.

When he finally felt the tree spreading out under his hind legs he let himself drop. There he lay on his back shaking in the sun, breathing deeply.

The bee quickly flew over to one of the deep crevasses by the tree roots. This he scrutinised and then with a curt nod called to the mole.

‘Come over. Here’s a nest of worms. They’re delicious and you don’t have to climb or get stung to get at them.’ He danced around excitedly.

Mole pulled himself up. His nose twitched. It certainly smelled nice. He picked up speed. As he got closer he dropped his nose to the ground. Delicious.

‘They’re down here, just dig below that root,’ the bee urged.

Mole tried, but he only made scratches in the ground. His whole body shook from the mouth-watering smell.

‘It’s not working,’ he growled. He starred longingly up at the bee hive far above him but then scraped at the soil again, the smell driving him on.

After a few more minutes of Mole frantically gouging the ground the bee climbed onto the root.

‘Maybe we can help. As good neighbours.’

Mole stopped and looked up expectantly.

‘You know how your hind feet are good for digging but your front ones are not. Maybe we can help you dig.’

Now, the mole was very interested. ‘How?’ he demanded.

‘Well, you’ve been stung before,’ the bee started. ‘And you know the pain goes away after a while.’

‘Yes,’ the mole said eagerly, the delicious worm smell in his nostrils.

‘Well, there’s magic in our stingers. If we anaesthetise your paws with our stings they will dig better so you can get to the worms.’

‘How?’

‘That, my friend is our magic and I cannot tell you, otherwise it might not work.’

The bee was interrupted by an insistent growl from Mole’s stomach.

‘OK, do it,’ growled Mole and held out his paws.

‘Close your eyes.’

‘What – no.’

‘Otherwise our magic won’t work. Lay your paws on this flat rock.’

Mole looked sideways at the bee.

‘To help the magic work. To get your breakfast.’

‘Oh, OK.’

Mole put his paws on the stone and closed his eyes firmly.

‘You’ll hear some loud buzzing, it’s just our magic working,’ said the bee. ‘Move your paws a bit closer together.’

Mole readjusted his position. ‘Just get it over with.’ He prepared himself for the bee stings.

‘Crash,’ he felt a push of wind against his face just before indescribable pain in his paws. As his eyes flew open he saw a large flat stone lying where his paws had been. A scream of pain rang through the woods as he pulled backwards but his paws were stuck. He wriggled them out carefully.

As the pain subsided, he hurried back to the tree and started to dig to finally fill his belly. He made good progress and the first worm was delicious but crunched between his teeth leaving grit on his tongue. He spat

again and again to clear his mouth.

The mole still had a craving for baby bees. His tummy rumbled and his mouth moved into a smile at the thought of their deliciousness. Holding up his front paws he sighed as he realised, he would never be able to climb a tree again. He starred wistfully up at the bees' nest before he began digging a tunnel to hide away in shame.

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