

Winnie-the-Pooh and the Bees



By A A Milne

Once upon a time, a very long time ago now, about last Friday, Winnie-the-Pooh lived in a forest all by himself. One day when he was out walking, he came to an open place in the middle of the forest, and in the middle of this place was a large oak-tree, and, from the top of the tree, there came a loud buzzing-noise.

Winnie-the-Pooh sat down at the foot of the tree, put his head between his paws and began to think. First of all he said to himself: "That buzzing-noise means something. You don't get a buzzing-noise like that, just buzzing and buzzing, without it meaning something. If there's a buzzing-noise, somebody's making a buzzing-noise, and the only reason for making a buzzing-noise that I know of is because you're a bee."

Then he thought another long time, and said: "And the only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey." And then he got up, and said: "And the only reason for making honey is so that I can eat it." So he began to climb the tree. He climbed and he climbed and he climbed, and as he climbed he sang a little song to himself. It went like this:

Isn't it funny

How a bear likes honey?

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

I wonder why he does?

Then he climbed a little further ... and a little further ... and then just a little further. By that time he had thought of another song.

It's a very funny thought that, if Bears were Bees,

They'd build their nests at the bottom of trees.

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And that being so (if the Bees were Bears),

We shouldn't have to climb up all these stairs.

He was getting rather tired by this time, so that is why he sang a Complaining Song next. He was nearly there now, and if he just stood on that branch ... Crack! "Oh, help!" said Pooh, as he dropped ten feet on the branch below him. "If only I hadn't—" he said, as he bounced twenty feet onto the next branch. "You see, what I meant to do," he explained, as he turned head-over-heels, and crashed onto another branch thirty feet below, "what I meant to do—" "Of course, it was rather—" he admitted, as he slithered very quickly through the next six branches. "It all comes, I suppose," he decided, as he said good-bye to the last branch, spun round three times, and flew gracefully into a rosebush, "it all comes from liking honey so much. Oh, help!"

He crawled out of the rosebush, brushed the prickles from his nose, and began to think again. And the first person he thought of was his friend Christopher Robin, a boy of about six. So Winnie-the-Pooh went round to visit Christopher Robin, who lived behind a green door in another part of the forest.

"Good morning, Christopher Robin," he said.

"Good morning, Winnie-the-Pooh," said Christopher Robin. "Do you happen to have a balloon?"

"A balloon?"

"Yes, I just said to myself coming along: 'I wonder if Christopher Robin happens to have a balloon?' I just said it to myself, thinking of balloons, and wondering."

"What do you want a balloon for?" Christopher Robin said.

Winnie-the-Pooh looked round to see that nobody was listening, put his paw to his mouth, and said in a deep whisper: "Honey!"

"But you don't get honey with balloons!"

"I do," said Pooh.

Well, it just so happened that Christopher Robin had been to a party the day before at the house of his friend Piglet, and he had balloons at the party. Christopher Robin had chosen a big green balloon; and one of Rabbit's relatives had chosen a big blue one, and had left it behind; and so Christopher Robin had brought both the green one and the blue one home with him.

"Which one would you like?" he asked Pooh. Pooh put his head between his paws and thought very carefully.

"Well," he said, "when you go after honey with a balloon, the best thing is not to let the bees know you're coming. Now, if you have a green balloon, they might think you were only part of the tree, and not notice you, and, if you have a blue balloon, they might think you were only part of the sky, and not notice you, and the question is: Which is most likely?"

"Wouldn't they notice you underneath the balloon?" Christopher Robin asked.

"They might or they might not," said Winnie-the-Pooh. "You never can tell with bees." He thought for a moment and said: "I shall try to look like a small black cloud. That will trick them."

"Then you had better choose the blue balloon," Christopher Robin said; and so it was decided. They both went out with the blue balloon, and Christopher Robin took his slingshot with him, just in case, as he always did.

Winnie-the-Pooh went to a very muddy place that he knew of, and rolled and rolled until he was completely covered; and then, when the balloon was blown up big, Pooh Bear let go and floated gracefully up into the sky, and he stayed there—level with the top of the tree and about twenty feet away from it.

“Hooray!” Christopher Robin shouted.

“Isn’t this wonderful?” shouted Winnie-the-Pooh down to you.

“What do I look like?”

“You look like a Bear holding onto a balloon,” Christopher Robin said.

“Not,” Pooh said anxiously, “—not like a small rain cloud in a blue sky?”

“Not very much.”

“Ah, well, perhaps from up here it looks different. And, as I said, you never can tell with bees.”

There was no wind to blow him nearer to the tree, so there he stayed. He could see the honey, he could smell the honey, but he couldn’t quite reach the honey. After a little while he called down in a loud whisper:

“Christopher Robin!”

“Hallo!”

“I think the bees suspect something!”

“What sort of thing?”

“I don’t know. But something tells me they’re suspicious!”

“Perhaps they think that you’re after their honey.”

“It may be that. You never can tell with bees.”

There was another little silence, and then he called down again:

“Christopher Robin!”

“Yes?”

“Do you have an umbrella in your house?”

“I think so.”

“I wish you would bring it out here, and walk up and down with it, and look up at me every now and then, and say ‘Tut-tut, it looks like rain.’ I think, if you did that, it would help with the trick we are playing on these bees.”

Christopher Robin laughed to himself, “Silly old Bear!” But he didn’t say it aloud because he was so fond of Winnie-the-Pooh. He went home to get his umbrella.

“Oh, there you are!” called down Pooh, as soon as Christopher Robin got back to the tree. “I was beginning to get anxious. I have discovered that the bees are now definitely Suspicious.”

“Shall I put my umbrella up?” Christopher Robin said.

“Yes, but wait a moment. We must be practical. The important bee to deceive is the Queen Bee. Can you see which is the Queen Bee from down there?”

“No.”

“A pity. Well, now, if you walk up and down with your umbrella, saying, ‘Tut-tut, it looks like rain,’ I shall do what I can by singing a little Cloud Song that a cloud might sing.”

So, while Christopher Robin walked up and down and wondered if it would rain, Winnie-the-Pooh sang this song:

How sweet to be a Cloud

Floating in the Blue!

Every little cloud

Always sings aloud.

“How sweet to be a Cloud

Floating in the Blue!”

It makes him very proud

To be a little cloud.

The bees were still buzzing as suspiciously as ever. Some of them, indeed, left their nests and flew all around the cloud as it began the second verse of this song, and one bee sat on the nose of the cloud for a moment, and then got up again.

“Christopher—ow!—Robin,” called out the cloud.

“Yes?”

“I have just been thinking, and I have come to a very important decision. These are the wrong sort of bees.”

“Are they?”

“Quite the wrong sort. So I think they would make the wrong sort of honey, don’t you?”

“Would they?”

“Yes. So I think I shall come down.”

“How?” asked Christopher Robin.

Winnie-the-Pooh hadn’t thought about this. If he let go of the string, he would fall with a bump and he didn’t like the idea of that. So he thought for a long time, and then he said: “Christopher Robin, you must shoot the balloon with your slingshot. Do you have a good rock you could sling?”

“Of course I do,” Christopher Robin said. “But if I do that, it will hurt the balloon.”

“But if you don’t,” said Pooh, “I shall have to let go, and that would hurt me.”

When he put it like this, Christopher Robin saw what he must do, so he aimed his slingshot very carefully at the balloon, pulled back on the band, and released his rock.

“Ow!” said Pooh.

“Did I miss?” Christopher Robin asked.

“You didn’t exactly miss,” said Pooh, “but you missed the balloon.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Christopher Robin, and he tried again, this time nicking the side of the balloon with his rock. The air came out slowly, and Winnie-the-Pooh floated down to the ground.

Winnie-the-Pooh’s arms were so stiff from holding onto the string of the balloon for so long that they stuck up straight in the air for more than a week, and whenever a fly came and settled on his nose he had to blow it off with a “pooh!” And I think—but I am not sure—that that is why he was always called Pooh.