

Frances the Firefly



Frances the Firefly wanted to grow up quickly, but there were one or two things she had to learn first...

Deep in the middle of a forest far away was the Kingdom of the Insects. They were a friendly bunch who worked together to build a land where everyone had a purpose.

The spiders spun silky, silvery webs to decorate the land and fill it with splendour.

The ants, who were immensely strong, built all the houses. And the bees ran the honey factories, making sure that everyone had enough delicious honey to eat.





The fireflies had a very special job. Because they could make their tails glow, they lit up the forest at night time, so that the other insects could see in the dark.

Every evening, after the sun had sunk below the trees, they flew up into the sky with their tail torches glowing, and shone like rays of sunlight. Nobody needed street lamps in the Kingdom of the Insects!





There was one little firefly called Frances, who wanted to join the others in the sky at night.

She watched them take off and begged to go with them. But they told her she was too young. "You can't make your tail glow brightly enough yet," they said kindly.



“I shall practise until I can make it glow properly,” she thought. She flapped her wings furiously, trying with all her might, but her tail hardly glowed at all. This made her feel very sad.

The other fireflies said, “Don’t worry, Frances. One day you will be old enough to join in with the grown-ups.” Frances felt that day was so far off, it would never come.





A few nights later, Frances was sitting on a twig in the forest, feeling very sorry for herself. Suddenly, something tapped her sharply on the shoulder.



It was Charlie the Cockroach. Charlie was a naughty young insect who was always getting into trouble. He knew why Frances was upset, and he thought he would play a trick on her.



"I've got something exciting to show you, Frances," said Charlie. "Come with me." He led her to his hiding place, pushed a leaf to one side and pointed. It was a box of matches!

"Oh Charlie, where did you get these?" asked Frances. "Matches are dangerous, Mummy said so."





“I found them on the kitchen table at home,” Charlie chuckled. “And nobody has noticed that they’re missing yet.”

Charlie leaned over and whispered in Frances’s ear. “If you strike one, you can have a tail torch of your own, and be like the grown-up fireflies.”

Frances wanted to be grown up, so with Charlie's help she lit the match. At once a bright glow shone all around her.

"Fly up, fly up with it!" yelled Charlie with delight.



Frances flew up and up. "Just wait till everyone sees what I can do," she thought. But she was too pleased with her lovely bright light to notice that the flame was growing larger and larger. It came creeping up the match until it reached her wings and burned them.



The flame hurt Frances so much that she dropped the match, which fell down to the forest below.



The match landed on some dry leaves and twigs on the forest floor, and of course they started to burn. The flames spread quickly, and it was only a matter of minutes before the whole forest was alight.



All the good work that the insects had done was ruined.

The houses were destroyed, and the honey factories burnt to cinders.



Next morning, when the fire had finally been put out, the insects held an emergency meeting. Many of them had been badly burned, including Frances, whose blackened wings were still very painful.



King Chrysalis, a grand butterfly who ruled the Kingdom of the Insects, rose to speak: “We must rebuild our land at once, and make it beautiful again.” He looked down at Frances, who was feeling very ashamed of herself.

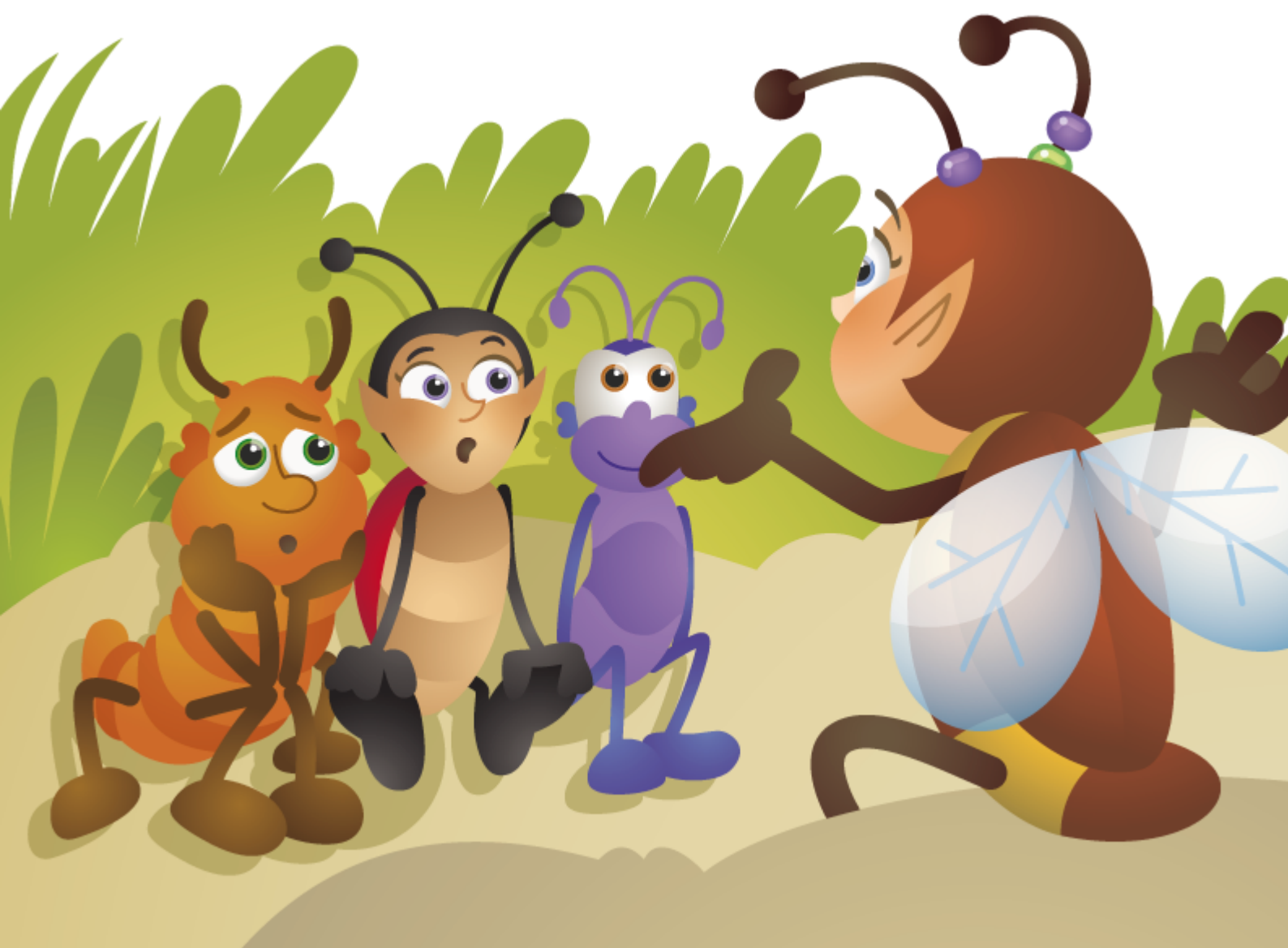


“I hope you now understand how dangerous fire can be,” he said to her in a stern voice.



Frances had indeed learned her lesson. She helped the rest of her friends rebuild the houses and factories, but she was also given a special job to do. Every now and then she gathered together all the younger insects and told them her story.

They would sit and listen to her tale, and understand why they should never play with matches.





And what about Charlie the Cockroach? He was sent away from the Insect Kingdom in disgrace. Even today, you can sometimes see him scuttling amongst the litter in towns and villages, looking for something to eat.



Don't forget, never play with matches or lighters!



Points for grown-ups to remember:

- Always keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.
- Never leave children alone at home.
- Don't let children play near a fire, or leave their toys too close to a fire.



Children:

If you see matches or a lighter lying around, tell your mummy or daddy or another grown-up. You should never play with matches, as they can be dangerous and, like Frances, you could be badly burned.



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