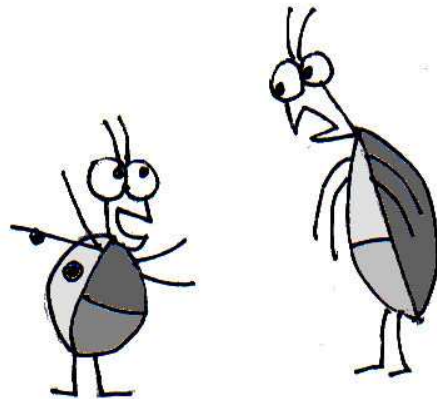


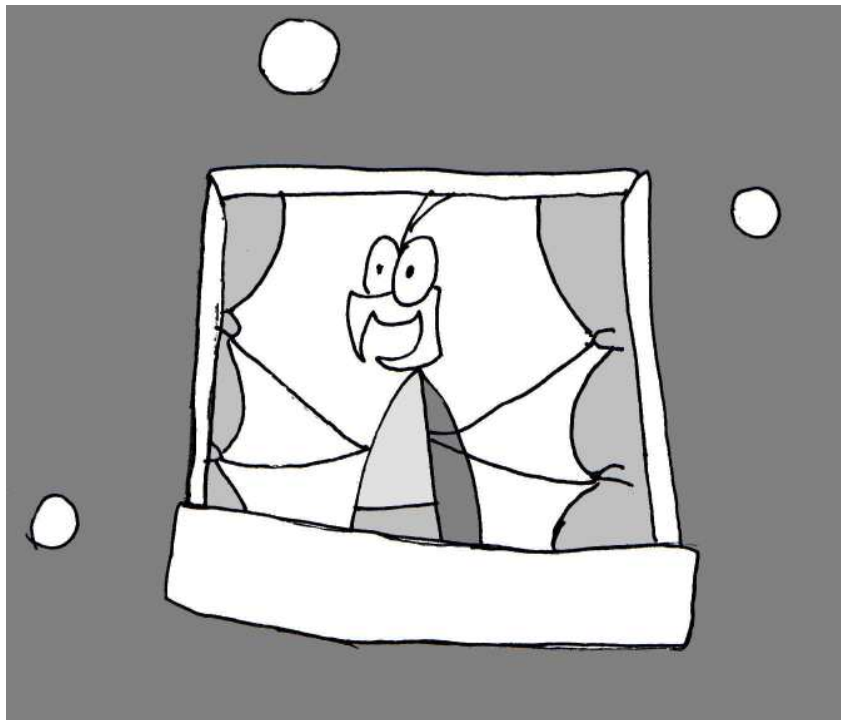
Big Beetle Learns to Fly

By Adrian Tchaikovsky

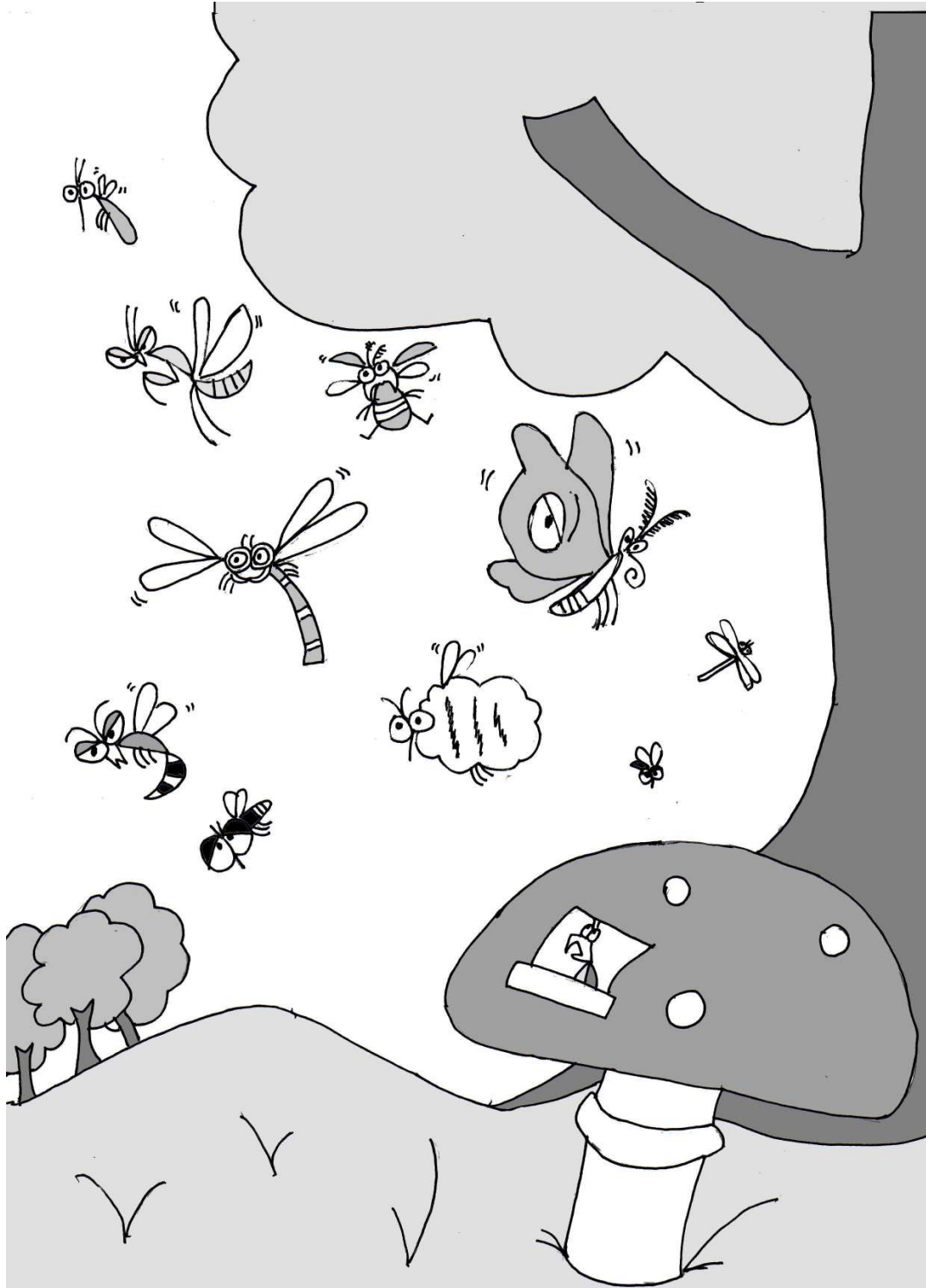


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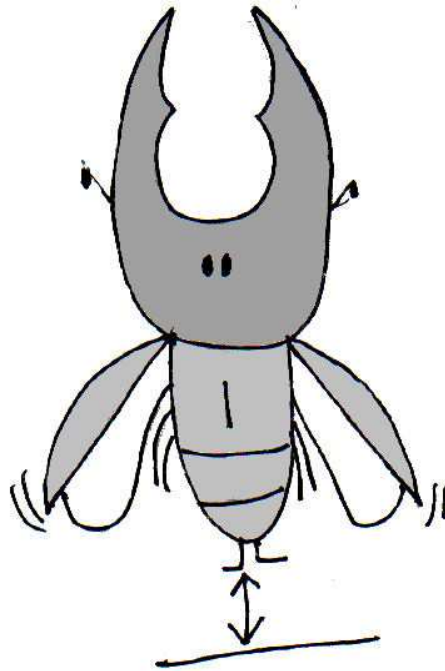
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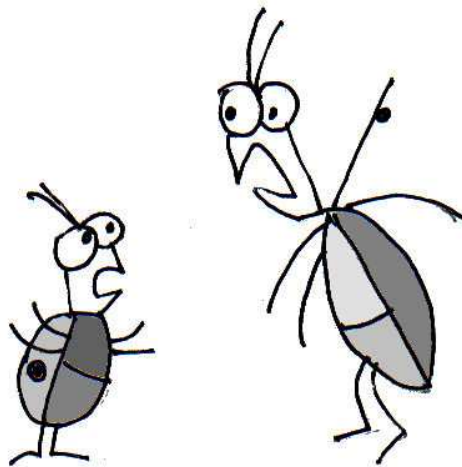
One day Big Beetle woke up and went over to his window.



The air was full of flying insects of all kinds.
“I wish I could fly,” said Big Beetle. “All sorts of insects can fly.”

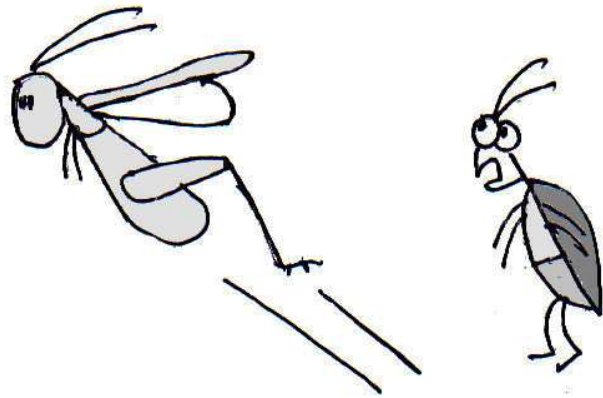


“Even cousin Stag Beetle can fly a little.”



When he went outside he found his friend Small Helpful Beetle and Big Beetle explained that he wanted to be able to fly. “Ask Grasshopper,” said Small Helpful Beetle. “She can fly.”

Big Beetle went and asked Grasshopper. “You’re a big insect, but you can still fly. How do you manage it?”

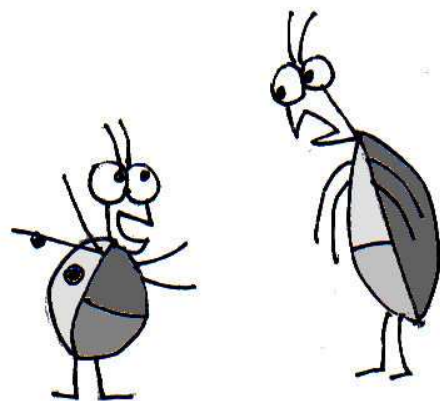


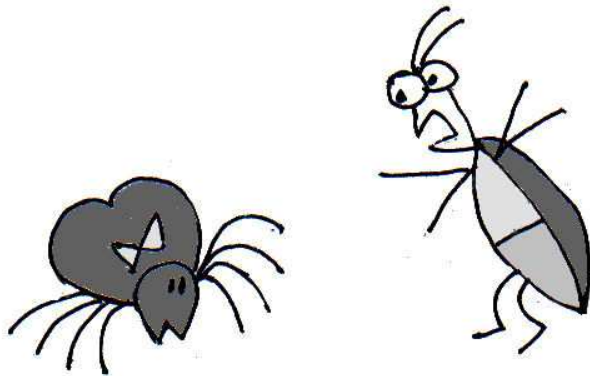
“I jump,” said Grasshopper, and did. He jumped into the air and spread his wings, and flew away.



“That’s how I’ll do it,” said Big Beetle, and he spent a long time trying to jump in the air. All that happened was that he found that, not only could he not fly, he couldn’t jump very well either.

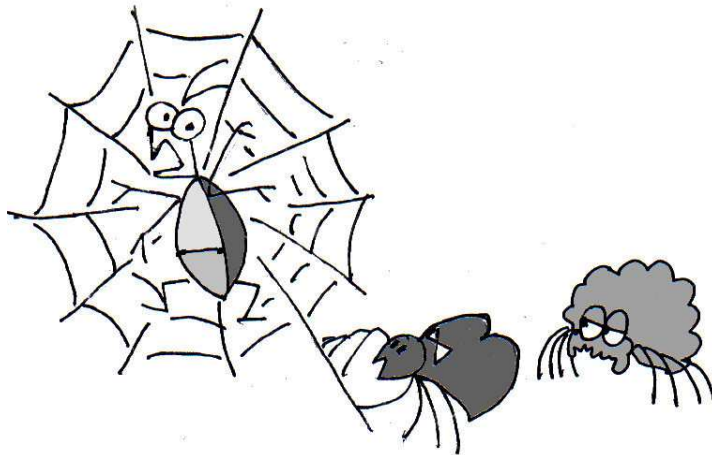
“Ask the Spiders,” suggested Small Helpful Beetle. “Everyone knows that they’re very clever.”





So Big Beetle went to ask Small Spider if she knew how to fly.

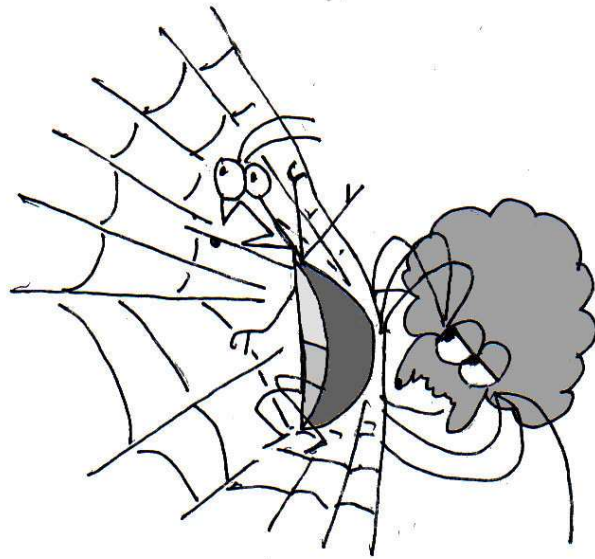
“I don’t have wings myself,” Small Spider said, “but my silk is very springy. We can use it to throw you into the air.”

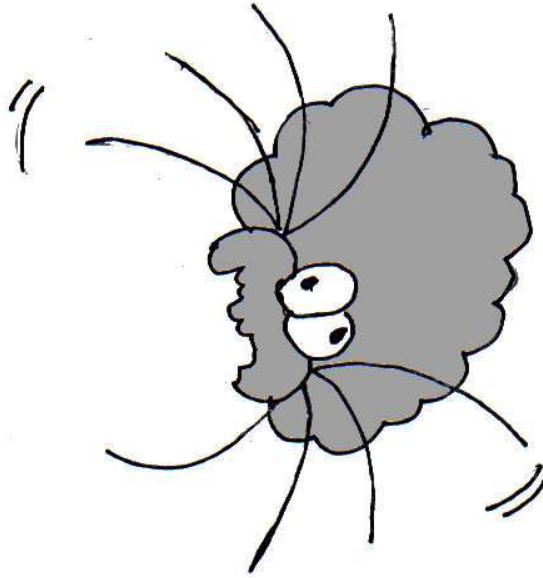


She built a big web, and Big Beetle sat in the middle of it.

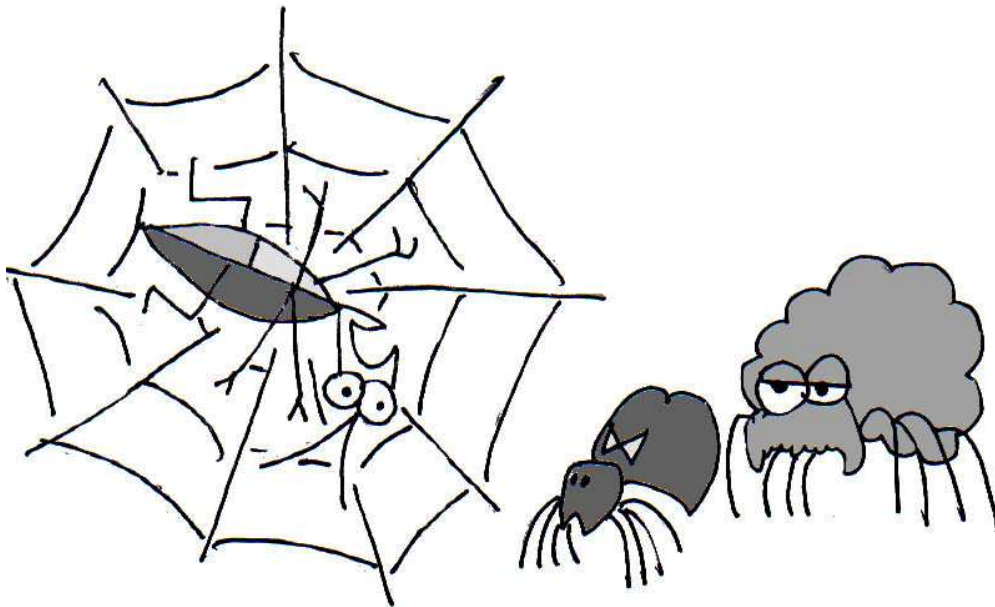
Then they got Large Hairy Spider to pull back the web as far as it would go.

“Now!” said Big Beetle, and Large Hairy Spider let go of the web.



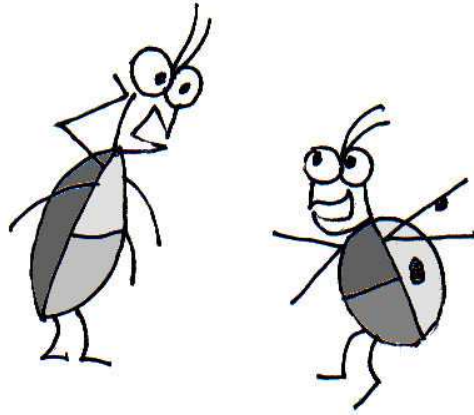


Twang!

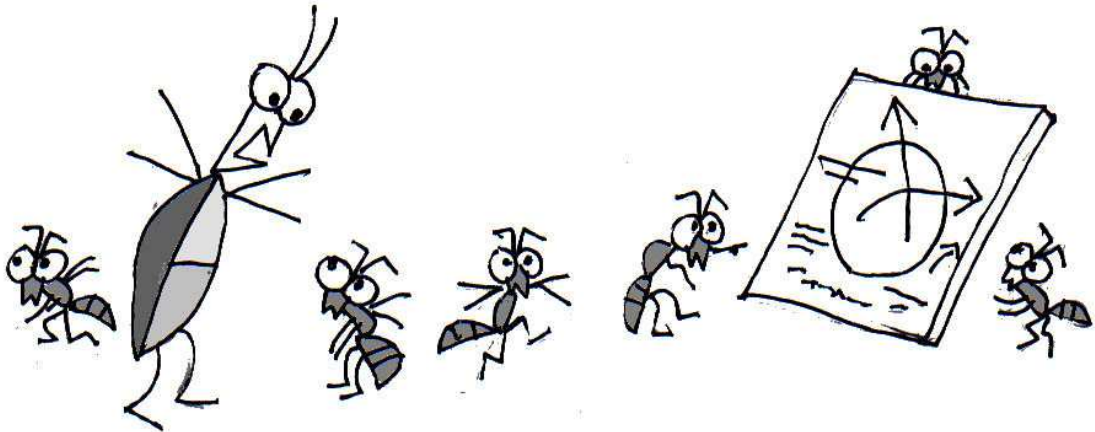


“I’m flying!” cried Big Beetle, but he was not. The web was too sticky, and all he did was bounce about in the middle of it.

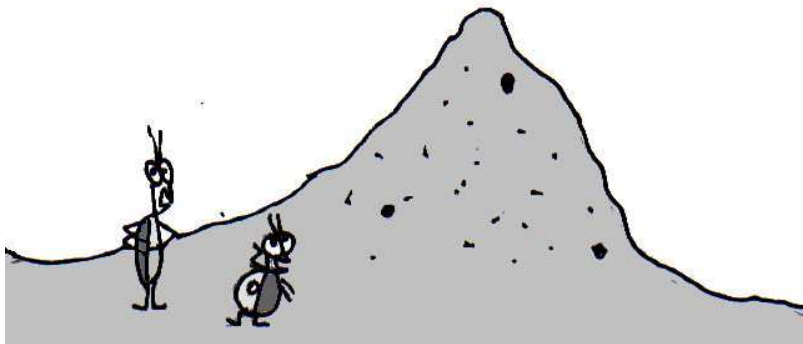
“Ask the Ants,” said Small Helpful Beetle next. “Maybe they can build you something to help you get into the air.”



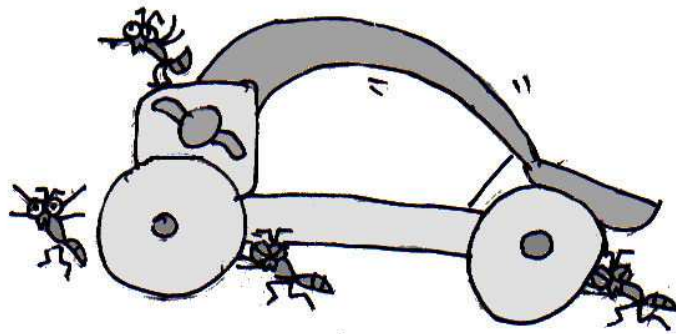
So Big Beetle went to speak to the Ants.



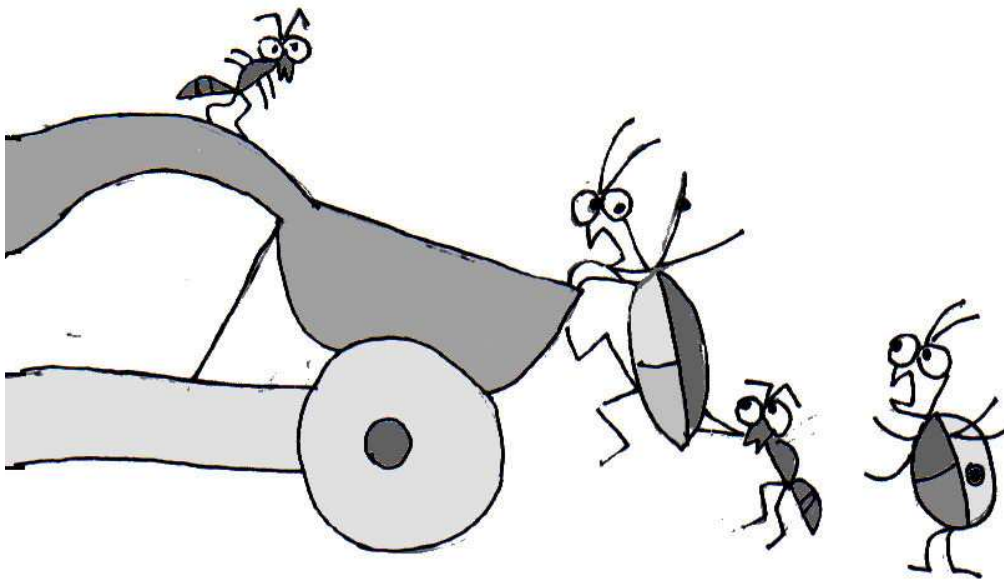
They couldn't fly either and they were very excited about the idea. Before Big Beetle could even explain what he wanted they were drawing up complicated plans.



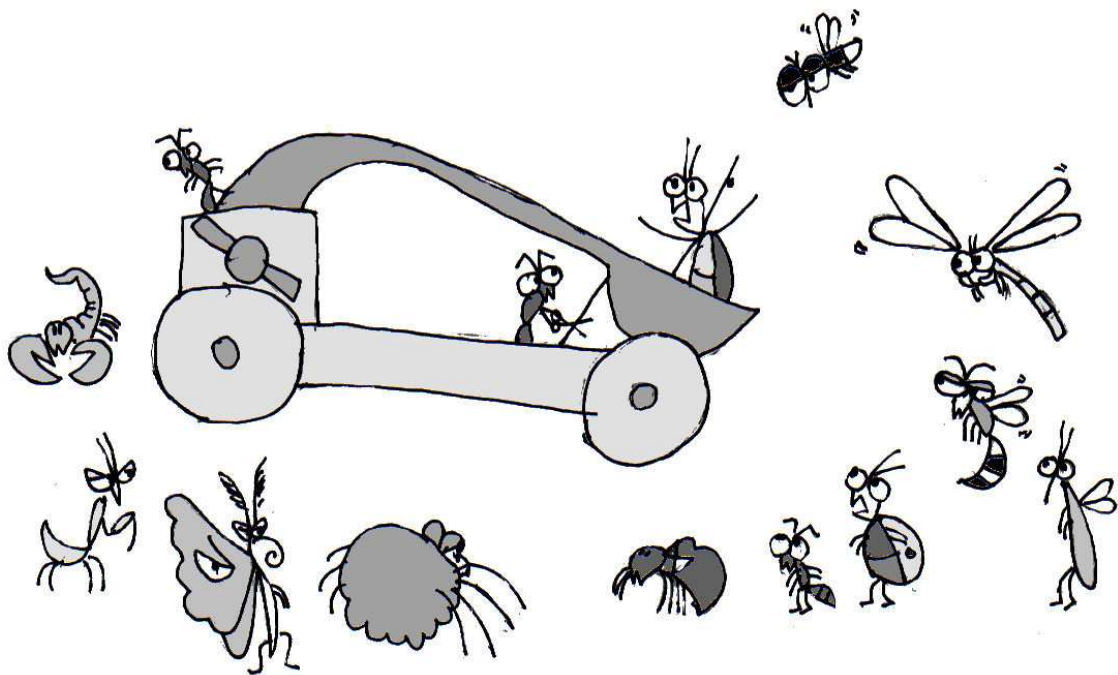
Then there was a lot of banging and hammering from the Ants' nest.



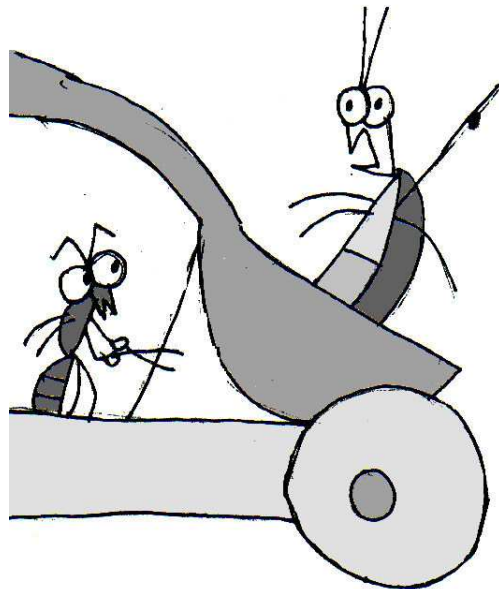
And at last they wheeled out an enormous machine. “This is our catapult!” they announced proudly. “With this, you will fly high in the air.”



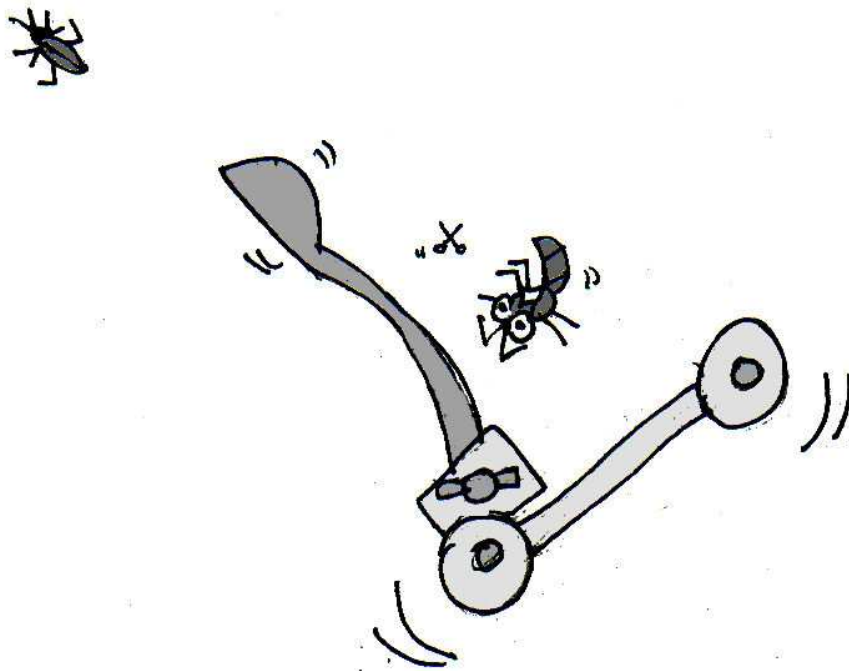
Small Helpful Beetle thought this sounded dangerous but Big Beetle was overjoyed. “At last,” he said, “I will be able to fly.” So he climbed up onto the arm of the catapult and told the Ants to get it ready to work. “You must let it go when I say ‘now’,” he told them.



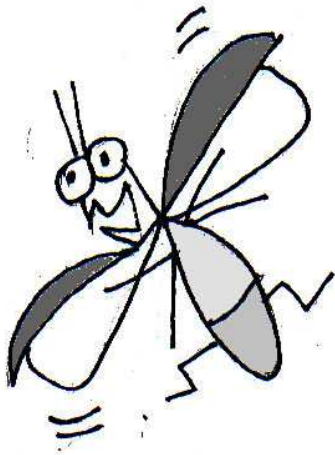
A crowd of insects had gathered by now, and Big Beetle prepared to make a speech.



“Many of you said that I could never fly,” he told them, “but now-“

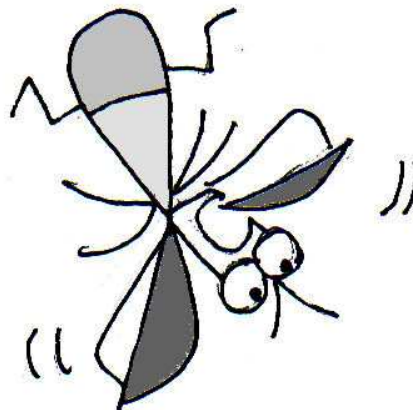


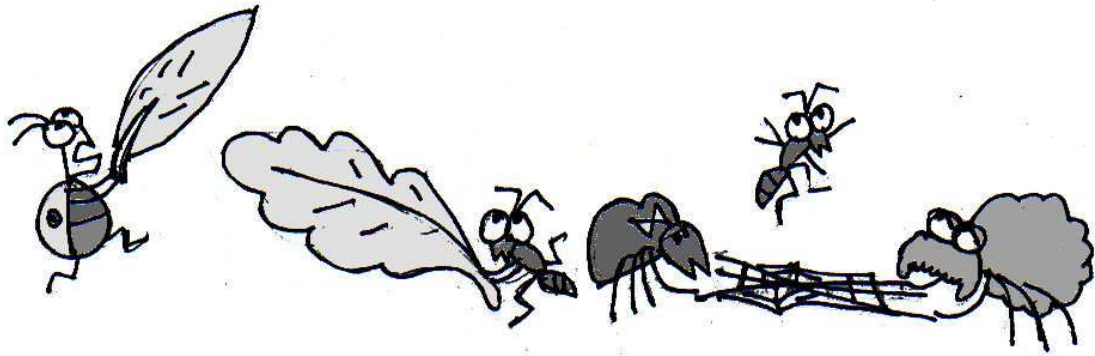
Twang! Because he had said 'now' the Ants let the catapult go, and Big Beetle disappeared into the air.



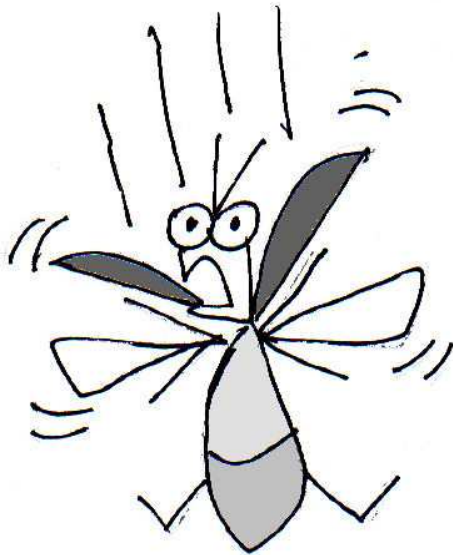
"I'm flying! I'm flying!" he cried.

And then: "I'm falling, I'm falling!"





On the ground the insects rushed around with leaves to try to catch him, and the Spiders spun webs.

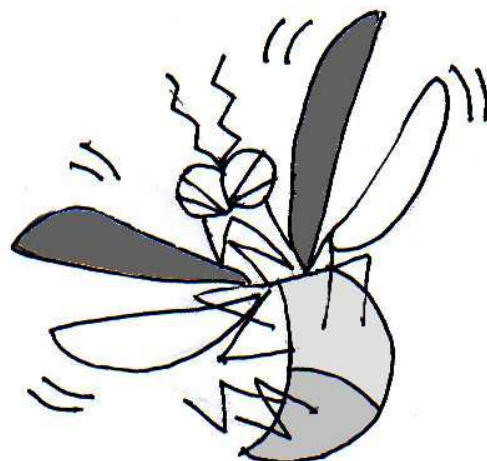


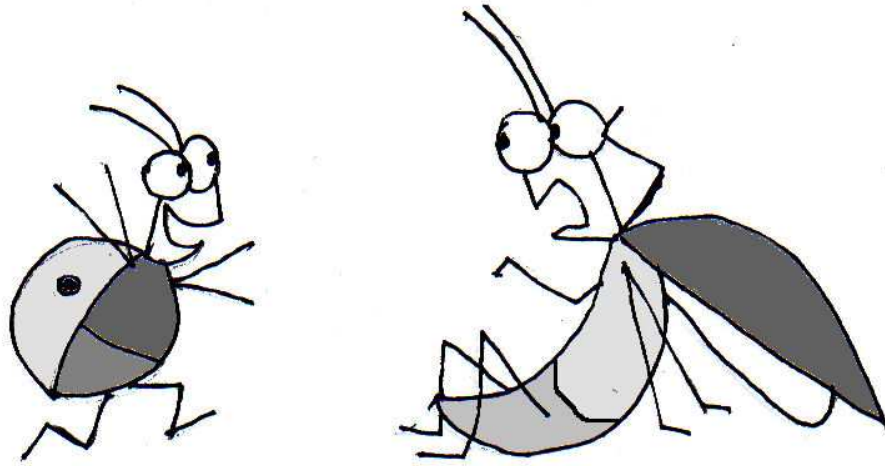
Big Beetle could see the ground coming closer. He spread his wings and flapped them with all his might.

Closer, and closer, and closer came the ground until...

It was only an inch away...

But Big Beetle didn't touch it. He stayed just an inch off the ground, with his wings flapping so fast they were a blur.

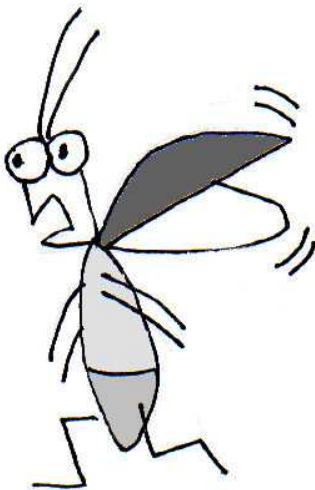




“You’re flying!” cried Small Helpful Beetle. Big Beetle was so surprised that he stopped flying and sat down.

“So what was the secret of flying?” Small Helpful Beetle asked him.

“Well,” Big Beetle said, “Now that I’ve been high up in the air, I think the secret of flying is to stay as close to the ground as possible,”



And he went home, with his wings flapping, flying so very low that his feet were still touching the ground.