

There it was again, the yellow ocean. Thousands and thousands of dazzling yellow blossoms and above the blue sky. Josy's bees flew to and fro from the hive to the field and back again. Back and forth and back and forth. As if they'd have to harvest all the world's flowers, as if only they were assigned to do so, as if they only had this one day. Fascinated Josy watched them. It was incredible, nature exploded these days, not only behind the house, but everywhere in the gardens, in backyards, along waysides, along the course of a stream, on wildflower meadows and in parks. Plums, pears, chestnuts. Lilac, poppy, lungwort. And dandelion, of course. And cuckoo flower. Blossoms all over. And the wind carried the pollen in every ever so small nook, through every ever so narrow gap. Like fine desert sand it covered tables and chairs, lamps and windowsills. Josy's mother couldn't keep up with dusting any longer. Josy stood at the end of the garden and looked across the large rapeseed field that stretched endlessly into the landscape. Rapeseed, nothing but rapeseed. The yellow looked surreal. At that moment her mobile rang, she pulled it out of her trouser pocket and answered.

"So, what are the ladies up to?", she heard Alma's familiar voice. "They are busy", Josy answered. "All day long they're out and about. Luckily, they don't have a long way to go. The rapeseed is blooming. And how it is blooming!"

"Soon we'll have to extract the first honey."

"Honey, oh yes!"

"Have you looked for queen cells?"

"Sure."

"When?"

„Yesterday “.

„And? “

„Nothing. Only queen cups. No eggs “, Josy said.

"And you really looked thoroughly?"

"First me, then daddy. Even with a torch."

"I could come over. Just to be on the safe side."

"Josy! "That was the voice of Josy's mother.

"Wait a sec", Josy said into the phone and turned around. Her mother stood on the terrace. Her index fingers were pointed at her head like two red blinking arrows, pling, pling, pling. Josy understood immediately. Where – is – your – beekeeper's hat? She moaned quietly and rolled her eyes.

"What's the matter?" Alma asked.

"Nothing. Everything's ok", Josy answered calmly.

“So, am I supposed to come?”

“No, not necessary”.

“Are you sure?”

“Sure. Everything under control.”

„Fine, then until Thursday. “

„Yes, until Thursday. “Josy took a deep breath and put away her mobile.

“Child, where do you have your beekeeper’s hat?” Josy’s mother called in an unreasonably loud voice across the garden.

Josy tilted her head to the side, smiled cutely and shouted: “It’s in the basement.”

What a fuss her mother always made. She wore the stupid veil-thing often enough. Besides her animals were peaceful and friendly, a hundred percent meek. How often was she supposed to tell her? When would she finally get it? When would she ever get anything concerning her, Josy, and the bees? But did her mother even want that? Figure something out? Understand. Comprehend.

All of a sudden Josy had the overwhelming wish to make her mother nervous, to provoke her, to drive her a wee bit up the wall. That’s why she now slowly and with small steps walked sideward towards the beehive, closer and closer to the humming colony; and even though her mother stood pretty far away from her she could see on her face that she was already gasping for air.

Finally, Josy stood still, tilted her head back and with closed eyes let her bees buzz around her. Never, absolutely never Josy knew for sure would her mother now come and pick her up personally. For the rest of her life, or at least as long as honey bees lived in the garden, she’d anyway probably spend sunny days only on the terrace. And yet the garden was so lovely at the moment. The plants that Alma had dropped off grew splendidly, green and blossoms all over, one could hardly see the earth in the flowerbeds. Josy stretched her arms towards the heaven and began to circle with them in the air. She knew that her mother was still watching her, she wouldn’t take her eyes off her daughter for one second now, not for one second.

Josy’s arms whirled through the air. Josey was the trainer in the circus ring.

The tank in their abdomen was once again full to the brim. And heavy. That was especially due to the nectar of around a hundred blossoms stored in it. The bee took off. It wasn’t far from home. Short distance. No obstacles on the way. For hours, she’d been flying the same route, from the hive to the field and back again, the evening was still hours away. Rapeseed, rapeseed, rapeseed. The blossom it had just left had been its 1003rd rapeseed that day. There was no end to the blooming. Nor to work. To be a collecting bee was a very arduous business, the most arduous a bee could be exposed to. It often ended with tatty wings and always with death. Today it was almost windless. No rain, only a few clouds. So, ideal

weather for flying. The bee sped across the field. On its way, it didn't see the luminous yellow of the blooms below, not at this speed. It was color blind. It only saw colors when it headed for blossoms, but now on its way home it paid attention to other things. Trees, bushes, walls, masts. Black and white landmarks. Or obstacles. The human being close to her hive was such an obstacle. A moment ago, it hadn't been there, no, definitely not. Now, it stood directly and unfortunately in its flight lane and its suspended, circling arms made the direct approach to the entrance of the hive virtually impossible for the bee. In slow motion, the bee's eyes captured the swift movements, the bee tried to swerve, to the left, to the right, between the fingers. At that moment, it was seized by a hand and hurled through the air. The bee spun over twice, faltered, staggered but then recovered again immediately and switched. To attack. The unloading of the nectar could wait. The bee changed its flight direction, fixed its new target and raced off.

First Josy heard the buzz, shortly afterwards her cheek itched, below the right eye, above the nostril next to the small mole. It was really just harmless itching and far from what would follow seconds later. Josy touched her face. At that moment, she felt the pain. Deep and insistent. Completely unexpected.

The bee had thrust its sting deep into the skin of the enemy. The sting was a dangerous weapon. With it the bee could kill. Only insects, but still. It was easy to pull the sting out of an insect shell, but certainly not out of the skin of a mammal or a human being. The barbs that such a sting had attached, prevented it. And thus, this bee still crouched on the human being's cheek, even though it had wanted to be gone a long time ago. It tried to get away, pulled and tugged with all its strength and finally tore from its abdomen its complete stinger apparatus including the venom sac, muscles and ganglia. That was the end. Finished. Over. The bee had reached an age of exactly 39 days. It had cleaned honeycombs, built honeycombs, looked after the queen and the brood, collected nectar and pollen from thousands and thousands of blooms and carried it home. It would have had another three to four, maximum five days to live. Now it simply fell dead into the grass today. But its sting still lived, by itself it penetrated the skin of the victim deeper and deeper and pumped and pumped venom into the wound, which emanated a distinct scent and put the guard bees sitting at the flight hole of the bee hive on alert. Immediately they took off. A small swarm. The enemy was marked, it had to be fought.

Josy opened her mouth and screamed. First silently, then with all her might. It was a scream out of the depths of her gut, loud as a siren, a rising, penetrating wail, which nobody believed would ever have an end. Josy had stemmed her legs firmly into the ground and screamed. She stood there almost sessile and screamed, her fists clenched, her eyes closed. And still screamed and saw nothing. Not her horrified mother who was dashing towards her, not the small swarm of bees, which was flying straight at her.

Only when her mother shouted "Close your mouth!" did she react. Josy closed her mouth and tore her eyes open. Had it really been her who had screamed at the top of her voice?

Her mother grabbed her hand and pulled her through the garden, across the terrace, into the house. Away from the bees. Just away. Door closed. Closed.

The mother gently pushed Josy on to a kitchen chair. Josy's breathing was fast and she whimpered quietly. Motionless, with hanging shoulders she sat there, the chin uplifted. Under her skin something seemed to grow, it spread, relentless and large. Josy let her mother examine her who in no time, with just a few, secure handles had turned the small kitchen table into an ambulance. Disinfection spray, ointment, tweezers, cool pack. She had even taken sterile compresses out of the store cupboard, even though Josy didn't bleed. For a short moment Josy was surprised about the vast assortment and about the fact that her mother kept all these things on hand in the kitchen and obviously also knew how to use them. She now took the tweezers, with the other hand she grasped Josy's chin and turned her face into the light. "Don't be afraid. Hold still" was all she now said and pressed her lips together. Josy closed her eyes and held her breath. Her eyelids fluttered. Then a short prick, that was it. The mother cleaned the tweezers with a paper towel. There lay the sting. The two of them leant over it. One end of the sting was sharp as a needle, at the other end was a brownish lump.

"Yuck", Josy said.

Her mother laughed and proudly said: "Look, I got hold of all of it, sting with stinger apparatus." She pointed with the tweezers to it and Josy was astonished that her mother knew this.

"Have you also been stung?", she asked.

"No, never." Worried her mother now scanned Josy's face with her eyes. "Does it hurt?"

Josy carefully felt her cheek. "Not too bad."

The treatment was continued. Keep still again. Spray, ointment, cool pack. In this order. The cold took away some of the pain.

A good feeling. And for Josy it was also a good feeling that her mother now pulled a chair closer, sat next to her, put an arm around her and began to stroke her hair. First her hair, then her healthy cheek and then her hair again. Josy's mother hummed the melody of a German children's ballad and Josy cuddled up to her closely. She would have loved to doze off now, here in mummy's arm, here in the kitchen. Yes, it would have been lovely if they had continued to stay silent or just spent the time with humming children's songs and maybe later with a cup of cocoa.

But now, now, of all times Josy's mother sat upright, took Josy by her shoulders and pushed her a bit away from herself. Then she began to speak: "It was predictable" she said with a suddenly changed voice.

"What?", Josy whispered and blinked only with one eye, as the other had disappeared together with the injured cheek under the cool pack.

“It had to happen at some point! I always knew. Always. From the start. “

Her mother said it in a reproachful manner and with a look as if her worst fears had just come true. As if this incident necessarily implied some kind of consequences. Josy didn't want to hear more, not the one sentence, she'd been waiting for all the time, all the weeks and that she was afraid of.

And before her mother could even catch her breath, she had leapt up and had banged the cool pack on the table. Then she ran out of the kitchen, up to her room and vehemently kicked the door closed. Josy would have liked to kick something else or torn something apart, but in a rush, she didn't find anything, which could be kicked or torn, and so she simply threw herself on to the bed, rolled on her back and stared up at the ceiling

'Mummy', she thought, 'has finally found a reason, a ludicrous, trivial reason, to ban the bees from the garden.' Josy imagined how her mother continued to develop the story downstairs in the kitchen, how she saw aggressive, out to sting swarms of bees pass through the gardens of the neighborhood.

Bees didn't do something like that. Other people were bit by their dogs, scratched by their cats or kicked by their horse. Such a kick by a horse could send one flying through the whole stable and in the worst case into the next world.

And Josy thought: 'What actually happened? I was stung – yes. By a bee – yes. By a tiny, small bee. Yes! And I'm lying on my bed and not in hospital.

Anything else? No.' Carefully Josy touched her cheek, which suddenly and oddly enough hurt quite a bit again. The pain had begun to feverishly throb and the skin was taut. Josy had the feeling a table tennis ball was under it. She turned her head to the side and looked into the mirror, which hung on one of her wardrobe doors. Josy was startled. She looked like an alien.

They had nearly gotten hold of the enemy. It really wouldn't have taken much more and they would have caught-up with him. But then suddenly an invisible wall had popped up. It had just stood in the landscape and two of them had bumped into it at full speed. They had almost died. But then again only almost. In the end, the enemy had disappeared behind the invisible wall and all seven guard bees had turned around and returned safe and sound to the hive, where they immediately took up their position at the entrance again. Guard bees were the gatekeepers at the hive, they were responsible for security and only let those bees enter that belonged to the colony. However, a few days ago they had shown mercy for once, when a whole unit of bees that had become homeless had requested admission to enter. The strangers had had copious amounts of nectar as a gift for the hosts with them, and thus they had managed to cozy up to them and beg their way into the colony.

Only a few of them had been slain by especially beastly and suspicious guard bees. Just like the bumblebee yesterday. But well it really had only itself to blame. Twice guards had

energetically shoved it outside. Twice they had taken the trouble! But the bumblebee had been after the honey and hence stubbornly persisted, or simply understood nothing. By the time it had seriously tried to intrude into the hive for a third time, several bees had pounced on it and killed it in a moment. But now all was quiet, business as usual, collecting bees flew in and out and the guard bees, with full poison sacs, sat at the flight hole and closely monitored the bustling coming and going. The bee that had just lost its life, lay contorted in the grass. It had disappeared between the thin blades. If a bird wouldn't soon devour it or a human being tread on it, then sun and air would dry, completely shrivel it within the next days, and pretty soon the bee would fall apart, crumble and then disappear completely at some point.

Josy hadn't been at school for two days. Even though the doctor had reassured her nervous parents that the dramatic swelling wasn't anything out of the ordinary and completely harmless after a bee sting, she had stayed at home for two days. Of course, she had also called Alma one day after the attack. She had come immediately. Alma smiled compassionately and declared that with the first sting it was like with the first kiss. One gave it too much weight. On the third day after the sting Josy could half way open her eyes again and the cheek didn't hurt as much anymore when she woke up. She stood in the bathroom in front of the basin and checked herself in the mirror. She found that she, alas, still looked as if she'd brushed a lamppost at full speed. She moaned quietly, and while dressing tried to imagine how her teachers and classmates would react, when she appeared with a lopsided face at school today. Even though the evening after it had happened Josy had called her friend Emma, so that she would excuse her with the teachers. But she had only told her about the prosaic fact that she had been stung by a bee, and not about what exactly the sting had done to one half of her face. Monster cheek, Moon face. Grimace. All kinds of things crossed her mind about her mirror image. She was late. The bell had already rung twice and most of the pupils had already disappeared into the classrooms, as lessons began in a few minutes. Josy hurried into the school to her room and breathlessly stopped at the door first.

There Emma discovered her. „Josy!“

The daily morning chatter and laughter, the teasing and the bickering faded, and those who had sat or stood with their back towards Josy, as if by command turned around. Everyone stared at Josy and Josy stared back. After all she only had a swollen cheek! Josy felt the blood flow into her head. She lifted her hand and said as normally as possible: “Hello.”

“Hello”, murmurs came from all sides and the first came up to Josy. “Gross”, somebody said. And: “Was that really only a bee?” Others said: “awesome!” And “mean”.

“Poor you”, Emma said and put her arm around Josy. Shortly afterwards Josy was closely surrounded by her class, like a bee queen by her colony and she heard not one silly comment. At that moment, the bell rang for the second time and Mr. Guntram energetically entered the room. He broke the group up and everyone scampered to their desk. It took quite a while until he discovered Josy's swollen face.

»Wow! «, he called and went up to her. "Josy, Josy. One shouldn't pick a fight with bees." Laughter broke out. How did Mr. Guntram know that a bee had done this to her? Josy hadn't had math lessons on her timetable this week, so no one could have told him. Mr. Guntram raised his hand and it was quiet again in the class. "Did you know the bee?", he asked.

"Well, what does knowing actually mean?", Josy said. "It's difficult to tell one bee from another. But it was one of mine." A whisper went through the class. Hadn't Emma told them that Josy kept thousands of bees in her garden? Mr. Guntram also seemed impressed. He sat on his table and put the chalk aside. "One of yours", he repeated. "So, you keep bees. How many?"

„One colony“, Josy said. „Currently around 50.000. I inherited them from my grandfather.“
"Great, inherited. And where do you have them, the bees?" "In the garden. "

„Do you keep them in Zander frames or in German standard measure?"

„Zander.“

„Aha. Plastic material or wood? “

"Wood, of course ", Josy answered.

"But isn't wood much too heavy, much heavier than plastic material"

"Not if you use frames made of Weymouth pine."

"What kind of a pine?"

"Wey-mouth."

»Ah sure. «

Mr. Guntram pensively rubbed his chin and already asked the next question. And Josy answered. And he asked again. And so on. Question, answer, question, answer, to and fro.

Josy always had something to say but was confused nevertheless. What was the point of these questions. The first in the class already giggled and whispered. Did Mr. Guntram perhaps not believe her? Maybe he didn't think her capable of keeping bees? She wasn't exactly a genius in maths.

And then Mr. Guntram said: "I would also like to get some." "Bees are en vogue right now. But my girlfriend hasn't quite agreed yet. And we don't have a garden."

"Oh". Josy couldn't think of anything else to say. Bees were en vogue? She'd never heard that one before.

Mr. Guntram got up. „We should definitely continue our discussion. “He nodded at her in a friendly way. „Fine“, Josy said. It was a strange feeling to know more about a matter than a teacher. On her way home, she still thought about the conversation with Mr. Guntram. She

hadn't expected this interest in bees from him. She was just turning into her neighborhood, when somebody called after her. "Josy! Wait a sec, Josy!" She looked behind and recognized Mirko from her class who came running along. Josy stopped and waited. "We can walk some of the way together", he called, when he had almost reached her. "Of course, only if you want to." Panting he stood in front of her. Josy didn't say a word. „By the way, since Saturday I live here." Mirko pointed to the left. Shortly Josy looked into that direction and swiftly pondered if she liked that or not. Did Mirko think they'd now always walk together? Mirko was a pale, lanky guy with dark stubble-hair. Josy assumed that he was not the sharpest knife in the kitchen, as he had to repeat the sixth grade. But in maths he was really good. Anything else? He had a wry smile. When Marko smiled his mouth turned up weirdly. Just now he wasn't smiling.

Josy looked him over. "Where do you exactly live?"

"Snow White road 5". Ennerved Mirko sucked in some air.

"Dumb name for a road. The house is ok. But Snow-White road. Pffff. Absolutely bonkers! "

Josy had to smirk. „Frog Prince road. That's where I live. Not much better." They kept walking.

"By the way, the bees, pretty cool", Mirko said.

"What? "Josy looked at him suspiciously.

„That bees belong to you. As a matter of principle. I know no one who has bees." Mirko stopped. "May I see them some time?"

"Oh, sure. "Josy stopped and pulled out her mobile. She wiped across the screen a few times and passed it on to Mirko.

"Here, these are totally recent ones. There I still have them on two frames, but here... wait... here the honey super is already on it. And, look, what's going on at the entrance. Can you see the pollen pellets?"

„Ah. "

„You don't see them? I'll zoom in closer."

"Nope. "

„What nope? "

„I thought you'd show them to me in real. Mirko shoved his hands in his trouser pockets and looked bashful. "Doesn't have to be today ", he quickly said.

„Today isn't possible anyway ", Josy said and put away the mobile.

Since the sting, she hadn't been back to see her bees. Not that she was suddenly afraid of them, not angst but respect. Alma had said she should take her time and by all means wear the beekeeper's hat. For reassurance. Silently Josy plodded along next to Mirko. And when they turned into the Frog Prince road, she only shortly called "Ciao" and ran across the street

to her house. No, she would not turn around. Otherwise, Mirko might have the idea of arranging to meet with her tomorrow morning right now. Josy pressed the doorbell. Her mother opened and said: "Alma and you, you'll make honey today." Josy was surprised. "But today is Friday, I have guitar lessons."

"Already cancelled."

"Really?"

„Alma called earlier. She only has time today and the honeycombs are filled to the brim. Moreover, the weather is agreeable. It's supposed to thunder over the weekend. Alma said that during approaching thunderstorms bees like to sting and we certainly didn't need that one more time." Carefully the mother laid her hand on Josy's cheek. "Does it still hurt?" Hardly noticeable Josy shook her head. „Not really. “

She looked at her mother hesitatingly. Was there more to come? But her mother only took her backpack and then disappeared in the kitchen. Josy dashed into the basement to fetch the bee smoker and the beekeeper's hat.

She immediately put on the hat. She wanted to be with the bees before Alma reached them. While walking up the steps, she already pulled the veil in front of her face. She shortly paused at the kitchen door. Her mother stood at the sink.

„Am already gone! “, Josy said. Her mother turned around. She smiled and said: "Fine. Alma is coming right away." With two fingers Josy tapped her hat and disappeared into the garden. "I'm already looking forward to your first honey!" her mother called after her. Josy walked across the lawn, past the blooming flowerbeds and past the small cherry tree, from which five tiny, green fruits were dangling. But Josy only paid attention to the bee hive, never lost it out of sight, while she approached it with slow steps.

Once she stopped and watched her animals. Everything seemed as usual. Bees flew in and out and it wasn't to be expected that one of them planned to lunge at her. Now Josy dared to come very close and put a hand on the tin roof that was quite warm from the sun.

„Hello. Everything ok? “, she quietly said. "It's me Josy. In case you're interested: I'm back." It was a sunny afternoon, with a bit of wind. And Josy closed her eyes and listened to the soft humming of her bees.

"Josy!" She opened her eyes and saw Alma approach her with resolute, large steps and a frame in each hand. "Well, then let's get going, dear colleague", she called in a good mood and put the boxes in the grass. Josy was surprised that even Alma wore a beekeeper's hat today. "To be on the safe side!", Alma said.

She lifted Josy's veil a bit and looked at her face. "You already look quite decent again", she murmured and let the veil fall. Then she turned towards the bees, took the lid off the hive and carefully pulled a honeycomb out of the upper box. It was full of bees. Alma handed it to Josy who held it with both her hands and was astonished how incredibly heavy this comb was. And what a scent! Of honey and beeswax. „Just have a look and see how well your

ladies worked.” With her little finger Alma pointed to the many white, closed cells, which Josy’s bees were just excitedly crawling across.” Just imagine, two to three kilos of honey are in such a honeycomb.” Alma fetched a small folding knife out of her bag, gently shoved a few bees to the side and scraped the lid off a few cells. Josy saw the honey shine. Alma dipped the knife point inside, lifted up the knife and let the honey flow off the blade. Then she turned the knife around and around and around until the sweet, sticky juice could be wound like a thick string. “Perfect! It’s mature.” She was happy and took the honeycomb off Josy again. “And now: taste test. Take your finger.”

Alma held the honeycomb in front of Josy and Josy pushed her finger into the wax thus dipping it deep into the honey. The she tried. “Mmmmmm.” Josy closed her eyes. This honey, her first own honey, was world class. Sweet and warm, almost velvety. And it tasted better, so much better than any other honey she had ever tasted.

Alma nodded happily. „And now the broom, please “, she said. Josy picked up the small hand brush that Alma had put in the grass earlier and handed it to her.

It happened in the early afternoon and came as a complete surprise and like a severe storm it swept away the bees, which were just in the honey supers, from the comb, just brushed them off. Not one could hold on, all were hurled through the air. Not one was harmed. And before even one of them could get excited, before even one of them turned aggressive and went on a stinging spree, the first had already discovered the flight hole, the entrance to their hive again. Such an entrance to a hive is incredibly reassuring for a bee. And so, one after the other flew – still slightly dazed, but very determined -there and crawled dutifully back in again and up towards the place where the honey was stored. Was stored? Had been stored. All supplies were gone. Gone. Where? Oh, the bees didn’t care. After all new combs were long available. Thousands of empty cells, which they would fill with nectar. Immediately they set to work.

Alma’s kitchen looked like a laboratory. All the worktops were cleared and refurbished. And in the middle of the room, on three legs with a red crank on one side, stood a shining container, the size of a ton, made of stainless steel. That had to be the honey extractor. “Wow!”, Josy gasped when she entered the kitchen. Together with Alma she had carried the combs filled with honey into the house. One box weighed around 25 kilos. Alone Alma had heaved it from the platform of her car into the wheelbarrow and the muscles under the spring tanned skin of her upper arm had impressively bulged. Now Alma slipped a protection hood into Josy’s hand. Hoods like this were otherwise worn by nurses or doctors during operations. Alma also pulled one over her hair. And then she showed Josy with which handles and tools she could open the capped combs. That wasn’t difficult and soon after the first four honey comb frames were ready for extraction. Alma put them upright into the ton and Josy was allowed to turn the crank, first slowly, then fast. The apparatus made a humming sound and it didn’t take long and the honey began to flow. In a thick, golden strand it came out of the opening on the side and flew into a bucket. Preferably Josy would have liked to take the honey home straight away, but it still had to settle, as Alma explained,

and then it had to be skimmed and stirred. Only then was it filled into glasses. Alma promised to bring the honey over as fast as possible.

The honey harvest was the major issue at the next general meeting of the beekeeper's association. Some had brought samples, like trophies they stood on the table. If it was really true what some of them said, they had seen streams of honey this year. Josy's honey was stored in the basement, rapeseed honey, 28 glasses, brimful and another glass in the kitchen cabinet. It was already almost empty.

The chairperson cleared his throat and called for the next item on the agenda. Josy had waited for this, as the other beekeepers were supposed to decide if they wanted Josy in their association today. "Josefine Clara Bruckner", the chairperson said with a raised voice. "The young lady wants to become a member of our association." Josy nodded shyly. "Does anyone have questions for the candidate who I'm asking to briefly stand up." The candidate got up. 'Questions', Josy thought. What kind of questions? '

„What do you do when one of your swarms goes missing?“, Dieter pressed ahead. "Leave the child in peace", someone hissed. Dieter plucked his bristly eyebrows and slyly looked at Josy. "If I miss a swarm, I call Alma", Josy answered. Roaring laughter. Dieter's question was the sole question and Josy was unanimously accepted as a member of the association.

„I'm Heinz“, the man to her left said when Josy sat down. Heinz nodded at her in a friendly way. "Franz", the next one said and also nodded. Then came Willibald. And then Erika. Konrad. Werner. Wilhelm. Almost all were present today. Bernd. Dieter. Lydia. Walter. Hermann. Frieder. Hans Günther. Theo. Uwe. Karl. Henning. Jurek. And Rudi. »Alma«, Alma finally said who was the last in the row. And she laid her large, broad hand on Josy's.

It was around two weeks later, when Josy's dad once again kneeled in front of the beehive and with the help of a small torch was intensely looking into the mounted brood chamber from below. "They don't want to take off. I'm almost sure ", he said. Josy stood next to him and bent down to him. "I said so ", she whispered into his ear. „Those are just empty cups. Today and yesterday and the day before yesterday and three days ago and... "Josy's father made a gesture, as if wanting to chase away a pesky fly. Josy fell silent.

Her father took his beekeeper's hat off his head and with his face he approached one of the large cells as closely as possible. "Nothing. There is really nothing", he eventually murmured and got up. „Or is there? "He put the hat back on. „Gosh, Josy, Alma really worried me with her call just now. Her colonies still all show the urge to swarm. All!" He paused. „Maybe we should form a nucleus. It would definitely be great if Alma came by and ... "

"No!" Josy stomped her foot. „Not again! You saw it yourself. They have enough space, they can brood and make as much honey as they want. For my bees, there is no reason to take off." Energetically she took hold of the brood chamber with both her hands and tilted it back into the right position.

Last week she had asked Alma to come over to check on the queen cells. And Alma had

reached the same conclusion as Josy: no departure on the horizon. Josy asked herself how many more times was her father going to summon Alma before he relied on her, Josy's, opinion? Josy knew what real queen cells looked like. She had asked Alma to show her over with her bees. And then they had taken all bee hives apart and removed the cells, in which young queens were growing. For one more moment Josy and her father stood silently opposite one another.

"Well, all right", Josy's father finally said. "As you like. They're your bees and you are the beekeeper." He helped Josy position the honey supers, then he returned to the house. Later in the evening, just before dinner, he put an illustrated book about bees open on her plate. He pointed to an illustration, which showed a gigantically enlarged queen cell, in which a larva lay in thick, whitish gelee royal. "This will be a queen one day", he declared. Unnerved Josy looked up to him. "You don't say."

"I only wanted to show you what something like that looks like", her father said. Josy sighed way too loudly "Fine. Thank you." She closed the heavy book and gave it to her father who carried it back to the shelf and put it back among the other books about bees.

Like a small cup turned upside down, a bit smaller than a thimble, the cradle for the new queen hung at the bottom of the third honey comb frame from the left in the upper brood chamber. It was impossible to overlook. But the egg, which the queen had laid in there yesterday, certainly could. It took a very well-trained eye to recognize the thin, bright pin on the bottom of the cell. The day after tomorrow a larva would hatch from it straight into a bath of nourishing sister-milk, which the nurse bees produced themselves. Gelee Royal was the name of this special larval food, which was meant for all bee larvae. But only the queen larvae were given an especially sweet version for an extended time. Just like the larva that would hatch the day after tomorrow. The nurses would feed it for exactly five days. Five days, just long enough for it to spin itself into a cocoon, so that after further eight days it would step as the new queen in front of her people. Three days as an egg, five days as a larva, eight days as pupa – eternally the same metamorphosis. Three, five, eight - and here comes the queen.

As if someone had spoken a magic formula and thus sealed the fate of the bee colony. But that was not the case. Solely the colony, solely the worker bees had decided this for themselves and for the old queen. She would be forced to leave her old home and with her a large part of the colony. By the thousands the bees would then swarm. Very soon. Even before the arrival of the new queen. Three, five, eight.