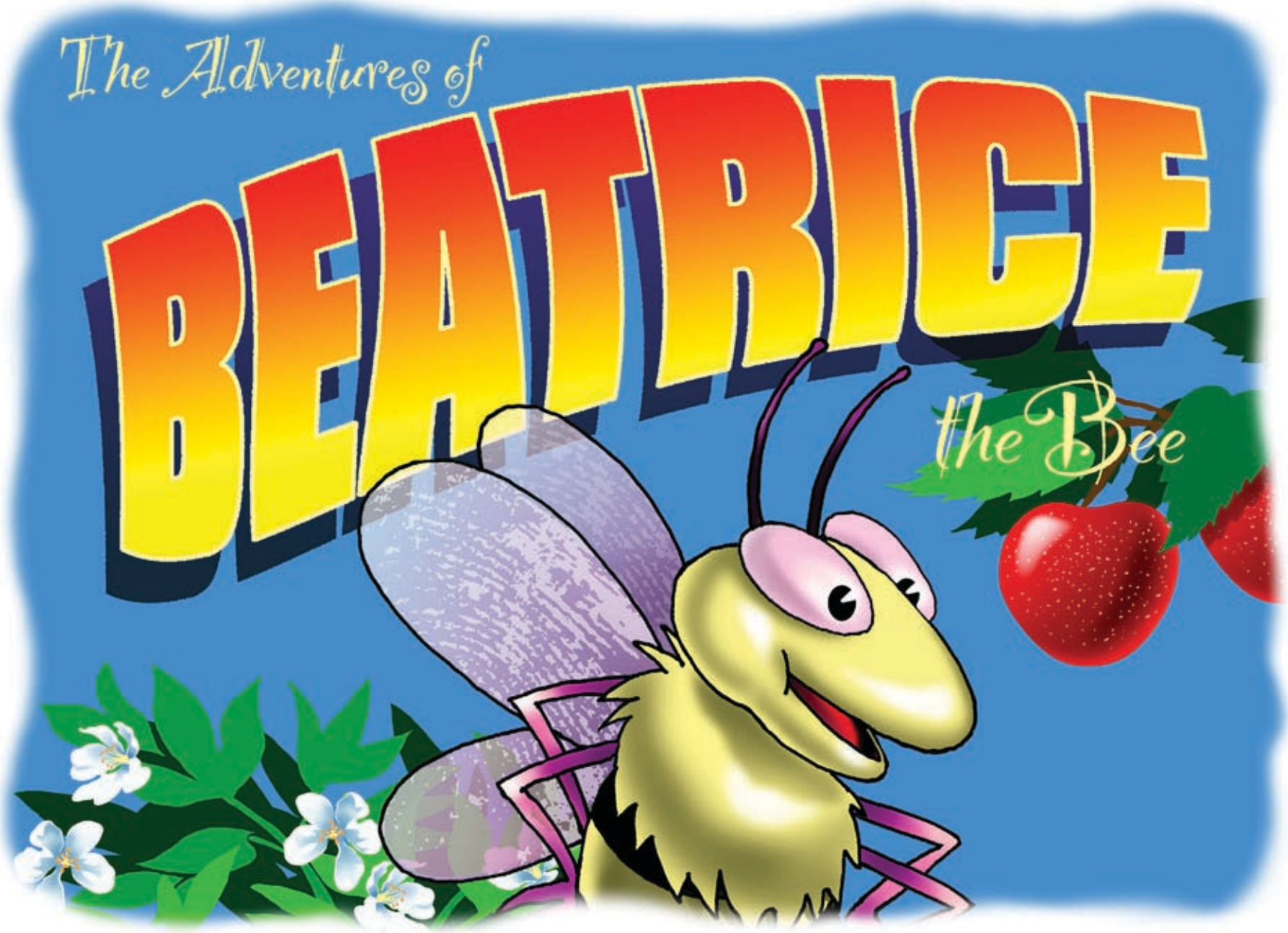

The Adventures of
BEATRICE
the Bee

Beatrice the honeybee made a beeline to the base of the tree to confront the predator.

It was Grubby the Bear.

The honeybee's buzz sounded like a rattle shaking very rapidly. Beatrice flew sideways with no difficulty at all. This amazed the bear.

Just then, he felt a breeze so gentle it barely caused a rustle. It smelled of honey. Grubby whiffed it. A whiff was all it took. He grabbed the tree trunk with his great big claws and climbed to the hollow in the middle of the tree where the sweet honey was stored in the beehive.

Just as he was about to stick his nose in the honey, Beatrice flashed her stinger at him.

The bear stared at the stinger and s-l-o-w-l-y retreated.

Beatrice lived in the hive with 50,000 bee friends and took guard duty seriously.

From the ground, Grubby, who craved the honey more than anything in the world, angrily pounded out some numbers on his padded paws: If there was one bee buzzing, there could be two. And if two bees were buzzing, there could be four. And if four bees were buzzing, there could be more.

He paused.

Before he could do all the math, Beatrice dropped like a helicopter straight down from somewhere over his head and stopped in midair at eye-level.

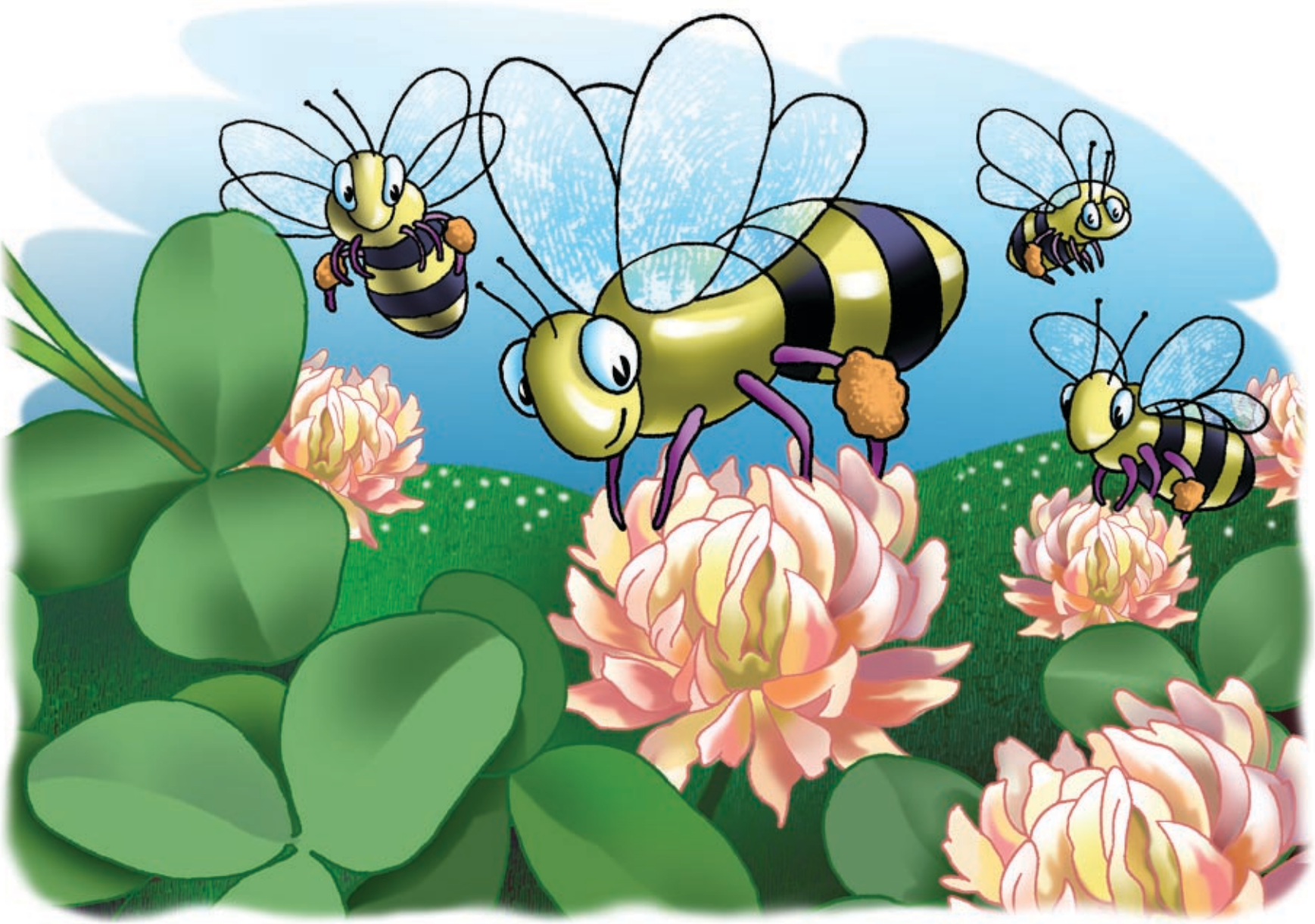
"Go back to your cave," she buzzed.

This was too much for Grubby.
He puffed up, making himself as bad as he could, and growled:
"I'm surprised to see you're guarding your hive.
Honeybees are dropping like flies.
You know, I ran into some bee counters the other day.
They told me more than a third of your buddies in U.S. colonies
have been lost since last year.
That's tens of billions of bees.
They were snuffed by mites, pesticide drifts and a mysterious disease
that's causing the big bees to abandon their hives."

Beatrice looked stung and buried her antennas in her fuzzy striped body.
Grubby chuckled.

“I’ve been watching your hive every day,”
Grubby continued, his voice matter-of-fact.
“Couldn’t help but notice, there’s not as much BUZZING
going on as last summer.”

Beatrice alighted on the bear’s ear and climbed it like a mountaineer.
“That’s none of your business,” she whispered.
Grubby tried to swat her.
He missed and she violently flew around his left ear in a tight circle.



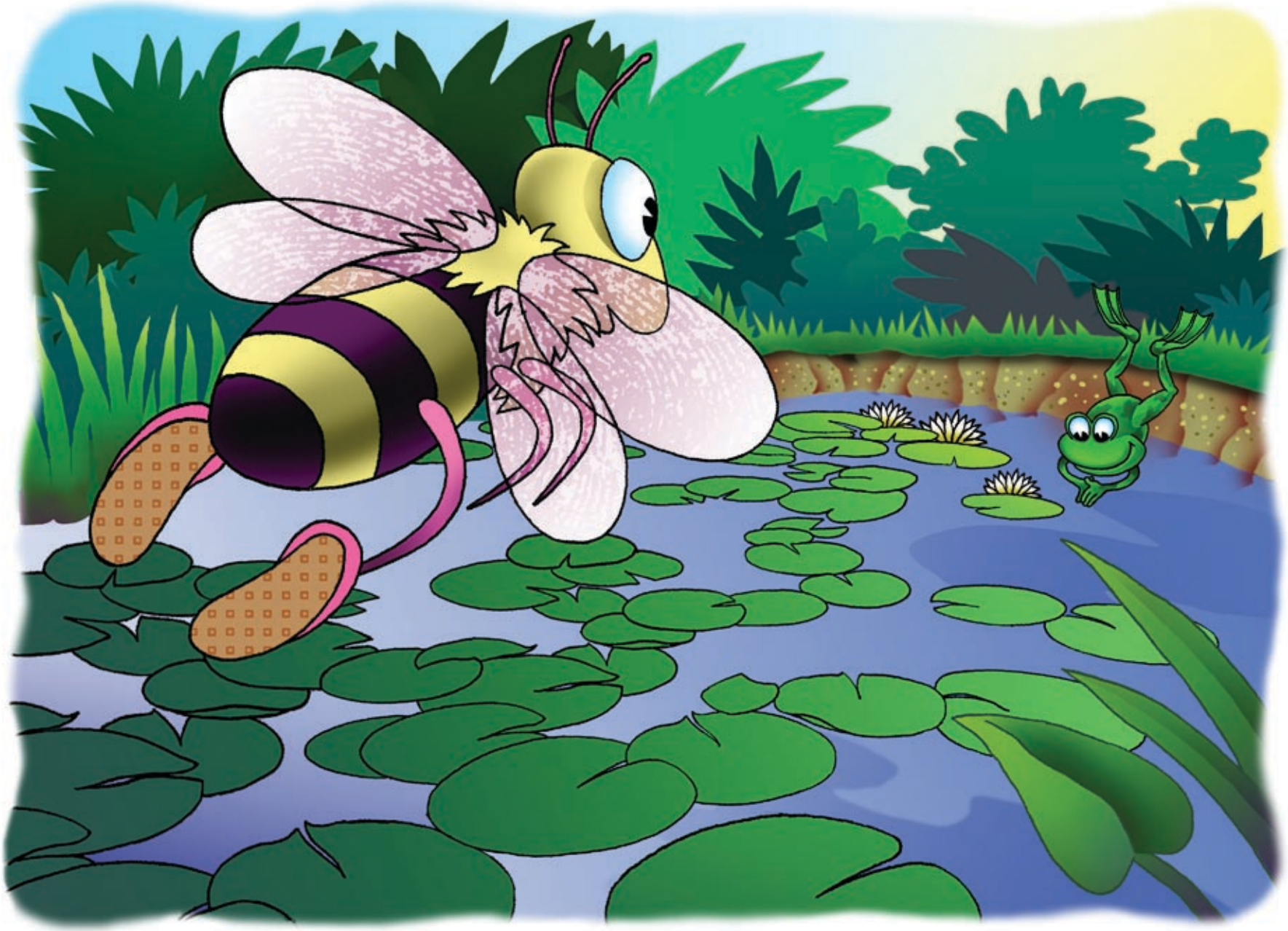
Grubby grumbled: “It’s everybody’s business.” He turned away muttering something about how bees need to get with it. They weren’t pollinating plants like they used to and his cubs would suffer because of it.

Beatrice watched him go. She thought about how the elder bees were preparing her to become a pollinator. Worker bees like herself are some of the best pollinators. They pollinate everything from apple trees to berries to eggplants. They do it when they go shopping for ingredients to make honey: nectar and pollen. Both are stored in the blossom of a plant.

Beatrice had never done any pollinating, but her guard duty would be over soon and she’d become a pollinator soon enough. That’s the way worker bees do things.
They switch jobs as they age.

Drought last year caused a lot of workers in her hive to give up.
The queen was sick from pesticides.

Beatrice instinctively knew Grubby was right. Her bee friends weren’t well and she had to save them. But what could one little bee do?



She thought long and hard and finally decided to go down and see her friend, Zot the frog.

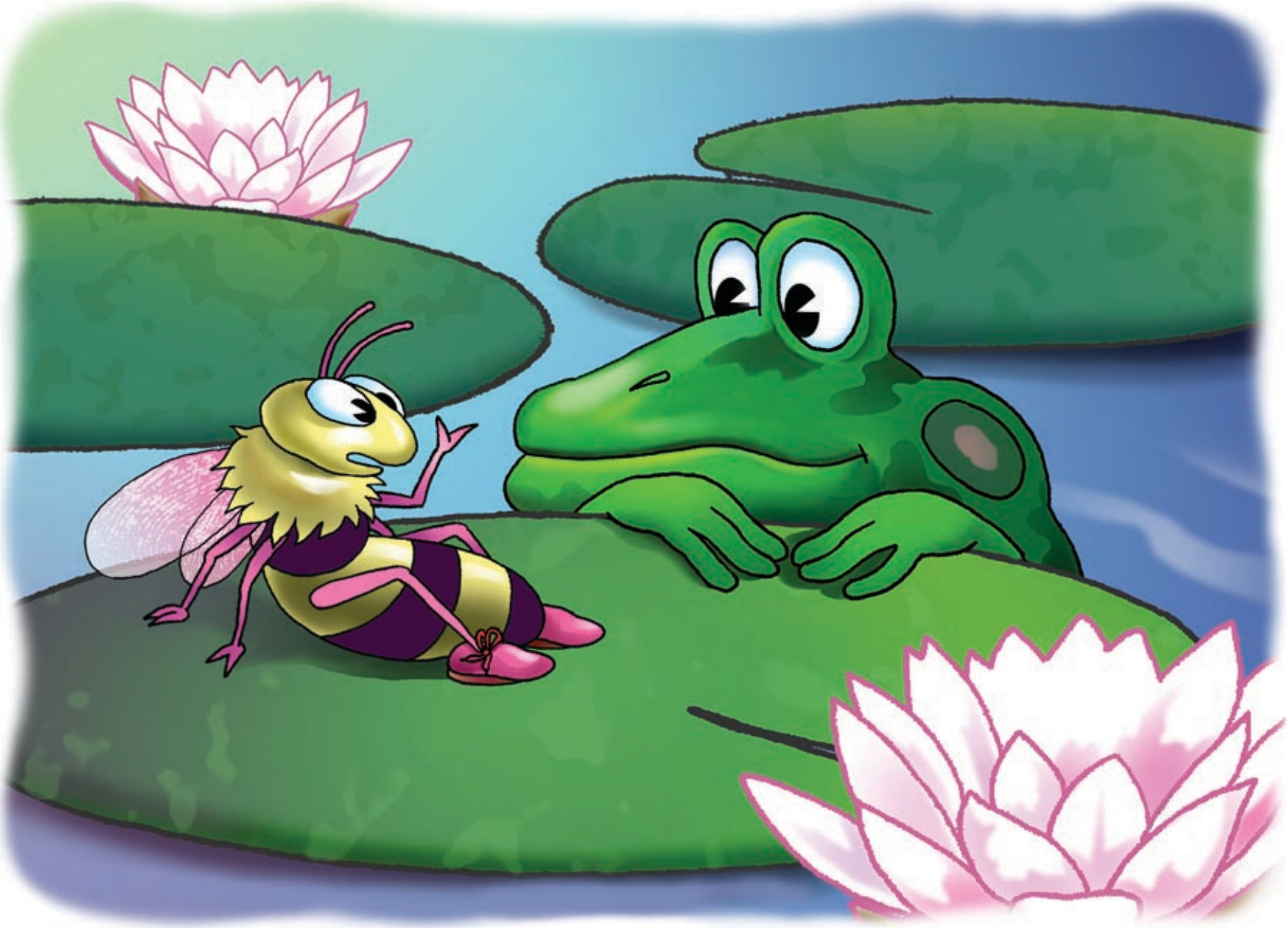
He was leaping and plopping in the pond when she got there. Ringlets of water formed everywhere he went but she lost track of him. Duckweed and pollen from trees made swirls on the water.

Beatrice looked to the left, to the right, up and down, but couldn't find him.

Plop!

When she looked in the direction of the sound, she saw two huge bubble eyes emerge above the surface of the water, still as a rock. Zot was surveying the bugs.

"Zot!" Beatrice shouted.



She alighted on a lily pad next to him and sat back on her wings.

"I'm busy making a living," Zot gurgled. "What is it?"

Beatrice sighed. "I have something important to say," she said.
"I'm afraid I'm the only healthy bee left in my hive."

Zot didn't tell her she had reason to worry. Instead he said: "What are you going to do?"

Beatrice shrugged: "I don't know what to do. Can you help me?"

"I'm afraid not," Zot replied. "But a beekeeper lives on a farm at the end of this field.
Maybe the queen of that hive can help your colony."

Beatrice asked him
how to get there.

Zot drew a map on a lily pad,
folded it up and gave it to her.

His directions were good.

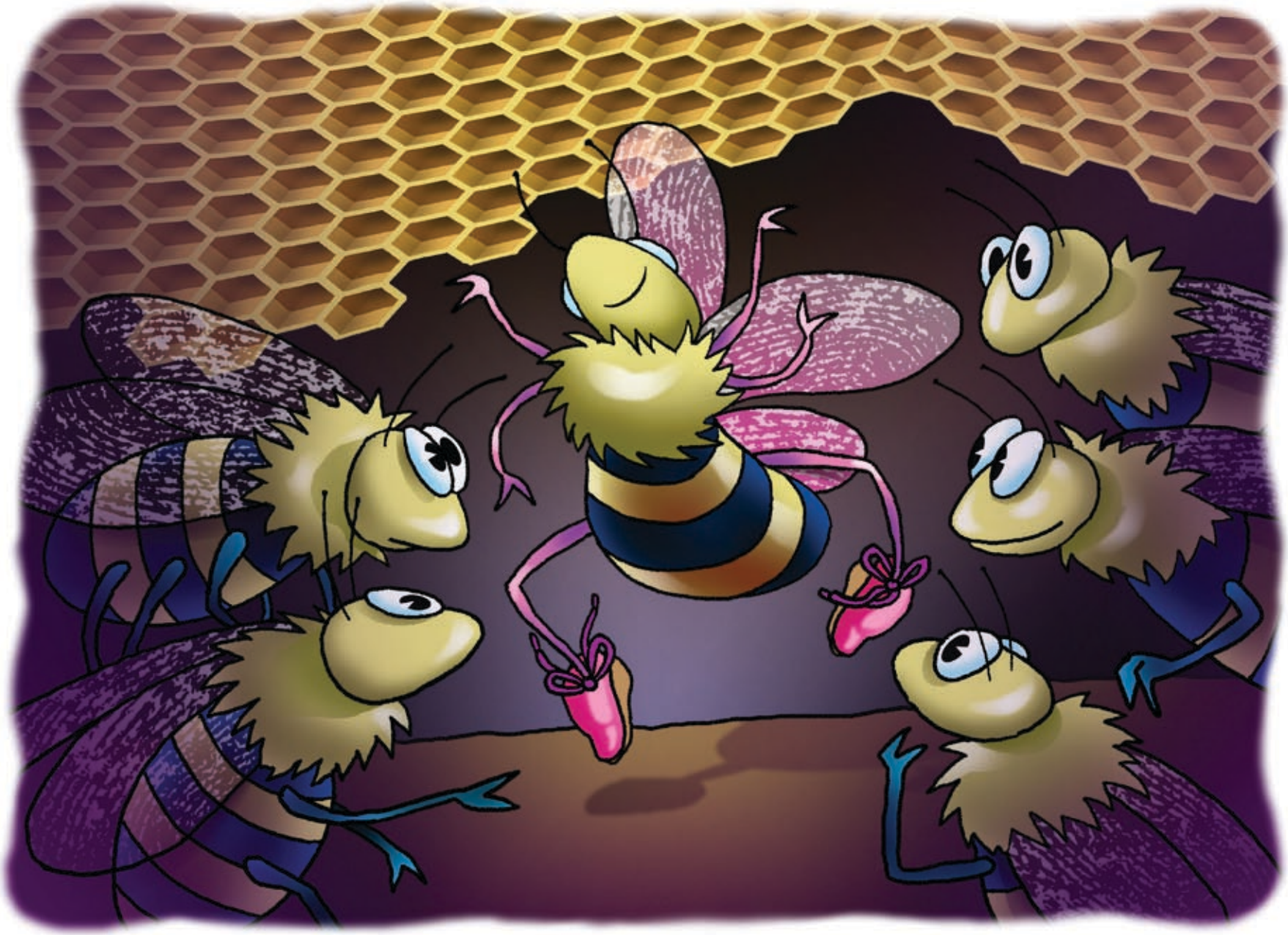
She found the beekeeper's yard in no time at all.

He was standing next to a box-shaped wooden hive.

He wore a mask over his face and thick gloves.

In the hive were thousands and thousands of bees.
Beatrice squeezed through the hole and crawled inside.

The bees of the hive looked at her for a long time.
Beatrice didn't mind.
She stared back at them, and then she did what
bees do to communicate . . . she danced a jig.

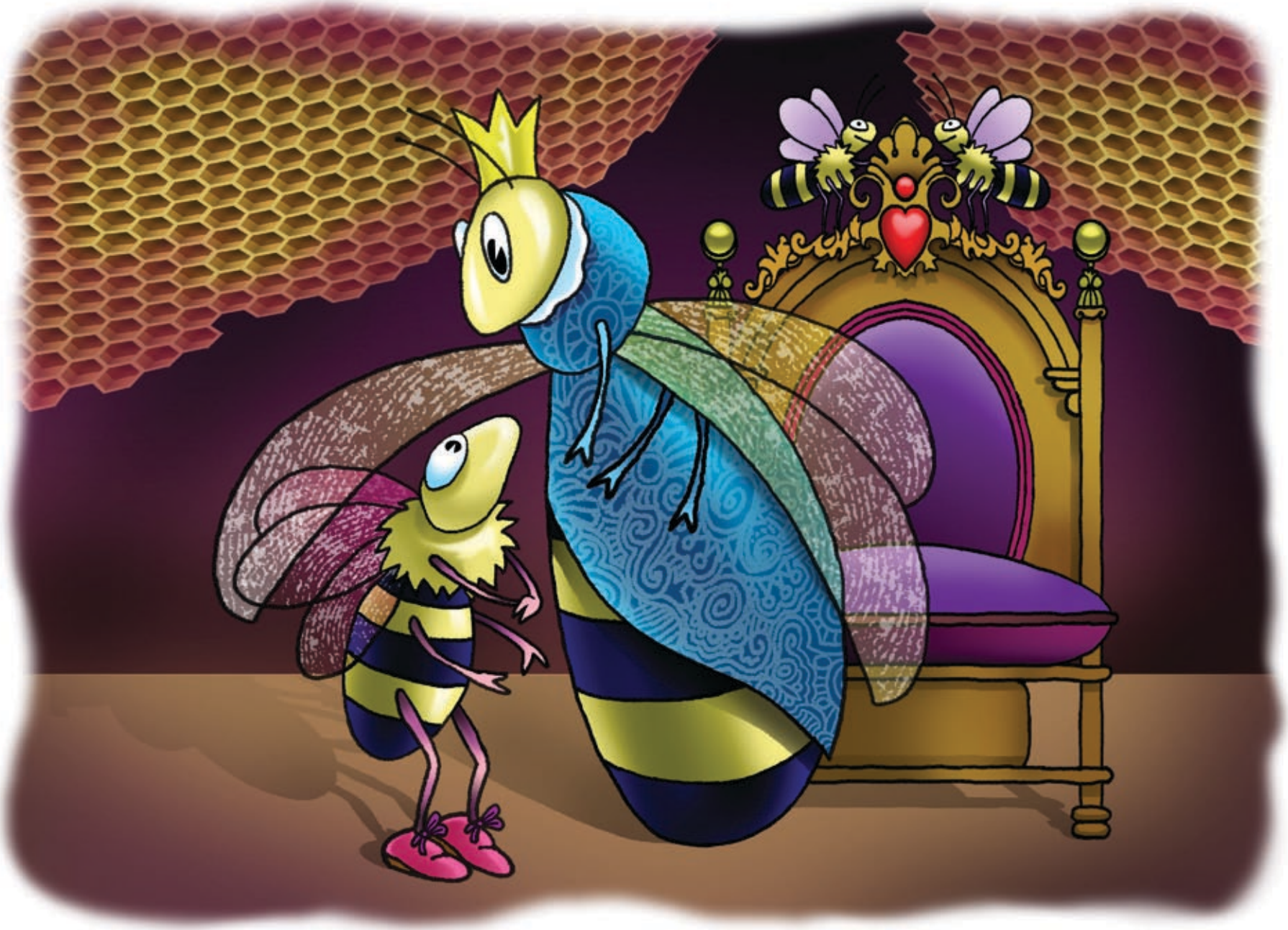


She danced to tell them she was all right.

She danced to let them know she was here to save her colony.

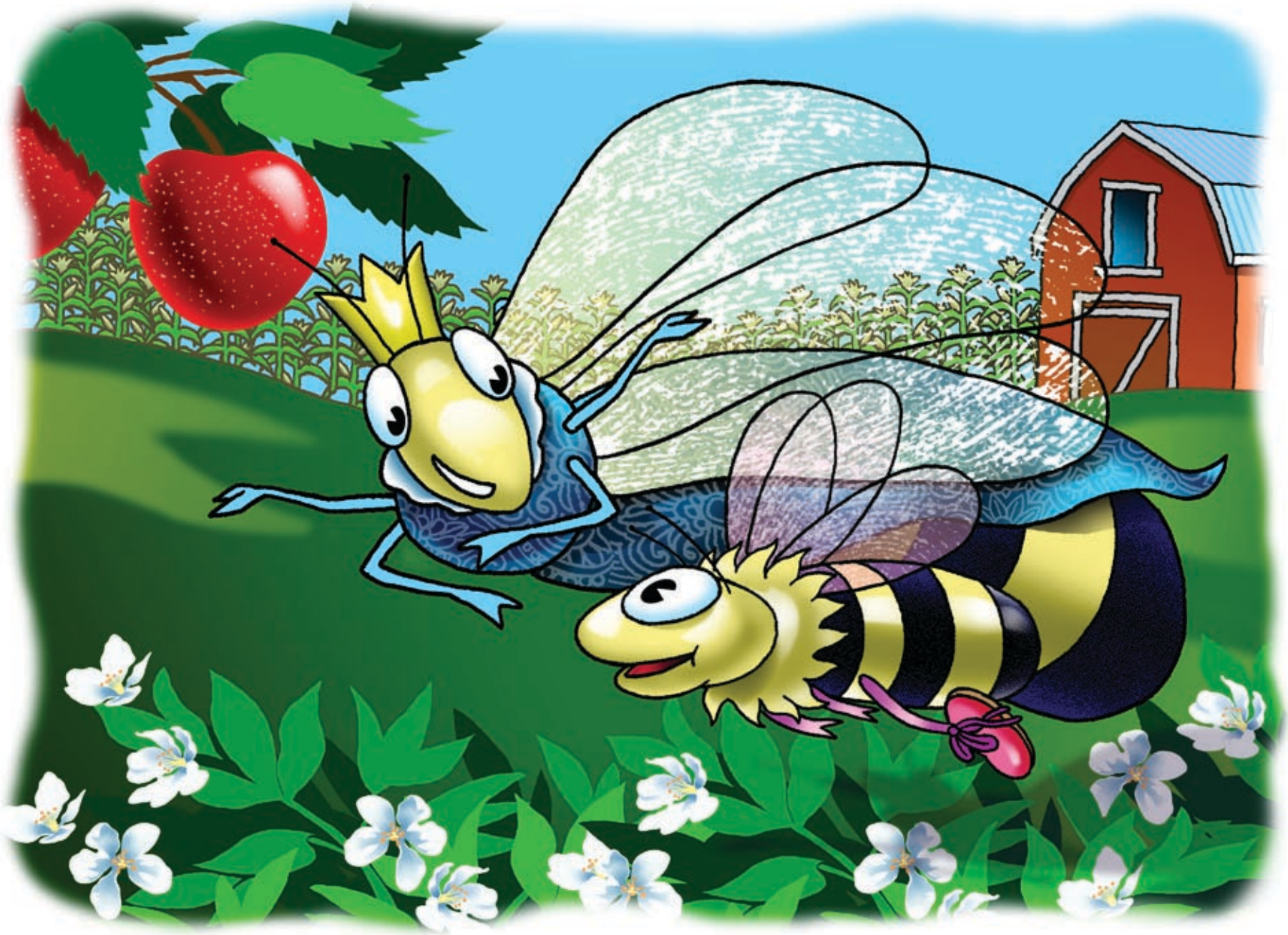
She danced to convey the distance.

She danced until the queen of the new hive dispatched a worker bee to Beatrice's buddies and kindly took Beatrice under her wing.



“We might not be faring any better,”
the queen solemnly said, dabbing her tongue with royal jelly.
She continued. “But there is reason to hope.
A lot of energy is being spent trying to figure out the causes.
Everything from cellular phone towers to migrant bee labor is being blamed.
I got sick from a poor diet on my last trip cross country to work on farms.”

With that, the queen coddled Beatrice and said:
“Honeybees are one of the most important insects in the food chain.”
The queen wanted to show Beatrice how it works.
So the two of them caught a ride on a current of wind
to an apple orchard bursting with blossoms.

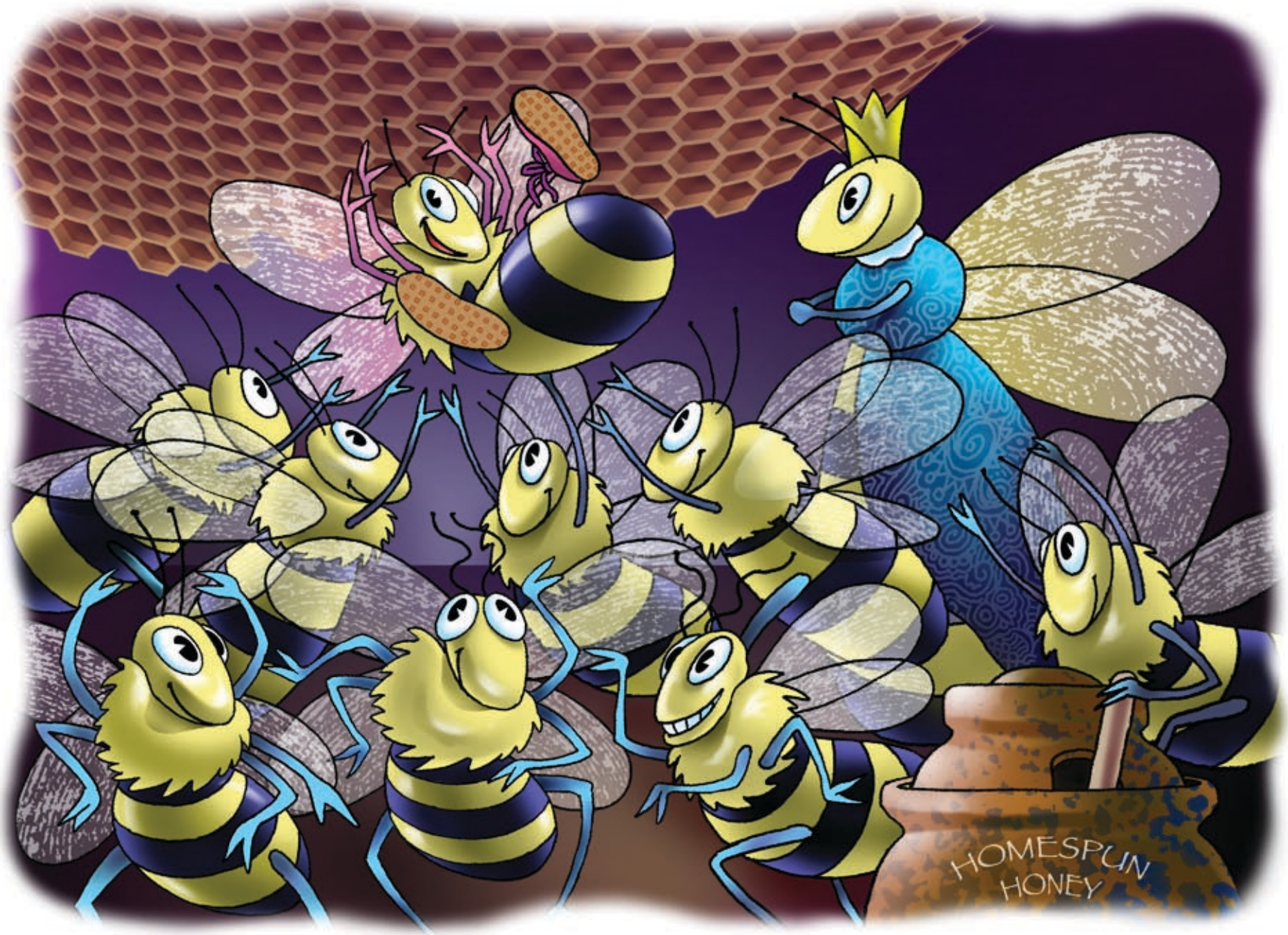


“Apples don’t just grow on trees,” the queen panted.
“Unless an insect pollinates the blossoms,they won’t bear fruit.”

Beatrice never knew that.
The queen observed her surprise with a twitch of satisfaction.
“Different kinds of fruits and flowers are the same way,” she said.

The next day, Beatrice began working as a pollinator for the first time in her life.
She spent the morning gathering pollen from squash and watermelon in the beekeeper's garden.
She put pollen in the baskets on her legs and stored nectar in her honey stomach
until something in the sky caught her eye.

It looked like fighter jets, a whole swarm of them.
As they drew near, Beatrice saw it was her old colony.
They flew down to a tree in the beekeeper's backyard.
He lifted a cane and gently shook the tree branches until they came down
and flew into a hive where Beatrice was waiting for them.


HOMESPUN
HONEY

Beatrice and her buddies celebrated their reunion
with some homespun honey cones.

The End

Beatrice saved her colony.
Here are ways you can help honeybees:

• Plant a bush or flower that would be good for honeybees. Beekeeper clubs in your area know what's best. To find them, pick your favorite online search engine and type in the name of your state and beekeeper associations. A list will come up. Pick the one you think might be right for you.

• Another fun activity — make bee wings out of an old kite or large pieces of cardboard. Attach them to your back with a belt or rope. Now you can tiptoe around dipping down or disappearing into things like Beatrice did. To really be a bee, paint yellow and black stripes on an old shirt. The fuzzier, the better.

• Act out the story of "Beatrice the Bee" with your Mom, Dad or friends. Have one of them be Beatrice, the other one, Grubby, the third one, Zot, the fourth one, the Queen. Now switch roles. See what it feels like to be each of these characters.

Other ways to learn about bees:

• Eat honey. What's really fun is to taste different kinds of honey. Every plant has its own pollen and that pollen creates its own flavor of honey. Next time you go to the store, look for the different colors of honey and try them out. Each color is a different flavor.

• Where can you buy honey? All stores carry it. But organic stores and roadside markets often carry a wider variety of honey produced by local beekeepers.

• Before you think about starting a hive of your own, why not take a trip to a local apiary? An apiary is a bee "farm." Beekeepers can't GROW bees, because bees are wild insects. But they do manage them. They have field days that are open to the public. You can go there and watch them inspect the hive. They'll open it up and show you what's inside. Better yet — you can watch them taking the honey.

"The Adventures of Beatrice the Bee"
created by the National Biological Information Infrastructure—Kid's Corner
Visit us online at: www.nbii.gov/kidscorner