

Jupiter and the Bee

This Roman myth teaches a lesson

There was once a little bee with a wonky antenna. He lived in a busy beehive with his family, in the garden of Jupiter, the king of the gods. The little bee loved to make honey more than anything.

One spring day, he was tired and thirsty after working hard all morning.

‘Dad,’ he shouted. ‘I’m going to look for a drink.’

‘Okay son,’ replied his father.

‘Will you look after our precious honey please? Someone has been stealing it.’

‘Don’t fret,’ answered his father. ‘I’ll be here all day.’

As the little bee buzzed along, he could see bright, yellow petals in the distance and heard the quiet hum of other insects around him. Quickly, he dashed to the dazzling flower and began to drink. He could taste the delicious, sugary nectar in his mouth and felt the soft, powdery pollen tickle his antennae. He was having a wonderful day.

When he was full, he flew happily back to the beehive to make some more honey. However, when he arrived, he saw a terrible sight. The honeycomb was almost empty.

‘We’ve been robbed,’ yelled the little bee. ‘Who’s been stealing our honey?’

His father hobbled around the corner, rubbing his leg.

‘Dad, are you alright?’ asked the bee anxiously.

‘Yes, I’m okay little one. I was hurt by the human intruder, but don’t worry, I’ll be fine.’

But the bee didn’t think it was fine. He couldn’t bear to see his father hurt and his hard work stolen.

‘Right!’ exclaimed the bee. ‘I’ve had enough of this. I am going to get help.’

Courageously, the little bee flew up to Jupiter, the king of the gods. He took the last drops of honey with him to gain the god’s favour.



Jupiter was sitting on his throne with a thunderbolt in each hand. He sampled the golden honey and laughed with a voice as loud as thunder. He said that it was the most delightful thing he had ever eaten.

‘I will give you what your heart desires,’ he boomed.

Thankful, the bee requested, ‘I would like a fearsome weapon. A stinger to protect my honey.’

‘Agreed,’ bellowed Jupiter.

The little bee felt a tingling sensation in his tummy, then a sharp stinger burst out of his body. The bee was overjoyed and wagged it about. He turned to leave when Jupiter stopped him.

‘Just a minute,’ roared Jupiter fiercely. ‘You must now pay a price for your stinger. From now on, all bees will be given stingers to protect their honey, but any bee who uses it must pay with his life.’

The little bee went from feeling overjoyed to regretting his decision. He knew that his family would not be happy with this arrangement, because it could cause the deaths of many of their friends, but it was too late now.

When he returned home, he cried and hid his stinger from his father.

‘What’s the matter, son?’ asked his father.

‘Dad, I’ve done a terrible thing,’ he muttered. He revealed his pointed stinger and recounted the whole story.

His father sighed. ‘You should be careful what you wish for, son. We have two choices now. We either share our honey and live, or protect it and die.’

The tiny bee climbed into bed that night, wishing he had not reacted so quickly when he was angry.

Since that day, if any bee uses its stinger, it dies.



Pluto and Proserpine

This Roman myth explains a natural phenomenon

Proserpine was a beautiful, young woman with long, red hair. She was admired wherever she went. She was so lovely that Pluto, god of the underworld, fell instantly in love with her. He knew that Proserpine would not want to live with him in the darkness of the underworld, so he came up with an evil plan.

It was a fine, spring morning when Proserpine was happily strolling through the fields with her mother, Ceres, goddess of the harvest. Everywhere she looked, there were signs of new life. She saw pink petals on the cherry blossom trees and bright, white lambs next to their mothers. She could hear the nervous tweeting of fledgling birds in their nests and could smell the fresh scent of roses beside the trickling stream. She felt the tall grass against her palms and it tickled. This was her favourite time of year.

‘Mother?’ she asked, ‘please may I go to the rocks to look for insects?’

‘Of course, my dear,’ replied Ceres, ‘but remember to be careful. I don’t want you to slip and hurt yourself.’

‘I’ll be careful mother,’ promised Proserpine. She skipped across to the rocks then slowed down to cross them cautiously.

There was an almighty crack. Suddenly, she felt the ground tremble beneath her feet. The rocks began to break and huge flames burst out of the ground. Terrified, she shielded her eyes from the heat. When she looked again, fearsome Pluto was rising from the earth. His grey hair and beard whipped around his face as he reached out a muscular arm. Proserpine tried to run but the rocks were slippery. Pluto dragged her to the opening in the ground and carried her down into the underworld. Proserpine wept. The god laughed in triumph.

When they reached Pluto’s kingdom, Proserpine refused to eat.

‘Eat,’ boomed the god.

‘Never,’ answered Proserpine bravely. ‘I know that if I eat anything here, I will never be able to leave.’

‘You are mine now. Queen of the underworld. You’d better get used to it.’



Eventually, Proserpine was so hungry that she ate six pomegranate seeds. This made her miserable because she knew that she would never see her mother again.

Meanwhile, Ceres was looking for her daughter in the field but could not find her. She began to cry. Jupiter, the king of the gods, worried that the harvest on Earth would fail if Ceres was unhappy, so he sent Mercury, the messenger, to speak to Pluto and strike a deal.

Mercury saw that Proserpine had eaten six pomegranate seeds, so he came up with a compromise. 'Proserpine has eaten six seeds,' he said to Pluto, 'so if she marries you, she will live with you in the underworld for six months, then return to earth in the spring for six months.'

After some thought, Pluto and Proserpine regretfully agreed to the deal.

'I am not satisfied with this plan,' roared Pluto, 'but at least I get my queen for six months.'

Proserpine added, 'I am not happy with this plan either, but at least I will see my mother again for six months every year.'

Every spring, Ceres makes the flowers bloom to welcome her daughter's return to Earth and every autumn, when Proserpine goes back to the underworld, the crops die until the next spring because Ceres is so unhappy.



Romulus and Remus

This Roman myth explains a historical event

Once there was a handsome king called Numitor, who ruled the ancient city of Alba Longa in Italy. He had a hideous younger brother called Amulius, who was jealous of him.

‘I want to be king,’ announced Amulius.

‘But I am older,’ explained Numitor. ‘The oldest son always inherits the kingdom.’

Amulius shrugged his shoulders. ‘That’s what you think brother,’ he sniggered.

One autumn day, Numitor was walking around his magnificent kingdom. He saw the beautiful mosaics on the walls and heard the children’s happy voices in the streets. He could smell the delicious aromas from the kitchens and felt the warm breeze against his skin. He was enjoying everything around him.

Suddenly, everything went black. Numitor had been captured and thrown into prison by his envious brother.

Amulius crowned himself the new king and told Numitor’s daughter that she must not have any children because they might challenge his right to the throne. However, she had twin sons with Mars, the god of war. They were called Romulus and Remus.

Amulius could not believe it.

‘I will not be disobeyed. Not even by a god,’ he shouted. He turned to one of his servants and commanded, ‘Take these twins and drown them in the River Tiber.’

‘Yes, master,’ replied the timid servant.

So, the servant carried them in a basket to the water’s edge. He heard them gurgling and looked at their innocent faces with large, round eyes and flushed cheeks. He held their tiny fingers and felt their soft skin against his rough hands. He pitied the poor children and could not follow Amulius’ orders, even though he was terrified of him. Instead, he gently placed the basket in the river and pushed the babies downstream.



The twins floated for miles until they were found by a kind she wolf. She protected the twins from dangerous animals in the woods and gave them milk. A chirpy woodpecker brought them food.

After some months, they were found by an old shepherd and he looked after them until they were fully grown. They grew into strong men and vowed to kill Amulius when they discovered the truth about their childhood.

‘What? How could you survive?’ asked Amulius in shock when Romulus and Remus stormed his castle.

‘We were rescued by a she wolf,’ answered Romulus calmly. ‘We have come to take our revenge.’

‘You cannot kill me. I am the king,’ Amulius responded outraged.

‘We are not afraid of you,’ Remus laughed.

‘Kings also die,’ declared Romulus coolly, as he struck the cruel tyrant with his sword.

With Amulius dead, Numitor became the king once again.

Romulus and Remus decided to build a city on the site where they were rescued but could not agree which hill to build on. Romulus chose the Palatine Hill and Remus chose the Aventine Hill. They argued about the location of the city for days.

Eventually, Romulus built a high wall around his hill, but Remus jumped over it. ‘You cannot keep me out brother,’ chuckled Remus.

‘We’ll see about that,’ replied Romulus steadily. In the next instant, he struck his brother dead.

Romulus built his city on Palatine Hill and named it Rome, after his own name.

