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**I hope you enjoy my story.**



KIERSTYN, AGE 10

## Queen Victoria

By

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As life first came to Victoria, she tried to move within the darkness of her tiny, six-sided royal chamber. Her two pairs of wings were folded closely against her long body. There was no room to spread them. She moved her six legs for the first time and crawled slowly toward the front of the cell. The sweet scents of warm beeswax and fresh honey filled her senses.

With her powerful jaws she bit into the wax cap that sealed her from the outside world. As she chewed she heard honeybees on the other side helping her to emerge. Soon the cap was gone and the entrance was open. In the total darkness Victoria pulled herself out onto the smooth, flat, golden honeycomb.

“Good morning, Your Highness,” greeted one of the worker bees. “I’m Rose.”

“Nice to meet you, Rose,” Victoria replied. “Where’s my mother?” Victoria looked around.

“The Queen? Oh, you’ll see her soon,” answered Rose. “Violet flew to fetch her as soon as we noticed you breaking through your cell cap.”

Word traveled quickly throughout the colony that the new Queen had been born. Curious and excited, everyone was gathering to greet her. Victoria was humbled by their respect and admiration.

“Your Majesty,” Rose began, “allow me to introduce you to your subjects.” One-by-one Rose announced the names of the bees as they paraded by. “This is Iris, Holly, Ivy, Pansy, Daisy, Apple Blossom . . .” Rose went on and on and on and on and on and on . . .

“Rose?” Victoria interrupted. “Just how many bees are there?”

“A little over 55,000, your Majesty. Another 700 will be born today.”

My gosh, Victoria thought to herself.

Rose continued, “Tulip, Zinnia, Buttercup, Daffy . . .”

“Daffy?” Victoria interrupted, because the name seemed odd.

“Actually, that’s her nickname, Your Highness,” Rose explained. Her real name is Daffodil. Many of your subjects prefer using nicknames. For example: Alyssum calls herself Ally, and Chrysanthemum calls herself Chrissy.”

A fuzzy friendly worker bee named Carnation added, “You also have 247 drones, Your Ladyship.” Victoria knew instinctively that a few of the male bees called drones would eventually mate with her so she could produce tiny eggs that would grow into honeybees. She would lay over a thousand eggs a day and live about four years.

There was an unusually loud, annoying buzzing sound. Victoria watched as a young drone flew into the hive and crash-landed like a klutz into several of the females.

“Greetings, Your Highness,” said the clumsy showoff drone as he stood tall like nothing stupid had happened. “My name is Michael. I’m at your service. If you ever need anything, your wish is my command.”

Victoria felt like saying, “My wish is that you would disappear instantly.” Instead, Victoria was polite and said, “Thank you, Michael.”

Like other drones Michael was much larger than the female worker bees. Because drones are bigger, their buzzing is louder and often scares people. Sometimes Michael would fly close to humans just to frighten them. Most humans don't know that drones do not have stingers. They can't hurt anyone. Victoria and the female bees each have a stinger, but they would use them only to protect the colony. When a bee stings, its stinger remains in the target, then she flies off and dies.

Drones are spoiled and treated like royalty all summer long. They are lazy and can't even feed themselves, the female bees must do that. The only job the drones have is to mate with the Queen, and most won't even do that. Drones live about eight weeks, two weeks longer than female bees. All summer long drones have it pretty easy. But in early fall, when the first frost comes and the Queen stops laying eggs, the drones are forced out of the hive because they are no longer needed. They starve, freeze, or get eaten by something. Being a drone does have a few disadvantages.

The beautiful June morning brought warmth and sunlight into the hive. Victoria was fascinated by the never-ending activity within the colony. Bees were

being born all around her. Cells became uncapped and new bees climbed out, stretched their wings, and immediately began preparing the empty cells for the queen to lay eggs for the next generation.

In a few days Victoria would begin laying tiny white eggs the size of short pieces of thread at the bottom of each empty cell. After twenty-one days each wee egg becomes another hard-working honeybee. Unless the egg was meant to be a drone, then it would take twenty-four days to develop. Although Victoria was larger and more complex, because she was meant to be a queen, she took only sixteen days to develop.

“Has anyone seen my mother?” Victoria was getting impatient.

“She’ll be here soon, Your Majesty,” assured Rose. “Please be patient. She’s very busy preparing everything for you. She’ll be here as soon as she can.” Victoria wondered what her queen mother would consider more important than the birth of her daughter.

Honeybees flew in and out of the hive by the hundreds every minute. Most of them carried nectar in their stomachs, nectar they had drawn from the flowers

in the fields. After the nectar became honey inside of them, they would deposit the sweet golden fluid into the honeycombs and seal it with beeswax.

Victoria noticed that the tiny sacks on the legs of many of the bees were filled with bright yellow pollen. She knew that the bees had gathered the nutritious pollen from the male plants in the fields where they had found the nectar. The pollen was used to feed the baby honeybees.

As the honeybees traveled from plant to plant, pollen from the male plants stuck to the fuzzy bodies of the bees. When the bees flew to a female plant of the same kind, some of the pollen would fall off causing the miracle of pollination. Thanks to pollination there are fruits and vegetables, flowers and trees, and plenty of food for animals and people. The Bible describes these lands as “flowing with milk and honey.”

“Hey everybody!” one of the worker bees yelled. “Over here!”

Victoria was hoping it was her mother finally arriving. Instead, she saw one of the returning scout bees doing a special “bee dance.” Scout bees are female workers who search for places for bees to gather nectar to make honey. By her

bee code of wiggles and waggles the scout told the others that she had just spotted a large field of flowers with a fresh flow of nectar. In her special dance, she gave directions to the field and indicated how many helpers would be needed to harvest the nectar. Then she flew off and was followed by hundreds of others.

Victoria's impatience was turning to alarm. She must find her mother NOW! Victoria wanted to know why she had been born. After all, every living creature has a God-given purpose. Instinctively she knew that bee colonies have thousands of worker bees and hundreds of drones, but only one queen. Bee colonies never produce a new queen unless they need one. So why was Victoria born? And where was her mother?

Victoria was determined to get some answers so she started walking toward the entrance of the hive. Workers and drones cleared a path as she walked across the honeycomb and headed for the sunlit opening which lead to the outside.

She reached the entrance, peeked outside, and her heart raced with excitement. The magnificent beauty of the outside world was breathtaking. The

colony was located inside the hollow trunk of a towering oak tree on the edge of a resplendent forest.

Victoria was taken back when she noticed thousands of bees covering the trunk of the tree below the hive entrance. Hovering a few feet away from the entrance were thousands of bees swirling and buzzing in a massive cloud. The bees on the trunk and in the cloud were plump looking because they had just gorged themselves with honey, honey they would need to start a new colony. The bees were getting ready to swarm!

From the midst of the whirling cloud Victoria saw her beautiful and majestic mother, Queen Elizabeth. With grace and dignity Queen Elizabeth flew over to her newborn daughter.

“Hello, Victoria. I’m Elizabeth, your mother.” Victoria was excited. She was also scared.

Victoria spoke gently and quietly. “Hello, mother. I think you’ll be going away soon, won’t you?”

“Yes, Victoria. It’s almost time. When I go I will leave you with half of the colony. There is more than enough honey stored in the combs to feed everyone through your first season of snow. The brood chambers are filled with thousands of my children still to be born. All of them will serve you, honor you and protect you with their lives.”

Victoria didn’t know what to say.

“This will be a safe home for you, Victoria,” her mother assured. “I have lived here through two summers. This was a gift to me from my mother. Just as it was given to me, I pass it on to you.”

“I promise to be a good and worthy queen, Mother.”

“I know you will, Victoria. And when the day comes that the colony should outgrow this home, as mine has done, then you will create a daughter of your own, and do the same for her.”

“Mother? Where will you go?”

“One of my scout bees has found a perfect place very much like this across the water. Our new home will be in the far timberland on the other side of the

lake.” For a few seconds Queen Elizabeth looked in silence at her daughter. “You will be a great queen,” her mother assured. “In your reign you will give life to a million children who will make honey for themselves and others. They will also pollinate the plants to make fruits and vegetables. I wish you sunny days, fields of flowers, and a long and happy life.”

“Thank you, Mother.”

“Goodbye, Victoria.”

Elizabeth sprung away and disappeared into the hovering swarm. One-by-one the bees on the tree trunk flew into the massive swarm making it grow larger and larger. The awesome cloud of buzzing honeybees floated slowly away from the oak tree as if it were moving with a gentle breeze.

Victoria gazed at the majestic cloud of bees that surrounded her mother. The swarm grew smaller and smaller as it drifted high above the lake, floated across to the other side, then disappeared. It was time for Victoria to begin her reign.

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