

“TWO BARK BEETLES ON THE STREAM “

by Daniela Mattes (translated by Margit Schaafberg)

Bark beetle Bob and bark beetle Bill were sitting on a small stream in the afternoon heat, watching the animals - big or small - cooling down in the water or drinking. "Where may the river be flowing?" Bill asked his brother. "Oh, I think definitely to the pool where the frogs live." "Ah", said Bill watching some loose leaves floating down the stream gently. The stream was not more than a trickle, hardly recognized by men but as large as a river for small animals.

"How long may it take to swim down to the end of the stream?" Bill asked again. "No idea!" Bob replied irritably. "Don't ask such difficult questions in all this heat!" Bill was quiet for a while. Then he went on. "Do you know what? I will build a boat made of leafs and float to the pool on it!" "What a stupid idea!" Bob replied. "The leaf will soak full of water and you will drown!" "No, it won't!" "Yes, it will!"

The two brothers quarrelled until their cousin Buff arrived. Buff listened for a while and then asked. "Bob, what would you use to float down to the pool if you were to build a boat?" "This wouldn't take much thinking - I would float on a piece of bark of course!" "And this would work?" "Of course this would work!" "Then why don't we hold a boats race to the pool - then we will see which boat is better and stronger!"

Bob and Bill were surprised. They had never had such an idea. "What a wonderful idea," Bill said confident of victory. "We shall meet here again in a week with our boats and then we shall float down to the pool. We should better ask our friends to stand guard along the stream to make sure that none of us can cheat and to pick us from the water if we should drown." "Fine, agreed!" Bob and Bill shook hands. And in spite of the heat, they started to build their boats at a secret place immediately.

The other animals learned about the bet soon and were almost more excited than the two brothers. They discussed heatedly among each other which of the two brothers would be the winner. But the opinions were quite balanced. Cousin Buff was grinning. He had a special surprise for the two brothers!

When the day of the competition finally arrived, the bark beetles carried their boats and launched them gently with the help of their friends (each of them had put together a team). Still, however, the boats were tied to the new landing stage so that they could not escape.

The boat made of leafs and the boat made of bark were floating in parallel on the water. Both had tiny sails and an anchor. The two brothers were wearing funny little life vests so that they could not drown and Bill had even made a small captain's hat of leafs and he was wearing it proudly on his head.

The tension was rising and finally, the referee, a large dragonfly, arrived and floated above the boats. "Get ready," she yelled from above and the helpers along the stream untied the ropes but still held them in their hands so that none of the boats could start before the time. "Ropes into the boat," the dragonfly yelled and the helpers cast the ropes into Bob's and Bill's boats. "And off they go," the dragonfly yelled swinging a flag made of braided Daisies. The boats were starting to the deafening cheers of the spectators and both were floating towards the pool immediately. Bob and Bill corrected their sails and held wheel tight in their hands - both were very proud of their boats. But right after the start, nobody could see which boat would be the winner.

Friends and families were running cheerily and encouragingly along the bank with the two captains. Even a bit of wind had risen and the one who controlled his sail best against the wind was advancing best. Bob and Bill were running industriously back and forth, corrected the sail and steered the boat. But still, both boats were on the same level.

Unfortunately, they had missed Buff who was not present at the start. Strange. In fact, he had had the idea for this competition. But Buff had a completely different idea. He knew that both boats would soak full of water and therefore, he had sneaked off to a different part of the stream where children were playing with small boats made of newspaper. He was sure that the paper would be much more stable and he had simply stolen one of the boats the children had left behind. When his cousins had started, he had sailed off much further behind them and had also set a large sail. Of course, the secret winner of the competition would be HIM.

Grinning he was driving his newspaper boat and indeed, it was gathering speed. When he came into sight, he was yelling "Move along - here comes the winner!" Bob and Bill looked quite astonished but when they saw their cousin in his newspaper boat, they started to laugh. Indeed, he had caught much more wind with his large sail and was approaching dangerously quickly. "Move along!" Buff was yelling hectically but Bob and Bill could not get out of his way quickly enough and also, the stream was not wide enough to allow for three boats floating next to each other. Only seconds later, Buff was crashing into his cousins' boats and thrust

the leaf boat and the bark boat aside. Both of them capsized and were picked from the stream by the rescue team immediately.

Buff was standing sadly on his boat which was not damaged, floating further towards and into the pool. His cousins were sitting grumbling on the bank spitting water. Buff had spoiled everything! Buff was feeling really bad and the spectators were hooting when they saw the accident. Angrily they ran along the bank throwing little stones on him until his newspaper boat became so heavy that it finally sank. Nobody helped Buff when he swam to the bank. He crept to land all alone spitting water.

Bob and Bill walked to the place where Buff had crept to land. They looked at him angrily. "You are a spoilsport!" "Why do you always have to move into the foreground?" They yelled. "And we don't even know whom of us had won in the end!" They left Buff angrily and went home. Buff was broken. Everything had only been meant as a joke. He had only wanted to overtake the boats but not to hurt or annoy anyone. He flew home sadly.

For a week, nobody could find Buff and Bob and Bill were already starting to worry if they had been much too mean to him. Then one morning, he was standing at their door and said "Follow me, I've got a surprise for you!" Curiously, Bob and Bill were flying behind Buff to the place where the competition had started." "That's for you!" Buff yelled and showed them a new landing stage where three leaf boats and three bark boats were waiting. Next to it, there was a small booth with a chair on each side of the stream where the two cousins could rent their boats.

Bob and Bill couldn't believe it! Buff had prepared everything secretly to make up for his mistake. But before anybody could inaugurate the boats, Bob and Bill simply looked at each other, jumped into one of the boats each, loosened the roaps and quickly floated towards the pool. "Now we shall see who arrives first!" Bill was cheering. And all the bystanders were running behind him clapping their hands. And if you want to know the result: They arrived at exactly the same time and were happy that they were both right!