

# The Sea-of-Firefly

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**p 13-15**

## The bison

One morning, something peculiar happened to the bison.

When he wanted to go and sit somewhere, he was already sitting there.

When he walked somewhere, he was already walking there, just ahead of himself.

When he put something in his mouth, he was already in the process of swallowing it.

It's as if there are two bison!, he thought.

Nothing like that had ever happened to him before.

He walked faster and faster through the tall grass of the steppe, but there he was – walking ahead of himself and just as quickly.

Racing along, he ran into the forest and saw the ant, so he stopped and told the ant what was happening to him. As he spoke, he had the feeling that he had already told the story just recently.

The ant listened to him with a serious face.

'You're in your own way, bison,' he said. 'You need to move aside for yourself.'

He said goodbye to the bison and walked on.

The bison walked on too. It was the strangest thing he had ever heard. Move aside for myself... he thought. But he never moved aside for anyone! Not for the ant, not for the rhinoceros, not for the sun and certainly not for himself!

I wish I could meet myself now, he thought, and then we'd see who moved aside...

But he didn't meet himself. He was still walking just ahead of himself.

'Turn around!' he shouted.

'No! You turn around!' he heard himself shout back.

'Move aside, and then I'll run past you!' he shouted.

He didn't catch what was shouted back, but he didn't move aside, just went on walking ahead of himself, stopping when he stopped, running when he ran.

'Who are you?' he shouted. He was running as fast as he could.

'Myself!' he shouted back.

'But that's me.'

'Me too!'

The animals who heard him yelling and saw him racing past at full speed watched in surprise.

All day long, he couldn't manage to shake himself off or, if necessary, to move aside for himself.

Maybe I'll end up trampling myself underfoot, he thought, and what then?

Late in the evening, he came home, to his house in the middle of the steppe, and fell down exhausted on his bed.

‘Ow!’ he yelled, because he was already there, apparently sleeping.

He was completely drained, so he simply fell asleep, right on top of himself.

That night he dreamed of thousands of bison, all colliding, blocking one another’s way, trampling and stamping and yelling at one another.

But when he woke up the next morning he was alone again and he breathed a sigh of relief.

That whole day he ran around the steppe, without meeting anyone, and just yelling something at the sun from time to time, high above his head. Because the sun was always there.

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p 17-19

## The hippopotamus

One morning the elephant was standing at the foot of the oak tree.

For the past few days he had been learning a new dance, and now he wanted to perform it in public for the first time.

He looked up. At the top of the oak tree, he thought, that’s where it would look best. He took a deep breath and started to climb.

As he climbed, he went over the dance steps in his mind: first turn left, then stand on my left back leg, wrap my trunk around my neck, stick out my ears, jump up, spin around and land on my right front leg.

It was a complicated dance, maybe the most complicated one he had ever come up with, but he thought he had mastered it sufficiently by now.

Feeling satisfied, he went on climbing.

But when he got to the top, he found a house there.

A house? Here? How can that be? he thought.

It was only a small house, and the window was open.

The elephant looked inside. In a corner of the room, there was a bed. And in that bed lay the hippopotamus.

‘Hippopotamus!’ the elephant cried in surprise.

The hippopotamus looked up and said: ‘Hello, elephant. I was asleep. Have you come to visit me?’

‘Hmm... to visit you... um, visit... I, err, just happened to be passing by...’

‘Come on in.’

The hippopotamus threw off the bedcovers, got up, had a stretch and opened the door.

The elephant stepped inside.

The house was so small that there was only room to stand, right up against the bed.

‘So how long have you been living here?’ asked the elephant.

‘A day or two,’ said the hippopotamus.

‘Don’t you think it’s a bit too small?’

‘Ah, small...’ said the hippopotamus with a shrug. ‘I have everything I need: a roof, a bed and a view.’

He pointed out of the window. ‘And what a view it is, eh?’

‘Yes,’ said the elephant, who knew the view well.

'We can't sit down,' said the hippopotamus, 'but I do have tea.' He took out two cups and a pot of tea from under the bed.

Standing up, they drank their tea.

When he had finished his tea, the elephant cleared his throat and said: 'I actually came up here to perform a new dance. But I didn't know you lived here.'

'You can perform it inside,' said the hippopotamus, 'and meanwhile I'll just lie on the bed.'

'All right,' said the elephant.

He took a deep breath and began his dance, as the hippopotamus lay on the bed, with his front feet under his head.

The elephant first turned left, wrapped his trunk around his neck, stuck out his ears and stood on his left back leg.

He paused. That's not the right order, he thought.

He began again, but when he was standing on his left back leg, he couldn't remember what he was supposed to be doing with his trunk.

It's so different up here than I'd imagined, he thought.

So, instead of a jump, he was forced to do a backward somersault, but he misjudged it and went flying out through the open window.

Upside down, he whizzed through the branches of the oak tree and, remembering how the new dance should go, he shouted out 'Oh yes!' and just managed to stick out his ears before landing on the ground with a huge bang. 'Ow,' he said, as he felt a bump appearing on the back of his head. After that, he didn't feel anything else for quite a long time.

The hippopotamus leaned out of his window and saw him lying there. He realized that there was little he could do to help. So he shook his head, closed the window and lay back down on his bed.

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p 21-23

## The giraffe

The giraffe stood under the plane tree, wondering if the two little stalks on his head could do without him.

He squeezed his eyes shut and pictured them hopping through the clearing in the forest. They can probably hop, he thought, but not walk or crawl or anything else.

They hopped through the trees, occasionally meeting someone who looked at them in surprise.

'Who are you?' the animal asked.

'The stalks,' they replied. 'The giraffe's stalks.'

'I'm the one stalk,' said the one stalk.

'And I'm the other stalk,' said the other stalk. 'We're branching out on our own.'

'But where's the giraffe?'

The stalks didn't know.

'He's abandoned us,' said the one stalk.

The giraffe opened his eyes again and felt sad. I'd never abandon you, he thought. How could you think that?

It was quiet on top of his head. The two stalks did not stir.

Maybe they do want to be without me, he thought gloomily. Maybe they think it's boring up there on top of my head. And they're right – it is boring. Just standing around, being dragged all over the place, not having any say...

He squeezed his eyes shut again and saw them jump off his head, heard them say: 'Heh heh, we're finally rid of that stupid head...', 'You can say that again...' and then watched them disappear into the trees.

A little later, he saw them sailing on the sea. The one stalk was holding the rudder, and the other stalk was in the crow's nest. 'The whale, the whale!' it shouted. 'Where?' 'There!'

They moored against the side of the whale, climbed up onto his head and danced under his fountain.

'Isn't this wonderful!' they both cried.

'You can stay here if you like,' said the whale. 'There's plenty of room on my head.' He gently rocked to and fro on the waves and said, more or less to himself: 'I've always fancied two stalks up there.'

The two stalks were enjoying themselves and they told him that they liked it much better up there than on the giraffe's head.

'Does he have a fountain too?' asked the whale.

'No,' said the one stalk. 'All he has is us.'

'All he *had*,' said the other stalk.

The giraffe felt tears filling his eyes, and he squeezed them even more tightly shut.

But the two stalks did not stay at sea with the whale. They wanted to do more and see more. They went to the steppe and the desert, climbed the highest mountains and crawled under the ground. They ate black cake with the mole and the earthworm down there, and went wild with excitement and sang: 'We're the stalks, the stalks from the giraffe's head... but now we're free! Free! Yes, that's what we said!' The mole and the earthworm sang along.

After wandering for a long time, they finally bumped into him again, their giraffe. He was standing under the plane tree, looking mournful with his deserted head.

He opened his eyes again. I wonder if they ever feel sorry for me too... he thought.

He didn't know and so he decided from then on not to squeeze his eyes shut anymore, not to picture anything and to think that his stalks were always happy to stand on his head. 'It's a privilege,' he said. 'You do realize that, don't you?'

The stalks did not reply.

'Yes or no?' he asked.

'Yes,' they said. He heard them quite clearly.

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p 53-54

## The elephant

I wish I was the sun, thought the elephant. Then I'd climb up the back of the trees every day.

He had just fallen out of the top of the lime tree and was looking at the sun, which was climbing up behind the trees in the distance.

And when he reaches the top of the trees, he climbs even higher!

The elephant could not understand how the sun did that. There was nothing to climb up, was there?

But, he thought, there are other things I don't understand too. Falling, for example. I don't understand that at all.

He looked at the sun again, which had already climbed a bit above the highest trees.

He's so lucky to be able to do that... he thought.  
He tried to stand up.  
And yet, he thought, he doesn't seem really happy to me. He never dances, for example. When I'm happy, I dance, and when I dance, I get even happier.  
He stood on his four legs and very gently tried to take a step.  
I wonder if he can see something from up there in the middle of the sky, something that's not pleasant? Something that takes away the joy of dancing?  
Yes, he thought. That's it. Something is stealing the sun's joy.  
That's obviously why he sinks and goes back down. It's because he's sad.  
But what could it be? he thought. It must be something terrible, something you can only see when you're high in the sky. Only he can see it. The moon and the stars can't. They only shine at night. So they don't see anything.  
He took a few steps. Seems all right, he thought.  
He thought about the sun again. But at night he goes to sleep and forgets what he's seen. The next morning he climbs back up and is curious about what's in the distance and he's so full of joy when he arrives up high in the sky that he could do a pirouette. But then he sees...  
Yes, thought the elephant. That's it. That's what happens. That's what makes him sad, something up there high in the sky.  
So I'm lucky that I can never climb any higher than the top of the highest tree. And that I don't shine, of course.  
'Oh, the elephant's shining so brightly today!' No, no one's ever going to say that, he thought.  
He began walking faster and faster towards the oak tree. High up in the blue sky was the sun, still climbing higher and higher.

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p 65-67

## The weasel

The weasel loved visitors, but only when he wasn't expecting them.

Sometimes someone came by, knocked on the door and said who he was and that he just happened to be passing and he hoped he wasn't disturbing the weasel, but the weasel wouldn't open the door and called from inside: 'Yes, that's what I thought: he'll probably come by today. So just go on walking. Come back another time, but not when I'm expecting you.'

So the chance visitor would walk on, disappointed.

One morning, the weasel heard someone coming.

'Weasel,' said a voice.

'Who's there?' asked the weasel.

'Guess.'

The weasel pondered as quickly as he could who might be there and who he might have been expecting, but he couldn't think of anyone.

'I don't know,' he said, 'but I did think someone would come by and say: "Guess who I am." So go on walking.'

'I've brought something for you,' said the voice.

The weasel pricked up his ears and tried to peer out at an angle through his window to look at his front door, but he couldn't see who was standing there. 'What is it?' he asked.

'Just open the door,' said the voice.

The weasel could feel his heart pounding. 'Wait a moment,' he said. 'I have to think.'

This is so difficult! he thought.

Then he leaped up and said: 'Do you know what? Just put it down in front of my door. I think it's a shame for you to wait any longer, but I need to think first and decide if I can entertain you – and that could take a long time.'

'No, no, it doesn't matter. I'll wait,' said the voice.

'Even if it takes days?'

'Yes.'

The weasel was becoming desperate.

'Why did you actually come here?' he shouted. 'I didn't invite you, did I? Just go on walking. I'll write and let you know when I can entertain you. And that's not now!'

'I've come when you weren't expecting me,' said the voice. 'It's because of what I've brought for you.'

The weasel was afraid that he was going to faint because of all the thoughts whirling around inside his head. I can't open the door now, he thought. But maybe he has something really special for me! One kind of regret was clashing with full force into another kind of regret, right in the middle of his head.

The day was not going at all as he had imagined that morning when he woke up.

After pondering for a long time, he made a hole in the wall at the back of his house, as silently as possible, crept through it and sneaked past the side of the house to the front door.

No one was there.

'How can that be?' he cried.

It was quiet in the forest. The path in front of his door was empty.

The weasel went back in through the door and into his house and climbed into bed. The storm in his head had calmed, and his thoughts lay battered and scattered all around.

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p 65-67

## The termite

The termite loved counting. He knew that counting was his destiny – and he loved his destiny.

He counted everything: seconds, minutes, days, falling leaves, grains of sand, shells, waves.

He found it hard to be in places where there was nothing that could be counted. An empty room without any furniture, a bare tree trunk in the winter, an empty beach, a perfectly smooth sea. But luckily for him, wherever he went, there was nearly always something to count.

When he stood in the grasshopper's shop, waiting for his turn, and someone in front of him had bought ten chairs or twelve coats, he always asked if he could quickly count them again, just to make sure.

When he walked past the rosebush, he counted the roses that were flowering and the buds that had not opened yet.

When he listened to the thrush, he counted how often the thrush sang the same sequence of notes.

When he saw the millipede, he always checked to see if he still had a thousand legs, not a single one more or less.

And when he was lying in bed and had counted the specks of dust dancing between the curtains at his window, he pondered what could be counted and what could not.

Trees could be counted, and so could tables and flowers. Air could not be counted, and neither could earth or darkness.

Water, in his opinion, fell into both categories: in the river it could not be counted, but when it rained and fell as drops, then it could be counted.

The termite loved the rain. At night he listened to the drops tapping on his roof. He counted them and tried to keep up, but it hardly ever worked. 'Not so quickly!' he would shout. But he didn't get angry, and he went on counting until it stopped raining or until he fell asleep.

When he met other animals and they greeted him – Hello, termite! – then he would count them, as quick as a flash, and say: 'Hello, grasshopper, toad, ant, squirrel and hippopotamus. There are five of you.'

And at birthday parties he always counted the guests and told the animal whose birthday it was: 'You have thirty-nine guests.'

'Thank you, termite,' said the birthday animal, who now knew how many pieces to divide his birthday cake into.

Very occasionally, the termite lost count.

But he didn't mind. He could just start again. That was always possible.

Imagine if it wasn't possible though... he thought. Imagine if someone put his head around the corner and said: 'You've lost count? Aha! Then you can't start again, termite! Losers weepers!' and then disappeared. Then if five animals came by, he would have to say: 'Hello, grasshopper, mouse, earthworm, beetle and rhinoceros. I don't know how many of you there are.'

Not being allowed to count anymore – that seemed to him like the worst thing in the world.

When he climbed into bed, he always took one last quick look around.

One chair, one table, one window, one door, four walls, he would think.

And when he got up, he always looked in his mirror first.

'Two ears,' he would say, holding his face up close to the mirror, 'and one termite.'