Loop 0, 0-Stitch : Bee’s Story, Part 0

*Youngest Oakely was the most amazing boy. His first love was a flower, and he loved her because he could see that she was so very much more than only a flower - She was also a bird, and a bee, and a dragon, and a muse.*

*She was a wonderful Wimsel as well, for all of those other things were, in those oldest of days, all the very same things that every Wimsel was, and all the more –*

“Wait, hold on. Now, what’s a Wimsel?”, said the child, feeling somewhat seasick at the old woman’s cadence.

“Child, I haven’t gotten to that part yet.”, said the older woman, she supposed for neither the first nor the last time.

The child moved onto the next of her questions, “Well, who’s *Thamore*?”, leaning a little closer, for clarity.

The elder looked at the seven-year old as though she had two heads. “What do you mean, Maevis?”, she delivered the question with a taut and thoughtful frown.

“Who. Is. Thamore?” Maeve repeated, slowly and more helpfully. “Is he or she a wizard? Is she or he the hero or are they the villain?”

Aunt Bee glanced up at her Grandfather’s Clock in the corner of the den, over the mostly listening heads of the six or seven other expectant children who had ostensibly been dropped off there for story time, but had once again been tricked into attending question period on the Hill, instead. Bee was patient, just to a point.

“One question at a time, my dear. ‘Who is Thamore’? I don’t know what you mean by that. Now I have a question for you. And I would dearly love to hear your answer.”

Maeve could not imagine what the question was that Aunt Bee had for her, but she very much wanted the old woman to dearly love the answer she would give, and so paused, somewhat uncharacteristically.

Bee had in her heart more love for her young grandniece than she knew what to do with, most days. The child had owned her from the moment they met, when she was still in the mother’s womb. Maevis was also the second-only person Bee had ever met who could make her wish - just for a moment - to strangle a cat quickly when no one was looking.

“I am here, Maevis, to tell you and your friends – “

“They’re not *all* my friends.”

“-I *know* that dear, they will be someday, I assure you. Please stop talking when I am trying to finish my sentences and stories.”

Maeve’s produced her well-practiced pout face, and her cheeks reddened nearly enough to match her curls, for a brief moment.

Bee continued.

“I am here to tell you and your friends my short, speculative fiction story for thoughtful, younger minds. My question is, do you wish to participate in workshopping it, or do you wish to go elsewhere and ask questions of someone who has more time and answers for you than I do at this moment?” Bee flinched inwardly at the harshness of her own words, perhaps poorly chosen. The child was a witch - she was certain of it some days.

Maeve looked at the floor, trying to appear slightly hurt, buying time to think of a good comeback or question. Her friend, Chuckless, who was sitting next to her (as always), endeavoured to lighten the mood, and said, “I want to hear about the Wimsel, Nanna Bee. What it is?” Chuckless was five-and-three-quarters, and was still happily reckless with his words.

Bee turned her head slightly to address the young boy - draped in flannel and brown overalls in the middle of August - sitting cross-legged beside his best friend Maeve, and trying his hardest (as always), to spare her from being called annoying more than was strictly necessary. “Charles, thank you. I will get to that soon. Just wait.”

Bee scanned quickly the other children – the youngest 11 months old, the oldest, eleven years and four- months – and gathered her thoughts. This would be her last story time for these children for the next several months, if her doctor had anything to say about it. She would not tell the children this of course, so what she told them instead was that she was writing a book for thoughtful, younger minds, and that she wanted help from her story-time group, to shake out the details before she would disappear on a sabbatical to finish writing it, in seclusion.

This story, like all of Bee’s many stories, rang true to the kids, excepting Maevis, of course.

Maeve liked story time well enough, because she loved her Aunt Bee more than anything, including even Science. She thought story time was a bit childish for a seven-year-old-going-on-nine however, and didn’t understand why they couldn’t just have a discussion that involved her talking at least as often as her great aunt would. Wasn’t that storytelling too? The other kids didn’t seem to care one way or the other, they mostly just drifted off when her and her grand Aunt started discussing things. Like they were doing now.

“Aunt Bee,” Maeve slightly whispered, so everybody else could only barely hear, “this story is a little *boring*…. And kind of for little kids.” Mencer, the one-and-a-quarter-year-old aspiring piano prodigy, sat himself up on his rainbow yoga mat and spit up slightly on his own shirt, possibly in agreement.

“Maevis. This is a story I have written for *thoughtful* young minds. That is, it is for children who like to think, and also - “ she paused briefly, for effect - “ for children who like to think of *others*, from time to time. This is *Bee’s Story Time Hour*“, Bee pointed to the Bristol board sign the kids had helped her make at the beginning of that Summer, many of its sparkled letters beginning to erode in interesting ways due to cheap dollar-store glue from the new, inexplicably named *Too-Toonie’s* down the lane – “and I am Bee. That means this hour is for *me* to tell *you* a story. There is, as you know, a ten-minute question period at the end of the story hour.”

Bee waited a beat to let anybody have a word, if needed.

“So”, Bee continued, addressing each pair of eyes briefly and in turn, to let them know there was a learning moment forthcoming, “we have forty-five minutes of story, followed by a five-minute *quiet* break, followed by ten minutes of questions - if there are any.” She was back to looking at Maeve now. “And what time is it, Maeve?”

Maeve didn’t much like where Bee had gone with this. Two weeks ago, the young girl had announced to the entire group that she knew how to read time on the Grandfather’s Clock, and now Bee could distract her pretty much whenever she wanted, by asking her what time it was in front of everybody, because the old lady “couldn’t find her glasses”.

“Nine-fourteen.”, Maeve answered, flatly.

“How many minutes then, until break?” Bee handed the math question to the entire group of children, while trying to remember whether there were supposed to be five or seven of them in the room with her at that moment.

Maeve blurted out an answer, “Forty minutes! No, thirty-five minutes! I mean thirty minutes!”

“Thirty-one minutes?” helpfully chimed in little and quiet Rebecca Lee-Daniels, before she shrunk back into the line of children on the floor, shyly. Chuckless had been trying to do the math on his fingers and toes, but had only gotten one shoe off by that point. Mencer was having his face wiped by one of the older kids, but was still attempting in vain and frustration to answer the question by waving his arms wildly about, and using his words. Nobody bothered counting his flaps or shrieks though, which did not surprise him much, anymore.

“Excellent, Rebecca!”, exclaimed Bee. “Thirty-one minutes is how many minutes we have before we start our five-minute break at nine-forty-five, in preparation for our ten-minute question period, which begins at nine-fifty, and goes right to, but does not exceed, ten-o’clock.” Maeve did not feel like returning Bee’s look at that moment. Chuckless whapped her shoulder with his shoe, playfully.

“That’s enough, Charles. Shall we continue with the thirty-one minute conclusion to story time, which at any moment will be only thirty minutes long?”

General nods from the audience.

“Well enough. Let’s continue”, said Bee to the children, and sitting up straight, she folded her fingers together the way she would always do, when her next words would require every bit of her attention.

*Youngest Bently was, at* *most, a most amazingly ordinary boy. His first love was of flowers, and he loved them the most of all things, because he could see things in them that most could not.*

*But one Wimsel, the boy loved more than any other, for it was the most colourful of any Wimsel he had ever seen. In those early days, the other Wimsels had begun to forget who they were, and instead would spend the day struggling for the sun …*

Maeve had lasted this long, to her credit, but the sheer number of continuity errors between the first and second starts she was being presented with made her head start to shake lightly, without her knowing it.

“Good heavens, child! What is it? Why are you shaking your head at me in that distracting manner?”, Aunt Bee sighed, trying to wrestle with the story’s next line.

Meave, a field reporter by nature, didn’t know what question to ask first. “Who’s Bently?” she finally decided upon, soliciting a few nods from around her.

Aunt Bee – Beatrice to her sisters, when they were about, which they weren’t at the moment – scanned the children’s faces curiously, as though looking for another answer to different question. “Bently? Is he here?” and she looked about for him, and then remembered, a moment later.

“I meant Oakely, of course. Bently was a dog of mine, and he liked trees, and so did Oakely, and so I mix them up at times, silly Aunt Bee. Old age does that to a person, now and then.” She looked about cheerfully, and added, “It can be quite fun, at times.”

The children considered this thought for a moment. She continued to present them with a warm smile, wondering all the while if they had just finished or started the lesson. The story.

Chuckless spoke next, one hand in the air, the other trying in vain to put his shoe on, upside-down, “You were saying about the Wimsels!”.

And then Bee remembered fully.“Yes Charles! I was saying all about the Wimsels. Thank you, sir”. At that, she was soon once again saying to them about Wimsels, like everything was just and fine once more.

Maeve called her grandaunt’s porch “the cage”, because of the many screen windows and doors there were in it. She was also sent there on breaks fairly often. She had in fact been sent there just now, for interrupting the story about Wimsels and Weavelings, right after the moment Aunt Bee introduced - without any warning beforehand, or explanation immediately afterward - the word ‘Weaveling’.

Rather than providing clarificztion, Bee had instead sent Maeve to the porch with a number of colored pencils and some paper, and asked the girl to draw what she thought Wimsels and Weavelings looked like, because she was looking for an artist for her book, and would pick the artist whom she though captured them best, and split the proceeds of the book sale, three ways between she, the artist, and a charity of the children’s choosing. She then told Maevis to have at it, and good luck, and shut the door between the kitchen and the porch. And possibly locked it. Maeve was not ready to check that yet.

Maeve drew a lot of angry creatures during the first twenty minutes of that particular drawing session, but by the end of story time, she had begun to hope, in spite of herself, that Wimsels and Weavelings were both good, and so spent the last sheet of paper sketching faeries, insects, and tiny robots collaborating on rocket ship design and test flights (many Fey creatures heroically gave their lives to land on Mars, that evening).

Bee let her return for the latter half of question period.

“Why are we reading books about things that didn’t happen?” is what Maeve had chosen to ask as her allotted question, knowing she would have to go back to the end of the line every each and every one, however small.

Bee paused, and considered this. She had been planning for some time what to say, when the child asked the inevitable.

“That is a very excellent question, actually. Thank you for that, Maevis. It is something I will tell you about the next time we meet, I promise you.”

“You mean, next Thursday?” Maeve didn’t feel Bee meant next Thursday, but hoped that she might say that she did mean that.

“Possibly”, added Bee, kindly allowing the second question. “We might need to move the date around a little next week, because I am going visiting, and also… I will be busy writing the next draft of my story book. So, we will have to see.” She added, with a wink, “I will contact your parents using the Internet, and let them know my schedule.”, and with that, the first parents immediately began to arrive to pick up the other children, and everything became adult talk rather quickly, which Maeve mostly understood, but found kind of boring.

---

In Bee’s kitchen that evening, Maeve showed the old woman her best attempts at drawing Wimsels and Weavelings, and what she imagined they might all be like, with margin notes. Bee and she ate Rhubarb pie with milk and cheddar on the side, while Maeve tried to get a few more questions in before bed time.

“Aunt Bee, are you my real great aunt or just one of those ladies people like to call Aunt?”

Bee smiled, happy to have the place to herself again, with only her grandniece and the girl’s squirrel pet-thing, who had, she supposed, run off somewhere to hide for days. She took a sip of her bedtime tea, and said to the girl, “I am your real, grand aunt. I prefer *grand*.”

“Why?”, asked Maeve, poking at the pie. She did not think that she could like Rhubarb, and so had not tried it yet.

“Because what we call ourselves has meaning, child. You already know this, because I’ve already told you.”

Maeve considered her next question more carefully. “What’s a Wimsel?”

“You will have to wait until I return from my vacation to tell you.”, was what Bee chose to say, because it was easier. There were too many branches of that story to name.

Bee glanced at her Grandfather’s Clock (sitting as it did in plain view of all the rooms in Bee’s small home), and clucked twice. “Enough with the question sandwiches, my love. You’re going to be the nigh-death of me. We can re-convene tomorrow, when you’re well rested, alright? Tomorrow is another blank page”. Bee liked to end with a metaphor – it kept the child’s mind occupied until sleep finally, fitfully came.

Maeve did not want to go to sleep, but agreed to anyway, knowing it would be a losing battle. She brought her notebook and pen with her, as always, stashed beneath her quilted pillows, in the best small bedroom, made up just for her.