

BUMBLING

By: Shawn Robinson

Three bumblebees flew in a swan-like v pattern above the boundless ocean of green known by bees as the Grand Western Expanse and by humans as Lincoln Community Park in Bilford, Connecticut.

Being three males, they were not “worker bees”. At least not in the eyes of the matriarchal bee society, though every male bee would avidly argue that being a stay-at-hive overseer of the family eggs was just as much of a job as gathering nectar, if not more so.

The bees were not friends. In fact, they each had recently discovered they all shared a deep, undying affection for the same female, Queen Bee. This had created an understandable tension among the bees as they went about their daily bee business. For this reason and others, they flew in silence. Well, aside from the unavoidable white noise hum of their wings.

Bees didn't really have names, the primitive illusion of individual identity exclusive only to humans, which made singling any one bee out a matter of describing them to the best of one's bee ability. Present at this time was Fuzzy Fat Bee, who simply went by Fuzzy Bee to those familiar with him, Mostly Black Bee, and Prefers-Sunny-Weather-Bee. As you may have surmised, all bees prefer sunny weather to rainy weather, and thus this rather half-assed name was indicative of the general unpopularity of Prefers-Sunny-Weather-Bee, hereafter referred to merely as “Sunny”.

Fuzzy Bee led their unit. Self conscious about his weight, he often over compensated by working twice as hard as those around him. He also held the secret hope that Queen Bee, larger by nature herself, found him more attractive for the extra grams. This was a hope he never dared to express to his fellow males, however. The last thing he wanted was to be further ostracized on top of the already frequent and hurtful fat jokes he knew they said behind his back.

Mostly Black Bee was not without his social shortcomings as well. Being mostly black, he had once been confused for a common housefly wandering towards the hive. The other males pounced (Metaphorically, of course. In reality, they slowly hovered.) at the opportunity to defend their home from such a weak invader as a fly. Typically, invaders were wasps, birds, bears, or rival bumblebee gangs. Houseflies, put gently in comparison, and in words that a human reader

may understand, were the Martin Lawrence of the aviating insect world: nobody really knows what purpose they serve, but they nonetheless pop up every now and again.

Needless to say, all of the aggressive defender bees apologized profusely for their mistake— except for Incredibly Stubborn Bee, who had worried his credibility as the most stubborn bee would be put into question if he relented— but things were never the same for Mostly Black Bee. On the surface all was fine, sure, but in the depths of Mostly Black Bee's heart was a numbing, aching pain over the otherness his complexion established. An otherness he feared he would not live to overcome.

It was Sunny who tried to break the awkward silence as they flew.

"So," he began timidly.

"What?" Fuzzy Bee shouted over the buzz of his fluttering wings.

"I just said 'so.'" Sunny shouted back, a little louder this time.

"What?" Fuzzy Bee asked again, frustrated.

"I just said 'so!'" Sunny repeated as loud as he could.

The familiar silence returned. After another healthy interval of bee-time passed, Sunny turned to Mostly Black Bee. Mostly Black Bee noticed Sunny's shift, but hoped he could get out of a conversation by keeping his small bee eyes pointed forward. These efforts were ineffective.

"That nectar this morning sure hit the spot, didn't it?" Said Sunny.

When Mostly Black Bee's horoscope said he "would make the acquaintance of an unexpected stranger" in last night's bee paper, this is not what he had had in mind. He hoped instead that it meant the female worker, Low Standards Bee, would finally reciprocate his advances. Not that males and females could reproduce, but Mostly Black Bee believed his faux relationship with a different debutante would make Queen Bee jealous.

"You mean that fundamental nutrient we spend all of our time gathering, preparing, and then consume to stay alive?" He responded finally. "Yeah, it was pretty good."

Fuzzy Bee shot a sly glance to Mostly Black Bee, though admittedly some of the slyness was taken from the act on account of how noticeable it is when a bee turns their head. They have thick, stubby necks, Fuzzy Bee's thicker and stubbier still, meaning his entire striped body twisted as he and Mostly Black Bee shared a mischievous few moments.

"Hey." A pause. "-you." Mostly Black Bee stammered to Sunny, having forgotten his name.

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“Hay is for horses!” Sunny replied with a gleeful giggle. It was at this moment that Mostly Black Bee knew Sunny had to die.

“Right,” Mostly Black Bee continued through gritted bee teeth. “Fuzzy Bee and I are getting tired of flying. How about we stop down at that flower bed to the east, grab a bite of nectar, and head back to the hive?”

“What a great idea!” Sunny exclaimed. Then, in a more hushed tone, “I’m glad fatty opened up to one of us, at least. I kind of get the vibe he doesn’t like me too much.”

Fuzzy Bee heard this.

The three bumblebees flew over to a sea of dandelions within the ocean of green, the yellow of the earth meeting the pale blue of the sky all the way to the horizon. The original plan was to abandon Sunny among the flowers, as was standard passive aggressive bee nature, but Fuzzy Bee now had another prerogative. Unleashing a lifetime’s response to his persistent bullying on one poor victim, Fuzzy Bee charged at Sunny headfirst. Sunny, who had begun fretting over what he and the other two would make conversation about as they ate their nectar—Mostly Black Bee and Fuzzy Bee seemed like bee sports fans, but Sunny didn’t know the first thing about bee sports—was taken completely unaware as Fuzzy Bee’s massive bee body smashed into his, launching him far past the dandelion field. The last thing Sunny saw before everything went black was a continent of checkered red and white.

He awoke in complete darkness. It took a moment before Sunny realized he was awake at all, and then a few more to put together that this darkness was not night. It was a shadow. Staring down at him was an agitated human male, sporting trendy pastel shorts with a shimmering white polo and holding a thick brown book menacingly in his right hand.

It was a pretty rudimentary piece of bee common sense to avoid humans: beasts who treated stingers as a minor nuisance and killed entire hives at will. Sunny, apparently feeling particularly charismatic on that day, decided to try to talk his way out of imminent death.

It should be noted that only one human in bee history has ever learned the bee language. He told the bee intermediaries his name was Ron, and for a time it was thought Ron would be the bridge to a lasting peace between the beasts and the bees. Tragically, Ron’s family and friends became uncomfortable and scared when he claimed to be talking to the bees on the porch and Ron was quickly imprisoned in a psychiatric ward. Though Ron and the bees he spoke to had all died long

ago, hipster bees could still be found in hives all around the bee world with vintage "Free Ron" posters on the walls of their hive compartments. The point is, Sunny knew this human would not understand a word he said before he even began. This pastel-shorted man was no Ron.

"Hello there, human. I see you approaching with that book and I can't help but ... and you're coming closer. I'll cut to the chase. Look sir, I don't want to sting you. I'm not a violent bee. I'm actually a little bit of a pushover, believe it or not. I went to an all-female worker school for six bee-weeks growing up because I didn't have the nerve to tell anyone they had made a mistake. I really don't want to hurt you."

The book slammed down as a brown blur. Sunny dodged the impact, but was stunned by the brain pounding shockwave the book's contact created. He landed back on the checkered red and white blanket dizzy, but resolute.

"Also, if I sting you, my lower third will tear off and I'll assuredly...." The human prepared for a second swing. "Die. So how about you avoid the sting and I avoid death and we both just head down the dusty trail in our own directions?"

From above, Fuzzy Bee and Mostly Black Bee watched the human steady his killing-arm for another swing. This was way more hardcore than either of the two bees had planned. Abandoning Sunny in a dandelion field was one thing. Bees went missing all the time. This, on the other hand, was something different. Should another bee stumble upon this current scenario, Mostly Black Bee and Fuzzy Bee would be arrested and tried, at best for unintentional bee slaughter and at worst for full blown bee murder.

"We have to do something, right?" Mostly Black Bee asked Fuzzy Bee.

"Certainly," Fuzzy Bee answered.

Both watched as the human swung at Sunny again. He missed a second time.

"My god, what's wrong with humans these days?" Mostly Black Bee yelled over Sunny's delirious, punch-drunk screams of joy.

"I blame the schools," Fuzzy Bee remarked. "This whole participation award culture has created a generation of humans that can't even kill a bee properly."

"Yeah." Mostly Black Bee jumped in quickly, surprised at Fuzzy Bee's wealth of knowledge in regard to modern human education and feeling insecure about his own naivety on the topic. "I guess we really should do something this time."

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As the two flew down to the scene, they overheard Sunny still trying to talk his way out of it.

"If I may be so bold, I dare say part of this is on you. I mean, come on. Who actually goes on picnics these days?"

"Hold on there, champ." Mostly Black Bee announced. He still wasn't one hundred percent on Sunny's name.

"You guys! You came back!"

Fuzzy Bee and Mostly Black Bee flew at eye level with the human to distract him from Sunny. Horrified, the human began flailing his book wildly in the air, the two bees performing standard bee aero-maneuvers to avoid the blunt body. Sunny took this opportunity to join his two attempted-murderers.

"What the hell were you thinking?" Mostly Black Bee called to Sunny in between dodges. "You thought you could talk your way out of it? Does this guy look like Ron to you?"

"Enough chit chat. Let's get out of here," Fuzzy Bee said in a gruff voice. The bees darted, as fast as bees are able to dart, away from the human and back towards the hive. Unfortunately, the action and excitement of the last few hours was more exercise than Fuzzy Bee had gotten in the last few bee-years combined, and he was now entirely out of energy.

"Come on, Fuzzy Bee! We have to get out of here!" Sunny said encouragingly. And then, in a more hushed tone, "Thought he was a bumblebee. We should change his name to Porky."

Porky heard this.

In fact, it was the last thing he heard, as the human's book clipped his wings and sent him spiraling into the earth. Partly despairing at his oncoming death and partly relieved he finally had a moment to catch his breath, Fuzzy Bee looked up towards the sky, waiting.

In those last moments, Fuzzy Bee reflected on his life fondly. He did not pine after lost time or ask why this was happening to him. He was grateful for the days he had been given. The hardy laughs he had laughed. The amazing things he had seen. And so, in the second to last moment of Fuzzy Fat Bee's life, he came to see the world he lived in as something truly quite beautiful, meaningful, and profound. In the last moment, he was crushed under the weight of a human twenty-something's copy of David Copperfield, a book the human would never get around to actually reading all the way through.

The sky began to bleed orange as the sun set. Mostly Black Bee flew in silence, questioning the fragility of life and the absurdity of existence.

Sunny, trying to break through the awkward quiet, quipped to no one in particular, "Gotta' love Mondays."

Shawn Robinson is a junior in English Education who's just happy to be here. He is writing a novel about college. You can see him perform more poetry at the M-Shop on Open Mic Nights.