

THE ANGRY BEE
For Sashie, by Mom

Jelly Jack was an ugly bee. All the other workers and adults and Queens had beautiful yellow stripes along their lengths, but Jelly Jack was simply black. And he hated it. All he could think about from the time he was a pupa was the lack of yellow on his legs and face, and he believed that all the other bees thought he was too different to befriend.

So he kept away from the nest as much as possible, preferring to buzz around alone. But the lonelier he got, the angrier he got. After a while, he got so very angry, he started acting out. He scavenged picnic sites and barbeque parties, always seeking ones that were the best attended by young humans. Jelly Jack would land on soda cans and slurp up the sugary goodness, then dance around on the fried chicken with his filthy feet and taking a bite here or there. Sometimes he ate too much and got a bellyache, but instead of urping up on the grass, he'd do it on somebody's slice of watermelon, just to be mean.

Naturally, humans are afraid of bees, and would often swat at the air around Jelly Jack to shoo him away. This only made him angrier. He'd narrow his black eyes and set his strong jaw and wiggle his business end to get the venom into his stinger, and then ZEEEEOOOOWWWMMMM, he'd dive at his target and sting them, hard. Sometimes he'd sting more than once, just to make sure it hurt extra bad. Oh how those young humans hopped about and cried for their mamas! Jelly Jack just snickered and went back to foraging on their feasts.

One summer afternoon, Jelly Jack was on the attack at a pool party. He looked around for his first victim: he wanted somebody whose face was happy and whose flesh was tender. He was only happy when he could make somebody cry. Walking toward the pool was a boy named Miles whose smile was broad and whose bare feet beckoned.

ZEEEEOOOOWWWMMMM! Jelly Jack's aim was sure and straight and he delivered a sting like never before, right into the soft side of the boy's heel. Then he buzzed off to a safe distance to giggle and snigger as Miles cried.

But as he was bent over at his articulated waist with laughter, something began to hurt. Oh and then it began to REALLY hurt and he looked down at the ends of his six legs and he saw them throbbing and swelling. Jelly Jack screeched. Oh the pain! The stinging, miserable, unbearable PAIN! And as he watched with his black eyes wide with horror, tiny humanoid feet burst out of the ends of his legs.

"No!" he cried. "No-no-no-noooooooo!" He unfolded his wings and tried to fly, but he could hardly lift off the rock where he'd been standing, so heavy and unwieldy were these new extremities. What he hadn't known, of course, was that the boy he chose to sting was one of the kindest, smartest and most loving boys in all of humanity, and when Jelly Jack stung Miles, it wasn't just a one-way sting. The goodness in Miles poisoned Jelly Jack at the same time.

“Oh what will become of me now?” Jelly Jack bellowed toward the sky.

The thing about bees is that when one is hurt, the others come flying to help—even lonely, angry, ugly bees like Jelly Jack. So no sooner than they heard his wail, a whole search and rescue team was upon him. The leader of the team, a kind-hearted and massively strong bee named Kerrybel, reached him first.

“Leave me alone!” Jelly Jack shouted at her. “I’m uglier now than EVER!” And he hauled himself around so she couldn’t see him crying. He cried so hard he sounded like a human in the direst of straits.

Kerrybel raised her yellow forearm to the rest of the rescue bees in a signal that meant “I’ll take care of this.” They buzzed to a nearby rock to wait. Then she hopped around to face Jelly Jack, who hung his black head low.

“I’ve seen this kind of thing before,” Kerrybel said. “I know just what you’ll have to do.”

“You do?” Jelly Jack said, looking up at her. He’d cried out all his anger, and his black eyes now looked empty.

“Every once in a while, a bee stings a very special human and becomes poisoned with their best qualities. There’s no undoing it, I’m afraid, but the good news is that the infected quality is generally a good one.”

“What about these...*feet*?” he said.

“They’ll go away in a day or so. It just means you’re allergic,” Kerrybel said. “Meantime, you need to observe the boy you stung to see what kind of infection you’re dealing with. Then you’ll know what to do with the new quality you picked up.” She patted him on the shoulder. It was the first time anyone had ever touched him and he suddenly—inexplicably—wanted to hug her. But he couldn’t lift his foot to do so. “When you’re ready, come back to the nest.” He nodded. She began to fly back to the team, but turned around. “Jelly Jack,” she said. He looked up. “Nobody ever thought you were ugly.” And she turned again and flew away.

For the rest of the pool party, Jelly Jack watched Miles. He saw the way he said please and thank you; the way he carried dirty paper plates and put them into the trash; the way he offered to refill everyone’s lemonade. He saw him laugh and smile and throw his arms around his daddy’s neck before giving him a kiss. By the end of the party, when the sun grew heavy on the horizon and splashed the sky with streams of orange and pink, Jelly Jack’s feet were almost entirely gone, and the empty spot in his heart where the anger had been was filling up with something else: goodness.

With only a little difficulty, he flew back to Miles, who was about to get into the family van, and he landed, undetected, on the very spot where he’d stung him hours earlier. He

looked at the tender flesh and felt his big eyes grow misty with remorse. He leaned down and kissed the site of the sting, and he felt suddenly—but no longer inexplicably—better.

Jelly Jack waved to Miles, who never even realized what had happened, and flew back to the nest. He apologized to the workers and bowed low to the Queen, and begged all of them their forgiveness. They welcomed him home, and from that day forward, he was one of the happiest, most productive bees in the hive.

And also one of the most beautiful, even without any yellow.