

Published first by Dwelling Literary online lit magazine

Miracle at Ritz-Bug Mansions.

"Almost there Youngbumble."

This was the farthest that Youngbumble had ever buzzzzzzed. He felt safe with Grandbumble who knew when to fly and when to hide. Two solitary bees, on a secret mission. Mid-morning, sun still rising, cool wind whistled through Youngbumble's yellow-black fur. Youngbumble had much to learn of bumblebee tricks which could not be learned inside a nest. It fell happily to Grandbumble to guide the youngster. South of Primrose Meadow the elderly bee dipped groundward, zooming low over a weather-worn hardwood gate set into in a tall woven-willow fence. The community orchard lay protected behind the primary school and was home to the bug sanctuary so beloved of bumblebees amongst a thousand myriad insects. Grandbumble flew to a gnarled crab-apple tree drooping heavily with white spring blossom and alighted upon a thin but sturdy bough. Youngbumble settled beside him.

"Well, my boy, this is disappointing."

"Are we lost Grandbumble?? I like flying with you."

"Lost? No, Youngbumble. This is the place. That brown patch on the grass – burning yellow fingers has been here."

Youngbumble shivered. Raging yellow fingers, indiscriminate destroyer of trees and bees. Grandbumble frowned. The sanctuary of the hive of young hoomans was famed throughout insect-land. Many diverse rooms; plush furnishings; plentiful honeyed, syrupy nectar in bright flowers nearby and in Grandbumble's view, a better class of visitor. Unruly insects were kept in line by Broken Beetle and his armoured bandersnatches, shiny, tough and black with unforgiving, ominously snapping mandibles. A safe place for insects where Hoomans did not try to swat them with cudgels, hand-slap them, spray them with stinging drops or stamp on them.

"Something has happened here. The hoomans are sad, shedding precious water on their faces. Yes, something very bad."

The teachers wept over the black ashes of the Ritz-Bug Hotel. Six levels, custom designed for creatures which crawled, climbed or flew. Guests checked in, stayed a while, then moved on. Gradually the children lost their fear of creepy crawlies through crayon drawings festooning classroom walls. This would have been its first birthday had not the vandals struck.

Grandbumble trembled with rage. The weariness in his legs and wings was strong, but he had so wanted to share this special place with the youngster. Incandescent in the sun, Painted Lady fluttered by, bobbing on the breezes. She circled twice then landed gracefully as a lady must always do, beside them. Painted Lady's translucent gossamer wings thrummed a melodic vibration in the air which Grandbumble fancied he could understand.

"After sunset they came. Floor by floor they took our home, then set yellow fingers. So fortunate to escape. Our home."

Grandbumble visited the sanctuary frequently but always returned home. He never imagined that other insects saw it as home. Tongue tied with sadness; he could offer no words of consolation for madame butterfly. Of the other insects who visited he could see nothing.

"Come on mi'lad. We will feed awhile on the sweet meadow flowers and rest. I am sorry".

Grandbumble leapt into the air, Youngbumble following. Crossing the grey hardness, they narrowly missed being struck by one of the roaring monsters in which hoomans travel. On they flew to feed, through woodland dark and by waterfall clear and fresh, expanding Youngbumble's horizons with every four-time wingbeat. Grandbumble found a cosy burrow in the steep bank close to an ancient oak and guided Youngbumble in. Grandbumble settled into sorrowful silence. The night closed in, warm, still, and soundless except for inconsiderate deep-throated frogs in the pond nearby. Disappointment lay heavy on his wings. The sanctuary marked the limit of his range in these elder days, and the journey exhausted him. When the sun arose, he would fly out one last time – and then Youngbumble would be ready for his solo adventures. That was all an old bumblebee could do. Slowly his legs began to flex, his antennae stopped moving, and Grandbumble slipped sideways as if intoxicated on nectar. Youngbumble lay beside him, their legs twined and in moments they were asleep.

At sunrise Youngbumble, a furious cyclone of energy, entered the burrow, buzzzzzzing excitedly.

"Grandbumble, we must go back."

"The sanctuary is gone lad." Kindly, but weary. Woken too early.

"Please?"

Grandbumble was tired but he would not deny Youngbumble. So be it. Outside the burrow another young bee buzzed around with Youngbumble, their energy a warming memory for Grandbumble.

The youngsters flew ahead. Already at fever pitch they were greeted mid-air by Painted Lady, equally excited. The orchard was a jubilant hive of activity. The hoomans had remade and remodelled the sanctuary, bigger, better, grander. More resilient. Crawl spaces for the hard-shelled beetles and many-legged centipedes, slaters and granny granshers; pinecones for the spotted ladybugs; bundles of reeds for flies; stone grottos for bees and wasps. High up, a pretty palace for precious, lace winged rainbow flutterbyes as Grandbumble called them. Lots of soft fluffy bedding to snuggle into when the cold winds brought the soft, thick white water. Tubes filled with dry soil for Green Cricket eggs and a sunny veranda especially for the long legged, high-jumping grasshoppers. All would have a new home, even the tiny weevils with their odd little elongated snouts chewing the leaves.

Grandbumble watched as the insects danced and looped and sang and zoomed around the reborn sanctuary, full of the unfettered exuberance of young insects, none more gleefully than Youngbumble. Even two secretive cicadas and several froghoppers and leafhoppers had emerged to cheerlead the chorus in celebration of the miracle. This was their time, and it was sweet with unbridled joy. An old Bumblebee could share that cup of nectar and rest with a happy heart.

Grandbumble knew the youngster would find him again, eventually, and flew down to the well of a large blue Centaurea Cyanus. Within the protective embrace of the over-lapping blue Cornflower petals, he folded his wings, drew in his legs, and gently fell asleep.

There was still a lot of life left in an old Bumblebee.