





The Mysterious Tale of Gentle Jack and Lord Bumblebee







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Once upon a time, there was a father and a mother who had seven children. Three were girls and four were boys, and the youngest was known as Gentle Jack.

The father was the gamekeeper for the king of the country. He had a lovely home, right in the middle of the forest, with a lovely garden in a lovely clearing, beside a lovely stream. He had the right to hunt, to fish, to cut trees for firewood, to cultivate a decent patch of land, and he even had some of the king's money, year after year, to care for his poultry.

But the mean gamekeeper still didn't consider himself wealthy enough, so he would cheat and rob those who journeyed through the forest.

The couple's six oldest children had been brought up to steal like their parents, and they were very ill-mannered. Still, their parents loved them very much.

Gentle Jack was the only one they mistreated. And when his brothers and sisters saw that their parents were unkind to Gentle Jack, they began to taunt him, too.

Gentle Jack would often go alone into the forest, where he would weep, and ask the sky how he could be loved by his parents as much as he loved them.





One day, when he was feeling especially sad, Gentle Jack felt a sting him on his arm and, looking up, saw a huge bumblebee, still and staring at him. Gentle Jack took the bee by the wings and placed it on the palm of his hand.

“Why are you hurting me, when I have done nothing to hurt you?” he asked. “Go on, fly away and be happy.”

Gentle Jack washed his arm in the stream and then fell asleep. Eventually, when he awoke, Gentle Jack was astonished to see before him a big, tall man in black. The man said to Gentle Jack, “You have done me a service that I’ll never forget. Go ahead, small one, ask me for anything.”

Shaking with fright, Gentle Jack said, “Sir, my parents don’t love me, and I wish they would.”

“You are kind, but in order to be loved by your parents, you need to become clever.”

“Sir,” Gentle Jack replied, “if in order to become clever, I must also become wicked, then please don’t make me clever. I would prefer to be kind.”

“And what do you want to do with your kindness in a world full of wicked people?” asked the man in black, rolling his eyes.

With that, the big man in black disappeared.



GO ON  
FLY AWAY  
AND  
BE HAPPY





Gentle Jack wondered if all he had just seen and heard had been a dream. He then headed home, afraid he would be in trouble for staying out so long.

He had hardly set foot in the house when his mother said, “There you are! You don’t even know how lucky you are!”

After scolding Gentle Jack, his mother told him that a Lord Bumblebee had come into the forest, had stopped by their home, and had eaten a big jar of honey. Finally, after having looked at all of Gentle Jack’s brothers and sisters, Lord Bumblebee had asked, “Now, do you have a younger child?”

Having learned that there was a seventh child who was only twelve years old and who was known as Gentle Jack, he exclaimed, “Oh! What a beautiful name! That’s the very child I’m looking for. Send him to me. I’ll make him rich.” Then he left without another word.

“But I’ve never met this Lord Bumblebee. Who is he?” Gentle Jack asked.





“Lord Bumblebee is a rich nobleman who just arrived in this country. He will buy a beautiful castle nearby. Because he seems to have taken a liking to your name, you must go see him at once. I’m sure he wants to give you a luxurious gift.”

“And where will I find him?” asked Gentle Jack.

His mother pointed in the direction of the castle. “Go on, hurry along, and make sure you bring back for us whatever he gives you. Otherwise there’ll be trouble!”

As Gentle Jack began his walk towards the castle, he began to feel tired from hunger. Gentle Jack sat down to rest under a fig tree, where he soon heard the humming of bees above his head. Standing on his

tiptoes, he could just reach a beautiful honeycomb in the tree’s hollow. He ate a little bit of honey.

He was startled when a piercing voice cried from the hollow of the tree, “Seize that wicked child! Tear to pieces that thief who is stealing our riches!” Gentle Jack was scared half to death!

“Forgive me,” Gentle Jack said, trembling. “I was dying of hunger.

It was only when I tasted your honey that I found it was something even more precious than the finest gold.”

The Queen Bee was merciful and left Gentle Jack unharmed. As the sun dipped behind the bushes, Gentle Jack resumed his journey to Lord Bumblebee’s castle.



He walked for a very long time. He was about to collapse from exhaustion when he saw many lights shining through the trees and, after following them, he found himself right in front of a great mansion, loud with celebration music.

The gatekeeper asked if he was Gentle Jack. “We’ve been expecting you,” he said. “You will meet Lord Bumblebee tomorrow.”

He was then taken to a beautiful bedroom, where he was served a lovely supper of fruits and jam. Afterwards, Gentle Jack decided to explore the castle.

As he walked up the stairs, down the stairs, and through several rooms, he saw many things he didn’t understand, but which

entertained him nonetheless. Gentle Jack eventually slipped away from the party to sleep under the trees of the garden.





When he woke up, he saw before him the man in black. “Gentle Jack,” he said. “You did well to come and see me, because I am here to help you.”

“Is it really because my name is Gentle Jack?”

“Yes,” said Lord Bumblebee. “It’s up to you to tell me what you want.”

“If you could give me something that would make my parents love me...”

“First, tell me why your parents don’t love you,” said Lord Bumblebee. “Because you seem to be a strong, good boy.”

“They tell me it’s because I’m not smart enough,” Gentle Jack said.

“So,” said Lord Bumblebee, “we must make you clever.”

“And what must I do in order to become clever?”

“I can teach you science and magic and witchcraft, but you must come live with me and be my son.”

“I have parents already,” said Gentle Jack, “and I love them. Although they have other children they love more than me, it would be wrong of me to leave them.”

“As you want,” said Lord Bumblebee. “I won’t force you. Goodbye, dear Gentle Jack. Should you change your mind, or wish for something else, come see me. You will always be welcome.” Then Lord Bumblebee vanished into a rose hedge, and Gentle Jack was alone once again.



Gentle Jack returned home to find his mother waiting for him.

“What have you brought back? Where is the gift he gave you?”

Gentle Jack asked her to listen as he relayed his exchange with Lord Bumblebee and, instead of hugging and thanking him, his mother took a willow branch and started to hit him, enraged that he had turned down the opportunity to become the heir of a man richer than the king.

In tears, he begged his parents to tell him what to do to make them happy. They dressed him in rags and sent him back to ask for money.

Gentle Jack was mortified, but Lord Bumblebee seemed to have a special softness for Gentle Jack. Lord Bumblebee told him to take whatever he wished. He took Gentle Jack down to a big cellar teeming with gold, diamonds, pearls, and opals.

Gentle Jack, obeying his parents, filled his pockets with gold. He thanked Lord Bumblebee and turned back towards home, thinking: This time, I will show my parents that I obeyed them.





He was wearied from carrying so much gold, and so he paused to rest. He was curling up for a nap when he saw his brothers and sisters hovering over him, intent on robbing him of his treasure.

Gentle Jack defended his gold as best he could, pleading: "Let me take the gold home to show my parents, to prove that I have done as they desired, and after that you may take all you want."

But they were continuing to steal from him when, all of a sudden, a loud noise emerged from the oak tree and in an instant a swarm of hornets, wasps, and bumblebees came upon Gentle Jack's

brothers and sisters, stinging them so hard that they returned home with swollen eyes and hands. Yet Gentle Jack had not even a single sting. So he gathered his gold and brought it home.

The next day, when the father went to count the gold, he was astonished to see it melt between his fingers, seeping across the table in a mess of molten honey.

"There's magic in all of this!" exclaimed Gentle Jack's father. "Child, go back to Lord Bumblebee. Tell him that your father gives you to him. Stay with him: this is an order."

Gentle Jack left for Lord Bumblebee's castle with tears in his eyes.





When Gentle Jack arrived at the castle, he told Lord Bumblebee how his parents had told him to stay with Lord Bumblebee.

“Very well, very well, Gentle Jack, you have delivered your message. Now let’s talk about you, my boy. You will never have anything to fear from your parents again, and you will become such a clever man that you will rule the whole world.”

Lord Bumblebee welcomed Gentle Jack warmly. He dressed him well, gave him a nice bedroom, and made him a good meal. Then he began to train him in the art of magic.

Over the years that followed, Gentle Jack wanted so much to love Lord Bumblebee, but he just couldn’t. Lord Bumblebee disgusted Gentle Jack because he consumed only honey, jam, and syrup. It is for this reason that Gentle Jack didn’t like to hug him: Lord Bumblebee always had a sticky beard.

When Gentle Jack was fifteen years old, Lord Bumblebee took him

by the arm and said, “My young friend, it is time for me to teach you my secrets so that cunning will save you from violence when I am no longer with you. Come with me.”

Then Lord Bumblebee took Gentle Jack to the oak tree where they had first met. “Taste these acorns,” he said. “They are good.” Gentle Jack ate them with pleasure; but he was soon overcome by drowsiness so strong that he seemed to be dreaming.

The bark of the tree appeared crack open; inside, Gentle Jack saw a beehive with pale gold honeycombs, all of the bees withdrawn into their own delicious cells.

Lord Bumblebee began to buzz, beating his wings and legs on the door of the Queen Bee, who had barricaded herself inside.

Lord Bumblebee let out roar as loud as a hunting horn, and billions of bumblebees, hornets and wasps appeared like a storm cloud, from which a massive battle ensued.



Lord Bumblebee laughed despicably and told Gentle Jack, “Go on then, coward—eat, take, plunder, loot, kill!”

And he hurled Gentle Jack into the depths of the hive.

But when Gentle Jack opened his eyes, he saw that everything was as it had been when he had fallen asleep. Lord Bumblebee leered over him with a mocking smile. “That’s how you respond to your first lesson? You fall asleep while I’m trying to explain the laws of nature?”

Gentle Jack apologized: “Forgive me—I had some horrible dreams...”





Lord Bumblebee resumed his lesson. "I was explaining the natural history of hornets and bees. And if you wish to be a bumblebee, I will make you into a magician like I am."

"How do you become a magician?"

"Take an oath to abandon compassion."

"Do all magicians swear to this oath?"

"There are those who swear to an opposite oath, and who make it their business to serve, protect, and love all living creatures. They are fools."

"Well, Lord Bumblebee," replied Gentle Jack. "I prefer those other spirits to yours. I have no desire whatsoever to learn how to plunder and kill. I will go into the wild and join the other good spirits."

Lord Bumblebee chased after him as a dragonfly with blue wings appeared out of a wild iris and flew alongside Gentle Jack.

"Follow me," she told him. "Don't be afraid."





Gentle Jack found himself on the Island of the Flowers. A beautiful white daffodil bent over and kissed him on the cheek, saying “Here you are at last, my dear Gentle Jack. We have been waiting for you.”

Gentle Jack, revived by the lovely smell of friendly plants and by the soft shadow of the daffodil, fell into a delicious slumber.

Eventually, Gentle Jack was awoken by the sound of happy voices. Flowers were singing and dancing all around him: everyone seemed drunk with joy; the morning glories were waving like bells in the wind. Millions of voices cried in unison: “Gentle Jack is here! Gentle Jack is here!” And with that, all the plants spread open like a curtain, revealing the sweet face of the Queen of the Meadow.

“My dear child,” said the dainty and fragrant Queen of the Meadow. “Go, and be free. Enjoy yourself and be happy, because this celebration will last only for a hundred years. Open your eyes wide and learn!”

Then, the dancing began again. Gentle Jack was drawn into the center of the circle by two field violets and found that even though he had never danced before, he was able to follow the others as if he had been doing it his whole life.





The celebration was as beautiful as the weather. Sometimes it rained, but it was a warm rain that smelled of rosewater, violet water, and mignonette.

The nights were just as magical as the days. Everyone slept wherever they ended up at the end of the night: upon a bed of moss, on the grass, in caves illuminated by more than a hundred billion glowworms.

The one hundred years elapsed like a single day. At the end of the hundredth day, the Queen of the Meadow took Gentle Jack by the hand. He was stunned, because he thought it was the end of the first day. "Alas!" said Gentle Jack, overcome, for the first time in a hundred years, by a profound sadness. "Must I leave all these friends? Must I go back to the country of the greedy and thieving bumblebees?"

"I will tell you what you must do," said the Queen of the Meadow. "The land where you were born is called the Kingdom of the Bumblebees, because Lord Bumblebee is the crowned king. By extraordinary luck, I happened to be passing through your parents' forest, in the form of a blue dragonfly, at the moment of your birth. This drive that I have, to do good wherever I go, gave me the idea to endow you with gentleness and kindness: these are, in my eyes, the greatest gifts I could ever offer you."





The Queen of the Meadow continued. “After kissing you and brushing you lightly with my wing, I continued my voyage to see the Queen of the Fairies. When I stood before her, my first concern was to ask her permission to make you happy. But soon after, Lord Bumblebee arrived and threatened us, saying that no one other than he himself had any power over his country’s inhabitants.”

“The Queen of the Fairies considered this and said, ‘My daughter, the Queen of the Meadow, has endowed this human child with gentleness and kindness, and no one can destroy a fairy’s offering when it has been delivered over a cradle. Gentle Jack will therefore be gentle and good, but it is true that he belongs to the Lord Bumblebee.’”

“Gentle Jack,” resumed the Queen of the Meadow, “He has stirred the spirit of greed and theft among the people of your country, stifling the spirit of generosity in every heart but yours.”

Gentle Jack replied, “I have learned this from you: How to love with all my heart and to know the happiness of being loved—a happiness that I had always dreamt of but had never before known.”

“You know something that the people of your country do not.”

Gentle Jack paused and looked deep into his heart. “Smile on me, so that I may not be sad when I leave you—because I must. I am a mortal and want to share my knowledge with other mortals. You have taught me how to love. I feel that I must love those evil, mad people, even if they may hate me. Please accompany me back to them.”







FLY AWAY  
AND  
BE HAPPY



Looking deep into his heart, Jack continued, “I am a mortal and want to share my knowledge with other mortals. You have taught me how to love. And I feel that I must love those evil, mad people, even if they may hate me. Please help me go back to them.”

“Go, my son,” she said. “I want to help you make the people of your country kinder, so I’ll allow you to gather from my meadow as many flowers as you wish to take with you, and every time a mortal breathes in the scent of even one of them, you will see him become kinder and more accommodating: it will be up to your wit to do the rest of the work. It will be a terrible and dangerous struggle.”

Gentle Jack then went to gather bunches of flowers, sobbing and sighing as he picked.





With heavy heart, he walked to the shore where the Queen of the Meadow waited for him. In her hand, she held a rose, from which she then plucked a petal, dropping into the water. Gesturing towards the petal, she said to Gentle Jack, “Here is your ship. May your travels be safe and happy.”

She kissed him tenderly and Gentle Jack jumped onto the rose petal. He was returned to his homeland in no time.

He had hardly touched the shore when a throng of sailors ran forth, amazed to see a child in a rose petal—for it must be said that Gentle Jack hadn’t aged a single day during the one hundred years that he spent on the Island of the Flowers. Because the boat was a rose petal from the enchanted island, they soon felt calmed by its perfume and they decided to keep the petal for everyone to enjoy.

Gentle Jack walked into the center of the crowd of sailors, thrusting his magic flowers under their noses. Little by little, everyone was calmed. Gentle Jack told the crowd all about the beauty and tranquility of the land from which he sailed. Finally, he taught them the

art of loving and of being loved.

With time, Lord Bumblebee learned of Gentle Jack’s return and sent an ambassador to invite him to his court.

Gentle Jack accepted the invitation despite the warnings of his new friends, who feared the evil schemes of the king. But Gentle Jack wanted to share his treasure with the people of the kingdom, saying to himself, “So long as I do good, what does it matter if evil befalls me?”

He was received warmly by Lord Bumblebee, who pretended not to recognize him, and who seemed to have forgotten the past. But Gentle Jack could see that he had not changed.

“I am told, my dear Gentle Jack, that you have a bouquet of flowers that is a remedy for all ills. Because I have a terrible headache, would I be able to smell it? Perhaps that would relieve me.”

In that moment, Gentle Jack forgot that the Queen of the Meadow had told him that her flowers do not work on the evil bumblebees; to the contrary, the innocent child thought that such rare flowers would sweeten the sensibility of Lord Bumblebee.



Gentle Jack held them before Lord Bumblebee, who immediately thrust his poisoned sting in to the heart of the loveliest rose. A piercing cry and a huge tear burst from the rose, and Gentle Jack, terrified, let the whole bouquet fall to the ground.

Lord Bumblebee seized the flowers and trampled upon them. Blazing with laughter, Lord Bumblebee called his guards, and because he no longer had his flowers, Gentle Jack was snatched and thrown into a dark dungeon.





One night, as Gentle Jack lay sleepless, he saw some movement within a moonbeam and soon recognized his beloved Queen of the Meadow, once again appearing in the form of a blue dragonfly.

“Gentle Jack,” she said, “This is the moment to overcome the bumblebees, but there is one awful condition: you must die. Do you feel brave enough?”

“Yes,” said Gentle Jack. “I will do anything so long as I am remembered with fondness.”

The Queen of the Meadow kissed him and vanished.

Until daylight, from the depths of the dungeon, Gentle Jack sang the beautiful songs he’d learned on the Island of the Flowers. His companions—the lizards, salamanders, spiders, and rats—were so moved that they gathered around him to sing, each in its own language, as they wept.





When morning came, funereal bells sounded.

The great battle was beginning.

The Queen of the Meadow appeared in the sky like a big black cloud, leading an army of birds from her island. They descended upon the kingdom of hornets and honeybees.

“The danger is too great,” said the Lord Bumblebee, seeing the Queen of the Meadow’s army. “Let’s leave these miserable mortals to fight amongst themselves. The birds are better armed than our bumblebees. Our only way to compromise is to bring Gentle Jack from prison and tie him up upon a bonfire. Then we will threaten the Queen of the Meadow.”

At the sight of Gentle Jack tied up, the Queen of the Meadow felt her heart shatter, and her courage began to fail her. The Queen of the Meadow was about to give order to surrender when Gentle Jack, seeing her imminent forfeit, seized the blazing torch and hurled it into the middle of the fire, throwing himself into the flames. He was consumed in less than an instant.





This was the signal for total warfare.

At last, after an hour of furious fighting, the army of the bumblebees and their allies littered the battlefield. The wounded birds perched upon the trees, where they were healed by the Queen of the Meadow's smile. The victorious queen flapped her great blue wings as she flew over the bonfire where Gentle Jack had died.

"Mortals," she said to the inhabitants of the kingdom. "Lay down your arms and cast aside your hatred. Embrace one other, love one another, forgive one another, and be happy."





The crowd then turned to face the remains of the bonfire. Upon the mountain of ashes, a beautiful blue flower called the Remember Me opened its petals. The Queen of the Meadow gathered this flower to her chest. Finally, she and her army blew the ashes from the bonfire into the sky.

Ever since that day, the inhabitants of Gentle Jack's country lived happily under the protection of the Queen of the Meadow, and a temple was dedicated to the memory of Gentle Jack.

As for Gentle Jack, he was brought back to the island as the little blue flower. There he remained for the rest of time, next to a stream in the enchanted meadow, all the while singing, laughing, and loving.





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