

Kimberly Newton Fusco

# Beholding Bee

By Kimberly Newton Fusco

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## **1**

The way I got the diamond on my face happened like this.

I was sleeping in the back of our hauling truck one night after Pauline shut down our hot dog cart and Ellis closed the merry-go-round and the Ferris wheel, and then, after every one of the stars had blinked out for the night so no one could see, that is when an angel came and kissed me on the cheek.

That is the way Pauline sees it.

Other folks say different things, like “What a shame, what a shame.” I hear them when I am chopping onions and Pauline is frying hot dogs. “Now there’s a heavy load for a little slip of a thing to carry.” They make it sound like I am lugging coal.

I hear one lady tell her girl I must have done something horrid to be stained all over my face like that. Or maybe my mama is the one who did something awful, or maybe my daddy, and I am the one being punished.

“Stay away, stay away,” the big girls say. But they come up to our hot dog cart for a closer look. And they poke each other and whisper, as if I am not standing right in front of them, “Careful or you’ll catch it,” like I have the flu. And the boys ask did I get burned all over my face, or am I marked with the Evil Eye, and they holler at each other: “Run or you’ll get it on you.”

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But Pauline holds me and whispers they are not right. Otherwise, why would I have a beautiful jewel on my cheek the color of a rose at dusk and they do not?

I do so like Pauline's way of looking at things.

### 2

When you have a diamond shining on your face, you have rules about things.

First, I keep it hidden. There is a hose outside every place where we hook up, because we need water to run our traveling show. Pauline and I keep a bucket and a sponge in the back of our hauling truck. Water from a hose is cold as cherry popsicles but if you let the bucket sit in the sun all day it heats up and at night Pauline pours out her apple shampoo and we take turns washing our hair.

Pauline has a big towel and she wraps my hair and then combs it out and I don't yell out much because she is mostly gentle. Then she braids my hair and when it dries she lets it loose and it falls all soft in twists and curls and hides the diamond on my cheek. Because when you have a jewel on your face, some days you might not want to show everyone who feels like looking.

Second, I make sure I am always close to Pauline so when somebody comes up asking for hot dogs, I can turn my cheek toward her, where it is safe. I am always out of harm's way when I am near Pauline. I spoon onions and sauerkraut on hot dogs and wrap everything in squares of wax paper, all the time keeping my cheek turned to her.

Third, I make Pauline buy lemons so I can squeeze the juice on my cheek before I go to bed. The lemon juice stings as it slides over my diamond, and sometimes I scrub a little. I have not noticed it working yet, but Pauline says keep trying because you never know how things will turn out. Life is just full of surprises.

Hot dogs are Pauline's job. We park our cart right between the merry-go-round making its *dee-dee-da-dee* racket and the Ferris wheel playing "The Farmer in the Dell" so many times you start wondering if maybe the rat should eat the cat, just once. You really do.

Ellis runs our traveling show and says hot dogs make a lot of money when folks know they are there. So he wants us right where folks can see us and he makes Pauline and me paint the cart with red and white stripes every spring and hang balloons all over it until it is as bright as the sun on your face.

This is especially important since President Roosevelt declared war last December and young men are getting shipped overseas. This has got Ellis barking at everyone all the time. Business is dried up. Pauline fries up a whole crate less of hot dogs now, but children and mamas and grandmas and grandpas still buy a few, and they smother them with the onions I chop every day until my eyes hurt so much I am sure they are bleeding, and the tears are dripping down, rolling right over my diamond.

Those are my jobs. Chopping onions and lining up the bottles of mustard and ketchup and scooping one tiny spoon of sugar into everyone's coffee because this spring sugar rationing started. Folks are greedy like pigs. They always want more. When you can't have something, you want it awful bad.

My other job is making sure there is enough celery salt, because somebody who likes celery salt gets in an awful tizzy if you do not have any left. They poke their finger at you and say what is the matter with you, girl, there is no celery salt, and I might get so bothered I could forget to keep my hair pulled tight across my cheek to hide my diamond.

We also serve honey buns. They are big and fat and we buy them from bakeries in

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long cardboard boxes. They are made with honey and corn syrup, not sugar, of course, and they sit like a flat tire in your belly, but I love them. I eat them by the bucketload and Pauline wonders why I am still small as a chickadee. My job is to keep the honey buns beneath a little screen. They look nice under there and flies do not get at them. We do get a lot of pests around here.

My other job is to find me and Pauline a home. I told Pauline I would take over this job because she is not so good at it. She keeps forgetting what she is supposed to be doing. “Pauline, look at that one with all the flower boxes,” I point out when we pull in Trenton, or in Springfield, “Pauline, we would be so happy here. Look at that swing on that front porch,” but she is always writing poems in one of her little notebooks and not paying attention. “Oh, Bee, it’s not so easy to leave.”

I don’t know why. It would be easy as pie, one foot in front of the other. So I keep watching in each town we roll into, the whole caravan of us. I am always sitting up in the cab of the hauling truck between Bobby, who runs the Little Pig Race, and Pauline. I look out the window for our new home. I will know it when I see it.

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