

HAPPY

THE LIFE OF A BEE

WALTER F. McCALEB



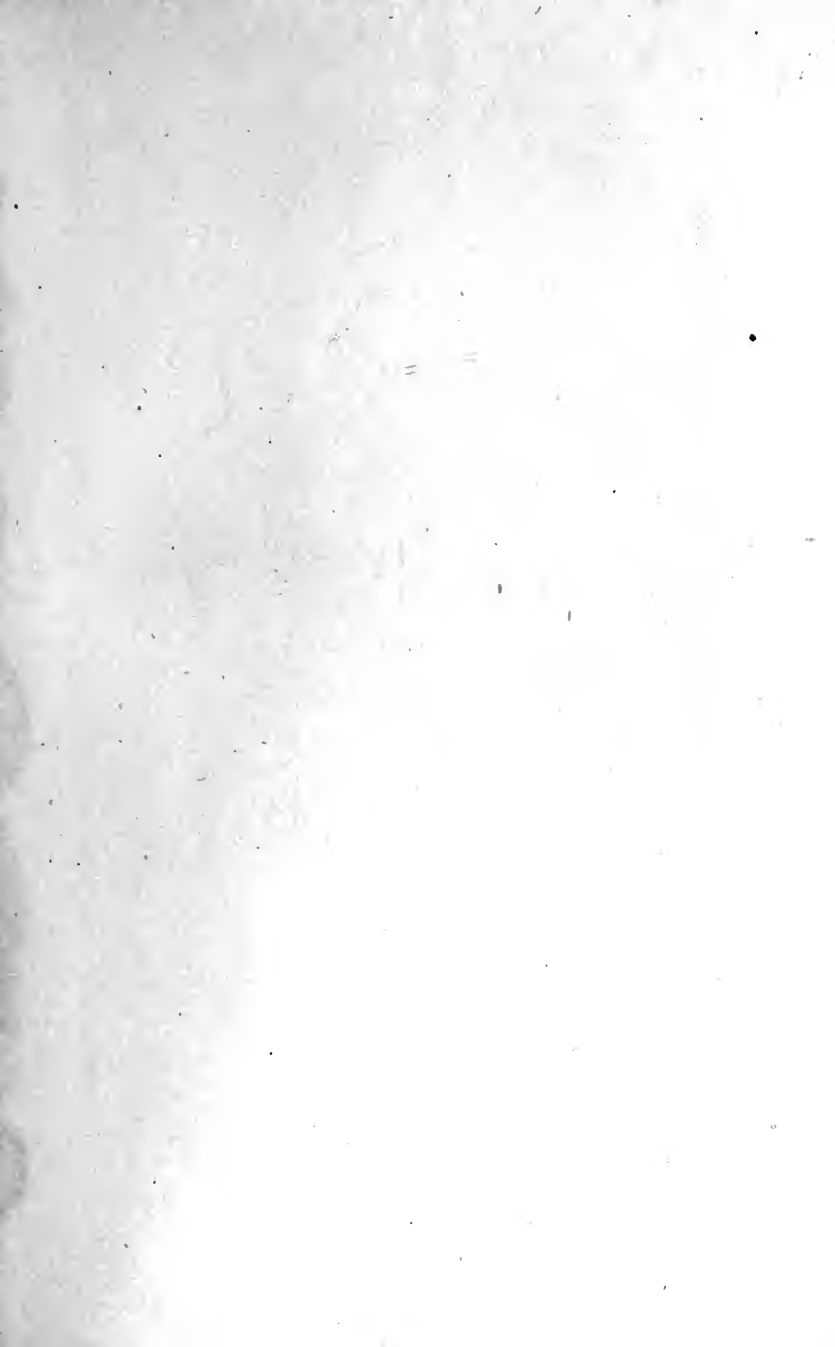
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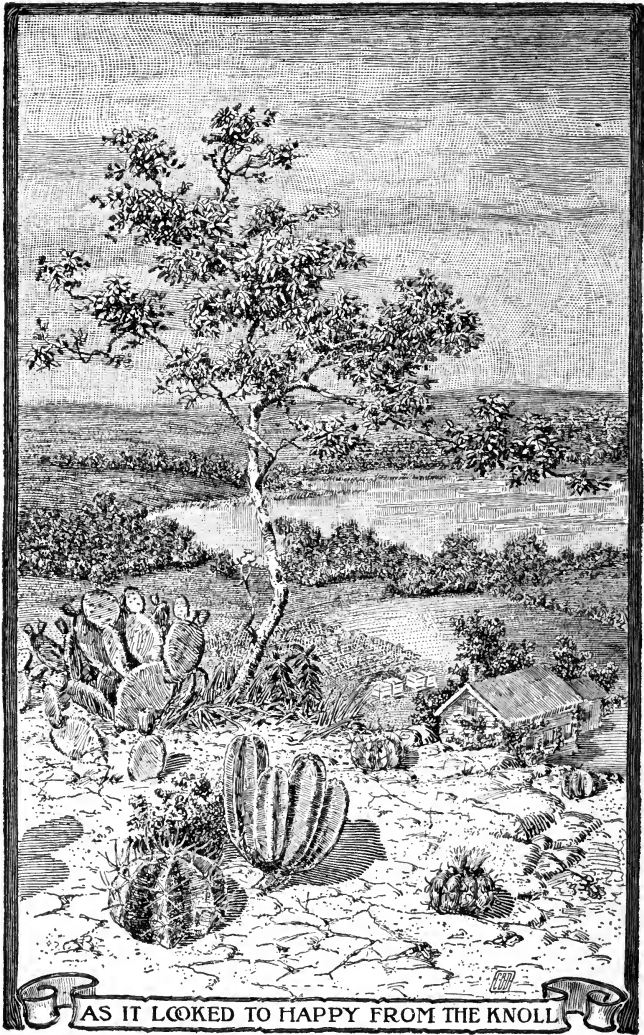


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AS IT LOOKED TO HAPPY FROM THE KNOLL

HAPPY

The LIFE OF A BEE

by

WALTER FLAVIUS M^cCALEB



Illustrations
and Decorations

by

CLEMENT B. DAVIS



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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HAPPY: THE LIFE OF A BEE

Copyright, 1917, by Harper & Brothers
Printed in the United States of America
Published April, 1917

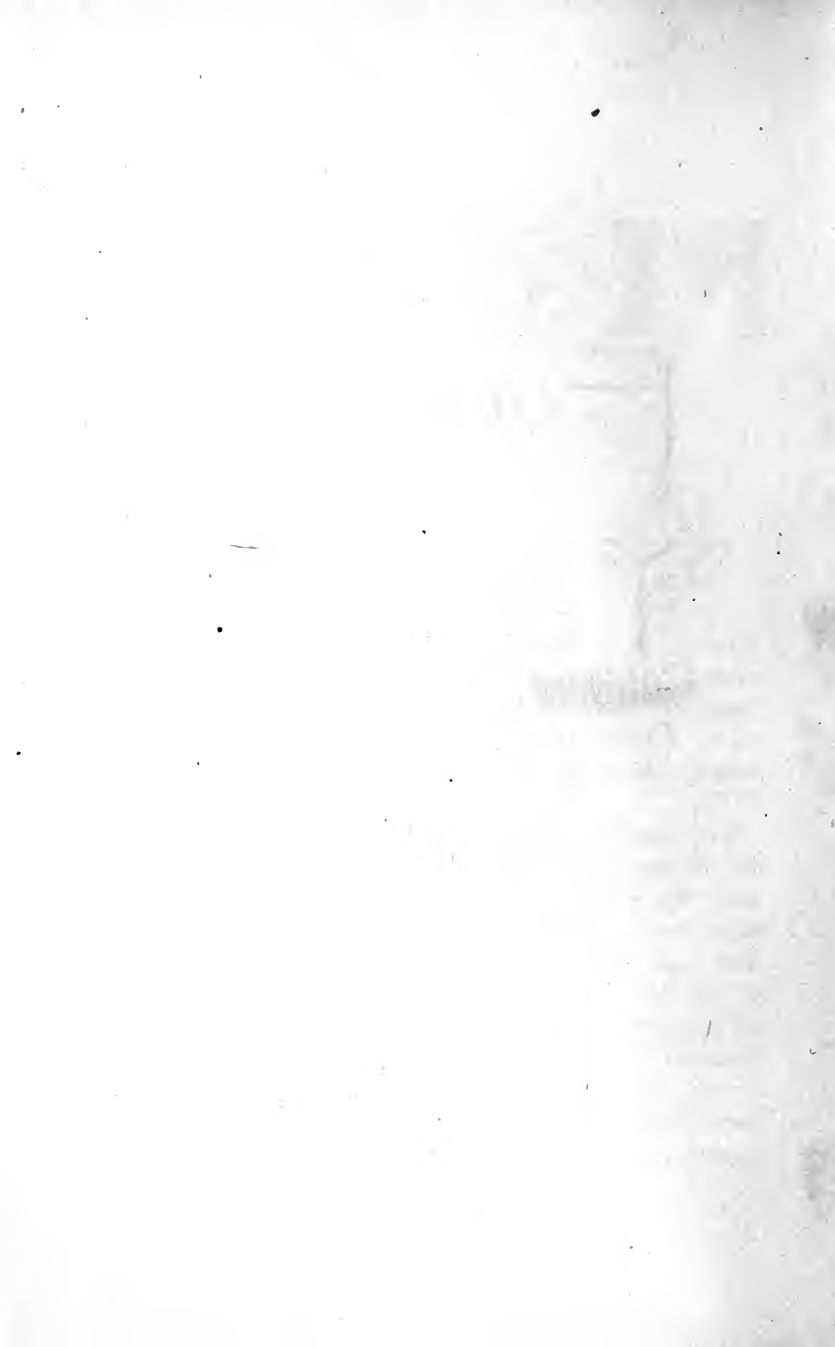
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FOREWORD

FEARS ago, banished into the far Rio Grande region, I became a keeper of bees. As a child I had loved them, even caressed them, and many a time have I held them one and a hundred at once in my hands. I knew their every mind and their wilful ways; I loved their sweet contrarieties, their happy acceptance of the inevitable, and their joyous facing of life.

So it came about that, grown older, I returned to my old engagements, and, far from human habitation, amid the wild, brush-set wilderness enveloping Lake Espantoso, I built my house and brought my bees. And, too, there came with me a little Shadow, and at his heels a shepherd-dog. There, in that land of boundless spaces, we waited and watched and dreamed.

The years went by silently, uneventfully—day following day noiselessly, as sounds die in the sea. Spring came with its bounty of flowers; and fast on the trail

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of retreating winter they leaped forth in multitudes: daisy and phlox and póppy and bluebonnet and Indian feather and anemone all tossed their heads and flung their beautiful wings into the sunlight. The earth was sweet with the wild, fresh sweetness of flowers. Even the cacti and the brush blossomed like roses of Cashmere, hiding their thorns amid a profusion of loveliness.

Then the winter came, brief, primordial in its changes. The brown earth and the brown-gray sweep of the horizon, stretching illimitably away, wakened in rueful contrast to the riot of the vernal months.

Season after season went by until, indeed, I seemed but a ghost fluttering in and out among the whirling days. Overhead a sky of perennial blue; in my face the winds from every zone, and in my ears the somnolent sounds of the years gone to dust. I was overwhelmed by the impalpable significance of the primeval world—and by the mysterious unfoldings of life.

Hours at a time I sat amid my little brothers, the bees, now and again catching up the harmonies of their existence and marveling much at the divine rhythm of their speech. The longer I sat and brooded the more I grew into their lives, until I seemed to know their every mood and to sound the mysteries of their being.

They seemed to know me and to love me. Often in their flight, tired and overladen, they would rest for a moment on my sleeve, and then away. Many a one did I raise from the earth where he had fallen—all too like our fellow-mortals—weighted down by bur-

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dens too heavy to bear. And how happy I was to see them, with ever so little help, again take wing and fly heartened to their homes. I have sometimes thought that, after all, men are but bees in their ultimate essence.

Thus, with the passing years, I, a keeper of bees, came to be one of them; and even now, though far distant, I wander in dreams through the open aisles about which their white houses cluster, and through that sweet rose-garden.

My cottage was framed in roses. Clambering Maréchal Neills, yellow as the sun; and Augusta Victorias, white as the snows of dead winters, leaned upon the walls; and all about varieties innumerable and known only to my mother, lifted their heads and prayed for the fulfilment of the law.

One rose there was of all roses the most beautiful. She called it the Queen of the Prairie. Red it was as the blood of the martyrs; and, huge as a lotus leaf, it blew the most wonderful of flowers. Here was my special pride. I loved it because of her hands; I loved it because it aspired toward perfection.

Early in a morning now gone—a gorgeous spring dawning—I rose and went into the garden, as was my wont. The sun had not yet risen, and there was in the air a brooding, a sound of far-away symphonies. From rose to rose I turned, until presently I came to the most marvelous of them all. Wonderful beyond words, I drew it to me—a Queen of the Prairie. I breathed its fragrance, thrilled at its beauty, when, with a start, I saw deep within the folds of its heart a little bee, drowsing in sleep. I could but gaze and

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wonder, and while I gazed one leg quivered a moment and then was still.

It is the story of his life that I would tell.

I plucked the rose and bore it away with me; and even now, as I write, its crumbled leaves lie over him in a memorial urn; and I shall be happy if I have truly caught the meaning of his life, which carried with it so much of the sweetness of endeavor, so much of the joy of living, and so much of love for the Kingdom of Light.

BEECHHURST, LONG ISLAND,
March, 1917.

HAPPY
THE LIFE OF A BEE





CHAPTER ONE

The Awakening



MY name is "Happy"—at least that is what the bees have always called me; and well I remember the first time I heard the word. I suppose I was joyfully flapping my wings at having emerged, white and feeble, but a living being, from the darkness of my cell, when I heard a queer, thin voice saying: "He¹ isn't a minute old, and yet what a fuss he's making with his wings! Let's call him 'Happy'!"

All around I could hear little noises of approval; any number of strange faces came hurrying to look me over; two or three actually jostled me, and one even drew his tongue across my face—and for the first time I tasted honey. I found out afterward that

¹ It is well known that all worker bees are females. But I have changed Happy to the other sex. Here I have taken a liberty, warranted, I think, under the circumstances.—THE AUTHOR.

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this was the customary salutation to all newly-born bees. Of course I was too young to appreciate all they said and did, and I soon forgot the jubilation, for I happened, in my wanderings, upon a cell brimming with honey, and, without asking permission, I ate and ate until I could not hold another mouthful.

Then a strange drowsiness seized me, and I scarcely knew which way to turn. But I fell in with what I afterward learned were nurse bees, and they took me in charge. Presently, hanging fast to the comb with my half-a-dozen legs, I fell asleep.

Wonderful things had happened in a very few minutes. It seemed to me, as I began to drowse and the light to fade, that once more I was falling asleep in my cell, whence I had so shortly emerged. The something that had awakened within me, that had caused me to turn round and round in my cell, and that had cried gently in my ear, "See the light—cut your way through the door and live," sang me to sleep.

When I awoke, for a moment I imagined I was still in my cell. I thought I could hear my neighbors, on all sides of me, biting at the wax doors that closed them in, and that I could see the thin, transparent shutters giving way before the eager heads which appeared in the doorways—tiny, whitish-black heads, with huge eyes that slowly issued from the dungeon-like cells. I, too, unconsciously trying my mandibles, must have been biting on the combs about me, for presently I was stopped by an important-looking bee that cried, sharply, "What are you about, youngster?"

He was rough to me, but I had learned that one must not bite the combs just for the pleasure of biting;

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it began to dawn on me that it cost infinite labor to build the thousands of little six-sided houses which, laid side by side, made up the combs of our hive. And almost before I knew it, I came to have vast respect for all the things I could see about me, for the things I felt lay out there in the unexplored depths of our home, and for the things which existed only in the consciousness of the colony.

I was still so young I walked but feebly; but everywhere I was greeted as a brother. Some of the little fellows climbed over me in their hurry; some of them, hustling about me, almost knocked me from the combs; and one actually stopped me, mumbling something I could not understand; but his meaning was soon made clear. I suppose he said:

"I see you are a novice; you have on your swaddling-clothes. This will never do. I must clean you up."

Whereat he proceeded, in spite of my protest, to lick me all over and to rub my legs and body, saying, "This white powder must come off; you can't stand here looking like that; you must get busy and be a real bee!"

When he had finished with me I found that I was no longer so wobbly, that my wings moved more freely, and, to my astonishment, a smart little bee came up to me and said:

"I note that you are changed; you are no longer grayish-white, but look like everybody else; your eyes are gray-black, a little delicate fuzz is in the middle of your back, and beautiful alternating black and gold bands make up the rest of your body. You look like a real somebody."

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Then he hurried on, and I heard him make the same speech to another bee.

Still heeding the small voice, I had gone but a little way on my round of exploration when I plumped into the biggest bee! He was in such a hurry he nearly ran me down. As he passed I saw on his two rearmost legs great balls of yellow-looking stuff.

"Out of the way!" he called. "The bread-man! The bread-man!"

Every one seemed to have understood except me, and even I, a moment later, heard the cry and gave way to a newly-arrived bread-man. Just what character of bee he was I had yet to learn, and little did I then dream that I, too, should one day be a bread-man, carrying great baskets of bread on my legs.

By this time I was again hungry, and presently, as I traversed a white strip of comb, I came upon a great store—cell after cell, like a thousand open pots, full to overflowing with honey. I was on the point of helping myself when I was turned away.

"This is not to be eaten," a worker said. "We are ripening it and soon it will be sealed for the winter. On over there you will find some."

He was busy and gave no further heed to me, but as I turned away I noticed fully a hundred bees standing ever so still—fanning, fanning with their wings the open cells to hasten the ripening processes. He left unanswered my wish to know what the ripening of honey meant—and the winter.

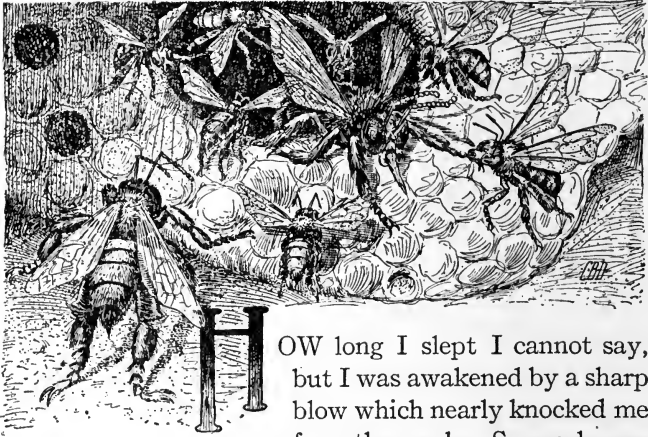
As indicated by the worker, I soon found plenty of honey and quite gorged myself. This time I took away with me a supply in my honey-sac. Again I felt sleepy,

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and started back to my cell. Finally I reached it. I was dumfounded to find that it had been overhauled and that the bread-men had filled it with shining yellow loaves. Wondering, I fell asleep hanging between the combs. The last sound that I heard had been a long, low murmur, which afterward I came to know to be the voice of my hive singing an immortal hymn, a hymn, I have been told, the bees have sung for a hundred times a thousand years.

CHAPTER TWO

The Cell House



HOW long I slept I cannot say, but I was awakened by a sharp blow which nearly knocked me from the combs. So nearly was I toppled over that I seized the first thing my feet fell upon. I felt immediately, by the way I was being dragged about, that I had grappled something dangerous; and imagine my consternation when I succeeded in opening my eyes! I was holding fast to the biggest bee that ever lived. Many of the same kind I have seen since that awakening, but none ever looked so terrible. When I had managed to loose my hold on this monster and stood fairly on the combs, I asked the nearest bee:

“Who is that?”

“Nobody; he is just a drone.”

“Please, then, what are drones?” for I had developed a wholesome respect for one of them.

“A drone is a great, worthless bee that won’t work.

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They stand around the hive until the time comes for them to die. He is nearly the last. For almost a month we have been driving them away, and when they won't go sometimes we sting them. You see, they never work and are useless. Of an afternoon they fly up into the sky with a deal of buzzing. Sometimes they follow the Queen into the deep of heaven. If they would stop there! But worse than that, they bluster about over the hive and eat a lot of honey. Besides, they get in the way and are just a nuisance."

I was listening very intently to this speech, when the very same drone that had collided with me came tearing past me with two mad workers clinging to his wings.

"Poor fellow," I cried, "are they driving you away?"

He headed straight for me, as though a friend had come to his rescue, and the next thing I knew I began to fall and fall, until I landed plump on the bottom-board of the hive.

In all my life I never fell quite so far again, although once I was high in the air with a great load of honey when a whirlwind caught me and hurled me to the earth. You see, I then knew nothing of distance.

I got up on my legs as quickly as I could and staggered about a bit, trying to get my bearings. Now, indeed, I had gone a long way from the tiny cell-house where I was born; but strangely enough, I knew the way back to it without even thinking. I had, up to that time, moved but a few inches away from it, but suddenly the world seemed to have yawned and swallowed me up. However, I quickly regained my composure, for around me bees were running, humming

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strange words as they went; and over me I could hear the croon of the nurse bees and other sounds which were still foreign and mysterious.

Without even thinking of the direction I took, I started on the way back to my cell. Crawling along the bottom-board until I reached the side of the hive, I climbed up it until I came to a bridge of comb stretching to a frame, and a moment later I was crossing from comb to comb, and, ere long, to my great joy, stood on the spot whence I had started. In my passage I had met hundreds and hundreds of my brothers, none of whom seemed glad to see me, although I thought a few stopped to watch me stumbling along on my way. However, I now know that not one actually paused from his work. The world they live in is too full of duties and the dark days of winter are always too close at hand, while eternally is sounding in their ears the refrain, "Work, work, for the frost is coming."

I went round and round the cell which had been my house. I couldn't make out why I did this, because I was absolutely sure of my location. Still, to make doubly sure, I even thrust my head into the doorway and scented the bread with which it had been filled. There still remained about it a curious odor, which I never forgot, and at this late day, with my eyes closed, I could find my cell—perhaps not by the smell, but through the same divining sense that has led me across ten thousand fields and streams and hills to my home again. I found, however, that I had been a little bruised by my fall. The foremost leg on my right side was hurting me. It had probably been sprained when I struck the bottom-board. I began to claw at it, when

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a bee interrupted who seemed to understand what troubled me. Forthwith he laid hold of the lame leg and pulled and pushed it unceremoniously, and presently, without a word, went on his way. I found immediately that it gave me no further pain, and I was engaged in licking my other legs when I seemed suddenly to grow sleepy and in a trice I planted myself on a comb and prepared to sleep.

If I really slumbered, it could not have been long, for when I began to drowse a bread-man was busy taking the yellow pollen from the baskets on his hindmost legs, and when I wakened he was just drawing himself out of the cell where he had stored it away. In fact, I saw him at the moment packing it down.

"What are you doing?" I asked, sleepily.

"Can't you see?" he answered.

Then it all dawned on me. It was interesting to watch him draw himself out and thrust himself in, head-on, battering down the loaves of bread.

"Why does he do that?" I ventured, of a bee that seemed to be loitering.

"In order that he may store a great deal in the cell, so that it will keep through the cold, wet months when there are no flowers. Bread comes from flowers, you know."

"Flowers! What are flowers?" I cried. "And bread?"

"You shall learn for yourself," he answered, patiently, turning away.

CHAPTER THREE Mysteries



I THOUGHT he might have answered my questions, but, without knowing why, I started off on an excursion, and surprised myself at feeling so much stronger. At least I could scamper along without swaying and staggering and clutching at every bee and thing I met. I began to feel brave and big.

As I went forward I encountered a stream of workers. They were humming a home-coming song as they hurried up the combs to deposit their loads of honey. I overheard some of them saying that the dark had dropped on them suddenly out of a cloud and that

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rain had begun to fall. I could not then understand what terrors were couched in these words—rain and darkness—else I might better have appreciated the thanksgiving hymn which these late-returning, rain-draggled workers were uttering. In days to come I was to learn what danger meant, for more than once I, too, was forced to flee before a storm in the growing blackness, bearing a load almost too much for my wings; and to spend a night in the woods, hiding as best I might under a leaf, and quaking at the nameless fears that beat about me in the gloom. There was no comfort even in the tiny lights that glowed over my head, nor in the small voices that called to me in the night. It was not fear that I should be lost that oppressed me, but that the load I had gathered with so much travail should never reach the storehouse upon which the life of the colony depended, for food was necessary to life. And life? I knew naught of it. But was it consciousness of imperative duty that made me shake in every passing wind? Even to this day my own life has given me no concern. I scarcely know that I have any interest in living, apart from serving, apart from the lives of these, my little brothers.

I noticed as I moved onward that the workers brought home no pollen. Their baskets were empty. I thought this strange and inquired about it, learning that the flowers yield pollen more freely in the morning; that the sun, wind, and insects tend to dissipate it, and that, therefore, bread was largely gathered in the early hours. I also learned that as a food it was far less important than honey; and that honey, too, was more abundant when the day was young. I knew that the

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incoming hordes were now laden with honey, and instinctively where it was carried, for my own sac was still stuffed nearly to bursting.

On I went without thinking, at each turn facing laden and singing workers. It never occurred to me that my progress would eventually lead me to the door of the hive, which was the boundary between my home and the wide universe that spread away to the stars. Many things there were that stopped me on the way. The last laden workers had passed, and I found myself still wandering on. The night song of the hive was already submerging the hymn of the late-arriving workers; but the two were strangely commingling, the one flowing into the other, even as the shades of twilight merge with the dark.

A mysterious feeling was creeping over me. I felt as though something imponderable was pressing upon me. Suddenly a whiff of air dashed in my face and I stopped, stricken with an indefinable fear. Then, the reassuring note of the guards at the door brought again my courage, and boldly I walked out into the night.

Several of the guards ran up to me, smelling me strangely, then let me pass. I must have been wandering as in a trance; all around me the night lay black and the soft wind shook my wings, and the little stars seemed hanging just over my head. I was seized with a wild desire to try my wings, to fly into the beckoning unknown. But my wings could not lift me, and happily one of the guards, seeing me approach too near the edge of the alighting-board, cautioned me and suggested my going back into the hive.

As I turned in I cast one long look back into the

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great black space that lay outside, and wondered and wondered. Overhead the sprinkled lights, like flowers in the gardens of heaven, leaned a little wistfully toward the earth; and near, ever so near it seemed, a wonderfully bright light shone, calling me to fly into its embrace.

"What is that?" I asked of the gentle guard.

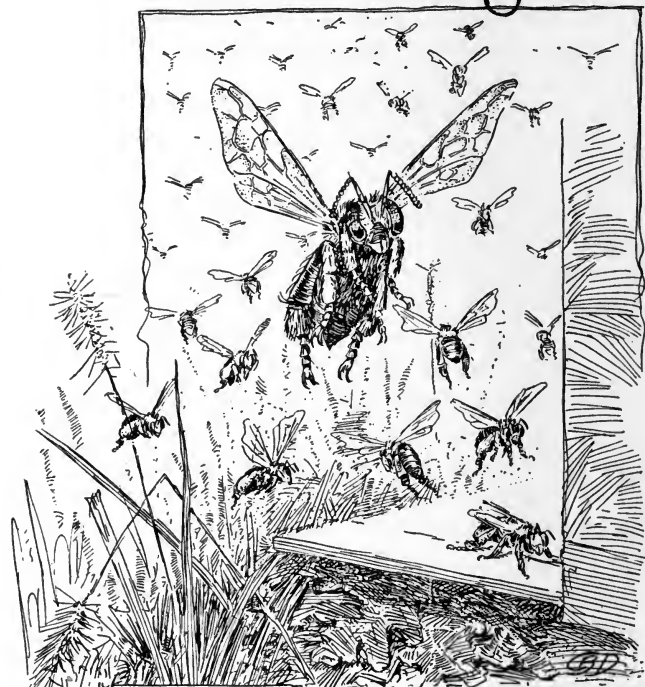
"The Master's lamp," he said.

The Master's lamp! What might that be? But I asked no more questions. There was too much of mystery around me. I clambered over the combs as rapidly as I might, back to my cell; but even there it was a long time before I slept, so spellbound was I, so stirred to the depths. Vast harmonies seemed athrob in the outer world, and one dim undercurrent of tone, the night song of my hive, ebbed and flowed ceaselessly around me. Gradually I seemed to lose my identity and to merge with the spirit of the things about me.

In a flash I felt that I was no longer just a helpless little bee, floating about in the maze of life, intent on my own purposes, bound no whither, owning no duties and driven by no destinies. Up to the moment I had given no concern to things beyond dipping into honey-cells for food, to exploring the house in which I found myself, to groping about with eyes wide and ears that missed no sound. But now I had been shaken with new desires. I seemed to have climbed out of myself, even as I had crawled out of my cell on that other day, now but a memory—so far away it seemed. My thoughts, my activities, my soul were no longer my own—they belonged to my little brothers buzzing in the alcoves or busy with endless tasks which I seemed to know without knowing.

CHAPTER FOUR

The First Flight



MY sleep was interrupted by I know not what strange dreams or fantasies. I suppose I was shaking my wings or my legs unduly, when a kindly nurse laid her hands on me.

“What troubles you?” she asked.

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I did not immediately answer, because I was at a loss for a reply and seemed still to be clinging to the edge of things. Such wonderful vistas had been opened to me, I suppose I acted like one entranced.

"I don't know," I answered at last.

"Wake up a bit, then."

Again I seemed quite alone, although all around me hundreds of my brothers were sleeping, or working at their manifold tasks.

It was still very dark, but I began to move about drowsily, giving no heed to the way. From comb to comb I clambered, passing over unexplored regions. Presently I came to what was clearly the outermost comb. I saw a lot of workers tugging and pulling at the cells. I stopped and watched them. Each cell had its bee or bees busily engaged upon it. They would seize the sides of it with their sharp mandibles, and, by dint of biting and drawing, extend it little by little. I could see that it was a laborious process, this building of comb. I was standing quite still, looking on and meditating, when, without ceremony, one of the comb-builders rushed up to me and began to touch my body, then left as suddenly as he had come. Instantly I was inclined to resent this treatment, and called to him as he turned:

"What is all this about?"

He did not stop to answer, and I was left to discover that he had mistaken me for a comb-grower. Just what that meant I was soon brought to understand.

Hours passed and still I hung around the comb-builders, until I felt that I had mastered the secret of the art. Then slowly I turned and made my way

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back to my home cell, tired, but greatly pleased with my experiences.

I suppose I must have slept, for with startling suddenness it dawned on me that the night had passed. The faintest light was coming into our hive, and over the whole colony there was ringing the early summons to the field. The cry caught me and unconsciously I moved forward with the workers, a solid stream of them making way to the entrance. I, too, passed out, and once more—now the full dawn upon me—stopped upon the alighting-board and flapped my wings, essaying flight, only to find that I could not lift myself.

I was distressed and sick at heart. I wanted to go—I knew not where; but instead, there I was, an obstruction; and I could not immediately re-enter the hive on account of the outward press of workers. The growing light, and then the sudden burst of the sun, quite fascinated me. Besides this, the flight of a thousand of my brothers, each taking the note of the field-worker when about to embark, filled me with longing to go into the wide world that spread around and that called me with infinitely tender phrases.

I suppose I was acting strangely, as well as blockading the entrance, when one of the guards mildly remonstrated with me and suggested my re-entering the hive. By this time practically all the veteran honey-gatherers had gone, and indeed those first out were beginning to return, chanting the song that tells of a successful foray into the fields. So, following the mandate of the guard, I seized the opportunity of falling in the wake of a laden bee. Instinctively I followed him.

He rushed along like mad, darting into the hive,

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and then over the bottom-board to a point where a bridge of wax stretched downward within his reach. Up it he scampered, with me at his heels, until he came to the very spot where the workers had been building cells the night before. Finding one to his liking, he buried himself in it, and in a moment had emptied his sac, depositing the honey at the bottom of the cell. Before I could turn around from inspecting what he had done he had gone. He appeared delighted to think he had been one of the first to return with a load, and as he went out I heard him calling aloud to his fellows to follow him, for he had found a new rich harvest field.

I hurried along and reached the alighting-board in time to see him fly, closely pursued by half-a-dozen eager workers. I rambled about on the alighting-board, constantly buzzing my wings for I knew not what reason, when I overheard one say:

“There’s that Happy again!”

It made no difference to me, for I was determined to stay to watch the incoming bees, and presently the worker I had followed inside returned and, at the briefest intervals, those that had gone with him. And now a real sensation was astir. These half-a-dozen all began to cry aloud:

“Hurry—hurry—honey—honey.”

In the briefest space a multitude was flying over the field to I knew not what rich storehouse. Indeed, every worker, on returning, was told the great news, and from one I gathered that a colony was being robbed, that something tremendous had happened. *The Queen had died!*

H A P P Y

I knew not what robbery meant, nor had I ever heard the word *queen*.

“What is a queen?” I asked.

One of the guards stared at me impatiently. “You had better go inside.”

I refused to comply with the suggestion; on the contrary, I remained where I was, ever and anon flapping my wings, and presently to my overpowering joy I felt my body being lifted off my legs, and without thinking I rose in the air! It was a wonderful sensation. I hardly knew what I was doing, but back and forth I flew about our hive, looking and looking to make sure I should know it when I returned; for now, indeed, I felt my soul bounding within me and that the wide world, upon which I had yearningly gazed, was about to swallow me up. Back and forth I flew, ever widening the distance, taking into view other white-faced hives and trees and houses, until presently, in a long spiral I rose into the heavens. Up and up I went toward the sun, glorying in the power of wings and the infinite grandeur of the world that spread out below me. How far away it seemed and how cool and green and inviting! I could hear around me strange noises, mingled with the whirring of wings. The note of my hive now and again faintly broke on my ears, and I knew that my brothers were traveling the airy spaces, working ever toward a goal far removed from thinking.

I did not feel lonely at all, but after a time I decided to return to my house to make sure that I knew the way. You would be surprised to know how straight I came back to it. Down and down I dropped into the bee-yard, and, turning right and left, without further

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thought I landed on the alighting-board. Immediately a guard fell upon me, but passed me without question. Then, with glee bubbling in my soul, I fled into the hive and set up such a buzzing for joy as I think none ever surpassed.



CHAPTER FIVE Robbery



OW that I had taken my first flight into the blue, I felt at last that the world had truly opened for me, and that I was a real bee with duties and responsibilities—and without hesitation I accepted them. Rushing around in uncontrolled delight, I heard again the laden workers murmuring about the great stores of honey they were taking. It seemed, from what I could gather, that practically all the workers of the hive were directing their course to this new, rich field.

I was listening as hard as ever I might to all this converse, when an important bee cried out:

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“Why don't you get to work?”

Up to that moment I had done nothing nor had I even then thought of it, but at the suggestion I made off, following to the entrance and then into the air a worker bound for the unknown treasure-field. I got off a little more slowly than he, but to my surprise I found I could easily outfly him. We had gone but a short distance when he began to descend, and, with no ceremony, landed at the same instant on the alighting-board of a strange hive where a thousand bees were struggling. I discovered immediately that many of the bees around were strangers to me and that all acted like mad—pushing, pulling, and fighting. Some were struggling to get in and some to get out. I saw at once that those outward bound were heavily laden with honey, and that they had to fight the hungry bees scrambling for a taste of the nectar. I collided with an old fellow heavily loaded and was about to attack him, when he hurled me aside. I was now aflame with the passion of acquisition. Honey I must have, even if it cost my life!

I scrambled along with the rest to get in and finally succeeded. But there the trouble began. Whether it was because I looked young or was really ignorant of the procedure, the first thing I knew a bad-tempered, elderly bee attacked me. I learned long afterward that he was one of the last survivors of the colony, fighting to the end. First, he seized me by the leg, but I kicked him off; then, undaunted, he got me by the wing in such a way that I could not shake him, and the next thing I knew he was about to sting me. Other bees were rushing pell-mell over us. I felt the tiniest

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prick of his stinger, and then with a supreme effort I escaped his clutches. I rushed away from the spot and soon came upon a batch of honey over which it appeared ten thousand bees were quarreling and fighting. Without thinking, I fell into the scrimmage and by some chance finally landed on a half-filled cell, and into it I plunged.

Here my troubles began afresh. Hundreds of bees piled on top of me and all but drowned me in the honey I was intent on possessing. For a minute my head was buried in it and I began to strangle. But by a mighty effort I escaped.

It was almost as difficult to get out of the hive as it was in; and on my return journey a hungry, malevolent bee intercepted me and demanded that I divide my load with him. On my refusing he seized me by a wing and jerked me so violently that I thought he had all but torn it off. I fought him from the start, but, he being a stalwart and I heavily laden, he thrashed me almost into a lifeless state. To add to my terrible mischance, another freebooter, more vicious than the first, joined against me, and the two of them overcame me quickly and robbed me of my load. They left me half senseless and I was only too glad to escape with my life.

I flew as straight as an arrow to my home, feeling outraged and exhausted. After all, I was not powerful—not important. I was crestfallen; but I did not even have to think of the direction or the location of my house, and you may be assured I was glad to return to it, if only to make sure that I was alive and knew the road. At the same time I was still under the

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impression that I had some honey in my sac. Nobody had taught me how to unload it, but I went forward to a cell. Imagine how downcast I was to find that not an atom of honey had been left me! I was infuriated; so resolved at once to try again. Hurriedly I went to the place for another load, but found the bees had nearly all gone. Once inside, I discovered that not a drop of honey remained, hence the reason for their leaving. I was wandering about when a poor crippled bee approached. Could this be one of the rascals that robbed me and who had suffered a worse fate?

“Won’t you have pity on me and let me go home with you?” he said, sorrowfully. “I’m all alone in the world.”

His tone and request cut me deeply; he was clearly no robber, for I saw that he was broken-hearted and had but five legs—one of his basket-legs was missing. And how wretched he looked!

“Have you no home?” I asked, with compassion.

“This was my home, but you and ten thousand like you have destroyed it. There wasn’t much left of it, though, when our Queen-Mother died.”

I felt guilty as a thief caught red-handed. Remorse was at my throat.

“Yes,” I said, “you may go home with me. But tell me about your Queen-Mother. What became of her?”

Then he began a fascinating story which kept me rooted to the place, desolate as it was.

“Well, it was this way: One sunny afternoon, a long time ago, our Queen-Mother went for a flight into the outer world, a thing she did but rarely—and never

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returned. Have you ever lived in a house without a Queen-Mother? You do not understand, then, what a terrible thing that is."

He stopped short and would say no more.

"Please go on!" I urged.

"Some day I'll tell you all of it. It is a long story, but for us the end was in sight. In the large economy of the universe our efforts were futile. Better for us and for the great Life of the Bee that the honey we had gathered should be conserved by strange colonies, and that our short lives should be yielded up or dedicated to strengthening them, than that it should be left rich booty to web-worms and mice. So it came to pass, you and others found out our condition and sought our stores, as it has been written you should. We fought at first, half-heartedly—as one without friends or kinsmen or home will fight. You saw the end of the battle. It is over. And now will you let me go home with you? You see I have but five legs, but I can still work and help do the things that remain to be done."

So absorbing had been his story, I quite forgot myself, and while I answered, "I'm so sorry for you, and want you to come," my thoughts were far away.

The things he had told me out of his life and out of the life of the colony had gone deep in my breast. Turning from him, I looked around and, lo! the hive was silent as death. Not a thing of life remained except this poor, miserable, orphaned bee. Death had come, and now stood guard over the portal of the little home where once a beautiful spirit had brooded, and where some of the laws we may not understand had come to fulfilment. . . .

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"Come with me," I said, in a whisper.

He followed, limping but uncomplaining.

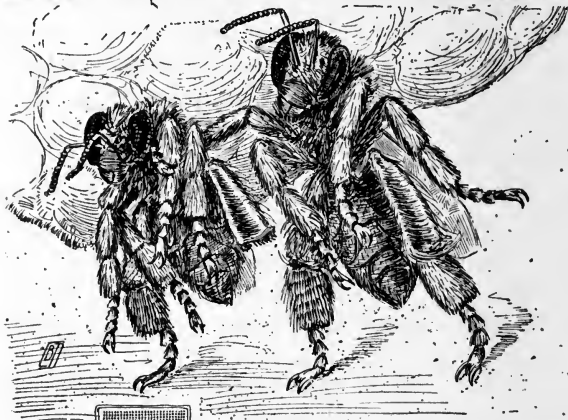
On the bottom-board we saw a number of dead bees which I had not noticed on going in, I had been in such haste.

"So many of my brothers are dead," he murmured, "why should I want to live? Because I am needed? You think I am needed? You think I am commanded by the high powers to give my energies and my intelligence to the problems that confront us? Perhaps that is true, and I shall bide by the call and give my life to my new family."

We came at length to the entrance; I noticed that he turned and looked in a dazed way at the things about him. It was a sad farewell. His little brothers had gone. His tribe had perished. He should see his home never again.

Then I rose on my wings and he followed me ever so closely. A new chapter in our lives had opened.

CHAPTER SIX—CRIP



SCARCELY were we risen in the air when I discovered the Master walking near my home. I seemed to know instinctively that he was our Master. Towering into the air and walking with such majestic tread, he filled me with wonder and admiration. Nor was I less interested in the Little One that ran at his heels. Stories there were of these two, eddying about the hive—of their kindness and also their malevolence. How mighty they appeared! I

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had seen them but once before. That picture was still vivid.

We were not long in reaching home. Without ceremony I lit on the board and instantly my friend was beside me. At the same moment a guard accosted him and seized him, recognizing him as an intruder. I interfered, but almost unavailingly, for the guard was about to sting him. The two of us escaped this guard only to be attacked by another, which we beat off, and hurriedly entered the hive. I was almost certain that yet others would question the stranger, and sure enough, we had barely got inside before another guard summarily attacked him. Poor fellow, with only five legs and tired from the combats of the day, he could make but a poor fight. Again I rescued him, and again we raced into the interior. And now, happily, our troubles were over. Without thinking, I made straight for my cell, with "Crip," as I began to call him, at my heels.

He seemed to realize that he was a stranger and that he owed his life to me, for he clung to me as closely as possible. He seemed to know, too, that the ground whereon I stood was sacred to me. He did not speak for a time, nor did I. We simply hung limp on the comb, and rested. He broke the silence:

"You have a wonderful colony, I can see. I hope I shall grow into it as though it were my own. Indeed, in a sense it is my own, for all bees are sprung from the same source, and the life of the bee is kept alive by us, each in his own cell. I know now that I shall grow into it. Listen to that voice! How long it is since I heard a Queen-Mother sing!"

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I roused myself, somewhat confused. "Queen-Mother!" I stammered.

"Yes. Won't you take me to her?"

I hardly knew how to answer; I had never seen her myself, although I knew from Crip's story and from some unknown source that there was somewhere a reigning spirit. But my life had been so brief and I had already learned so many things, I said, as lightly as I might, "Let us go."

He seemed to know the way to her. He hobbled along as best he might on his five legs. He was now no longer suspected as an intruder, and we marched without interruption. Presently we climbed through a hole in a comb and came face to face with our Queen-Mother.

I stopped, dazed, overcome by her serenity. The grace and magnificent proportions of her body and the fire of her eyes held me entranced. I shall not live long enough fitly to describe my emotions. There she was, queenly and wonderful, and yet simple as any one of us. She approached us and appeared to nod, as if to say, "I salute you, my children." Then she went on with her labors.

I turned to Crip. He was speechless.

Immediately we started back to our cell, for it was henceforth to be his also.

"It is strange," he said. "I do not understand it. Life and death are in her keeping, and yet she knows it not. You and I don't count for much. We pass like the leaves, but life everlasting lingers in her body—the very spirit of things ranges through her. But I am content with my insignificant place, to live my life, doing my duty from day to day."

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I did not answer him. We fell silent as we made our way across the combs.

"Suppose we take a turn in the woods," he suddenly suggested, wheeling about and heading for the door. "I have new bearings to get and you have new lands to explore."

"I supposed you knew this country," I ventured.

"I do, but the way to this new home of mine must be learned."

Out into the air we hurried, but he flew back and forth many times before our door. He wanted to make sure that he knew it; then, flying round and round in ever wider circles, we mounted with ecstasy into the higher reaches. Lake Espantoso, with its border of great oaks, lay below us like a bar of silver; and the Master's house stood like a sentinel beside the white hives which, row on row, spread beneath us in the sun.

"That prominent knoll," said Crip, "is a thing to remember, if you are returning late and flying low. And remember, too, that in that window of the Master's house a lantern burns. This may sometimes be a guide. But, mark you, never fly into it, though you may be tempted. Better still, get in before it is too dark. Just there by that row of hives is a tree to remember. It is a glory in the spring with its yellow flowers, until the cutting ants get it. They clip off the leaves and blossoms. But it is an excellent landmark, nevertheless. And there's the Master," went on Crip, "and the Little One, and that horrid dog. That little boy sits by for hours while the great one labors with some of us. The horrid dog sleeps—I'd like to sting him. Things will go wrong—the Master sets

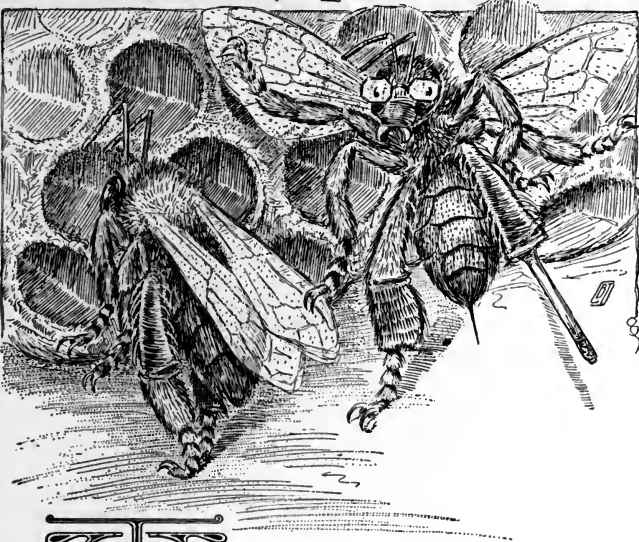
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them to rights. He seems to know everything; and yet, when he took away some of our honey, in spite of our having vast stores of it, we fought him. The little he took harmed us not at all, and I suppose we fight him because our brothers have done so for centuries. But I talk too much."

After a rather long flight, and much interesting converse, we reached our door again. Crip's experience with the guard was still fresh in his mind, for he clung closely to me for protection. But the guard' this time passed him without a word. He had acquired the scent and the note of the hive, and henceforth his life and all the energies of his body would be merged with that of the colony.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Crip, the Wise



WHEN we had returned to our cell we halted, and for a season remained quiet. Indeed, we slept a tiny bit, as much as ever a bee can sleep at a stretch, and then we fell into meditation. Among other things, I was wondering what the Queen-Mother was doing when she popped her long, thin body into each cell as she made her rounds. I could not understand and so I called on Crip to explain.

"Why, laying eggs!" he said, right sharply, as though annoyed at my ignorance.

"Well, what are eggs?" for I was still no wiser.

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"Come with me," he said, and off we went across the combs.

He did not stop until he reached the very spot where we had seen the Queen. The odor of her was still strong thereabouts, but she had gone.

"Now look, stupid!" Crip said. "At the bottom of each of the cells in this section of comb is an egg."

I looked down into one and, sure enough, a small, thin, yellowish-white egg was stuck squarely in the center of it. I looked into several other cells, and each had its one egg.

I shall never forget the story which he went on to unfold. The wonderful cycle from egg to larva, from larva to bee, he explained in fascinating detail. I saw at once that he was a real sage, that his knowledge was boundless, and then to crown it he told me that even the Queen-Mother herself had sprung from an ordinary egg, having been converted through miracle into a queen ruling over this empire. Simply by feeding and tending them differently—only the bees in their wisdom know how—the egg which might develop into a worker or a drone, passing through a metamorphosis, can be made to break from the dark cover of the cell the personification of life eternal, as exemplified in the body and the life of the Queen.

I could not quite understand all these things, but I felt sure Crip was telling the truth; and indeed I began to look up to him with increasing admiration and wonder on account of the worlds of things he knew.

We were silent awhile. There rose again for me the night hymn of the hive. It penetrated me as not before; it had a new significance, a new message—I had been

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visited with a revelation. The sight I had gained of the Queen-Mother woke new and tremulous emotions within me—there was a new meaning in life.

Crip stirred rather sharply, breaking my train of thought.

“What’s the matter?” I queried.

“I’m tired holding on. We must get another place to rest. You see, with only five legs the load of my body grows heavy.”

With that we moved up the comb to the top of it, and there he spread himself out with a little hum of content. And just then I developed a curiosity to know how he had lost his leg.

“You miss your leg, but do you suffer pain on account of it? And how did it happen?”

“That’s a short story. I was coming home late one day, well laden with honey, when, without warning, one of those terrible black bee-hawks darted for me and clutched me, sailing away to the nearest bush. He had quickly rolled me up with his powerful legs and almost by the time he lit he was ready to kill me with one thrust of his proboscis. Of course I had struggled, but when one of those fellows gets his claws on you it’s good-by. I had about ceased to struggle when suddenly there came a tremendous shock, and the next moment I was rolling on the ground and shaking myself free from the mutilated hawk. He had been torn to pieces by some mysterious force, and my leg, my bread-basket leg, was gone. At that moment the Master approached me; in his hands he held a long black thing which I had seen emit fire on other occasions, and somehow I suspected at once he had

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saved me. The little boy came hurriedly up, stooped over me and helped release me, and in a moment I was circling round to get my bearings. The little boy and the Master—and even the dog—watched my movements with an expression of satisfaction on their faces. I flew straightway home and was thankful still to be alive.”

“Tell me more about this Master,” I begged, for I was now growing vastly interested in his activities and in those of the Little One, and even the dog which once I tried to sting, because he came so close to our hive.

“Some say he is good—some say that he is bad. I only know him as the chopper of weeds about our home and as my rescuer. Many times since the day he saved me have I heard him shooting bee-hawks. Indeed, I had heard the little thunder of his gun before that day, but I did not understand its meaning. They say, too, that he takes away our honey—and he did take some of ours once—and frightens us nearly to death with the prospect of starvation. And they fall upon him and sting him, trying to drive him away. But all this is useless, they report, since he comes armed with fire and smoke.

“Others tell of him that in the dark, cold days, if provisions run low, he brings honey and closes the door against blizzards. But I know nothing of this. I have not lived through a winter and I fear I shall never know what it means.”

Thus I became infinitely interested in the Master who passed from day to day about the yard. But I was confused in mind about him. Somehow I in-

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instinctively feared him and I always found myself ready to attack him, as I explained to Crip.

"There would be no use in that," answered he. "Should you sting him, you would achieve nothing. Instead, you would lose your life."

"How is that?" I cried, for I did not till then know I had a life—at least, I had never thought of it.

"You can sting once, but unless you escape with your stinger, which is rare, your life is sacrificed."

I seemed to know this and answered him nothing.

"Is it not a strange fatality," he continued, "that we should be given stingers with which to defend ourselves and our homes, and yet, when we make use of them, we lose our lives! Still, we are always ready to strike, with no thought of death."

"What is death?" I asked of Crip.

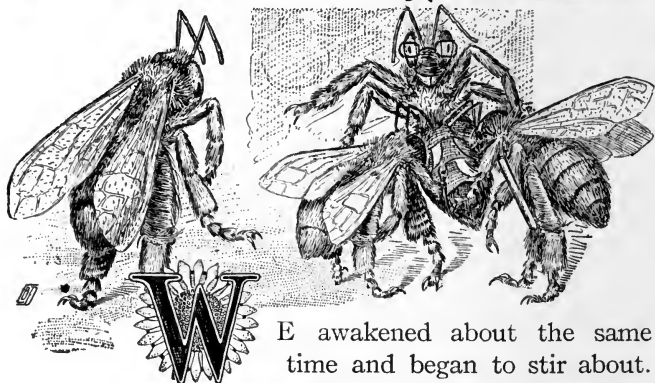
"I don't know, except that once when the bee-hawk caught me I felt myself going away. It grew dark and I heard the hum of wings that were strange and wonderful. Somehow you go to sleep and forget."

"I have thought of death," he went on. "I am old and battered, my days are as the falling flowers when the frost is upon them, and the frost soon will fall."

I waited awhile in silence, but he spoke no more. Soon he lay in that buzzing hive, asleep, and I was not long in following him to where the golden honey dripped in the garden of dreams.



CHAPTER EIGHT A Gleaner of Honey



WE awakened about the same time and began to stir about. The first thing that happened was a new experience—the wax-pickers fell upon me and raked and scraped me for the tiny bits of wax which now, on account of my voracious appetite, had begun to grow in each of the rings marking the under sections of my body. They were so rude that at first I was inclined to resent their interference, which seemed to be mere meddling. But when I looked at Crip and saw two busy wax-pickers fumbling over him, I began to understand that this was part of a routine, and so I stood still until they had finished.

“They won’t bother with me much longer,” said Crip, sadly. “You see, when one becomes old the wax grows thinly—so the pickers give over. But

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you! They'll get you. I have noticed that you are rather greedy about eating honey. This means you'll get fat and produce lots of wax."

"Tell me about wax and comb," I begged of him.

"Comb, my child, is made of wax; this is comb on which you are standing. It is everywhere about you. The cups that hold our honey and our bread are made of it. The cell in which you were born is of wax; and, besides, it is used to stop the holes in our house. Of course there are different kinds of comb, depending on the use to which it is put. Why, these sheets of comb with their six-sided cells are wonderful in their economy, in their plan and symmetry. The cell we build is perfect. No other structure would serve our purposes, combining such strength and capacity. The cell is indispensable to the life of the bee!—otherwise he could not exist. So don't let me see you make ready to fight the next time the wax-pickers approach, and they'll soon be after you again."

I answered nothing. I was wondering in what far age we had learned to build the six-sided cell, and in what tiny brain it had been conceived. They fit so perfectly, I stood quite still marveling at the harmony of it all and wondering how many things there remained for me to learn. At every turn I had been confronted with something new. And was it to be so to the end? What could the end be, of which Crip frequently spoke?

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Two months—glorious with flowers, but ending in disaster."

"What disaster?"

H A P P Y

“Well, you saw the close of it—the death of our colony.”

“Yes, I remember,” I said. But he was so wise I could scarcely believe that he was but two months old, for he seemed so tattered of wing and battered of body!

Without thinking what we were about, we drew near the door. Groups of workers were banked about the entrance, waiting impatiently to be away at the first streaks of dawn. Presently a note like a bugle-call sounded, and immediately the face of things was changed. By twos and threes and fours the workers took wing and scurried into the fields.

A dull gray light lay on the world; the air was damp and moved lazily out of the east; the dew had fallen thick on the flowers and now began to twinkle from myriad angles. Crip and I had left the hive at the same instant, but once on the wing I forgot all about him and flew like mad this way and that until I caught a whiff of fragrance from an unexplored meadow, and thither I hastened. Strange and thrilling sensation! I had not until now felt the joy of dipping into the flowers and searching out their honey-pots. It was a field of late sunflowers, and all of them had their faces toward the east, eager to look upon the sun. Joyfully they waved in the breeze and beckoned to one another as if to say: “Good morning. How glorious is the sun, our king!” In spite of the dew on their faces, some of them already were wearing the brand of the hot summer, which had all but gone and left them beseeching of autumn her tender graces.

“I am old and frayed,” I heard one say, “and these mornings chill me, but my work is done. The heart

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and soul of me are here; I shall not pass; I shall endure; my seed shall spring up to brighten the world."

"But I am young," a tender blossom said, "and I shall be cut off. The frost will slay me and I shall have rattled down to dust ere my soul has developed its immortal parts."

At the moment I was taking honey from its lips, and I felt a quivering as if its heart fluttered.

"Dear little flower," I said, "you are living your life; you cannot die; you will be swallowed up in the universal spirit of things. Your face has spread a glamour of gold in the world; your honey has nourished a thousand winged things; your scented breath has floated far and has carried blessings into silent places. Memory of you will linger; it will be preserved by the things you have fed, by the things you have gladdened. And, too, I promise that I shall remember you!"

"How can you remember me," the flower asked, "when you, too, are doomed?"

"What!" I cried. "Doomed! Why, I am young, I am swift, I am beautiful, I am glorious!"

"Yes, and so am I. But we pass."

"You are wise for so young a flower," spoke up the elder blossom. "Both of you are of the heavens; both have your lives before you in this tiny garden, ere you return to the golden fields that spread out toward the sun. You are immortal."

Just then I saw one of the petals blow away from the face of the elder flower. It fluttered and fluttered and finally fell to the earth. Scarcely had it struck the ground when something with a long, thin body and active legs seized it and began struggling to draw

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it through the grass, intent on some mysterious purpose. I was quite absorbed, and from my post of vantage on the breast of the floweret I followed the movements of the thing that tugged at the petal. I had never seen this thing before and I was wishing for Crip, when, behold! he appeared.

"What are you doing?" he cried at me. "How many loads have you gathered? What are you staring at?"

He had submerged me with questions. I answered none of them. I had, indeed, forgotten my work momentarily, so absorbed had I been in the talk of the flowers.

"Have you a load? Let's go," cried he.

I was ready, truly, but I could not refrain from asking him about this strange animal that pulled the leaf so sedulously through the grass.

"An ant!" Crip answered, rather glumly.

"Do you see what he is about?"

"Yes he is gathering his winter stores. A time comes when he must go indoors and he must have food even as you and I. Come now, let's be off."

I looked down at the ant struggling with his burden and then at the disheveled flower, casting a last glance at the tender face which had yielded up honey to me, wondering at the strangeness of it all.

"Come on," cried Crip, rising on wing.

I did not speak, but followed him. I flew at his heels until he began to fag a bit and then I came up alongside, careful, however, not to outdistance him. I soon saw that he had a heavier load than I, and I felt ashamed, but I knew this had come through my

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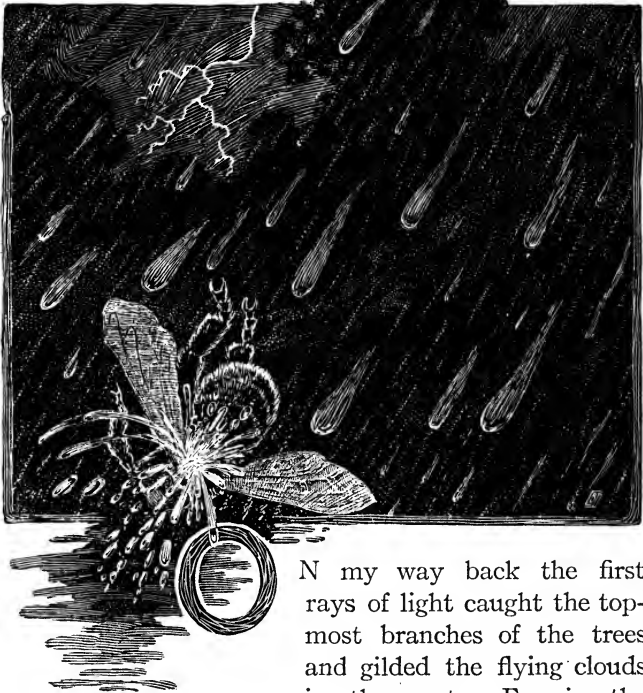
having wasted a few minutes, and I resolved then and there that the next time I should be first.

Another thing I noticed, we were flying very low, so near the earth we almost brushed the tops of the bushes. I asked Crip the reason.

"The wind," he answered, in better humor than could have been expected. "Don't you feel that heavy head current? If you should go up it would be a hard fight home with these loads. You see, there are currents and currents," he went on, "and you must use your wits. Take the current that blows your way. Profit by whatever nature bestows."

Almost at once I saw the yard with its white hives, like dots, and the Master with the Little One and the dog that seemed always with them. The next moment Crip and I were dropping down to our hive. I was overjoyed when I fell upon the alighting-board, and could not restrain my exuberance of feeling. So I bowed my head humbly as best I might with the load I carried, uttering a hymn of thanksgiving—the very hymn, Crip told me, that every worker for a million years had uttered on returning to his hive with his first load of honey. I cannot explain, but some mysterious force seized me, compelling me to bow my head and to sing. I should have done it had it cost my life. Such is the law of the hive, just as there is the law of the jungle. I did not know why I was so happy, but something bubbled over in me, and the very intoxication of it finally sent me running madly to deposit my load in a waiting cell, and once more to take wing for the field of the flowers of the sun.

CHAPTER NINE A STORM



ON my way back the first rays of light caught the top-most branches of the trees and gilded the flying clouds in the east. Far in the west, black and forbidding masses of cloud were gathering, and the wind, I observed, had shifted its course. Again I had lost Crip, and I was regretful, for there were questions which only he could answer. But I flew all the faster for being alone, and soon found the very place and the very flowers I had visited before. Speedily I took my load, but I could not

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fail to return to the flowers I had come to love. Other petals from the elder had fluttered away, due either to the eager foraging of bees or to the gusty impatience of the wind. The younger had opened wider her heart to the sun.

"I've been waiting for you," she said, sweetly. "All that I have I yield up to you gladly. This is my end. Oh, how glorious is life! How splendid to be able to give of one's store so that life shall go on eternally!"

"Yes, eternally," echoed the elder blossom. "Even I, in dying, leave my seed behind to follow the summer suns through numberless ages; and I breathe into the world an imperishable fragrance. It shall be wafted to the utmost bounds; it shall gladden the hearts of the lowliest. Though it be scattered by the winds, it shall not cease to exist."

By this time I had filled my honey-sac, and, after flying three times around these two well-beloved blossoms, I made for home. I was depressed by the talk which I had heard. I could not wholly comprehend it, and I wanted to consult Crip.

I was not long reaching our hive, for the wind seemed to get under me and literally to blow me on. I deposited my treasure, hurried out again, and once more headed for the sunflower-field, where I quickly gathered a load. Then straight for home. It was difficult flying now, because the wind was in my face. I rose higher, following Crip's advice, but still it blew and almost beat me back. The black clouds which I remembered having seen in the west seemed almost over me, and suddenly terrific noises crashed around. It

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grew dark and great flashes of fire tore the heavens apart and blinded me.

This terrified me. I knew not its meaning, but instinctively I fled homeward. But my progress was slow, and I had not gone far when again the whole world seemed to tremble, shaken through and through by the most violent rumblings conceivable. It grew so dark I almost stopped in my flight, not sure of my way. At this moment of hesitation something struck me squarely in the back, almost knocking me down. It had been a great drop of water, and almost immediately others began to pelt me. Soaking wet and tossed by the gale, I was forced to alight. As I dropped downward I saw nothing but black shadows, and presently I was dashed into a great tree. I seized a branch that offered shelter, which proved to be none too well protected against the blast that now drove the rain in solid sheets. I was cold, and clambered around to the under side of the limb, and there, feeling none too secure, I grudgingly deposited some of my honey in a crevice. By lightening my load I was better able to keep my balance; but so gusty was the blast that it whipped the rain all over me, and I was unable to find a spot that was dry. I began to climb from one branch to another in the hope of reaching a safer haven, but, alas! none was to be found.

Worse things, too, were awaiting me. I was crying for Crip when the branch to which I clung suddenly snapped. Down and down it fell while I clung to it. I was too cold and wet to try to take wing, and presently the branch crashed into a swirling stream of water. At first I was entirely submerged. It seemed an inter-

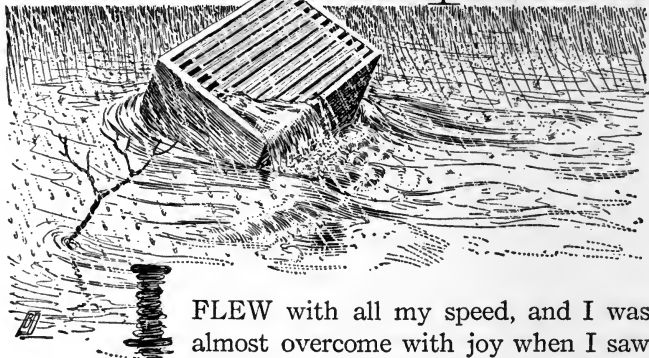
THE LIFE OF A BEE

minable time that I stayed under the water; but presently I came to the surface and caught my breath. Cold as I was, I still clung with all the tenacity of my being to the floating branch that was hurried onward by the raging torrent. I was beginning to feel a little more comfortable when over went the branch again in the seething water, and again I seemed to go down to immeasurable depths. This time I felt my legs giving way in the rush of the waters. My head swam and I strangled, but just as it seemed all over with me the branch again came to the surface. I caught my breath, shifted slightly my footing, and hurriedly emptied my honey-sac. This gave me more confidence in spite of the numbness that had nearly overcome me from the cold and water. There I sat shaking, awaiting the next turn of the branch, which now seemed merely to be bobbing up and down in the waters. The wind was still whistling through the trees, the rain was falling in torrents, and the thunder rumbled in unabated violence.

How long I clung to the branch in desperation I do not know. But after a time the rain ceased, the wind fell to a whimper among the bushes, and the darkness broke along the horizon. It began to grow a little brighter. Imagine my joy, therefore, to find that my perch was now quite clear of the flood waters, the branch safely nestling in the top of a bush. In a short space it grew warmer, and I took courage; I began to dry myself and to preen my wings. The light gained, and before long, after trying out my strength, I found that I could again mount into the air, and with one wide sweep I made for home.

CHAPTER TEN

The Aftermath



FLEW with all my speed, and I was almost overcome with joy when I saw my house. I noticed, too, as I approached, the Master bending over a neighboring hive, and I wondered what was the matter. But on alighting I was too happy to inquire about anything. I rushed inside and sang a song of thanksgiving at my deliverance.

Then I bolted straight for my cell to find my beloved Crip. He welcomed me with joy.

“Well,” said he, “I feared you were lost. You ought to have come home before the storm broke. But I’m happy you escaped. The next time you see great piles of cloud, make haste homeward. Your life is too precious to lose through stupidity.”

He came close and gave me a kiss, drawing his tongue across my mouth. The taste of honey excited me, and immediately I dropped into a cell and helped myself. I still felt stiff and cold from my experiences, and complained to Crip.

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"It might have been worse," he said, when I had told him all that had befallen me. "If you live long enough you will have some real adventures," he concluded.

I was inclined to resent his comment, for I felt that I should never again pass through such a storm and survive.

"Do you know what a real storm is, Crip?" I asked, with offended pride. But he ignored my query.

"Listen," he said, suddenly. "Do you hear that alarm?"

A note I had heard before suddenly ran through the hive. I could not at first remember the occasion, but instantly both Crip and I were off. By the time we were out I remembered what the sound meant. It was the robber-call. There was honey at hand—pure honey for the taking, and off we went.

It was just where the Master stood. He had righted a hive which had blown down in the storm, and was endeavoring to place a net over it, but already thousands of bees were swarming about.

"It is too late," Crip said to me, as we lit on the bottom-board and hurried into the hive. "They are dead. I see it all. The rains undermined the foundations and the hive toppled over into the ditch. The storm waters crept up and up, submerging it."

A little honey remained in the old combs, and we were soon busy with its salvage. We helped ourselves to one load only, for when we returned the Master had covered over the hive with his net. We flew about the place for a while, hoping to find some tiny hole through

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which we might creep; but none could be found. The net was covered with scrambling bees.

"Did all the bees drown?" I asked.

"Probably," he answered.

"Here's one on the ground that seems to be alive."

We both lit beside the little fellow struggling to dry himself. We approached and licked him all over, and when he could fly Crip begged him to come home with us, since his own colony had ceased to exist.

Right gladly he followed us; but when we had reached the entrance he seemed to realize the seriousness of daring to enter a strange hive. He drew back, but we urged him, standing one on either side. Almost immediately, however, a guard scented him and flew at him. Crip headed him off, but another quickly attacked from the same quarter. He caught the stranger, and it was all I could do to save him. When we finally freed him of the advance guards, we said to the stranger, "Run for your life!"

We three rushed like mad into the hive and escaped further interference, and never again was he questioned as to his identity.

He marched with us straight up to our cell, and thenceforward he claimed it for his own.

"What shall we call him?" I asked of Crip, when we had left him to recover and were once more on our way to the fields.

"Let's see. Suppose we call him Buzz-Buzz."

"Excellent!" I cried.

So, Buzz-Buzz it was, then and ever after.

Crip and I reached the entrance and looked about us. Mountainous black clouds still frowned, and in

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the distance thunder rumbled. It was much brighter, but still the sun was hid and a haze of mist hung about the world as far as eye could see.

"We cannot safely go yet," cried Crip. "The storm might break again. Besides, there is no honey in the fields; it has been washed away by the rains. It will be several hours before a trace can be found; even a day or two will pass ere some of the flowers fill their cups. The rain destroys the flow of honey for a time, and too much rain will cut off the crop entirely."

While we were talking Buzz-Buzz approached. "Well," he said, "you ran away and left me, but I warn you that when there are things to do you will find me close to you."

Presently we all rose on our wings, for the rain seemed to have spent itself and the wind in the cat-claw tree had fallen to a whisper. The three of us flew, for a while keeping closely in touch, but I was determined to guide, and had set my mind on seeing my sunflower-field. I feared, and, as it proved, rightly, that the floods had swept them away. On reaching the spot where the beautiful flowers had grown, we found it a quagmire full of broken stalks. Nothing was there to remind of the fragrant and glorious garden which only this day had displayed its choicest blossoms to gladden the earth. And now all had vanished.

I said not a word, but Crip seemed to divine the reason which inspired my flying round and round about the spot where I had gathered my first load of honey and where I had heard the fascinating speech of the flowers of the sun. He circled about with me, while Buzz-Buzz, puzzled at our actions, sailed in

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wider curves. He did not lose sight of us, however, and presently joined us again.

"What's all this about?" he queried.

"Why, only to-day this spot was wonderful with flowers. Look at it now!" I had spoken.

"That is nothing extraordinary," observed Crip. "It is only a chapter out of any life you choose. They had achieved all the things for which they were sent into the world. They were ready to go."

It was hard for me to think that the tender little blossom which had given me honey had filled its full scope of existence. It seemed fit for days of service. What a pity that it was not permitted to radiate its beauty in a world all too barren!

We said very little more, but made for home. This must have been instinctive, for suddenly we found the darkness descending upon us like a flood.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Fight with the Web Worms



We reached home quickly and were making our way along the combs, when I was accosted by a pretentious bee.

“It’s your turn to nurse. Come with me. This shall be your section. These little ones are to be fed to-night.”

“Well, with what shall I feed them?” I asked, impulsively, somewhat irritated to think that I, a honey-gatherer, should be set at such a task.

In answer to my question I got only a look; but I shall not forget it—it was withering. I felt ashamed of myself; and I resolved never again to question an assignment of duty.

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Immediately I set about my task. Without thinking, I peeped into two or three cells and found that the bees allotted to me were but four days old. Miraculous as it may seem, while I knew nothing about preparing food for the young, I fell to it with zest. Taking a supply of honey from one cell, I sought one stored with pollen; and there, without ceremony, I began to mix honey and bread, making a thin paste to which I had to add ever so little water. Then I placed the least bit of it in each of the cells of my section. The tiny worm-like bees began to wriggle, so I knew at once that I had succeeded in my task.

Several days now rolled away in comparative idleness. The great storm had completely washed out the supplies of honey, leaving the flowers draggled and broken. We busied ourselves with chores about the hive and with flights into the fields, ever on the scout for sweets. For my part, I was set to filling up a hole in the uppermost corner of the hive. At the moment it was serving as a ventilator. A little stream of air was constantly flowing out of it; but the cold weather was on its way and the time had come to stop the hole. With winter once fallen, it would be too late.

"The mesquite-trees are full of gum," said the dear old fellow who set me to my task. "Hurry and bring home a good supply. I hear you are a capital hand at this sort of thing."

So I went swiftly forth, and soon I found a crystal drop of gum on a mesquite-tree. I bit off scraps of it quite easily, and soon had my basket-legs filled with the gum; and it required only a moment to return and pack it in the hole in the hive.

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"You're a clever fellow," said the old director. "But I see bits of gum have fallen on the bottom-board and already there are accumulations which afford excellent hiding-places for web-worms. Go and clean them out, if you please."

I went promptly, and sure enough, chips from my patching and from many others and scraps of comb had gathered in the corner, and I found myself facing a considerable undertaking. Time after time I seized scraps in my mandibles and flew away with them, dropping them outside.

I was far from the end of my labors when suddenly the ugliest thing I had ever seen burst out on me. It was a long, white-brown worm, which I had uncovered in the débris. It wriggled away as though aware of danger.

I was standing by, irresolute, when I heard a call, from I knew not what source.

"Why don't you seize him, coward!"

I was not a coward, but I could not make up my mind what to do. But the little rascal that had scolded me knew, and fell upon the monster manfully.

Over and over the worm turned, writhing like a beast in torment, and suddenly it twisted itself quite out of the clutches of its enemy and made for a cell in the nearest comb.

Up to this point I had taken no hand in the fight, but now I joined in the pursuit. In the mean time the worm had escaped and was trying to hide in a cell.

We stopped for a moment, the two of us, peering at him, wondering what next to do. At least I was wondering, when my mentor spoke out sharply.

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"You're a poor excuse for a bee! If you had helped we should have done for him by this time. We have still a chance to save ourselves. Now, when I dive in upon him, he will probably rush out, throwing me from the combs. Then you must do your work. Hold him until I come, and between us we can manage him."

"Shall I sting him?" I asked.

"No, you idiot! It's not so desperate as that. You ought to know that only in a great emergency should a bee sacrifice his life. Now mind you; here I go!"

With that he lurched forward, and instantly back he came, the worm plunging along with him. I also seized the intruder, and the three of us dropped to the floor. Round and round we were thrown until I thought I was about to be beaten to death, but I had made up my mind to die rather than have fresh slurs cast upon my courage. I am doubtful whether we could have won the battle if two other active bees had not come to our assistance. The four of us soon had the breath out of the worm's wriggling body, and then we dragged him to the front of the hive. After vain efforts to fly away with him in the burial fashion of our people, we found the best we could do was to drop him to the ground from the edge of our board.

I was quite out of breath, and stood panting on the spot, when, lo! from the clouds dropped Crip.

"What's the matter?" he inquired.

"Nothing much. We've just captured a great worm—one of our enemies. There he lies on the ground."

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Crip walked to the edge of the board and looked down. "Why, he isn't dead."

I looked, and, sure enough, he seemed to be alive. But on closer inspection I saw that a multitude of small black creatures had taken possession of the body.

"He is dead for certain," I said. "Some bugs have seized him for prey."

Crip looked again. "Why, those are black army ants," he exclaimed; "one of the worst enemies a bee can meet. Sometimes, when they are hungry, they rush into the hive and help themselves. It is most difficult to deal with them. They nab you by the leg, when they do not sting you, and you cannot free yourself from their deadly grip."

I looked at Crip in silence. Was there no end to perils?

"Let us hope they'll travel on," he added. "There's plenty of food abroad for them. But tell me, where did you find that worm?"

"Back in the far corner. Come with me. I was cleaning out the débris when I came upon him."

"Well, did you finish your task?"

I had quite forgotten it. I had been so absorbed in the fight that the original undertaking had gone out of mind.

"Then come on. I'll help you."

With that Crip led off, limpingly. I followed by his side, amazed at his speed.

Soon we came to the place. Each of us seized a bit of the débris, and away we went to deposit it far from the entrance to our home.

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"I see where your worm came from," Crip observed. "There's a hole in the board, and he found it, then crept in stealthily and hid in this little heap of rubbish. I'm a bad guesser, or we'll find another here any minute."

And sure enough. Crip seized a piece of comb, and, upon dragging it away, out sprang another worm, even more forbidding than the other.

Crip was the first to spy him, and, valiant warrior that he was, seized him instantly. I attacked him, also, with all my might. But the worm, a full-grown one, and twice as big as both of us, simply flung us about and thrashed us unmercifully. He quite knocked me to bits; but I never relaxed my hold, nor did Crip. It was a poor showing that we were making, when several guards rushed to our assistance. The fight was soon over and the monster lay still.

"He's dead," said one of the new-comers. "Out with him."

We all fell to, dragging him along. It took the combined energies of four of us to move his huge form.

At last we arrived at the edge of our alighting-board, and down we dropped him to the tender mercies of the black ants, who immediately swarmed over him. One could almost imagine that they thanked us for the delicacy we had tossed them. I wondered what the ants thought of us, if they thought at all. I had become particularly interested in those big red ones that ran along the tiny trail skirting our home.

I was looking down at the worm, covered with the little black ants, when, in a final paroxysm, he flounced violently, scattering the little army that beset him.

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But once again they fell upon him, and presently they had cut him entirely to pieces, carrying away every scrap for a feast.

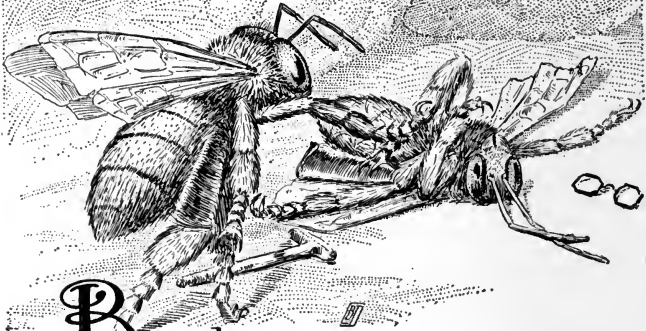
In the economy of things, these worms had grown and fattened on the refuse of our hive, and now they had become food in their turn for a host of tiny creatures which roamed the earth below, all this seemingly in accordance with some unknown law.

I stood there watching them for some time, until the last ant made off, following with unerring aim the trail of his fellows. Soon they were lost to sight. It seemed to me that this last one disappeared under a log where the Master often sat. I wondered what relation there might be between them, if in some mysterious way they worked together, for I remembered that Crip had told me that not only the Master, but even the ants, sometimes raided our hives, taking our honey. I turned to ask him to explain, but he was not to be seen among the bees swarming upon the board. I must find him.



CHAPTER TWELVE

The Wounding of Crip



Back to the field of battle I hastened.

“Tell me,” I cried in distress, for Crip was lying quite still on the floor, “what is the matter?”

“Ah, I fear I am done for at last.”

Grieved by his words, I rushed up to him, saluting him, pressing my tongue to his lips, praying for his life. I felt him all over, and at last came to a little moist spot on his body, and realized that he had lost his last basket-leg. I wiped his eyes, and came close to him to warm him a bit, for he seemed cold and almost lifeless.

“Go your way,” he murmured, dejectedly. “Leave me quite alone. My work is done; I shall pass. Remember me sometimes when you cleave the air and salute the sun and our mysterious Master.”

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By this time I was overcome with sorrow. My poor dear friend, the very personification of wisdom, seemed passing out of my life.

"No—don't—please—don't talk so mournfully!" I cried. "You will get well. Do! I so want you to stay with me."

At this he seemed to stir a little and, with an effort, raised himself on his remaining legs.

"I cannot walk, you see. I cannot be sure of holding my weight on the combs, even if I am not bleeding to death."

I was so shocked that it had not occurred to me to stanch his wound; but instantly I fell to it most vigorously.

"That will help," he said. "Do you think I have done well with my life?" Crip asked. "Do you think I have helped our people?"

I answered that he had been wonderful—that he had worked faithfully for two houses, and all for the betterment of our race—the Bee.

"You really think me deserving? Then I am happy."

He seemed suddenly to take on new life, and began to flap his wings for joy.

After a little pause he again flapped his wings violently. I did not understand.

"I still can fly!" he exclaimed. "I can fly! Go now, finish your work," he commanded. "Perhaps I shall yet be able to labor for a little; but I want to be as much as possible with you. Go now."

I went at his word, but when I came to the place of the débris, no scrap remained. My fellow-workers,

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alarmed at the news of the worms, had fallen upon it and borne it all away.

Almost without thinking, I moved slowly toward the door of the hive, for the afternoon was sultry and there now seemed nothing to do. Indeed, when I reached the outside the bees were heaped on the board, and they clung in great masses to the front of the hive.

"What idlers!" thought I. But I quickly realized that there was nothing in the fields to gather, and further, I knew that our hive was well stored with bread and honey against any possible contingency.

I made my way through the crowd, and presently I, too, was seized with the fever of sleep, and, taking my place among a group that clung to the uppermost front of the hive, I soon fell asleep.

How long I slept I know not, but when again I roused myself a summer moon was streaming above us, big and gloriously bright. The little dots of stars that glinted through were almost lost in the sea of light. I could hear the night hymn of the hive clearly, just as long ago I heard it for the first time. It was the low, murmured music of a thousand voices. This hymn of the night was like the throbbing of a muffled Æolian harp. Mingling with its harmonies rose the dull whirring of many wings set to the task of driving the sweet night air into the heart of the hive, to render it tolerable for the little ones dreaming in their cells against a day of awakening, and for our precious Queen-Mother, brooding through her watches without end.

Late in the night the air grew chilly, and one by one we drifted inside. I had been one of the first, for

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I bethought me of Crip, whom I had left disconsolate and battered from his fight with the worm. Returning to our old haunt, he was nowhere to be found. Then I went to the spot of the combat and there he was, more or less chilled and still sore from the loss of his leg.

"I thought you had forgotten me," was his greeting.

"I forget you? Not while I live. I was outside in the night."

"And the south wind blew? And there were stars?" he asked. "I want to look upon them once more. Help me, for I can only crawl now. My body can scarcely be carried by those four little legs, all that I have left. I don't know how soon I shall be done for, and then—and then—"

He struggled pitifully in order to reach the front. Try as I might, I could be of no assistance to him. But by dint of perseverance he finally gained the threshold and gazed into the night. The moon had drifted far toward the west, and already the morning star shone with transcendent brilliancy. The south wind breathed ever so softly through the chaparral, as it made its way to some hidden goal; and near the borders of the lake a coyote, in staccato treble, gave warning that the dawn was near.

Crip said nothing, nor did I. How useless are words when there is perfect understanding. He came close to me, however, and put his face as near mine as he might, as though he wished to look into the very depths of my eyes.

"It is well," he said. "I know."

Then he turned and dragged himself into the hive. I followed closely. How sad it was to see so great a

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soul chained in so broken a body. I stayed by him, cheering him and encouraging him, until the bugle of the morning sounded.

“Now you must go,” he commanded. “You have your work to do. Mine is nearly finished.”

I took a turn in the fields, but there was nothing to report, save the discovery that the white brush was ready to bloom, and that the sage-brush and the broomweed promised honey.

Again, for a number of days there was little to do. Toward the noon hour the September sun blazed with midsummer intensity and the winds were stifling. This meant that a deal of water was consumed. I was assigned to help. So, back and forth to the lake I went, ever returning with my sac filled to bursting. The young bees clamored for water, and it was a delight to see them scramble for a drink. Again, the front of the hive was packed with bees idling their day away, if, indeed, it can be said that they were idle when there was nothing to be done.

Another night passed as before and still another day. Then the news resounded over the hive that the white brush was opening and that honey was in the field! There was only the meagerest supply the first day, but hungry tongues searched out the white tiny bell-shaped flowers. The next day the flow was heavier, and the third day we began to carry such quantities that the colony began to develop a sort of delirium. Every nook and cranny was being filled, when a strange sound echoed over the hive.

“What does this mean?” I queried of Buzz-Buzz.

“I don’t know. Let’s find Crip. He can tell us.”



CHAPTER THIRTEEN The Swarming Fever

W

E found him at once. "What does this mean?" I cried.

"It means," said he, "that, late as the season is, the swarming fever has seized

the colony."

"Why?" we cried.

"Well, we have so much honey and there is so much in the field and the colony so strong, it can easily spare a force of pioneers to begin a new colony. Here is the working out of destiny controlling the very life of the bee."

Crip spoke enthusiastically, and both Buzz-Buzz and I were fascinated by his story.

The first thing I knew I, also, was seized with the

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enthusiasm. Queen-cells had been started—half a dozen at least. I laid hold and helped draw out the comb to build up a huge cell, where, in the mysterious processes of time, a Queen would appear!

Almost against her wishes, the Queen-Mother deposited eggs in the various cells and began, under mild protest, to expand her brood-chamber in anticipation of the promised exodus of her children. While she did not fear that enough would go to imperil the existence of her own colony, she doubted the wisdom of the enterprise. She discouraged in every way possible the ardor of the workers who continued to bring in honey until there was no longer space to store it. Indeed, they crowded the Queen so that she was driven to despair. The very space she had set aside for her brood-chamber for the winter was encroached upon and heaped with bread and honey, but for the nonce there was no stopping them.

Crip said: "You are crazy; it is too late in the season to swarm; it means extinction."

But one replied: "It is the law! There is a chance for the swarm to survive, and the chance must be taken; particularly when the parent colony shows its ability to survive."

"Truly said," added Crip. "I merely wanted to find whether you knew what the higher law compels."

But where would the swarm begin a home? This question now began to be asked. It seemed that nobody thought of the great Master who sat for hours under the mesquite-tree. Would he not provide a house?

The next day Buzz-Buzz came to me, greatly excited.

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“You and I and others are to go into the woods and search for a home for the swarm!”

That was the order. It was enough—we went.

We seemed to know that the only place to look for a home was among the great oaks that bordered the lake, and thither we betook ourselves. We flew from tree to tree, exploring every hole we could find in the hope of discovering a hollow big enough to house a swarm. Three days we spent in vain. On the fourth we found one, and with great joy we returned home and reported. Immediately a hundred bees or more were assigned to prepare the hollow tree for a habitation. Buzz-Buzz and I led the way back, and all hands fell to cleaning out the cobwebs and the débris of decayed wood. Several days were spent in this undertaking, and finally the word was passed that the new home was ready.

But things were not ready with the parent colony. No Queen had emerged from her cell. From hour to hour the bees marched by impatiently, waiting for the “click-click” of her mandibles and for sight of them piercing the wax door to the cell. And there was much speculation as to which of the half-dozen possible Queens would first emerge. Finally, one day, at high noon, the rumor ran over the hive that a Queen had been born, and the excitement became intense. “A Queen! A Queen!”

Crip and I forced our way through the crush to the spot where the Queen was surrounded by a joyous multitude. He, finally, on account of his lameness, was compelled to abandon his efforts to pay his homage to the new-born mother. But I, nothing daunted,

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persisted, and presently came near enough to feel her presence. I, too, sang fervently, for a new hope had risen. Soon in the vast forest of the world a new colony would be planted to aid in carrying on the eternal work of the bee.

At another corner of the hive I heard a different sound. It was the wail of a Queen that was being destroyed. I hurried toward her, but somehow felt no pity for her. A great cluster of bees completely enveloped her; this was the mode of taking the royal life. All the remaining cells with their occupants had been cut down, and soon there remained in all the hive but the one mother and the one daughter. I came upon the destroyed cells, torn and empty, and could not help mourning the death of the royal creatures they had housed. Perhaps there had been but minutes between the births of the Queens, but those minutes had been fatal to the last.

Preparations went steadily on for the day of the exodus. The new Queen took her first flight successfully; and then came the mating! Only a few drones had been permitted to escape the massacre of a month earlier—tolerated on the chance of a lost or a dead Queen—borne with against a belated mating.

“How wonderful,” Crip observed, “that these things should be provided for—and how close are life and death!”

It was a hot afternoon when the time came for the nuptial flight, and it lacked the wild glamour of an earlier one that I had witnessed. On the first occasion there were literally thousands of drones that went

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up toward the heavens in search of the one radiant thing in the world. And they had all returned save one immortal, who had found and won the Queen, only to lose his life! Compared with the first flight, this last seemed commonplace. I should have foregone the opportunity of witnessing the thin procession, bound on the momentous journey of uniting two lives, so that the thread of existence might not be cut short for the bee.

I groped about impatiently, awaiting news of the bridal party. It was not long delayed, for soon there were sounds of rejoicing throughout the hive; and now the last preparations had been ended and the day was at hand for the great adventure.

Round and round the hive went the signal that on the morrow the swarm should go forth to its home in the woods. Quietly and with no bickerings, the tallies were laid—this one should go, this one should stay—there was in no case dispute or contest. Each bee accepted the issue with all the grace of a fatalist. I was one of them.

Really, I was greatly disappointed not to have been chosen to go, for I had been one of the pioneers and had helped find and prepare the new home in the live-oak by the clear waters of the beautiful lake. It was a bitter disappointment, but I uttered no word of complaint. When I came up with Crip I found he, too, had been left behind.

“Why shouldn’t we have been chosen to go?” I asked, somewhat downcast.

“I am too old—too useless,” Crip answered. “You are young and brave enough, but battles are to be

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fought here as well as yonder. And some of the strong and gallant had need to remain."

Something in Crip's look and tone struck me. Was I too old to go? Had that been the reason? I had heard a cry over the hive that only young bees should go, for there would be small hope of raising much of a brood in the new colony through the winter. If it could build comb enough and gather sufficient honey to feed itself, it would be fortunate.

So, I was not young enough. Until then I had not thought of my age; it seemed to me that I was still as active as on the day I flew into the sky.

As for Crip, "too useless" seemed a cruel phrase. For who could say what was the worth of his stores of knowledge? But I could see that he moved more feebly from day to day.

"Only the strong are to be chosen—the fit? Crip, that bears hard on us."

"Not a bit of it," he replied, cheerily. "Take courage; that is the way of things in the world of the bee."

Then he added that it would be a hard battle to build a home in the short space of time allotted and to store food enough to last through the winter. It meant a fight, for already the glimmerings of the fall were upon us! Pale shadows of color began to stain the leaves, and the flowers turned their faces more wistfully each day to the sun. Still, the bees would go. There was no denying the operation of the law, which commanded that the chance be taken. The whole law of survival was involved—and there was none to deny it.

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So, all night long murmurings and vague discontents and forebodings and anticipations ran through the hive. Those marked so mysteriously to go realized that their lives were at stake and likely to be lost. Yet each one in the hive would have gone. It was not until late that I learned that our own mother, my mother, the mother of the hive, was to go away, leaving her daughter to preside over the destinies of the old. Here, too, Crip was wont to philosophize.

“You see, our mother is not young,” he began. “If she should perish in the stress of the winter and the new colony be lost, it would be less grievous than the loss of this new, vigorous Queen. Besides, our mother has had experience. She has lived over one winter. She knows how much of a brood to rear to maintain the strength of the colony—or whether she dare rear any at all—bearing in mind the while that there must be a fine adjustment between the mouths to be fed and the total of supplies. She knows well how to keep this account. Last winter, I am told, our stores ran low, so low, in fact, that many of our brothers sacrificed their lives in order to conserve the supplies so as to bring the Queen-Mother with a few attendants through the long, bitter winter. Not a young bee was reared until the first flowers had come riotously trampling on the skirts of the frost. So, you see, *they* know best. *She* will lead the swarm, and perhaps, if the season is late, and the frost slow to come, they can build their combs and store sufficient honey to bring them through. Perhaps even spring may come to their rescue, blossoming early. A late, backward

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spring, however, might end them, even if they had escaped the fury of the winter.”

There seemed no end to Crip's knowledge. Lying there on the comb, he looked pathetically helpless, and there was a quaver in his voice. I could see that he was reflecting—that age had dropped upon him heavily on account of his wounds. Then, stoic that he was, I knew that some morning I should search in vain for trace of him. Once a bee becomes useless, he said, there is but one thing for him to do. I knew that Crip was already contemplating the end. Bitterness for a moment welled up in me at the thought that so much wisdom should be lost—and so soon. That was the edict. But, after all, was the wisdom really lost?

Our talk was broken at length by the call of the morning. The first pale gleams of light filtered through the entrance of the hive. Already there were murmurings and presently the faint note of the swarm.

Two hours passed—three hours—and now the trumpet sounded for the flight. Each of the chosen rushed to the nearest cell and filled his sac to its utmost capacity. Some early-returning foragers, laden with pollen, heard the signal and made ready to go, carrying with them their loads. Stores must be taken along to last until comb was built and new supplies gathered from the fields. Rations for three or four days were thus provided. When all was ready the trumpet sounded again and the march began. In the fore went the scouts who were to lead the way to the new home. Then, following after, came the chosen ones in a mighty multitude, and lastly the Queen.

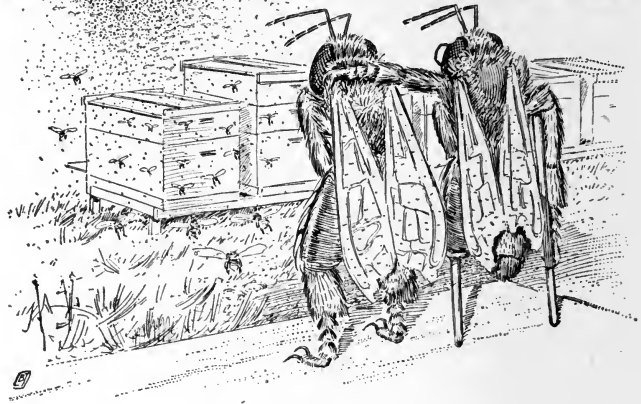
THE LIFE OF A BEE

Out into the air they flew, then round and round, each one singing the Song of the Swarm, which could be heard afar off. Round and round in a dizzy circle they flew, but in an ever-widening whirl. The scouts, I could hear from my point of vantage at the door, were becoming impatient. The Queen had been delayed, and until word of her presence among them was spoken, they could only circle about. Or else, failing that word, they could and would return to the hive. But at the height of their impatience the glad word came, "The Queen is here!"

Then they delayed no longer, but started in a whirlwind flight toward the lake and to their new home, uttering, as they drew away, that marvelously wild and moving song which pulsed with the tremors of life and death.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Perils



CRIP and I were sober and silent. From the alighting-board we watched them draw away and disappear, and were on the eve of turning into the hive, when up came the Master breathlessly. He stopped and gazed at the retreating cloud, knowing too well what had happened. He knew, too, by their actions, that a home had been prepared for their reception. He seemed surprised to think that the bees should swarm so late in the season, and not a little chagrined to think they could have done it under his eyes. His curiosity at once led him to find whence the swarm had come, and he walked straight

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to our hive. A few excited bees were still flying back and forth, but Crip and I, like the condemned, stood stolidly and wondered.

His lips moved, but he said no word; he turned on his heels and went away.

Shortly, however, he returned, the little Shadow with him. They were talking of the swarming, for he pointed the way the bees had gone. In his hand he held that horrid smoking thing, and Crip and I both knew what that meant. He would open our house. I resented this, for I remembered the smoke in my eyes when he took the top off our hive and lifted out frame after frame, taking away from us part of our honey. I remembered, too, how I longed to sting him, but how all my efforts were unavailing, for he had hidden himself under a screen. And yet I really did not want to sting him. Just why I flew at him I could not understand.

"He is angry with us now," said Crip. "He knows we are insane. He probably will take away our honey and leave us to starve, as we merit. We have proven our short-sightedness and have lost our right to survive."

"No, he will not do that," I replied.

On the instant I seemed no longer to distrust him; I remembered his kindness to me on a day when, overladen, a gust of wind had felled me to the earth. He had placed me on a twig, where, after disgorging part of my load, and washing my body and my wings, I again made way to my home.

But it was certain that we should know his intentions shortly, for, on coming close, he sent a puff of smoke

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into the entrance that choked and blinded both Crip and me and the guards, and sent us scurrying into the hive. Then, passing the smoker to the Little Master, he carefully lifted off the top and the upper section of our hive, and began an inspection of the brood-chamber. He seemed to be right happy at discovering that the queen-cells had been destroyed, which carried the assurance to his mind that no further swarming was in contemplation; but when his eyes fell upon the new Queen-Mother, they widely distended and a smile of joy lighted his face.

“Wonderful creature,” he murmured.

The little Shadow cried: “Let me see. Isn’t she a beauty!”

By this time the smoke had cleared away and my disposition had changed. I said to Crip that we ought to attack them. But he answered that it would be folly now—that only evil would result. Further parleying was cut short by a blast of smoke shot at us by the Little Master, who apparently had discerned outward signs of the rebellion, for my body was poised and I suppose I must have been emitting the note of anger. The smoke sent us all flying into a remote corner of the hive.

Then the Master replaced the section of hive he had removed, and began to lift frame after frame, uttering little exclamations, as though he had not suspected that we had gathered such quantities of honey in so short and late a season. It was easy for him now to understand why we had developed the swarming fever, although it evidently appeared to him a foolish adventure.

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"He has been dreaming in his rose-garden," commented Crip, when the Master had nearly finished his examination. "That is the reason he has neglected us of late. He did not know there had been a great flow of honey."

We were talking among ourselves, when up came Buzz-Buzz, angry from the smoke in his eyes.

"A fine lot this fellow," he growled.

"You don't like him?" I asked.

He just looked at us. He was too irritated to speak.

"He'll get over it," mused Crip.

We were still holding converse when again the top came off and one by one the Master lifted out our combs and robbed them of their honey. They were battered and broken and empty when he restored them to us. We were all infuriated, and for a while flew madly about him and about the Little Master—the dog kept at a respectful distance—straining every effort to drive them away. But the Little One only smoked us the more, while the Master went on with his work. He was careful to kill no bee, brushing off every one of them before taking away the combs of honey, and while returning them.

Quickly it was all over. When he had gone we at once took stock and found that he had left us quite enough to carry us through the winter, barring accident. But almost before the appraisal had been made a catastrophe was upon us. The honey from a broken comb had flooded the bottom-board, and began to pour out through the entrance onto the ground, and robber bees were shortly upon it. We summoned all our guards for our protection, but the robbers in

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thousands came, and in spite of our resistance they forced their way into the hive and began to plunder at random. Poor old Crip even mixed in the *mêlée*, fighting like a veteran, while I, beaten and trampled, finally lay senseless on the floor.

We should have been lost but for the thoughtfulness of the Master, who, returning to see that all was well, found us besieged and overrun. He quietly closed the entrance to our hive, and thus left us to clear it of the marauders within doors, which we did promptly, although at heavy cost in the lives of our brothers. An hour later he returned and opened ever so slightly our door. Although a few robbers still lingered and endeavored to force an entrance, they were easily beaten off. In the mean time we carefully cleaned up the spilled honey which had nearly been our undoing—and the battle was over.

The night came and we cleared our house of the dead. Scattered indiscriminately they lay—friend and foe—many score of them. Among them I found the veteran who had been kind to me, with the mark of a lance in his breast. Certain it was that he had died fighting bravely. I had found his body, and I determined to keep it by me through the night, and on the morrow I meant to give a fitting burial. I remembered a high knoll overlooking the lake and the country round about, and there I said he should be laid to rest. I told Crip of my purpose, and he applauded me, and together we watched over him. More than once we almost had to fight to prevent the cleaners from taking his body away.

On the morrow, in the early dawn, I dragged him

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forth and, taking him in my mandibles, flew away with him, dropping him on the knoll. The poor old veteran! Somehow I had gained the notion that one day he would awake, and from that vantage-point find himself nearer the stars.

We now began another chapter in the life of our colony. We were left with none too much honey, and, besides, our numbers had been greatly depleted by the exodus and by the assault of the robbers. Our Queen-Mother immediately organized her followers and sent us all scouring the fields for additional foods. Thanks to the late season, there still remained an abundant harvest. Soon we had replenished our supplies to a point where we could rest comfortably, and our good mother set about rearing just enough brood to have us weather the winter safely. But we never stopped work. Day after day we gathered bread and honey.

"We cannot have too much," said Crip. "You see, since you have not gone through a winter you have much to learn. It is no simple business. Frightful northerners sweep down upon us and chill us and kill us. Sometimes it grows so cold the young bees are frozen in their cells. They must then be removed, or else sickness and disease will follow. Sometimes, too, if stores run low and our numbers fall below a certain point, we ourselves can no longer keep warm. That means death for us all."

"But we have plenty of stores," I replied. "We have nothing to fear."

"There are always fears. An animal running wild may topple over your house; a bad man may slip in

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and steal your supplies; a moth may enter and lay eggs producing destructive worms; a bear may chance to find you and with his great paws rend the hive asunder!"

"Stop!" I cried. "If there are yet other dangers, I do not wish to know them."

"But it is well to know. There are diseases to combat, such as dysentery, paralysis, and foul brood—"

"Oh, stop!" I begged him.

Was life really such a hazard? so perilous a journey? And all for what? Toward what misty goal?

It was a glorious day in October. The Indian summer had come, flooding all the hills and vales with its magical sheets of amethyst, while a drowsy wind from the south bore on its breath the odor of autumn. Now and then that indefinable note, presaging the advent of winter—a note which is neither a requiem nor a dirge—could be heard like a faint flute in the branches of the trees. The sun shone big and round and still with a suggestion of summer. Scattered clouds went drifting lazily by, wonderfully emphasizing the turquoise blue of the sky.

"Is it going to rain?" I asked of Crip, who was dragging himself along on the alighting-board, ready for a new excursion into the woods.

"No," he mumbled.

It had been weeks since my experience in the flood, but ever after that when a cloud was in the sky I bethought me of rain. But I had now come to know that rains were something more than clouds.

Crip and I had been laboring to fill adjoining cells. We had already gathered many loads of honey that day.

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"I'm tired," he said, right plaintively. "I can't do as much as I could once."

"Why don't you rest?" I begged of him.

"Rest! What word is that? Did ever a bee rest when there was work to do?"

With that he hobbled a little farther on his four legs, his poor old body half carried and half dragged. But his wings were still powerful and lifted him instantly into the all-absorbing space.

This time I took an entirely different direction from any I had thus far traveled. On and on I flew, mile after mile, until presently I scented something and went for it. It proved to be a field of June corn, in silk and tassel—and, oh, what quantities of pollen! I gathered a little and hastened back to report. Almost at once a string of my brothers were flying to and fro, laden with bread.

We had now stored up a great surplus of food, and the Queen-Mother broadened her brood areas. She deemed it wise to enlarge her family; first, because she had a premonition that a wild winter would soon break upon us, and, for the further reason, that half the battle was to be strong in numbers in the spring, when the honey-fountains opened.

When I returned with my last load, well toward sunset, I found Crip waiting at our rendezvous, my ancient cell.


"You have done well to-day," he said, "and I wanted to tell you so. Five miles is a long journey to go for a load, but it was worth it. I, too, made one trip—but have pity on me—only when I got there did I remember that I had no basket-legs; hence I was

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forced to return empty-handed. It is too much for me to bear. I am old and useless."

I could not stand to hear him depreciate himself in such fashion, and remonstrated with him.

"Well, it's too true," he persisted. "Some day you will understand."



CHAPTER FIFTEEN
A Midnight
Adventure



I DID not answer Crip, for at the moment I was notified that I should take my turn at guard duty, and I went at once to report.

It was now fast growing dark, and the last workers were dropping on the alighting-board and groping their way into the hive. It was the duty of guards to inspect all who entered, and to keep out bugs and ants and intruders. More than a score of guards, I among them,

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kept a continuous patrol before the entrance; and all went well until far into the night.

The Master with his little Shadow had passed among us as if to bid us good night, and had gone. The moon was now rising, and a mocking-bird in a neighboring tree had been rendering melodies without number. There was no sound in all the world save the mocking-bird's song that ebbed and flowed in ever wilder cadence. High above his perch he would soar into the moonlight, and as he dropped again—his little gray body looking like a bit of mist—he would almost burst his throat with rapturous song. Often had I heard him sing, but never had he so completely abandoned himself to the sheer frenzy of it—and at such an hour!

“He's making the best of it, for soon the winter will come and his songs will cease,” observed a guard.

“But what glorious singing!” added another.

While we were talking a guard suddenly gave an alarm. He had either scented or seen an enemy; but doubt was immediately removed, for the raw smell of an animal was borne in to us. We paused and prepared for an attack. Our wings were buzzing at intervals and our stings were ready to strike. And none too soon, for in a moment more a monstrous animal stuck his nose into the entrance of our hive. Instantly we all flew at him, some landing in his face and some on his body. But only those that struck his face succeeded in stinging him, for the hair was too long on his body.

I was unfortunate enough to have been one of those landing on his back, and immediately found myself

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so entangled in his hair that I could neither sting him nor free myself. I struggled in vain, and my efforts were rendered more difficult on account of the mad capers he cut in escaping from the spot. The moment we flew at him and stung him about the head, he turned somersaults and cried like a cat in torment, while he fled madly. So wildly did he fly that he banged squarely into a neighboring hive and nearly upset it. Then he collided with weeds and brush and cacti—in fact, I now suspect he could see nothing. Certainly he cared not what lay in his road.

I can think of it calmly, now that I am safely back, but while I rode unwillingly upon his back I thought each instant would be my last. After vainly trying to reach his body in order to sting him, I gave over and endeavored to free myself. What with the buzzing of many pairs of wings in his ears, and the pain from the stings, he fled like the wind. Presently, however, he stopped suddenly and tried to reach me with his claws. Then he did his best to crush me with his teeth, snarling and whining betimes. He did crush some of my brother guards; but I was just back of his ears, and he could not reach me. However, I may add I almost wished he had, for his breath was horrible. I never could abide the breath of any living thing.

Soon he gave over and set out running again at top speed. I had abandoned myself for lost, when a bush scraped me out of my entanglement and I fell half dead to the ground. But the would-be robber never stopped, for I could hear the brush rattling in his wake. He still fled incontinently, as though he feared another

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attack, as though his very life depended on his rate of speed.

I lay there for a moment, scarcely able to move. But what could I do? The moon was still bright, but bright as it was, the way back home was dark. Instinctively, I turned to a friendly bush and made my way to the topmost branch, and there I planted myself for the rest of the night.

The wind was blowing lustily. I did not like the thrashing back and forth of the branches in the gloom, with the chance of being knocked off at any moment. I could not think calmly of crawling on the ground, for Crip had told me this was a thing to be avoided at all hazards. Scorpions and beetles and toads and snakes made the night perilous. So I clung to the branch with all my might. Now and again a pause in the wind would allow me to look up at the stars through the screen of leaves—and how dear and wonderful they were! Long ago I had thought how beautiful it must be up there in the blue space, fretted with tiny lights no bigger than the candle burning in the window of the Master's house. And even then, as I turned, I could see his lamp, and I almost started to fly toward it. There was a fascination in its beams which I could scarcely resist. Always, when on guard duty, at any hour of the night, I had been able to see his light and to hear the bark of his dog. He seemed never to sleep—or if he slept the lamp and the dog kept watch over him.

The blustering wind finally had compassion on me and ceased altogether. There came a silence that was more than silence. I felt it oppressive. Then, as if

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a pause had been made for them, the crickets and katydids began a frightful chattering, which was punctuated betimes by the far hooting of an owl. The air grew chilly, and I began to feel cold and stiff, and held none too securely to my bush. It was a fortunate thing, I thought, that the wind had died away.

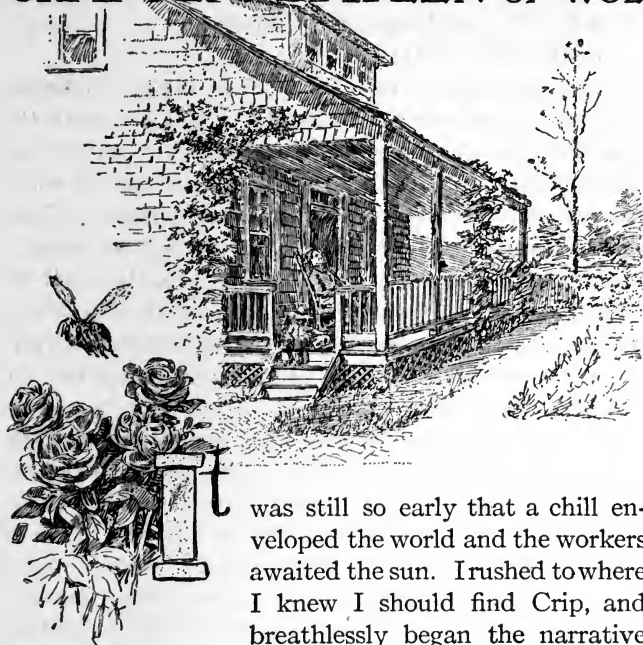
How tired I was! This had been one of the hardest days of my life. As I reflected on it, it seemed very long ago that it began; and I heartily wished for the dawn. I must have drowsed awhile, for when again I looked about me a mellow light brooded on the horizon and a great star beamed above it. Soon wide streams of gold flowed across the pale-blue sky, quenching the fires of the stars. Then, as if in compensation for their loss, fleecy Gulf clouds caught the early rays of the sun and filled the world with showers of rainbow lights.

Presently I could see well enough to rise on my wings, and in spite of the chill in the air, up I went until I got my bearings. A strange fit seized me. "Fly to the sun!" I heard in my ears; and off I went. Up and up I flew—higher and higher—until below me I could scarcely see the white houses of the apiary where I lived and the white house of the Master. But under me the waters of Lake Espantoso glimmered like a mirror, and in the dark fringe of trees that bordered it I remembered a swarm of my little brothers had taken refuge, and I wondered how they fared. Far as I could see stretched the undulating hills over which I had flown in search of treasure—hills now clad in their robes of autumn. A fragrance reached me at this great height, which came from I knew not where.

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I had wheeled about and started home, when I caught sight of the Master wandering dreamily in his garden. Then immediately I knew that the fragrance came from his beautiful roses. Many a time had I flown over the place, marveling at the flowers. Indeed, I had gathered honey from the honeysuckle that climbed on the walls of his house and from the crêpe-myrtle hard by. But the roses—ah, the roses! I loved to drop into their hearts and to breathe the sweet breath of their lives. So again, without thinking, I flew down and down until I reached the garden and sank into a rose to rest. I felt tired, ever so tired. When I emerged there was the Master fondling a rose; I circled slowly past him and around him. He saw me at once, and a tender look came into his eyes. Reluctantly I left him caressing his roses, and flew rapidly home.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN TIDINGS OF WOE



It was still so early that a chill enveloped the world and the workers awaited the sun. I rushed to where I knew I should find Crip, and breathlessly began the narrative of my adventure.

"I know just about what happened," he ventured, when he had expressed his joy at seeing me, for he knew that I had been on duty and that a number of the guards had been lost. "I wept not a little for you. Yes, it was a racoon," he repeated. "You will remember I told you about them. They are crazy over honey."

He was deeply interested in the account of my mad and unwilling ride.

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Then I told him of my visit to the garden, and of the Master. He made no reply, but presently asked:

“What do you know of the Master?”

“Little—very little.”

“Do you know that lately I’ve been wondering whether I have been fair to him? Once I was perfectly sure that he was an enemy to be fought on all occasions, that he made use of us only for selfish ends. Now I am beginning to think I was wrong. While he has taken our honey, he has always left us enough. Last winter, I am told, he actually brought a lot of honey and gave it to the colonies that had none. Besides, before we came in contact with men, we lived in caves and hollow trees, exposed to all manner of enemies. It is different now.”

We were still busy talking when the signal for work rang through the hive, and both Crip and I made our way to the front. And, as many times before, we rose from the board together and flew at once to the field of broomweed. Side by side we ranged, visiting many of the tiny yellow flowers ere we were laden. Everything was now painfully dry, and it was all too evident that the honey flow was over. Try as hard as we might, we gathered only a few loads a day. And Crip remarked how short the days were and how far into the south the sun had drifted. Then, besides, we were obliged to leave off earlier, on account of the cold.

“The leaves are all turning red and brown and yellow,” said Crip, as we flew homeward. “This is the melancholy time I’ve heard about. Even the wind seems sad and loiters around bush and tree as though

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he feared his caressing touch might hasten the down-dropping of the stricken leaves. Happy, I'm sad, too."

I could only answer him that I of all bees was one of the most unhappy. And at the moment I was stricken with a feeling of homesickness, as though I, too, were bound on a journey toward the setting sun, or as though an unmeasured catastrophe impended.

As we neared home we saw the Master and his little Shadow seated by our hive, and near them, sprawling on the ground, the faithful dog. The Master was watching the incoming bees. Well he knew by the burdens they bore the condition of the fields.

"The workers are coming home very light," remarked the Shadow. "Just a little bread."

"The season is ended," murmured the Master. "Soon they will go indoors and rest through the cold. We must come presently and take off the empty uppers, so as to concentrate the heat of the cluster. In that way they will conserve their stores. The cluster, you know, son, is formed by the bees covering over the brood and hanging on to one another so as to keep themselves and the young bees warm."

Crip and I deposited our loads and then returned to the alighting-board, but the speakers had gone. We could hear the Master singing in his garden; and from a mesquite-tree hard by a mocking-bird answered him. All too soon he ceased; and the bird, after trilling a few wild refrains, as though to coax him to return, dropped into silence. For a time not a sound was heard, then the bird broke out again in a most plain-

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tive song. He seemed to summon his phrases from the depths of despair.

Twilight had now quite engulfed the world. Crip, who had been for a time very still, began to stir restlessly.

“Happy, that is my passing song. How could the bird have known that this very night I shall cleave the air for the last time? Yes, I mean it. Please don’t interrupt me. The year has gone—I have done my work. I am a cripple, and my wings are tattered. I shall be a burden, eating the food that may be needed ere the harvest again is ripe. My time has come—and I must go into the dark. This is the law. Why should not bees fly away and never return? How much grander to pass away on the wing, hushed to sleep by the stars. How poor a thing it is to cling to the combs until death shall drag one down to the earth, there to embarrass one’s brothers.

“My work is done. My body is wrecked, and the golden call echoing from eternity is in my ears. I must go. You, Happy, have much to do ere your time shall come. But you will face life bravely.

“How can I thank you enough for having saved my life? Do you think I have done well? Have I worked faithfully? Hero, you say? No, not a hero; but I have tried to do the things that came to my hand; and that is all that one can do. That sums up the true meaning of life—service and duty done.

“Hear the bird! What a song for the night! Ah, but what music I shall hear soon when I fly out across the spaces of light! I am ready. I love you. Farewell—farewell.”

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Crip had turned about for the last time, and was ready to go, when a heartrending cry woke the innermost caverns of the hive. He staggered a little, for he knew its meaning. I stood puzzled and amazed.

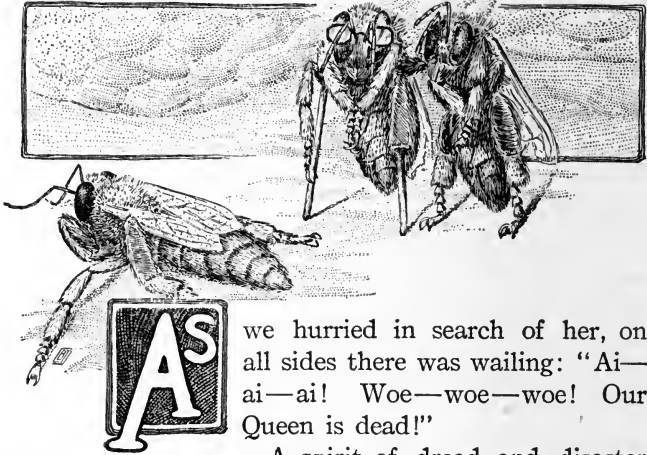
"What is it?" I begged of him.

"The worst of news—our Queen is dead!" he echoed.

"Let us go to her at once."

In we went, and while I was shaken by the news which I did not fully comprehend, I was sobered and silent. I should probably have had no thought of death at all had I known what lay before us, the midnight ways we were to tread.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN The Death of the Queen



AS

we hurried in search of her, on all sides there was wailing: "Ai—ai—ai! Woe—woe—woe! Our Queen is dead!"

A spirit of dread and disaster filled the place and shook us mightily. Crip said never a word.

"I remember you told me once you had lost your Queen-Mother—that was the time I found you in the hive that we robbed. You were going to tell me about it."

"Yes; but now it is too late—it is terrible. You do not understand—"

At length we came to where she lay asleep on the bottom-board of the house she had graced for so short a space. Around her surged her children, weeping for the queenly dead.

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"She had been ill but a few days," one said.

"She has not been well since the robbery," added another.

"She was hurt in the fight," put in a third.

"But she did not complain," answered another.

Crip and I now in our turn came into the presence of the Queen lying prone on the floor, her wings draped about her. There were present none of the trappings of the dead, nor anything to show that she was not asleep, so peacefully she lay there. I came presently face to face with her, and once I had looked into her eyes I saw that the vision had vanished, that the spirit had gone.

I turned away sick at heart, wailing I know not what black hymn of despair. Crip, too, I had lost, and I feared he had gone on his long journey. I seemed to sink into a bottomless abyss.

Soon I had partially recovered my composure. The commotion which had swept the colony slowly subsided, although there still ran an undercurrent of anxiety. What should we do? That part of the intelligence of the bee which has to grapple with such emergencies had been active on the instant.

"The Queen is dead—long live the Queen," was the low, reverential chorus.

"Three Queens have been ordained," ran the cry.

Without knowing why, I hurried to the place which had been chosen for the wax-cell palaces—and there was Crip! He appeared to be the leader, and I was overjoyed to see him.

"You've found something more to do," I said to him. "I'm so glad."

HAPPY

"You see, I'm one of the oldest—"

"Don't look so dejected," Crip volunteered to those about him. "Hurry—hurry! Soon we shall have another Queen to reign over us."

And now magic began to intervene—or miracle. Three cells with three tiny larvæ, two days old, were selected, and over these the great cell-palaces were erected. But more mysterious was the feeding of these tiny things, which under normal conditions would emerge workers. Think, then, of the transformation which will produce a Queen! Thanks to a secret buried in the heart of the bee, the worker, it is supposed, is converted, through feeding, into a Queen. Crip told me all this in his cheerful way; and he assumed so much importance in looking after the destinies of the three royal personages, that once or twice I was irritated at his conduct.

"Why three Queens?" I inquired, one day. "We need only one."

"To make sure that *one* will survive. The bee takes no chance where it can be avoided."

The embryonic Queens grew rapidly, and in due season the doors of the palaces were sealed, not to be broken until her ladyship herself should choose to bite her way to the light.

The days were now being counted, even the hours, against the time when She would appear! Once more a little life was manifest in the hive. Workers went scouring the country for forage, and every bee found something to do, so happy were they in anticipation of the coming event.

The Master, too, had shown much interest in us.

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On one of the early days of our trouble, in passing, he had discovered our condition.

"They have lost their Queen," he said to the little Shadow. "You can tell that by their movements. Everything is now in confusion. Let us see whether they have eggs or young larvæ available for the making of a Queen."

With that he opened our hive and found the queen-cells.

"Here are cells already," he commented, a gleam of satisfaction on his grave face.

"Let me see!" cried the Shadow, poking a little, curious face around a corner of the hive.

The Master knew at a glance the age of the Queens, for the cells had not been sealed; he knew that on such a day one would come forth amid the acclaim of a colony which had languished between hope and fear—life and death. So now, from day to day, with his little Shadow, he passed, pausing in front of the hive long enough to discover whether the great event had occurred.

It was on a day golden with a sun steeped in the waning glory of an Indian summer that the Queen emerged and took her throne. Crip and I had gone to the lake for a load of water, and we should probably not have missed the event had we not, out of curiosity, returned by the hollow tree which our brothers of the swarm had occupied. We flew up to the very entrance; the workers were filing past in a great stream, humming a note of content.

"They will survive," I said to Crip. "The season has been a late one, and they must have gathered ample stores."

HAPPY

We were in jubilant mood, on account of this discovery, which chimed in perfectly with conditions at home, for even before we alighted the sound of rejoicing reached us.

"A Queen has been born! A Queen! A Queen!"

We found a throng mad with rejoicings. Crip and I edged our way in, eager to pay our homage, thrilling at the thought that a new lease of life for the colony had been vouchsafed. We reached the place of the palace-cells, only to find them in ruins. Excited bees were razing the last buttresses, while echoing from all sides were: "A new mother has come! A Queen!" Presently two beautiful Queens were led to execution, for one had been crowned—and one only might rule the hive.

Order was restored, and things went normally until the nuptial day. In the life of the colony there is no equally vital event. Destiny waits on the mating of the Queen.

On a wonderfully fine, warm day, at the noon hour, she made ready for flight. Already in the air could be heard the roar of the drones, that groped about in search of the queenly presence. And now from the alighting-board she rose into the crystal blue. Crip and I, for no reason, followed, not near enough, however, to encroach on the sacred precincts. Higher and higher she climbed, now pursued by some scores of drones. Round and round in mazy flight they whirled until the heavens seemed dizzy, and the ultimate moment had arrived, when a yellow flash crossed the sky and fluttered in their midst—a bee-bird.

"Fly for your life!" a drone cried. "Fly—fly!"

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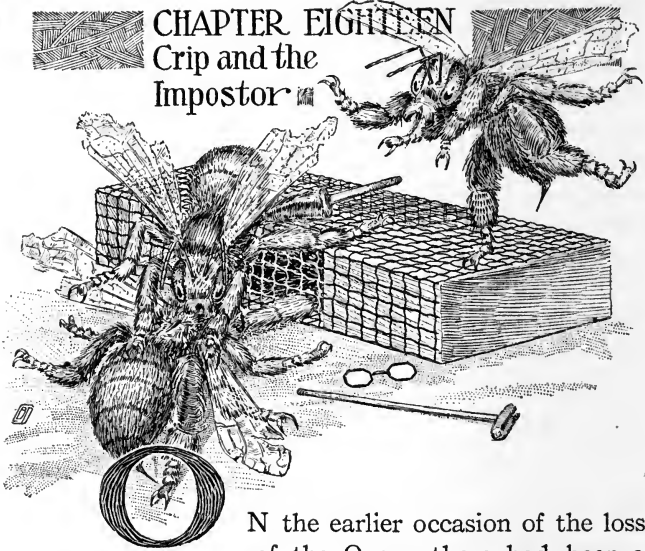
A moment later it was all over, and a silent doomed procession dropped earthward—the Queen was missing—the bee-bird had caught her.

The news spread instantly. I had been among the first to make report of it.

“We shall all die together now,” said Crip, in dejection. “It is only a matter of days. We have no eggs, no larvæ, and may not rear another mother. Alas—alas!”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Crip and the Impostor



IN the earlier occasion of the loss of the Queen there had been a brief spasm of despair; but it had yielded, for the possibility of rearing another rose uppermost. Now that possibility had vanished. There was absolutely no hope. Death stalked abroad, and one by one, the eldest first, the bees would go to their doom. There were no young bees to take their places, nothing but dust and darkness.

Several days passed, when one morning a great cry rang through the hive that eggs had been found and that queen-cells had been started. It was a strange and pathetic mystery, for we knew that we had no Queen, and yet exulted over the finding of eggs.

Still hoping beyond hope, we tried to create a Queen from the eggs—all in vain. The eggs we now

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found deposited freely—one, two, or half-a-dozen in a cell—were the eggs of an impostor, a would-be Queen, called a fertile worker.

Strangely enough, too, we began to work in a half-hearted way, gathering honey, feeding the brood of the impostor, and yet we knew or seemed to know that there would emerge but worthless drones. Hope still lingered in our hearts, but daily it grew more faint until despair overcame us.

One morning Crip and I were brooding over our affairs when we saw the Master and his Shadow approaching. They stopped near us.

“Something has happened,” said the Master; “something is wrong. We do not need the smoker. Here, son, lend me a hand!”

“A fertile worker—an impostor!” he exclaimed, on lifting up a frame from the brood-chamber. “See those eggs dropped haphazard! A Queen never does that.”

“Why, there are six in one cell!” cried the Shadow.

“Run, son, and bring me that Italian Queen in the new cage.”

In a few minutes the cry of a Queen rang through the hive. Crip and I flew toward it, and presently paused beside the trap which contained a most beautiful Queen. But she was not *our* Queen, and now a riot was started. “Kill her—kill her!” broke on all sides. While Crip and I took no part, we entered no protest—we stood almost alone.

Over the cage, biting and clawing, a mob of bees, incited partly by the impostor, endeavored to reach the royal personage. They meant to kill her; first, because she was not of our tribe; secondly, because the

HAPPY

impostor had come to own an ascendancy over the colony. It was a strange fate, as Crip explained, that we should cling to an impostor and die rather than bring an alien to reign over us. But Crip and I were thinking, and so were many of our little brothers. Crip, on occasion, now gave her food through the wire screen; while I found it convenient to hang about the place. In the mean time the impostor spread her vile brood over the hive, and kept up her conspiracy against the Queen the Master had given us.

Several days passed, and the Master, returning, found what he thought a reconciliation. He opened the cage and out walked the most beautiful Queen I had ever seen, except my own Queen-Mother. Instantly, however, a troop of hostile bees, evidently led by the impostor, fell upon her, and in a moment she was in the center of a "ball" and being slowly crushed to death.

The Master was watching, however, and quickly rescued her and restored her to the cage.

"They are not ready to receive her, son," he said. "In fact, unless we can destroy the fertile worker, that horrid impostor, we may not succeed."

"I've been thinking," said Crip, to me that night as we stood by the cage and listened to the regal call of the Queen, "that I shall fight the first bee that comes near her."

"And so shall I."

Crip had just given her some honey, and was standing near her on the screen when an ugly bee, unusually large, came up and caught hold of one of her legs which had protruded through the meshes of the cage. He

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laid hold of it and pulled it with all his might, and the Queen began to cry with pain, when Crip rushed to the rescue.

A terrific battle ensued. I tried to help, and did seize the vicious bee by one wing, only to be kicked off. But Crip had grappled him in his vise-like mandibles, and I saw it was a battle to the death. Over and over they whirled, finally to fall to the bottom of the hive—still fighting. I followed as fast as I might, and when I reached where they lay they had ceased to struggle—both were dead.

A lance wound in his heart had finished my beloved friend.

“Crip—Crip!” I cried aloud; but got no answer. One little foot moved a few times, then was still.

Almost simultaneously an alarm sounded. The impostor had disappeared.

I shook with an unrestrained emotion. “We are saved,” I thought.

“Where is our Queen? The Queen is gone!” they called.

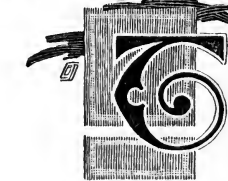
A wild rush of bees set the hive in pandemonium. Finally one began to cry: “Here she is—she is dead.”

“Dead—dead!” rose loud over the place.

They were wailing over the lifeless body of the impostor, while I stood broken-hearted beside my Crip, who, at the sacrifice of his life, had redeemed that of the colony.



CHAPTER NINETEEN FAREWELL



TWO days later the Master came and opened the door of the cage, and the new Queen he had brought walked boldly out on the combs, to be wildly acclaimed, "Mother!" The hostility which had been displayed toward her had totally disappeared, and in its place had come affection. The death of the impostor had wrought a profound revolution, and everywhere my poor Crip was proclaimed a hero.

Within the space of an hour every egg and every young bee which the impostor had left was dragged out and cast to the ants; and almost at once the new Queen began to deposit eggs of her kind, and the hymn of rejoicing that welled up in that hive of many calamities cannot well be imagined. I think that I more than any other was moved to the bottom of my being.

It is not possible for me to express the loneliness which came over me at thought of Crip's death. We had been such dear companions, and he had been so kind and wise.

When another day had dawned and the sun had sufficiently warmed the air, I went into the fields with the

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rest, but I seemed to wander as in a dream. All the while the desire possessed me to fly farther and farther away. Had I, too, lived out my period of usefulness? But Crip said that I had not, and I acted in this faith.

On my next excursion into the fields I felt a tremor in the air such as I remembered from another time, when the storm had broken. Black clouds, too, loomed on the horizon and little snake-like flames crawled in and out among them. This time I was not so eager to secure a load, and made off with all possible speed. Scarcely had I reached home when the rain began to fall in sheets and the thunder rattled frightfully. In a little while it was over; the sky was clear, but a dreadful wind from the north blew like a hurricane and it grew cold. By the next day it was so cold that we formed a cluster about the brood in order to keep it warm. We, too, were cold, and not a bee ventured from the hive.

Three days passed ere it was warm enough for us to look outside; and when I saw the world again, truly I was shocked. Everything was black and bare.

"The frost has fallen, not a flower remains alive," mournfully exclaimed one of the nurses.

This was surely the winter of which I had heard so much. Happily, the Master came to our assistance by closing the door of our house, leaving but the smallest hole for our passage. This helped greatly in the matter of our keeping warm when the northers swooped upon us.

The season now alternated between moderately warm days and biting weeks of cold. On all days fit for flight, we sailed into the air for exercise and for the care of our bodies.

HAPPY

Close, close to one another we packed during the cold days and nights, and in this way generated enough heat to keep the hive warm and habitable. Life was monotonous. We were limited in our activities to caring for the brood and to policing the hive. There was little enough to do on the latter score, save on warm days. Then we searched out every nook and corner to see that the moth had not entered, for she was the mother of the web-worms, and I, for one, had the utmost respect for them. Sometimes harmless beetles were found, and, much as we hated to send them into the cold, we felt it must be done. Sometimes they went peacefully, but often enough we were compelled to drag them bodily forth—and occasionally we were forced to destroy them.

And so the days ran on. As for me, I employed them in meditation. What could be more conducive to reflection than the long, dark hours of quiet that reign in a winter-bound hive? Slowly, ever so slowly, I neared the end of my task.

And now I have come to the end. There remains only to tell what these last days held for me. Already the winter has gone and I am ready. Even as poor Buzz-Buzz, I feel that my labors are done. I am old and worn and need to make way for the young life which is already singing about me. The Queen-Mother, aware of conditions, has been scattering her brood over wide spaces, and already young bees, flapping their wings frantically, are stumbling over the combs, and hundreds more of them soon will be waiting for the signal to go into the fields. Eagerly will they try their first wings and eagerly will they gather

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from the flowers the pollen and honey that unfailingly come with the spring.

Even as I—even as a hundred thousand generations before me—will they marvel at the mysteries that surround them, but, undaunted and undismayed, they will fly into the face of the sun or struggle in the teeth of the hurricane! It is youth that knows no danger, that brooks no defeat, that pursues, that conquers. It is youth that constructs, that hopes, that achieves—youth that charges the heavens with glory!

Crip was right. Now age has torn my wings and rendered my body nearly useless. While I am still alive, I am among the dying—but, dying, I shall live again.

February has come and already the grass is green and the yellow catclaw-buds are bursting. The great tree that stands hard by is a-bloom. The alarm has been sounded, and out into the world the bees fly by tens and hundreds. I, too, cannot resist the call and rise into the air, driving toward a place I well remember. Sheltered from the north wind and exposed to the sun, a little slope lies dotted with daisies. In its midst a catclaw-tree sways like a golden ball in the breeze, and about it hum a score of bees. I, too, gather my load and wend my way homeward, but at heart I am weary. I had imagined that I alone knew of this particular spot. Alas! there are no secrets.

Flying out again, I took another course—one which led me over the Master's cottage. There he was in his garden, pondering his roses. Round him I circled twice, thrice, until, perceiving me, he followed me with his eyes until I passed from his vision.

HAPPY

Then on I went to the place of the sunflowers, but where once had been beautiful blossoms the green grass waved in triumph.

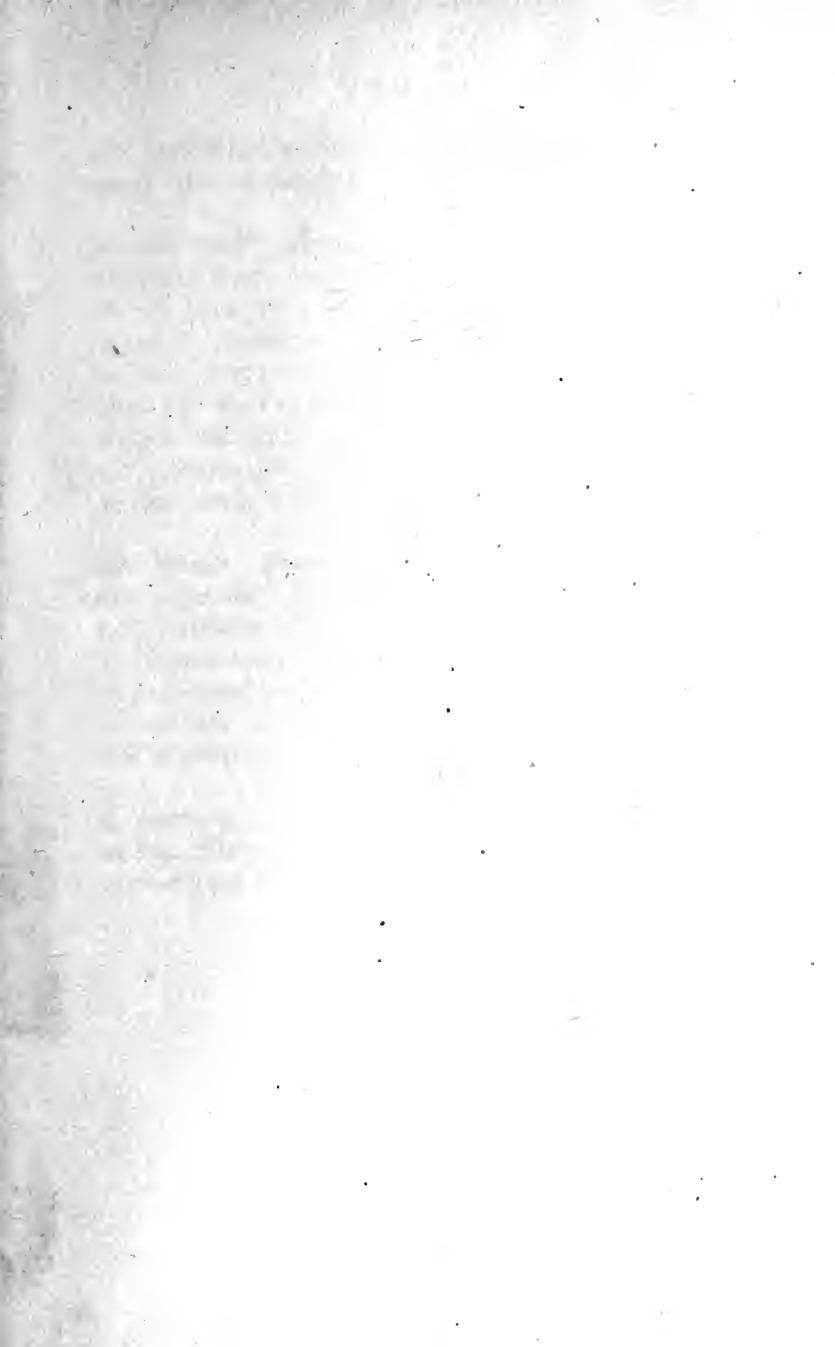
It seemed to me that a never-ending night followed this excursion. I rested little or none; back and forth I raced from end to end of the hive, and from the entrance to my cell, which I had not forgotten. I passed and re-passed the Queen-Mother at her tasks, touching her reverently as one might touch the garment of a saint.

At length the gray light broke along the horizon and gleams of color pierced the low-lying clouds. My time had come. I felt the call, and there was no denying the command.

For a moment I seemed in a maze. Round and round I turned, like a child lost in the wilderness, then made straight for the entrance, where already a few of the hardier and younger workers were assembled, waiting for the light. How restless they seemed; how they longed to be off in the world; how alluring the unattained; how fascinating the great adventure of life!

As best I might, I have told my story, and here it must end. I have striven; I have dreamed; and as far as ever it comes to God's creatures, I have been—
HAPPY. Farewell!





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