

## City of Golden Wax.



The Story of a Colony of Wild Bees. Condensed  
from the Book by Frank S. Stuart.

(continued)

### Honey Harvest.

THE CLOVER HARVEST had been bountiful, whitening the hillside like manna. In the uncut hay meadows it grew long-stemmed, swinging its dainty head among the clashing grasses; behind the whirring mowing machine it sprang up afresh in the night, starring the ground like sunlit snow.

This was real mid-summer, the bees' time of destiny. Each bee, flying from the city to gather a load of nectar, visited more than 100 clover blooms before it turned back. That load would equal one-third of a drop. But of this from 50 to 80 per cent. was water: the weight of the nectar exceeded that of the resultant honey fourfold.

Yet the city must gather 500 pounds of honey between April and September, as a minimum on which race life could safely go on—500 pounds of honey to be collected, one-third of a drop of nectar at a time, each drop coming from the nectaries of 300 flowers.

Sometimes the bees, returning from the clover fields with loads of thick honey too heavy for them to bear, fell victims to a strange mischance. As they approached the oak a playful breath of scented summer wind sent them staggering. Several managed to reach the gates. Others, completely tired out, went gliding heavily to the ground at the foot of the tree.

Ants awaited them there. Before each bee a fierce ant stationed itself, staring pitilessly into her eyes. The bee remained motionless as a stone. Soon some magic in the blank, black gaze of the ant's minute eyes began to act on the bee's consciousness. Unable to stir wing or foot, its mouth slowly opened and its tongue came out as reluctantly as if it were being dragged by invisible silver strings. The long black tongue uncoiled and stretched out—and lo, on its tip was a drop of honey taken from the store in the sac, that store already dedicated to the use of the bees' city.

The ant advanced. The hypnotised bee stood rigid with extended tongue and lifted all the honey it could carry from the bee's tongue-tip, then turned and hurried away. Very gradually, the bee seemed to emerged from a weird dream. It withdrew its tongue, hesitated, then leapt into the air and hurried shame-faced into the city to deposit the remainder of its load. All day long the ants waited under the tree; and so they do each summer wherever bees live, tiny middlemen of the insect world, reaping where they have not sowed and gathering where they have not strewn.

### The Swarms of Death.

A black bee glittered in the sunshine outside the oak and was attacked by sentries. It turned to escape, but an instant later it was met in mid-air and its wings and head torn from its body. Eagerly the sentries bore the dismembered parts to the alighting platform before the city gates. There the broken black body was distributed in full view as a warning to potential robbers.

Later a second black scout was caught high up on the oak trunk by a solitary sentry making the final rounds for the

night: then the following day there appeared a black patrol of three fierce, shining old bees, evidently picked warriors.

Flying wing-tip to wing-tip they beat off the dart of a solitary sentry with contemptuous ease. Presently they dived into the gateway and vanished into the crowded combs.

Expertly the robbers shouldered into a mob of bewildered young bees, swiftly filled their honey sacs, then, fully loaded with stolen sweets, darted down the comb toward the gates.

A nurse spotted them and turned to pursue, and, in a flash several hundred bees had joined the hue and cry, but it was too late: one robber got away, eluding a score of flying attackers, and whined away through the wood and out of sight.

The whole city was in an uproar. All work was stopped except essential nursing duties. Fighting regiments swiftly began to mass inside the gates. For, where one scout enters and escapes, invasion follows inevitably.

The successful robber flew half a mile down the valley to a straw skep, which was the black's home city. These black bees are the old English strain, hardy and terrible fighters. They smelled the stolen sweets, and first a group and then a crowd of blacks began to surge in the leader's wake, all swinging their abdomens and banging their wings in a savage war dance.

Within five minutes 30,000 robbers, like an air fleet on its dark way to face a declaration of war, were flying in close formation. But in a practice raid before visiting the golden city they suddenly swooped down on a small, recently established beehive in a garden nearby. Smothering the sentries by sheer numbers, they fought their way inside. There was no battle, only a brutal, senseless slaughter. The defenders, outnumbered by five to one, surprised and disheartened, gave up the fight almost as soon as it began.

Then followed a strange thing. As at a signal, the victors stopped the aerial massacring, and instead stretched out their tongues and licked the shrinking banded forms. Instantly those who had escaped being put to death began to bluster and prance among the invaders; then, in a final act of perfidy, to plunge their heads into honey cells, robbing their own home.

Within a few minutes the blacks were in the air again, with thousands of reinforcements from the raped hive streaming behind them. Many bees in the frightful alliance were already gorged with stolen honey; but once bees begin aggression and butchery they cannot stop.

This time, however, they would meet no quisling army. As the sentries of the golden city marched calmly up and down before the assembled regiments, like a dark hailstorm the attackers flung themselves not only at the main gates but at every crevice and cranny that might somehow lead into the city, in the first drunken rush they carried the gateway and then, at incredible cost, swept through into the city itself.

Mercilessly they brushed every living thing forward in front of them along the combs. Soon the floor was inches deep in dead and wounded bodies. But somehow they could not sweep through the last defenders. Perhaps their orgies were telling; all the invaders now carried full sacs of honey, and the greed which inspired them was also their ruin. They were tiring. Steadily the golden defenders poured in fresh troops. The line of fighting blacks bulged, was forced back by incredible gallantry and ferocity—and burst into rags and shreds. Golden hordes began to run through the gap.

But now a disturbance arose in a new quarter. A reserve army of blacks had hacked and bitten their way through the transparent propalised barriers where the rainbow colours beat into the golden city at sunset, and were pouring in behind the main body of defenders in a vicious drive to reach the queen. The small bodyguard around her tightened into a solid ring; but there was no need. Ever since the first blacks began to cut their way in, an old sentry, hairless and hideous, backed by a band of picked warriors, had been lurking in

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