

**HAPPY**  
**The LIFE OF A**  
**BEE**

BY  
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# HAPPY

## The LIFE OF A BEE



AS IT LOOKED TO HAPPY FROM THE KNOLL



TO MY MOTHER

## FOREWORD

Years 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 contrarities, 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 of retreating winter they leaped forth in multitudes: daisy and phlox and poppy 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 inimitably 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 burdens 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 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: “He<sup>u</sup> 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 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; 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."

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, and started back to my cell. Finally I reached it. I was dumfounded to find that it had been over-hauled 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 immemorial hymn, a hymn, I have been told, the bees have sung for a hundred times a thousand years.

[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.

## 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. 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 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 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 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

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