

A Woman with a Hatful of Bees

by Victoria Cooper

Margot woke with the hat of bees buzzing loudly on her head. In those bleary-eyed moments as she lay dormant but awake, she had forgotten them, but then their drone snagged on the synapses in her brain and tugged her back to the hive of memory. She was a woman with a hatful of bees.

She stared at the cursor blinking back at her while the droning buzz blanked out all creative thought. The bees buzzed and her fingers poised as they both hovered above the keyboard.

The usual 6am start of chamomile and honey was fruitless.

The usual three-mile walk, up through the woods, past the leaning crab apples, counting as she went, gave her nothing. When she reached fourteen trees, had waved at the windmill on the brow, she returned; hair swarming out behind her.

She could taste Autumn approaching, the salt on her tongue fizzed from the harvest storms brewing; she turned up her collar and headed for home.

Still the bees buzzed. Round and round, their incessant noise distracting, beguiling, obfuscating any sentence or phrase. She turned up the radio hoping one noise could drown out another.

They crowded inside her hat until she was numb.

Margot knew her deadline was looming, she knew the publisher would be on the phone in the morning, with her usual bright and breezy tone, insinuating warmth not quite concealing the coldness that lay beneath.

Margot shut her eyes and saw the same and only sentence she had written two weeks before, "I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it". The words mocked her, just like the bees in her hat buzzed. Bleakness gnawed until she had no choice but to face the view of the blinking cursor head on.

The bees grew louder and obliterated everything.

Margot sat at the computer screen hour after hour, its illuminance casting strange comb-like shadows on her face as the light outside faded and she found herself stiff from sitting and colonised to her chair.

She sipped her daily Royal Jelly cocktail at 6.30pm the usual twist of lemon and crush of ice stinging the back of her throat.

She re-read *The Wasp Factory* before going to bed and hoped the bees would hum indiscernibly. Finally, as she watched the waxing moon outside, she felt herself waning towards morning.

Margot's phone buzzed beside her and she sleepily picked it up.

"Honey, how are you?" dripped the voice oozing down the phone.

She felt for the hat and it pulsed confidently in return.

"So, how's my favourite debut novelist then, have you got the 50,000 draft you promised?" I am just bombinating to find out." Throaty laughter erupted down the phone and the cacophony hit the hive like a hailstorm.

Margot's hat began to team, the bees skittishly bouncing inside, circulating every cognitive thought, wrapping themselves around every syllable, crowding out every word that entered her head.

"Buzz off," she muttered and replaced the handset.