

# **The Bees Study Guide**

## **The Bees by Laline Paull**

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## Plot Summary

“The Bees” by Laline Paull is a fascinating look into the most industrious of natural orders, a beehive. However, with a dash of creative storytelling, she magnifies the society into a dystopian nightmare. The main character is Flora 717, who is born into the lowest caste of bees, the sanitation workers. However, due to a few evolutionary perks, Flora is larger and more powerful than her kin, and she can speak. In a place where most bees with deformities or aberrations are disposed of, Flora is spared by Sister Sage, the most powerful bee of the most powerful kin, the priestesses. Flora is allowed to leave her kin and try different parts of the hive, which is almost unheard of. Since she can produce royal jelly, she is allowed to work in the nursery for a while, until the fertility police’s strict policy on aberrations causes her too much distress to stay near the babies any longer. When she is sent back to her own area, she bravely confronts an attacker—a wasp. Her courage in defeating the most hated of foes allows her an audience with the Queen.

During her time in the Queen’s chambers, Flora learns the history of the hive through a series of six scent-panels, which use sensory memories to communicate the myths surrounding their species. Flora loves the queen and is very devoted to her, but in her presence she learns the queen is ill; after that, when Flora finds herself able to lay eggs, she is burdened with two terrible secrets, for only the Queen may lay eggs. For anyone else to do so is treason.

Flora lays her egg and smuggles it into the nursery, where it quickly dies of starvation. Mournful at her loss, she learns to forage for nectar and becomes one of the hive’s most productive and powerful foragers. Although Flora could have allowed her gifts and recognition to cause her some well-earned pride, she is careful to help others, show attention to the marginalized bees, and careful to protect her thoughts and actions from the Sage’s notice.

Soon Flora lays a second egg, and finds a new creative place to hide it. In this process she discovers three dead Sage bodies, all young. This discovery arouses suspicion, but she keeps the secret and goes about her business foraging, because fall is coming and the hive must settle as soon as it can. One day she returns to “The Visitation,” which is the hive-myth name for when the hive’s human owner visits and takes honey from the bees. In the process, her second baby is killed, and Flora goes into depression.

Fall approaches, and after a lean summer the bees are fearful that the winter will kill them off. The Queen ceases to lay in preparation, and in a last attempt to find food Flora confronts a spider, who predicts to her that she will lay once more, winter will come twice, and that Flora’s actions will bring the hive into madness. With such a scary prophecy, the hive slowly starts to starve. First they kill all of the males, although Flora’s friend Sir Linden escapes; Flora finds him under a pile of dead and rotting Sage babies, yet another clue that something strange is afoot. As fall slips towards winter, the Sage put the entire hive to sleep in “The Cluster.” For months the bees sleep, slowly rotating throughout the Treasury, where kin by kin they feed on the last of the honey.



Flora wakes periodically through this time. One day she forages and remembers a “glass cage” that promises good flowers. She finds the greenhouse and is able to bring loads of nectar back to her sisters in the hive. Spring comes, or a false spring does; the bees awaken and are ready to welcome warmth and flowers. In this time the Queen starts laying again, but all of her brood are ill and will not live. The Sage declare her unfit to be Queen, and she is executed.

The hive descends into madness. The Sage declare that they will produce a new Princess in three days, which leads many bees to believe they have been planning a coup for some time. Winter comes again, as the spider predicts, and Flora finds herself with a last egg in her abdomen. She hides this child high in an unused corner of the hive, and feeds it when it is born. Springs comes again, and Flora forages as much as she can to feed her child. Many days pass without a new Sage princess, and another kin talk of presenting their own. The entire hive is tense.

Flora returns from the field to a battle in the main chamber of the hive. The Sage Princess has appeared and must fight any other Princesses for the right to reign. The Teasel kin has their own Princess, and the two fight in front of the hive. The Sage Princess wins, and is about to declare her right to rule when Flora’s daughter appears to challenge her. The two begin their fight, and Flora’s daughter is about to win when a horde of wasps descend upon the hive for an attack. The Sage demand victory, but many of the bees prefer saving the hive to the squabble, and sabotage the hive in order to kill the wasps. Then they flee, several kin strong, with Flora’s daughter at the helm.

In the air they meet Flora’s old drone friend, Sir Linden, who mates with Flora’s daughter, making her a true queen. Flora shows the Queen the way to a hollow beech tree in the forest, and the bees that fled start a new hive away from the orchard. The remainder of the bees, including the ruthless Sage and the fertility police, perish with the wasps.



# Prologue, Chapters 1-4

## Summary

In the Prologue, a man and woman walk through a yard. She is encouraging him to sell. He sees an old wooden beehive at the edge of the wood, recalls his father calling the bees “his girls.” He tells the realtor he is not ready to sell.

Flora 717 is “born” in Chapter 1, squeezed from a wax cell. She is bombarded with scents and vibrations — keys to how the beehive communicates. She knows her name and her “kin” - a Flora, the sanitation class. Immediately she begins to clean out her cell. Around her bees are bursting from their cells and beginning their similar existence. A bee appears, followed by police. Her wings are deformed, and the police inform her that deformity is against the rules. They kill her and turn their attention to Flora. With their antennae they discern Flora’s own deformities: she is taller, larger, and she speaks. A bee from the Priestess kin — the Sage — appears and sends the police away. Sister Sage gives Flora a drop of honey, and Flora follows her, the honey erasing whatever fears she was feeling.

In Chapter 2, Flora follows Sister Sage through her new home. She notices how the rest of her kin is avoided. The priestess leads her to a decorated compartment, where several male Drones are being fawned over by the other bees. Sage leads her through the main communication hub of the hive, which confuses Flora’s strong sense of scent. To calm her, Sage emits some of Queen’s scent, which covers Flora with a sense of well-being. Sage reminds her that her Kin is from the same of the Queen’s. They continue their walk; Flora’s mood levels out due to the Sage’s transmitted scent.

Flora and Sage enter the nursery in Chapter 3. Sage seems to know Flora’s thoughts and movements — the bees’ antennae transmit this information. The nursery is operated by the Teasel kin. They are all born to nurse the Queen’s brood. Teasel looks with disdain on Flora despite her efforts to please. Teasel informs Sage that she has lost six nurses to sickness recently, and that the other bees gossip that the summer is ending early and there will be food shortages. Sage tells Teasel that Flora has a tongue; Teasel responds with horror and criticism, but Sage chides the nurse and asks her to “experiment” with Flora.

In Chapter 4, Teasel takes Flora into the heart of the nursery, which is filled with glowing cribs and growing brood. The room is also populated by young nurses whose mouths are producing shining liquid, which they are passing to the babies. Teasel positions Flora by a crib and watches: as a baby begins to whimper, its scent produces a hormonal response in Flora, and her cheeks will with a sweet liquid called Flow. Teasel encourages her to let it drip into the baby’s mouth. The process is exhausting, so Teasel finds Flora a bed. For several days, Flora nurses the babies with the Flow according to the strict nursery schedule. Flora watches as the nurses come and go and different bees from the Teasel kin supervise; she also sees other sanitation workers and



understands how they are ignored by the other kin. The nursery in Category Two receives the bigger babies, and when Flora asks Sister Teasel if she may move, the older bee chastises her and tells her to do as she is told and not to study the rotation of nurses, for it is a matter of security. She reminds Flora how lowly her kin is, making her repeat Bee Catechism which states it is so. Flora repeats the first commandment, “Accept, Obey, and Serve.” Teasel sends Flora back to the smallest babies, but she finds she cannot feed anymore. Sister Sage appears to take her to another assignment.

## Analysis

Laline Paull’s “The Bees” immediately catapults readers into a foreign world, although the short Prologue is a reminder that the world is commonplace, maybe in one’s backyard. The first and most glaring aspect of Paull’s world-building is the caste system on which the beehive is built. The main character, Flora 717, is born into the flora “kin,” or the sanitation class. It is immediately apparent that the flora is the lowest of the kin — due to their cleaning duties, they emit an unpleasant scent, and furthermore, they do not speak. Kin, the author will show, represents an element of family and belonging and is curiously missing from this environment, in which sacrifice and duty to the upper class is so rigorously demanded.

A second important aspect of Paull’s beehive world is demonstrated in Flora’s first few moments of life; a deformed worker, with wings that are malformed, is violently captured and killed by a Gestapo-like police force. The language used to describe the police immediately tells readers that they are a coarse, violent, blood-hungry kin. Furthermore, it is obvious that the hive is all about conformity. Flora 717 is also a “variation” of her kin, but she escapes the fate of the other bee, which sets her up for the main course of the narrative. Flora, unlike her Kin, is large and powerful, and can speak. After a few days in the nursery, Flora notices how quickly the other bees fade from exhaustion, but she stays strong for much longer than her kin. These “variations” are just a hint of what makes Flora extraordinary; however, she lives in a world where it is safer to be the same. Flora herself is a constant symbol of uniqueness and individualism, and the author reminds the reader of this constantly by revealing Flora’s array of peculiar talents.

The Sage kin appear immediately in Chapter 1. Also referred to as Priestesses or the Melissae, the Sage kin reeks of power. Indeed, they are immediately set up as a symbol of dangerous authority, and it is immediately obvious that they have control over the entire hive, including the Police. Sister Sage’s authority trumps the rules against deformity; in fact, she refers to Flora’s “deformities” as “variations” in order to get what she wants — a test of Flora’s many skills. In this early chapter she appears as a friend to Flora, showing her kindness, giving her honey and a taste of the Queen’s Love (a scent which covers the bees with a sense of love and well-being); however, it is also clear that she is not to be trusted. The reader can see that the Teasel kin is wary of her, and she offhandedly mentions wiping Flora’s memory when her stint in the nursery is over.



## Discussion Question 1

Sister Sage tells Sister Teasel that "variation is not the same as deformity" (15). Is this true?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the first indication that the Floras are the least respected of the Kin?

## Discussion Question 3

What comparisons does the author draw between the beehive and a convent?

## Vocabulary

besieged, arable, dullard, emerged, impulse, fetid, soiled, distinctive, avidly, euphoria, obstreperous



## Chapters 5-9

### Summary

Sister Sage appears in Chapter 5 to take Flora to a new assignment. She praises Flora's devout and hardworking nature, and shares that "Sometimes it's good to spare the deviants, and experiment a little." (25) Her experiment was useful, as Flora has proven herself very helpful. They walk through the Category Two nursery and Sister Sage asks what Flora recalls of the schedules. When Flora answers, Sage probes her mind to determine if she is telling the truth. Sage also asks if the Teasel is meeting secretly without anyone's knowledge. Flora sees another of her kin, lowly and ugly; Sage tells her that the Flora is made from a mishmash of flowers that most bees shun. Their talk is interrupted by the Police's appearance in the ward. They had found another misshapen wing and are accusing the nurse kin of laying their own brood—a cardinal sin in the hive, for "Only the Queen may breed." The police move through the ward, and check all of the nurses and babies. They find one baby that could be errant, and Sage orders Flora to destroy it. She is filled with protection for the baby and cannot.

In Chapter 6, Flora awakens in something like a jail cell. She is aching from being beaten by the Police. Another bee is with her, a Clover. Several Sage bees arrive and accuse the Clover of laying eggs and spreading deformity through the hive. She protests, saying maybe the Queen is laying deformed eggs. The Sage sisters gather together and kill the Clover. Flora hears as the group discusses the low forage and the summer's early end; in effect, they should not be killing Flora when she is so useful. They zap her antennae with their own. The next thing Flora knows, she is awake and only driven by her kin-need to clean. Her conscious is dulled, and she carries out her duties. They stop only for Devotion — a moment when the Queen's scent is piped through the hive, calming the bees and reordering them. One day after Devotion, Flora is pushed into a horrid cell to clean, and the confusion of scents awakens her stunned brain and renders her useless for several minutes. Her supervisor kicks her out of the cleaning detail and Flora hides in a crowd of bees moving towards the Drones Arrival Hall.

Flora spends Chapter 7 cleaning with her own bee-kin. She finds comfort in the familiar scent and the quiet. While cleaning, the forager bees arrive from the fields and Flora receives her first taste of nectar. She illegally follows the forager bees into the collection hall and watches the solemn, almost religious process of depositing the nectar into wax cells. A party of male drones enters the hall, demanding honey. The assembled bees are in a flutter, and also try to dissuade the males with nectar. The summer has been lean. The men stick to their demands, saying they need the strength to mate with the princesses. The other bees flail at the sexual references and give them honey. One drone, Sir Linden, sees Flora cowering nearby and demands she clean him. She runs from him, angering him. In her getaway she dashes into the morgue and joins the line of sisters cleaning up dead bodies.





In Chapter 8, Flora blends in with the corpse-bearers. They are set to fly the corpses out and drop them in the field when the male drones appear once more to leave the hive. An old and respected forager bee, Lily 500, appears and there is some confusion on the landing board. In the confusion, Lily encourages Flora to fly with her, and she takes her first trip outside the hive. She absorbs all of the new data of the outside world. After a quick loop around the orchard she locates the scent of the hive and returns home, only to find the hive under wasp attack.

Chapter 9 introduces the reader to what the bees call “The Myriad,” or the wasp and yellow jacket population. Referred to as “infidels” and “dirty fiends” by the bees, the wasps are attracted to the honey the male drones left on the landing board. Flora fights with them in the air before entering the hive to prepare for the attack. A huge female wasp settles on the landing board and starts attacking the guards. Flora hears a voice inside her head directing her, and she successfully defeats the wasp before she can get too far inside the hive. Many bees die in the fight, and Flora helps dispose of all of the bodies. Sister Sage appears and asks Flora how she managed to fly, and to fight. She tells Flora that the voice in her head was the Hive Mind, and that sisters who hear the Hive Mind are allowed to meet the Queen.

## Analysis

Chapters 5-9 expand the world-building of the narrative, showing the reader more of the peculiar innerworkings of the hive. A recurring symbol in this story is devotion — the almost manic way the bees are devoted to their Queen is akin to mind control. Her scent is piped through the hive each day, filling each bee with a sense of well-being. A more intense version of this is the scent of the “Queen’s Love,” which helps each bee feel a particular sense of being needed. And each bee is needed; at least, each kin group is needed to help the hive run correctly. Furthermore, the bees recite mantras that are almost like Scripture in order to set their minds on the hive’s well-being.

The Floras are the least respected of the kin. In a way that sounds like she is reciting a legend, the Sage Priestess recounts that the Flora were created from the worst of the flowers. For a time, Flora feels ashamed by her kin. During this interlude with the Sage, Flora also feels the other bee put a sort of mind-lock on her antennae, numbing her thought processes and bending her will to that of “the hive.” This is another example of how the bees are devalued as individuals and only counted for how they can contribute.

Sustenance is another running theme in this novel — the bees are constantly worried about how much nectar they are going to get and how short the summer is. As the novel progresses, the too-wet summer yields to a wet fall and winter, during which the bees nearly starve. Chapter 8 foreshadows this when the male drones come in demanding honey, to which the bees respond that the honey is for storage, not eating.

Chapter 8 also expands on the characters of the male drones. They are there to mate with the “princesses” in order to make a new Queen, but the rest of the bees — all asexual according to biology — are overwhelmed by their pheromones and treat them



like celebrities. The other bees groom them and feed them and fawn over them. They use sexual metaphors and make the older bees uncomfortable. Flora refuses to “groom” the crotch of a drone named Sir Linden, and it is clear that in a hive of 9,000, he will remember her for the course of the novel.

The collective “fertility police” search the nursery because some of the brood are deformed. Because The Queen is perfect, the assumption is that another, lesser bee is laying eggs, which is illegal. Their fanaticism and adherence to the law lead them to destroy several baby bees and nurse bees, devaluing individuals. However, when they ask Flora to kill one of the babies, a strong maternal instinct takes over and she refuses. This is foreshadowing for the central conflict of the novel — that Flora will spontaneously breed on her own, the worst sin in the hive.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Paull remind the reader that this book is about insects and not humans?

## Discussion Question 2

Is the author successful in explaining the connection between the bees' scents and antennae, and how the hive communicates?

## Discussion Question 3

How do Flora's differences work both for and against her?

## Vocabulary

devout, scarce, forage, deviants, resonance, quaint, revulsion, calipers, snarling, astringent



# Chapters 10-13

## Summary

In Chapter 10, the Sage takes her to the highest level of the hive to meet the Queen. The Queen's ladies in waiting wash and groom Flora until she barely looks like herself. They teach her manners and feed her delicious food unseen in the lower levels of the hive. Before meeting the Queen they take her to the Library, where six panels of scent-coded tiles depict a story. The Ladies renew the scents each day rather than doing the Queen's Devotion. One panel describes each of the kin, all of which are based on flowers; however, the flora is not mentioned. After only one, the ladies tell Flora they can stop because the other stories "hold terrors," but Flora reads the second panel, The Kindness, which foretells a bee's death. Flora is eager to try one more scent-panel, called The Visitation, which is an assault on her scents, of different flowers. The ladies in waiting have to pull her away, and when she comes to her senses the Queen is there.

In Chapter 11, Flora sits in the Queen's chambers and recounts the fight with the wasp. The next day, Flora helps fetch water and pollen cakes while the Queen lays eggs. When she is finished, she requests that Flora attend her again, which is highly unusual. Flora returns to the Library to read the rest of the panels. The fourth panel contains the sounds and scents of the dance hall. The fifth contains an image of a plant and the smell of nectar mingled with the Queen's Love. And in the last, Flora sees a baby bee in a crib, destroyed. She screams and loses her senses. When she wakes she is back with the ladies-in-waiting, who chastise her for touching the panels. The Queen summons her once more. Flora lies with her on her couch; some sort of pain seizes her, and she commands Flora not to tell and sends her out. The ladies in waiting send her back to sanitation.

Chapter 12 takes place in the Dance Hall. After being expelled from the Queen's chambers, Flora goes there to see the Dance — the bees' means of communication and the location of the daily Devotion. Many bees are gathered there, and as the Queen's scent is filtered into the room, it calms everyone except for Flora. Around her, forager bees are likewise still agitated, until a forager runs in from the landing board and joins the Dance. It is Lily, the forager Flora met earlier. She tells the location of new nectar, which is great news for the hive. Flora follows Lily out onto the landing board but stops to help a small bee that needs help carrying food to the drones. Many bees complain about the lack of food. Flora is called upon to groom Sir Linden the male drone again. He tells her of the Princess bees, how they choose one male with whom to mate. Afterwards she takes a dead bee down to the landing board and is poised to fly out in attempt to forage, when a forager comes crashing onto the landing board, covered in a thin, gray film. Several bees follow, sick, in the same condition.

In Chapter 13, the arrival of the tainted bees has put the hive in a flux. The Sister Sage accuses the oldest forager, Lily 500, of bringing tainted pollen into the hive and dancing erroneous directions to the other bees. Sage demands all affected bees to sacrifice



themselves. The police plan to execute Lily 500, but Flora rushes to her assistance, telling the police that she wishes to pray with Lily. Lily presses her antennae to Flora's, thus communicating all manners of information about the surrounding fields and hives. The police take her away and send Flora back to sanitation.

## Analysis

In Chapters 10-11 the reader meets the Queen for the first time, and as a character, she fills all of the stereotypes of an actual Queen. She is industrious for as much time as it takes to lay her thousand eggs, and then she is attended by ladies-in-waiting; that position itself is a coveted one, and the severe stratification of the hive is demonstrated again when the ladies treat Flora with thinly veiled disdain. Flora is taken to see the Queen because she heard the voice of the Hive Mind, a fact that seemingly elevates her above other bees. In every chapter, Flora distinguishes herself from the other bees of her kin, which flies in the face of the hive's emphasis on the collective over the individual; Flora is actually constantly singled out. Another way this theme comes up is in Flora's insistence on helping other bees, rather than letting them suffer for the hive's sake. There are two examples of this in Chapters 12 and 13. In the first case, Flora's help lands her again in the presence of the male drones. In the second, Flora receives a virtual road map to all of the plentiful nectar in the area, just before Lily 500 is killed.

Chapter 12 also introduces the reader to the Dance. The Dance is, in nature, the way the bees communicate with one another and a means for sharing information related to the outside world. For the purpose of the novel, it is also a symbol for the sacred history of the hive, and also a means for the higher caste of bees to control the lower. In Chapter 12, the Dance is merely a way for the bees to listen to information from the foragers; however, later in the novel, The Dance Hall will become a place of terror and manipulation.

The Bee Scriptures are a means of Devotion — and thus control — that are often mentioned in this narrative. The bees repeat words akin to the Bible: The Queen's Prayer contains the phrase, "Hallowed be Thy womb." The Queen's chamber is adjacent to a library, which displays four "scent panels," which hold legends and myths of the bees' faith. Flora, again singled out for her bravery and stamina, is allowed to touch the scent panels, a job usually left only to the Sage and the Queen's ladies. In the process, Flora is introduced to the darker side of the hive, and the author uses the experience as means of foreshadowing the dark future ahead. Another interesting note to the scent panels is that the first "myth" is a recitation of all of the bee-kin and their origin flowers; however, the Flora is omitted from the list. This is another example of how Flora's kin is devalued.

Chapter 13 closes with a plague on the hive; several bees return from the forage sickened with a mysterious outside source, and are sacrificed so they do not taint the hive.



## **Discussion Question 1**

In what ways is the hive guided by superstition?

## **Discussion Question 2**

When the Queen asks Flora "promise you won't tell," what is she talking about?

## **Discussion Question 3**

In what ways does Flora show that she thinks of the bees rather than the hive?

## **Vocabulary**

vaulted, infusions, lilted, uncouth, flinch, olfactory, craven, sanctum, expiation, sanctum



# Chapters 14-17

## Summary

Flora joins sanitation in scrubbing out the Dance Hall at the beginning of Chapter 14. The hive is in confusion due to the strange smell. After the cleaning she falls asleep, only to wake to a painful pressure in her abdomen. Afraid she picked up some poison from Lily, Flora leaves the dorm to get away from her sisters and is overcome by pain. Moments later she finds she has laid an egg, which is highly illegal. She is fearful and excited at the same time, but knowing her sin, she takes the egg straight to the nursery to confess. Because it is so late, she finds Sister Teasel (the main nurse) sleepy and confused; she thinks Flora is one of the Queen's ladies with a new egg. Flora places the egg in a crib and escapes undiscovered.

In Chapter 15, a senior sister wakes Flora, and she is certain she is going to her death. However, Flora finds that they feed her the best honey cake and ask her to use Lily 500's last transmission to try to find food. She mentions the rains and the previous day's purge of soiled nectar. Flora takes off, using Lily 500's information to assist her in finding the best flowers. She is determined to do well, and successfully picks up a bounty of pollen and nectar. Only afterwards does she see a litter of dead insects on the ground beneath the flowers. She exchanges information with an ant, finding that "sick rain" fell one day ago. Flora is both fearful about what she has taken into her body, and saddened that Lily did not make a mistake, but that the rain tainted the field. Almost immediately she feels the effects of the poisoned pollen. She pauses and vomits the poisoned nectar from her system. The male drones are nearby. When she feels better she heads towards home to share her findings.

Chapter 16 finds Flora outrunning a crop of crows; Lily 500's data helps her survive the danger. She safely arrives at the hive to a gathering of Sage priestesses. Flora finds her antennae "closing" against the mind-probing of the Sage. When they question why she has closed her mind, Flora says she did not want to transmit false information about the tainted pollen. She escapes further questioning and goes to the Dance Hall to share what she saw outside. After her dance, the Sage proclaim that she will be "promoted" to a forager bee. Flora wishes to see her egg again — she recalls the schedule of how long an egg goes from hatchling to larva to bee — but is taken outside to forage again.

In Chapter 17, Flora spends the day gathering nectar and pollen. Foraging requires a bounty of energy and time, so Flora cannot visit the Nursery to see her egg. The next day passes in the same manner. The third day it is raining and flights are suspended. Flora visits the Nursery to secretly see her egg and finds it in an uproar. Teasel tells Flora that "someone" had put a drone egg into a worker's crib, and because drones eat more than workers, the baby starved to death. His cries brought the fertility police and all of the nurses were punished for their mistake. However, it was Flora's mistake, and she is crestfallen. She cannot fly to ease her pain; Sir Linden appears and tries to



comfort her in his offensive way. He gives her a touch of Devotion — the Queen's scent — to increase her spirits, and she feels better.

## Analysis

The central conflict in “The Bees” arrives in Chapter 14, when Flora spontaneously lays an egg. Biology aside (bees are supposed to be asexual and Flora has not been mated by a drone), this development is key to presenting a host of issues. Only the Queen may breed, and any aberration from the clockwork world of the hive is cause for alarm and immediate action. Any issue that is not from the Queen is assumed to be flawed. Flora and her baby would be destroyed. This suspicion is reconfirmed after Flora's baby tragically dies at the hand of the fertility police; Sister Teasel says if everyone was allowed to lay eggs, the hive would be filled with deformed monsters. There is a superstition at work here regarding the diving perfection of the Queen bee. In the drama that follows the discovery of Flora's baby in the wrong crib, many nurses and ladies in waiting are killed “for the good of the hive.”

The conflict is intensified by Flora's feeling of maternal protection. Her small sins have all worked to her credit, but this one would not go unpunished. Yet she feels more love for her child than for the hive. This truth is demonstrated when she spontaneously closes her mind against the Sage's mind-probe. The main Sister Sage, who seemed kind in the earlier chapters, is slowly emerging as Flora's main antagonist, and the Sage kin as a whole are increasingly portrayed as manipulative and power hungry, with their mindless police force and their mind-controlling abilities. However, Flora manages to escape them temporarily in Chapter 16.

The poisoned nectar from the “sick rain” drives home the importance of sustenance and the way the hive is driven by the foraging. The poisoned nectar that sickens the population in Chapters 16-17 is indicative of the thread of discontent that runs through the bee population and will increase as the narrative continues. Only a few bees are strong enough to resist the Sage's power, and the reader can see that Flora will drive the streak of independence that characterizes the rising action in this novel. It is not by accident that the author chose to make Flora the lowest kin, and yet grace her with so many individual strengths and talents as to force her to stand out in her population. Even when they choose her to scout out for nectar, she is told that it is due to her kin that she is expendable; and yet, due to her courage and strength, she continually brings back the biggest haul of nectar and pollen. Paull has a message for her readers here — that each created being can and should stand out for their own gifts and talents.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss Flora's conflicting feelings regarding her egg-laying.



## Discussion Question 2

How does Flora's elevation to forager help drive the action in the narrative?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Flora's odd friendship with Sir Linden. What purpose does it serve in the novel?

## Vocabulary

trespass, retribution, pumped, strobing, turbulent, carrion, sickle, prudent, scanty, immaculate, imminence





# Chapters 18-21

## Summary

The rain continues in Chapter 18, and the sisters are further busy repairing leaks and mold outbreaks in their hive. Even Devotion seems dampened by the moisture. With nothing left to do, the sisters take to gossiping in the canteens. Flora herself is exhausted and tense, particularly from holding her thoughts closed all of the time, trying to keep the secret and scent of her egg away from her sisters. In the midst of the downtime Flora feels the quickening of her abdomen again. Determined to be prepared this time, she finds the Chapel of Wax so that she can make her egg a hidden wax crib.

In Chapter 19, the bees that make wax are happy to see Flora and teach her their craft. The sisters there liken wax production to prayer, and so lead Flora in a process of devotion. Flora makes wax and stores the knowledge so she may construct a crib. She walks through the bees gathered in Devotion, trying to use the Queen's love scent to guide her to a secret room. A Sage bee stops her, but Flora outwits her, and is able to locate a small room and an unused staircase. The room at the top is quiet and undisturbed, but with strange scents and sights. Inside it are three old coffins containing long-dead Sage priestesses. Flora lays her egg and builds it a wax crib, and then examines the young Sage bees, all of them dead before they were born.

In Chapter 20, Flora joins the rest of the hive as they batter back an assault of hail. The Sage call a meeting in the Dance Hall and recount the Hive sins of apathy and waste. The Sage call for "expiation" - self-sacrifice for the good of the hive - among the old, sick, or sinful. Flora immediately volunteers. A chorus of other bees follows Flora's cry. The priestess finds a clump of wax on Flora's fur and proclaims her too young and useful to spare. Flora feels guilty at her youth and suppleness in light of her sin, and begs again to die. They ignore her, and the ritual begins, in which the old bees are laid out and trampled by the young. In the process, as the bees chant and recite the Scriptures, old Nurse Teasel bumps Flora's antennae and reads the scent of her egg. She screams at Flora, accusing her of laying eggs. Flora crushes the older bee beneath the feet of the trampling thousands, and she is killed. The ritual is over, many older bees are dead, and the sun comes out.

In Chapter 21, Flora flees the hive to fly, happy to be rid of the crushing scent of the ritual and of her own horrible act. During her flight, she gets off course and the data stream in her antennae is interrupted when she flies too close to a power line. While looping in the air trying to find her scent again, she finds a young wasp taunting her. Flora is weakened by the electric throb, and the wasp overpowers her, forcing Flora to follow her.



## Analysis

Chapters 18-21 see an increase in the tension inside and out of the hive. The pressure of the weather and lack of food lead to tensions within, in which the forced apathy causes the bees to grow stir crazy. Indeed, the idleness breeds contempt, as each worker begins to question the Queen's divinity and her laying power. The clockwork-like industry of the hive is interrupted by bad weather, during which the sanitation crew cannot clean and the foragers and drones cannot fly. The hive smells and looks as if nobody has worked for days. It is interesting to note how this break in occupation causes such a stress on the hive community.

Flora feels the pressure of an egg again, and Chapters 19-20 show the darker side of the almost superstitious devotion to the Queen. Early in Chapter 19, Flora retreats to the Wax Chapel in order to produce wax for a crib. The process of wax-making is holy, and Flora is able to bring it forth through prayer and devotion to the Queen, which is ironic considering it is the biggest hive sin that is leading her to make wax. When she verbalizes this thought, an older bee tells her, "You are a child of our Mother. She makes nothing that is not holy" (141). It is this time of wax-making that spares Flora from the Expiation, during which she volunteers to be killed in order to appease some sort of cosmic oppressive force. The Sage will not allow a young, wax-making bee to be killed.

The Expiation is an example of the darker side of the Devotion and the superstitious religion of the hive. The older, less useful bees are sacrificed, both to spare food and space but also in a sort of offering, to ease the weather and oppression of the outdoors. Far from just being sent out of the hive, these older bees are literally trampled by their sisters while they sing the "Holy Chord" of the Queen. Even Flora is caught up in the frenzy, although not for the Queen. In the ultimate show of self-preservation, for herself and the egg she had recently lain in a secret corridor, Flora tramples old Sister Teasel herself when she brushes again the scent of Flora's baby and begins to scream accusations at her. In this case, Flora shows the strong preference of her in individuality over the good of the hive.

There is a strange bit of foreshadowing when Flora lays her egg; the secret chamber in which she lays contains three old coffins, each holding a young, dead Sage priestess, died before she was born. The image is that of fear and power, even though the bees are dead. They also hold an air of mystery.

## Discussion Question 1

How does the insects' adherence to myth and legend play into the relationship between bees and wasps?

## Discussion Question 2

How do Flora's myriad abilities contradict the hive philosophy?



## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the effect that idleness has on the bee population.

## Vocabulary

barring, jocular, bedraggled, salvage, agile, squalid, corpulent, disconsolate, harmonic, concentric



# Chapters 22-25

## Summary

The wasp forces Flora to follow her in Chapter 22. Flora is barely able to move on her own and must trust the other insect. The wasp taunts Flora about the bees' adherence to turning nectar into honey, when the wasps forage after pure sugar. In hopes of bringing home something useful to eat, Flora allows the wasp to feed her candy from a residential development, and it almost immediately makes Flora ill. She realizes the wasp has led her to an enormous wasp's nest, and Flora must maneuver quickly to escape. Once free of the wasps, she is well and truly lost, her mind altered by the sugar rush. A storm descends on the valley and she is thrown about in the wind currents and rain.

In Chapter 23, Flora finds a dry crevice in an old beech tree in which to wait out the storm. She feels shame at her ill-advised flight and her folly in listening to the wasp. Dying in the hive among her sisters would be preferable to dying alone in a tree. As she thinks about her egg alone in the hive, Flow comes into her cheek glands and she swallows it, which gives her strength. She thinks of her child again, and prays with joy. Morning comes and Flora is shocked to find that she lived through the night, which is rumored to be impossible. When she leaves the tree, she picks up the scent of the hive and flies towards the orchard. She stops to fill with nectar and pollen, and then flies towards the hive. When she arrives she finds chaos.

Chapter 24 finds the hive's human owner rustling about, using smoke to confuse the bees and stealing their honey. The old man croons to the bees as he lifts out "an entire wall of the Treasury" — a frame — and wraps it in plastic. Amidst the panic and fury of the bees, the old man departs, honey in hand. Back inside, the Sage take charge to put things back to rights. Nobody can smell the Queen and the entire hive is in an uproar. Finally, she emerges from the Chapel of Wax and the population feels right again. The bees rush to the Treasury to repair the honey vaults. Flora recalls her egg, hidden not far from there. Thousands of bees work to repair the damaged honey frames. A small bee tells Flora that she had danced, and collapsed, in front of many of her sisters. Flora realizes that her egg had been hidden behind the frame man took, and had drowned in honey. Her suspicion is confirmed when the fertility police appear and announce that there is a sinning worker among them, laying eggs in secret. They promise to check all of the bees throughout the day.

In Chapter 25, Flora turns inward, lonely and depressed. She flies, eats, and sleeps, and can muster excitement for nothing. Flora finds crows in the normal places, and rushes home to warn her sisters of the danger. The police are in her way, and she stands up to them. The bees follow Flora's dancing. A Sage priestess appears and commands that Flora's abdomen is measured for eggs. The Sage commands Flora to open her antennae so she can read her mind, and Flora refuses. Her punishment is to leave at dawn, and if she does not return with a cropful of nectar, she will be banished.



## Analysis

There is a lot happening in Chapters 22-25. Flora's confrontation with the wasp reminds the reader of the almost religious mythology of the bee kingdom, and of a long-held feud with "The Myriad." The wasps live in envy of the bees because they can produce honey, while the wasps are bound to eat processed sugar. What is more, the author demonstrates the effect of the sugar consumption on Flora's body. Paull illustrates through this event that honey is clearly the better quality substance. The sugar crash almost renders her a victim of the massive wasp's nest. She escapes, but the wasps remain protagonists of the hive in general. It is interesting to note that the lust for sugar causes Flora to make the near-fatal error of trusting the wasp.

Flora once again defies the teaching of the hive by surviving a night away, a feat that is supposedly impossible. When she returns, the author gives the reader a reminder that this complex and cutthroat community is still "just a beehive." The hive's human owner stands above the hive, "stealing from the Treasury" and confusing the host with his smoke machine. This simple act of daily humanity throws the hive into crisis, with two-thirds of their winter honey supply taken and their wax destroyed. The honey, such a precious commodity, disappears into his hands.

Flora recalls "The Visitation" from the fourth panel in the Queen's library. Flora's baby is discovered and killed in the process, which increases the tension, as now the fertility police are constantly on the lookout for the "laying worker."

In Chapter 25 Flora's nerves are stretched taut with loneliness, and it is this reckless abandon of reason that leads her to stand up to the police. Her cries for freedom remind the reader that this is a story about a society in which the collective is valued above the individual, and Flora, with all of her unique traits and abilities, is a glaring example of the beauty of the individual. The confrontation also signals Flora's growing discontent with the status quo, the control of the Sage priestesses and the emphasis on Colony over Bee. It is also important because Flora's strength lends itself to the rest of her kin. The always-devalued Flora kin find themselves loyal to their own special member, almost above the hive itself. She is their representative - -brave, strong, and courageous -- and they find themselves rallying to support her, even against the laws of the Hive.

### Discussion Question 1

How are Flora's gifts a danger to the hive?

### Discussion Question 2

Discuss the character of the wasps in light of their addiction to processed sugar rather than natural nectar.



## Discussion Question 3

What strength does the author show in the rest of the Flora kin?

## Vocabulary

brash, tang, fibrous, lissome, provenance, maelstrom, acrid, atrocity, atavistic, chalice



## Chapters 26-29

### Summary

Chapter 26 signals the close arrival of winter. The spiders have arrived and the air is cold. Flora prepares for her punishment flight. Flora finds some nectar, but must return home half full. The guards will not allow her to enter the hive. However, the other assembled foragers deposit their nectar into Flora's hold so that she can be called successful. A nearby spider taunts the assembled bees, sharing that the Sage trade the older bees in exchange for information. Several spiders join in, making the same offer to Flora and her friends. An old forager nearby submits, flying willingly into the spiderweb. Flora flies out to meet the spider to get her information: the spider tells her that winter will come twice, and that that she, Flora, will have one more egg.

In Chapter 27, summer ends and Flora has no more eggs. The forages run dry, and many foragers sacrifice themselves to the spiders. The Sage priestesses fly out daily to speak to the spiders. The food stores are dwindling and many bees fear there is not enough to last the long season. At the outset of winter, the Hive Mind commands the bees to perform "the Great Obeisance" on the male drones. The worker bees fetch the drones to the Dance Hall, and the bees obey. With the males assembled inside, the workers attack them, eating them all in a massive bloodbath. Flora's friend Sir Linden is not there; he is "gone to passion," according to his friends.

Chapter 28 describes the aftermath of the strange ritual. The Dance Hall is a mess of bodies, venom, and blood. Flora vomits when she comes to her senses. In the midst of the clamor, the Queen appears, calming her community with the scent of devotion and love. The Queen tells them a story of a princess newly crowned, growing restless in the hive until she goes outside for her marriage flight and takes all of the male drones who mate with her and die in the process. After the mating, she returns to the hive for life, satisfied. The Queen likens the sacrifice of the mating males to what just occurred, the sacrifice of the existing drones for the hive to survive the winter. The bees awake from the trance renewed and forgiven. Flora finds her antennae open with the news of her egg, but the other bees do not notice except for a huddle of Flora, who cannot speak. What is more, they keep her secret out of devotion to her. Sage appears, having seen the exchange, and commands Flora to remain with sanitation throughout the winter. Her first task is to clean the entire Dance Hall and the morgue, and after, she is to send her kin sisters to the spiders.

In Chapter 29, Flora and her kin clean the bloodied rooms. In the corner of the morgue Flora finds a stack of discarded babies, left to rot — a complete and total sin to the hive. Flora discerns the Sage scent on all of the babies. A Sage appears and Flora tries to show her the babies, but the Hive Mind cripples her. Her sisters appear to help her clean, but she dismisses them so they can avoid going to their deaths. Flora looks back to the pile of dead brood, finding Sir Linden hidden beneath it. He apologizes to Flora for the way he and the males treated them, and asks for her to kill him mercifully. She



will not. Her sisters return and he disappears. They clean the morgue and obey Sage's orders, sacrificing themselves to the spiders. Flora's mind roves over the Catechism, trying to remember where it is written that the Sage's word is law.

## Analysis

Chapters 26-29 lend a substantial amount of plot development and increase in tension. The setting changes to add atmosphere to this increase -- it is now cold, and spiders have stretched their webs near the landing board in order to catch any bees that try to leave unattended. The trap seems to be growing nearer for Flora as well. The Sage priestesses seem to know that she has secrets, yet even when they manage to break into her mind to read it, she is able to block their mind control. However, it seems to be only a matter of time until Flora is caught breaking Hive Law. The Sage, which represent the controlling force in power, are looking for ways to rid themselves of Flora, but she is slowly gaining loyalty among the other bees -- both those in their own kin and other kin as well. Sacrifice is a recurring symbol in this narrative, and at this point in the novel, other bees are sacrificing themselves for Flora, which is a twist on the "sacrifice yourself for the good of the hive," which was prevalent early on. Flora presents an option for "hive over bee." There are several examples of Flora caring personally for a bee, no matter the consequences. In a few cases, she even disobeys the Hive Mind to save other bees, which is unheard of.

These chapters also see an expansion of Sage power, so much so that in the end of Chapter 29 Flora questions where it is written that they are an elevated kin above all others. There are two indications in Chapters 27 and 29 that indicate the Sage are equally concerned about their own power. In Chapter 27 there is a rumor that they are making deals with the spiders, sacrificing the older bees to their webs in exchange for information. This would break the firm laws regarding dealing with the Myriad. A more grievous ill is in regards to brood -- the precious Queen eggs, the laying of which are vital to the hive. So much of the laws of the hive revolve around reproduction and its importance; the brood represents the next generation of hive workers, the very means of perpetuating the hive's lifespan. Flora finds a stack of brood in the morgue -- discarded, hidden away to rot, not even correctly disposed of. When she investigates she finds they are Sage brood.

Perhaps the ultimate demonstration of the Sage's control over the hive is when the priestesses work the bees into a frenzy of bloodlust, drawing out their reserved anger and resentment towards the male drones, which results in a total, bloody destruction of Their Malenesses. The imagery in that scene is very powerful: there is blood spurting, worker bees chanting prayers in devotion to the men, and in one case, an older bee rips away a drone's sex organ and eats it. After being ordered about by the males because of their reproductive abilities, the worker bees strike back.





## **Discussion Question 1**

What are the motivations behind The Obeisance?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What are the implications of the dead Sage brood hidden in the morgue?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What are possible implications of Flora sparing Sir Linden's life?

## **Vocabulary**

alight, gossamer, exquisite, deftly, malice, emanated, plumes, convulsions, shun



## Chapters 30-33

### Summary

In Chapter 30, the hive quickly adjusts to the absence of the drones. When word comes that the Queen has ceased laying her male eggs, the bees are certain that winter is coming. Many bees die from the cold, and Flora is forced to forage. The Sage are absent for a day, and then appear en masse, polished and beautiful, chanting as they walk the halls of the hive. That evening, they serve dinner to the other bees, an unprecedented event. They give each bee a large portion of honey, and then they warn the hive that the Cluster is coming. The bees enter the Treasury, where the Queen awaits, and form concentric circles around her and her ladies. The Hive Mind commands the bees to open their antennae and sleep. Flora is still, but keeps her mind closed. The air cools, but the bees keep each other warm. She has a hard time sleeping, but for a time she sleeps and wakes as the bees rotate positions so they can feed on the honey cells. Another forager, Madame Rosebay, goes stir-crazy and tries to run away, but dies. Flora stays with her until the end.

Chapter 31 reveals where Sir Linden has been hiding. He watches the entire scene from the broken Treasury; he tells Flora she is kind. She invites him to join the Cluster so he can be warm, and then returns to sleep. After a while, she wakes, hungry, and cannot settle again. She leaves the Cluster to visit the landing board. Several foragers stand about, and Flora takes the chance to fly out again in search of food. Lily 500's data of long ago resurfaces in her brain, and the words 'cage of glass' pull Flora to a greenhouse. There are many good flowers available, but also flies and spiders. The spider calls Flora an "egg layer" and accuses her of challenging the Queen. She prophesies to Flora that should she return to the hive, she will "cause madness... and turn sister against sister..." (242) Flora escapes the spider and finds her way back to the hive.

Chapter 32 sees Flora returning to the hive. The Cluster is alive and she has nectar to share. She shares her nectar with her kin, including Sir Linden. She makes her way inside, to the Queen, to feed her some of the new nectar. The surrounding priestesses send her back to her own people. That night, it snows on the hive. Some bees are growing weak and the strong bees help them. The Hive Mind puts the bees into an even deeper trance, so they may sleep through the harsh weather. Flora sleeps for a time, but is awakened at the sound of scratching on the hive wall.

In Chapter 33, a mouse chews its way into a corner of the upper treasury. Many of the bees awaken to stop the threat and protect the Queen. They sting the mouse and it dies in the hive. The bees must seal the corpse away with wax so its scent does not permeate the hive. Flora is the last bee working at the task, and at is close Sister Sage approaches. Tired by the work, Flora is not quick enough to seal her thoughts from the priestess. Sage presses Flora, saying she knows that Flora is hiding something. Flora blurts out that the Queen is sick — she remembers long ago when the Queen clutched



at her in pain. The Sage is skeptical, and sends Flora back to the Cluster. There the bees are commanded to go back to sleep.

## Analysis

Chapters 30-33 are a sort of stall in the action to prepare for the last push towards the climax. This lull coincides with the bees' hibernation, which the priestesses call The Cluster. They gather around the queen to keep warm, rotating the layers at intervals so share the last of the winter's honey. Although, it is to be noted, the flora kin eats last, and the honey they receive is coarse and gritty. The most treasured of the bee castes eat first and best during the long sleep. Paull reminds the reader that the bees sleep in order to stave off their gnawing hunger. Most of their actions are driven by food and the need for sustenance; in fact, the higher castes emphasize this almost to the point of manipulation.

The Sage kin has been using mind control throughout much of the novel, but before the Cluster, they lull the workers into submission by appearing mysterious, singing a strange mantra, and hand-feeding each bee a large cup of honey. With these actions the bees are pliable, ready to obey anything the Sage ask, which in this case is falling into a trance to forget their hunger.

During the Cluster, the bees are controlled by the Hive Mind, which reminds them to "Accept, Obey, and Serve!" When the bees grow restless, the Hive Minds speaks to them again, although many bees remain awake and alert during the Cluster. Flora is, of course, one bee that remains alert for much of the winter. As the main character and narrator, she cannot sleep too many months away. During one of her waking periods she flies out for a last forage before the snow, luckily stumbling upon a greenhouse with many open flowers. Again, the author uses very sexual language to describe the process of the bee pulling nectar from the flower. The flowers practically "quiver with desire" for the bees to alight on their petals. Paull even calls the flowers "promiscuous" and "flashy."

The stop in the greenhouse is also a scene of foreshadowing; a spider hangs about in the space, hoping for bees or bluebottle flies to get trapped in the glass cage. The spider gives Flora a prophesy: Flora will "cause madness... and turn sister against sister..." (242). The spider's statement lays out the conflict for the rest of the story. In the same scene, a small bluebottle taunts Flora in competition for the best flower. Flora, recognizing the fly's craving for respect, shares a polite conversation with him. Once again, Flora attempts to recognize the uniqueness of all creatures -- even lowly flies -- and tries to give them value.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the possibility that the Hive Mind is actually on Flora's side.



## Discussion Question 2

What possible function can Sir Linden still serve in the narrative?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Flora's commitment to kindness over self-preservation benefit her?

## Vocabulary

bouquet, austere, astringent, conspicuous, mantra, timbre, exacerbated, provenance, filament



# Chapters 34-37

## Summary

Chapter 34 opens to a freezing, weakening fog. The bees are slowly freezing and starving. Although eventually they feel signs of spring, they are slow to hope in case they are wrong. Eventually, the air shifts and the bees wake from their sleep. The hive starts pulsing instructions, and as Flora prepares to forage she stops and asks a Sage if they can trust the spiders; a spider had told her that winter would come twice and that she would lay one more egg. The Sage's answer seems false, and Flora leaves to forage. After bringing in a large haul of pollen, she learns that the Queen has laid eggs again. The hive is thrilled. Flora is torn between wanting everything to be normal and wanting another egg. The next morning, sanitation secretly disposes of tons of brood that is supposedly "plagued." The sanitation bees say that the babies are dying in their beds and the Sage told them not to speak of it. A crop of new male drones arrive. Flora feels the weight of the sickness, but does not have anyone to lean on.

In Chapter 35, Flora tries to locate the scent of the sickness, scared that the sickness will permeate the hive. She tracks it through the hive until she reaches the Queen's chambers. The scent comes from her chambers, and the police break through the door to her chambers. The Queen looks well, but the scent of sickness clearly comes from her. She holds a dead baby in her arms. Flora weeps at her feet, apologizing for knowing her secret. The police take her to the Dance Hall and announce the end of her reign. They execute her, and the rest of the bees mourn. The Sage announce that they will raise a new Queen from their own stock in three days. The Hive Mind confirms that the Sage may rule. A Teasel accuses the Sage of planning the coup in advance, because it usually takes longer for princess to be born. The Sage confirm that they have been planning the princess's birth because they feared the Queen's secret.

In Chapter 36, the hive is weighed down and depressed because of the Queen's death. The Sage continue to preach joy, for the new Princess is coming; in addition, they let a scent permeate the hive that is almost like a calming opiate, dulling their senses into submission. To make matters worse, the next day a new swath of cold air and snow blanket the orchard, reminding Flora of the spider's warning that winter would come twice. Almost immediately, Flora feels an egg pulse in her abdomen. Without a queen, her feeling of betrayal is gone, and she is thrilled. She rushes through the hive to hide, and finds a place where the mouse's body is sealed in propolis. Her eggs comes soon after. She uses the propolis around the mouse to build a crib, which shields both the baby and the baby's scent. Three days, she remembered, and the egg would hatch into a baby.

In Chapter 37, the bees awaken ready to welcome the new Queen, but it is still cold outside and they cannot forage. By evening the Sage appear and announce that the Princess is delayed. There is little to eat in the canteens, but the bees eat a very little bit and force one another to share. Flora goes to forage; when she returns her mouth is



making Flow, proof that her egg is about to hatch. She enters the hive, where many bees are dumbfounded without a Queen, and the Teasel are accusing the Sage of being sick themselves. Like the spider predicted, sister is turning against sister. The police try to silence the vocal Teasels for their accusations. The Sage appear and side with the Teasel. The confrontation is interrupted by news of a lone wasp patrolling the perimeter of the hive. The guards rush to the landing board, and the wasp retreats.

## Analysis

The tension tightens almost to the breaking point in Chapters 34-37. The Queen's sickness is revealed, winter comes twice, and Flora finds herself with another egg. Reproduction is once again at the center of the conflict. Obviously, a hive cannot run without brood, but the Queen's new eggs are all dying as soon as they are born. Whoever can produce healthy eggs controls the hive, and the Sage quickly dispose of the Queen and promise to raise a new Princess. Only a few bees are asking the right questions, which is "why are the Sage in control?" With the Queen dead, a new Princess is vital for the hive to continue, and most of the bees are asexual. For two entire chapters, the hive holds their breath. They are almost lulled to atrophy by the worry and lack of movement. When the Sage fail to produce their Princess in three days, the other kin groups accuse them of trying to take over the hive. A vital confrontation occurs between the Teasel kin (the nurses) and the police, in which the police accuse the Teasel of treason. They rightfully ask how there can be Treason with no queen. This entire conversation brings to light the unfair advantage the Sage kin has been leveling over the hive for the entire story.

By contrast, until the very end the Queen is a perfect picture of grace, even when she knows she is going to be killed. Flora says the "scent of devotion" rolls off of her even as she holds a dead baby in her arms. The Hive Mind is also a strong presence in the Queen's last moment, as the Queen speaks in the collective: she refers to Flora as "our daughter" and says "we are nursing our baby." The Hive Mind is supposed to be for the Hive, and at times during the story it speaks for the Sage and Flora both.

Even though it is a sin for Flora to reproduce, she hopes for the spider's predictions to come true. She hopes she will lay an egg again. In this way, the feeling of maternal love is more important than obeying the hive's laws. Flora has long represented an individuality that separates her from the rest of the hive. It is this individuality that gives her the ability to hide her thoughts from the Sage and think for herself. Whenever the Sage speak to her, she "seals her antennae" in order to hide her thoughts from being read.

It is also interesting to note that the spider's predictions all come true, adding to the superstitious nature of how the bees view the natural world. The bees are almost rendered useless by their collective mind.



## Discussion Question 1

Why is it important that the Teasel would accuse the Sage of planning a coup against the Queen?

## Discussion Question 2

What is a possible outcome of Flora's last egg?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the actions of the Sage kin. Are they just filling a gap in leadership, or are they outside of their authority?

## Vocabulary

clammy, probing, pulsing, vital, malice, straggly, buoyant, feign, midst, elusive



# Chapters 38-41

## Summary

In Chapter 38, Flora returns to her hidden egg, now hatched, and feeds it Flow. When she returns to the hive, she finds the bees confused and off-kilter. Many sanitation bees are going to the Dance Hall to clean again the scent of the Queen's blood. Several Teasel bees enter, holding the dead body of the bee that spoke against the Sage the day before. They demand to know how the Sage can remain in power if they have not produced a Queen. The head Sage bee challenges the head Teasel bee to allow herself to be mentally purged, to free herself from such errant thoughts. The Teasel dies in the process, the Sage blaming it on her own spiritual impurity. Another Teasel argues that Divine Right does not make a Queen; it is how a worker bee is fed that makes her fertile. This causes uproar. The Sage lock down the minds of the mass of bees, and command that any Queen-cells be destroyed. Flora's mouth fills with Flow and she escapes to go and feed her baby. The wasps still circle the hive, as if they know it is without a leader.

In Chapter 39, Flora rushes to her hide and feeds her hungry baby. The main Sister Sage is there waiting for her, watching. She had followed Flora's scent of Flow to her hiding place. She accuses her of treachery. Flora responds that she loves her child, and Sage laughs, saying that love is a sacrament that surely a lowly Flora cannot feel. They fight; the Sage attempts to subdue Flora's will by locking her antennae, but Flora is bigger and overpowers the priestess, killing her. Because there is still a small hole in the hive behind the mouse's corpse, Flora is able to push most of the body out of the hive, but requires help; it appears in the form of Sir Linden, who is seated outside the hive watching the whole thing. He assists her, and then further helps by rallying the drones to pump their male scent over the scene in order to cover the scent of Sage blood and venom.

In Chapter 40, Flora sees that her baby — a girl — has grown substantially from the feeding and is almost too big to remain in the hiding place. The child needs to go into the Holy Time trance, and Flora must find a place to allow that to happen. The Drones are making noise in the hive, and Flora rushes her child to the morgue and seals her in a wax enclosure, hidden from the rest of the room. She says the Queen's prayer as she does this and feels the power of true devotion.

In Chapter 41, the tension between the Sage and the Teasel reaches a breaking point. The mass of bees who have not "taken sides" are eager for a Queen, any Queen, to take leadership of the deteriorating hive. Flora inspires her fellow foragers to fly and get food, for the hive, casting aside divisions and politics. The weather is beautiful and the flight is profitable, for Flora and her fellow bees find a host of flowers and nectars. In the midst of it, Flora feels a jolt of assurance that her daughter has awakened.





## Analysis

The first of many small climaxes occur in Chapters 38-41. Paull has foreshadowed the importance of Flora's third egg, and it is this egg that draws Sister Sage -- the same bee that has been Flora's antagonist of sorts -- to the hidden chamber for their final confrontation. The Sage epitomizes the glorified upper class, the exact opposite of Flora, who was born lowly but with extraordinary gifts. Sage cannot believe that Flora laid, or that she has any wealth of love or feeling -- that emotion is supposed to be one of the higher castes. She even says that Flora should have been disposed of as soon as she was born. When they fight, Flora feels no remorse even though killing the priestess is certainly some sort of treason. She acts on protection of her child and it is the controlling factor in their confrontation.

Sir Linden, who is supposed to only be acting on impulse of his gender and his purpose -- to impregnate a Princess and turn her into a Queen -- is found to be a loyal friend to Flora. More than once he has appeared when needed, and they have traded favors several times in the novel. In disposing of Sage's body, he is complicit in Flora's great sin of killing a priestess, and it is clear that Paull is not finished with Sir Linden just yet.

Also in this section, the Sage's consistent manipulation and control of the other bees is revealed by the Teasel nurses, who share the truth with the entire hive: Queens are not born by kin, but by special feeding. Therefore any kin can produce a Queen. The bee that proclaims this is swiftly killed and the rest of the hive is silenced by mind control. In this instance, the story is simply boiled down to a revolution of the masses vs. the priestesses, and so far, the priestesses are winning.

It is shocking how the hive is reduced to aimlessness without a Queen. The political struggle, mingled with the lack of purpose and a leader, has reduced many of the bees to despair. Several bees proclaim, "Without a Queen, I have no will," or "No children born, no life to work for" (313). Even Flora, who feels her age and the stress of egg-laying, has difficulty rallying her body to action. Paull also lays some heavy foreshadowing in the form of the wasps patrolling the hive as if they know the bees are without unity.

### Discussion Question 1

In what surprising ways has the lack of a Queen affected the hive?

### Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that Flora's child is a female?



## Discussion Question 3

Why is the Sister Sage surprised that Flora can feel love?

## Vocabulary

sanctity, gibberish, scanty, rancid, discord, extravagant



# Chapters 42-43, Epilogue

## Summary

In Chapter 42, Flora rushes back to her daughter's crib and finds her gone, but there is no sign of violence. However, there is a massive amount of activity in the hive. She happens upon the source of the strife — a battle between two Princesses, Sage vs. Teasel. The hive is divided in support of one or the other. It is a short battle, and the Sage Princess wins. She is terrifying, commanding worship and support, when another Princess appears — Flora's daughter. Flora proclaims that she has been fed Flow, just as the Sage, so they are equal; she further proclaims that no Princess is a Queen until she is mated, so the battle begins. The fertility police clearly support the Sage candidate, for they torture the other bees and demand the Flora Princess surrender. At the height of the battle, just as Flora's daughter is prepared to execute her foe, the bees at large smell wasps in the hive. The priestesses call for the bees to declare a Queen; the rest call to defend from the wasps first. The Hive Mind tells Flora to rush to the Treasury for honey to strengthen her child. The other bees obey, and a host of wasps drown in the rich flow of honey. Flora urges all the bees she can to flee the hive, that it is already lost to the wasps. The Sage proclaim that they are the divine Queens and they will never flee. Outside the hive, there is a massive crush of wasps, several colonies together pressing in on the hive. Flora's daughter takes the lead and flees, with several kin following her into the air. As they take the air, Flora sees thousands of wasps descend on the hive.

In Chapter 43, the orchard bees flee through the air. Flora is trying to direct the swarm and keep them together. Flora's daughter does not know where to lead them and the foragers ask Flora for direction. Flora tries to sift through all the data in her antennae and remembers the hollow beech tree where she once spent a night. She dances the directions to the bees while her daughter searches to be mated, so she can truly become Queen. Her pheromone summons Sir Linden. Flora is reluctant, but she watches as Linden and her daughter do a love dance in the air. The swarm rushes ahead after Flora's daughter, the new mated Queen. They rush towards the hollow birch as Flora's own strength sags. Younger bees praise her for her long life of service to the hive, proclaiming "Praise end your days." Flora drifts to the ground and watches the new hive settle in the tree, all of the bees praising her daughter, their new Queen.

In the Epilogue, the human orchard owners poke at the box hive. The old man is gone, dead, and his children and grandchildren are ready to sell his land. The old man wished his son to tell the bees of his death, but when he approaches the box hive, he finds it empty of bees.



## Analysis

The book ends with an awesome climax, and kin fights against kin to proclaim a new Queen. True to form, the Sage claim their Princess is divinely raised and better than the other kin, and after she disposes of the Teasel Princess it seems hope is lost. Indeed, the Sage Princess lacks the grace and love of the former Queen. She commands and demands worship and submission through violence and power, just as her kin has been controlling the hive throughout the story. Even the fertility police break the sacred rules to help their champion win, by weakening the Teasel Princess to make her lose. The battle is fierce and the usually peaceful bees are worn down by the violence.

The political overtones in this novel are most apparent in this last battle. The Sage represent the ruling class, ruling by control and fear and manipulation, out of touch with the masses of other kin and castes, on which they look down without apology. When Flora's daughter appears as a Princess, Paull refers to her as "the true child of the hive" (330) - Flora's daughter is a Queen "of the people," from a low caste but an industrious one, and more specifically, born from a mother who has served and contributed to the hive in many more tangible ways than the Sage kin has. Indeed, Flora has worked in so many different forms and functions and readily put the hive over her own safety, she is a true servant of the hive and of the departed Queen. Flora is more a true symbol of hard work, industry, and individuality -- values that truly reflect the majestic creatures that are the topic of this novel.

It is only fitting that Sir Linden is Flora's daughter's first mate. The reader has long known that the author had a special purpose for Sir Linden; although he and Flora started with auspicious beginnings, he grew to be her friend and show that spark of individual thought that separated the bees throughout the narrative. Flora is loath to see him mate her daughter because it means his own death, but as her Princess pointed out, "he is perfect because you love him." It is a fitting end to his life, to take the honor of his character to mate the new queen.

In the end, Flora's daughter does not earn the right to be Queen through violence and overpowering, but through wisdom; notably, the ability to flee the wasps and certain death rather than win the smaller battle against the Sage Princess but lose the war against the wasps. It is this ability to say, "lose, but save as many bees as I can for the hive" that marks her wisdom and shows her a true "child of the hive." In the Epilogue, the reader sees that she made the right decision, as Flora's hive thrives in the forest, but the Sage's hive is lost to the wasps.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Flora not want Linden to mate her daughter?



## **Discussion Question 2**

How do the Sage bees fall prey to their own search for power?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss how Flora's daughter is a "child of the hive."

## **Vocabulary**

dissonance, sizzled, convulsed, stricken, ululation



# Characters

## Flora 717

Flora 717 comes from the lowliest of the sister kin, a flowerless group, tasked with the lowest job in the hive -- sanitation. What is more, Floras usually cannot speak, are small, and have no sense of smell. Flora 717, while born into this caste of sorts, is exceptional. In a world where bees are given numbers and there is no emphasis on the individual, Flora has many gifts: she is large and fast, has a knack for flying, can read scents and codes, can make Flow and wax, and can speak. Her gifts benefit her for the early part of the narrative, until she distinguishes herself so much that she gains the wrong kind of attention.

In addition to her physical gifts, Flora also displays strength of character. She is devoted to her Queen and her kin. She is willing to stop what she is doing to help a bee. She notices bees as individuals and not as numbers. She is guileless for the most part, until she starts laying eggs, at which point her philosophy on the importance of the Colony changes. Her devotion to her sisters is replaced by devotion to her children.

As the story draws on, Flora's safety is threatened. Because she is so special, she is a threat to the bees in power - the Sage. Never does Flora set out to topple the authority structure in the hive, but she gains so much devotion from her sisters that that is exactly what happens.

## Sir Linden

Sir Linden is a male drone, one of the handful of bees that are created to mate with one of several "princess" bees to turn her into a Queen. Paull has a good time with the males, using language reminiscent of a fraternity and generally using hyperbole and humor to highlight their roles in the hive. She mentions the male pheromones, their "dronewood" and focuses on how the worker bees must groom and fawn over them, as well as feed them on demand. Sir Linden, who begins like his kin, slowly becomes a friend to Flora. He survives the slaughter of his fellow drones and ends up pledging his loyalty to Flora.

## The Queen Mother

The Queen is the Mother, the Holy, Fertile, worshiped head of the hive. As an actual character, she is kind and forgiving, very much like an actual goddess. As a figurehead, the Sage Priestesses use the Queen's name to exact control and obedience over the rest of the hive. Early in the novel, the Queen is alone with Flora and somehow communicates that she is ill. In a hive of 9,000, this somehow binds Flora to the Holy Mother for the remainder of the story.



## Sister Sage

Although the Sage are a collective group of high-powered priestesses, there is one particular bee that Paull often highlights as a sort of leader, more powerful, and whose scent is particularly known to Flora. The Sage are powerful and manipulative, both physically and mentally. Although the Catechism does not afford them more power than the other kin, they do claim to descend from the same royal blood as the Queen. They are ruthless and controlling, and use the brute of the fertility police and the local spiders to do their bidding. By the end of the narrative, they are revealed as law-breakers and sinners, but by then the hive has lost its tightly bound control structure.

## Lily 500

Lily is a forager, which is a class of bees and not a kin. The foragers are tasked with flying about the orchard in search of nectar and pollen, and with communicating their findings to the hive when they return. Lily is an older, weathered, respected bee. She is killed early on for supposedly leading the bees to poisoned pollen; later, Flora finds that a "sick rain" is what caused the blight, and not Lily's misinformation. Before her death, Lily communicates all she knows of the valley to Flora via antennae, allowing Flora to follow in her footsteps as a talented forager.

## Sister Inspector

For all of the bee kin, "Sister" can be a catch-all name for a group of bees that share the same DNA. For the police kin, Paull never separates one from another. The police operate as a collective, which serves to emphasize her point about the hive devaluing its members. The Police are the epitome of this: they are the bees that kill other bees and dispose of the old. They are ruthless and without depth of feeling or thought. They truly are robots programmed to support the Sage kin, even at the expense of the Queen.

## Sister Teasel

The Teasel kin are the nurses. They are in control of the several levels of nurseries, where the Queen's brood is fed and kept until they "emerge" into a fully formed bee. When the Queen is executed for her illness, the Teasel is the first kin to stand up to the Sage, accusing them of planning the Queen's death. Because the Teasel know exactly when and how brood are fed and how a "princess" bee (female bee that can mate and eventually become Queen) is created, they are the best informed to understand the Sage's treachery. In the end, it is the Teasel that are also secretly laying eggs and "raising a Princess" to compete against the Sage's offspring.



## The Flora Kin

The main character is from the Flora kin. The hive is a very caste-strong society, in which each kin is strictly separated from the rest, and some kin are more highly regarded than others. The Flora, as the sanitation workers, are easily the lowest regarded of the kin. Early in the narrative, the main Sage bee even tells Flora 717 that all other kin are named for a flower and/or a nectar, but Flora are a mishmash of frowned-upon nectar that only "promiscuous" bees of no taste would partake in. In this novel, the Flora turn out to be the most industrious and loyal of all the kin, standing by their leader Flora and consistently, quietly, doing the right thing.

## The Myriad

The Myriad is a catch-all term for other animals that share the orchard with the bees. It is a derogatory term, for the bees hold themselves above the wasps, hornets, ants, bumblebees, and spiders due to their ability to create honey.

## The Minerva

The Minerva is a more specific catch-all term for spiders. There are several different spiders that appear in the winter and speak evil to the beehive, planting seeds of dissent among the hive. Paull never distinguishes from one spider to the next, but the bees refer to any spider in the female form as "Minerva."





# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Queen

The queen bee is truly a Queen in this story, a symbol for the grace and forgiveness that makes a society thrive. Although the hive does not value its members, the Queen does have a kind word and phrase for every bee to whom she speaks. When her character is removed, the hive suffers aimlessness and unrest in her absence.

## The Brood

A hive cannot sustain itself without reproduction, and so the Queen's many eggs -- the brood -- is a symbol for continuity and sustenance. With every egg that is malformed or sick, the bees watch a chance for the hive's future die away.

## The Sage

The Sage bees are a symbol of oppression and control, and of de-valuing of individual existence. Nearly every scene in which they appear holds an element of fear or struggle. At their hands the bees are controlled either through force or manipulation, and by the end of the novel it is clear that it has been their aim to rule the hive all along, at whatever expense.

## Scripture/Devotion

A good thing that could be used for evil in any situation, one of the means of keeping the hive at a collective goal is through devotion and recitation of scriptures, a sort of catechism. These recitations represent an anchor for the society, a way to reorient their focus in the midst of confusion or distress. This is most easily seen in Devotion, which is the Queen's scent. When piped through the hive the bees immediately feel loved. On its face, such a thing is useful personally and to a society at large, but at several points in the story, the Sage bees use the Scriptures as a means of control.

## Honey

To the bees, honey is a symbol for their preeminence in the animal kingdom. The honey is stored as if it is gold, and when the bees actually are allowed to eat it, it is a time of great joy and rejoicing. The wasps and spiders are envious that the bees can make honey; during the battle with the wasps, the bees break open the treasury to drown the wasps in "their hearts' desire."



## The Dance

The Dance is a means of communication between bees. For the narrative, bees can speak, and the dance is used to communicate directions, especially pertaining to where to find the best flowers. Through the dance, bees gain respect for the forage bees and are also given a sensory glimpse of the outside world, because most of the 9,000 hive residents never leave their enclosure.

## The Stories

The mythological stories of the hive are contained in scent panels, which Flora "reads" early in the narrative. These stories represent a cohesive history of the hive, and is way for the bees to make sense of their world. For example, one of the panels contains a fearful event called "The Visitation," which is actually when the hive's human owner visits to take a frame of honey.

## Flora

Flora herself is a symbol of strength and individuality and a very human possibility to do great things and rise above one's station through hard work and dedication to good things. In a place where individuals are not meant to stand out and uniqueness is punished, Flora symbolizes a way for each unique creation to shine.

## The Hive Mind

The Hive Mind is an almost diety-like collective voice that speaks to bees who have served the queen with devotion. It is another means of control over the bees, although Paull does not make it clear how the Hive Mind exists or which kin it is loyal to. In most cases the Hive Mind really seems to be for the collective, rather than a particular kin.

## The Hive

The Hive itself is a political microcosm, one that would, if it existed in the human world, would be decried for crimes against humanity. With all of its strange ways, a beehive is easily one of the most industrious and well-run societies in nature. With Paull's novel, the reader can see why.



# Settings

## The Hollow Beech Tree

This tree is special because Flora successfully spent an entire night there alone, and in the end it is where she directs the swarm to make a new hive with her daughter Flora as the new Queen.

## The Greenhouse

Flora finds a greenhouse in the peak of the cold fall; there she is able to forage the last of the flowers during the winter. Further, she meets a spider that foretells dark days for the hive.

## The Town

During one forage, a wasp leads Flora to the edge of town; first to a power line ("a metal tree"), and then to a shop, where she feeds Flora pure, processed sugar. It makes Flora ill and she feels the folly of following a wasp.

## The Orchard

The hive is located in an orchard on a broad property. From the hive, the bees can see rolling hills and trees and a vast landscape of gardens. In the winter, the orchard is blanketed with snow.

## The Hive

The hive is the hub, literally, of the story and of the lives of the 9,000 bees that inhabit this tale. It is a political microcosm with its own specific social structure.



# Themes and Motifs

## Individuality vs. The Collective Whole

In *The Bees*, Laline Paull presents a world where the Collective is valued over the Individual. Bees are, in nature, programmed to follow this way of life, but by giving the reader a glimpse into a beehive through the mind of one individual bee, she suggests that all created beings have a desire to distinguish themselves.

Throughout the plot the reader sees examples of The Hive elevated over an individual bee, and is taught to understand why this must be so. At the same time, there are countless characters that feel their own identity infringing on the collective and struggle to find the balance between self and sacrifice.

The main character, Flora, is already distinguishable from her 9,000 "sisters" because she has exceptional talents. She is born into the lowest caste of bees, and yet shows abilities that borrow from several other of her "kin." Furthermore, the author muddies the waters by dividing bees into these "kin" and showing that the kins themselves have an identity to which they cling; and in some cases, they value their kin over the hive.

As uniquely created humans that, for the most part, live in societies that value creativity and giftedness, it is difficult to fathom a society like the beehive exists. At the very least, humans devalue bees as minuscule insects. However, Paull's look into the hive superimposes a human-like existence onto one that is very commonplace, in our backyards.

## Reproduction

Taken in hand with the prominent theme of Individualism, this plot device of someone other than the Queen laying eggs supports the author's claim that all beings are created with uniqueness. "Only the Queen may breed," is the oft-repeated, Scriptural mantra of the sisters. And yet, Flora, the exceptional bee from an unexceptional caste, spontaneously lays eggs just as the Queen does. The Queen, this says, is not the only special bee in the hive, and yet the powerful castes of bees use the Queen's ability to reproduce as a measure of control over the rest of the population.

Due to a bee's short lifespan, rapid reproduction and care for the brood is essential to a healthy hive. The powerful bees use this threat of survival to force the rest of the bees into submitting their own well being and distinctiveness for the health of the Queen. The sect of male bees in the hive demonstrates this importance, with the bees devoting their time and attention to the drones as if they were a harem. Indeed, Paull uses highly sexual language to describe all facets of a bee's existence.

The Queen's ability to reproduce is held as so unique and special that Flora is wrecked with guilt when her body produces its own eggs. through no efforts of her own. Flora's



ability to lay eggs presents a theme tandem to reproduction: maternal feeling. Experiencing the feeling of her own egg and its resulting scent is Flora's first threat to the collective good of the hive, to which she has devotedly subscribed in her short existence. Suddenly motherhood competes with the Queen Mother. This dynamic is prominent throughout the novel's events.

## Sustenance

The bees in this world are all talented, gifted individuals, held firmly in place by control and intimidation. One of the ways the powerful caste keeps the bees in control is how they disseminate the food. If Reproduction is at one end of the pendulum, feeding is at the other, and both serve as an equal means to keeping the hive functioning.

The foragers are the bees that go out each day to obtain pollen and nectar from the local flowers, and they are revered as the bold adventurers of the hive. However, when they return with their bodies weighed down by pollen, there are strict measures used to control how the food is distributed to the hive. The Queen and the Males get the biggest share, with the remainder spread among the other nine thousand bees as it can. However, the faithful masses are thankful for their food and never dare to complain or question.

Paull spends a large portion of the novel describing the onset of winter and of winter itself, during which food is scarce and the hive puts itself to sleep in a sort of hibernation trance. At one point, the threat of running out of food leads the bees into a strange frenzy in which they murder all of the male drones.

## Class Warfare

The beehive is divided into a rigid caste system, with the flora kin at the bottom and the Queen at the top. Historically, these systems are in place to insure success for any colony; however, it never takes account for the special or talented among the lower castes, and it assumes that the high castes are always populated with the brilliant and talented.

For this story, Flora's kin are the lowest, and the novel holds repeated references to that end. The floras clean, they do not speak, they smell bad, and they are not allowed in the better sections of the hive. By contrast, the Sage are the beautiful, the brilliant, and the powerful. Paull even describes them as physically superior to the other kin.

Because of this rigidly structured society, much of this story boils down to a simple "have vs. have-not" storyline, with the other bees in the lower ranks slowly transferring their allegiance to Flora because she is "one of them" in a way the Sage bees are not.



## Sacrifice

The idea of a forced sacrifice goes in hand with the Individual vs. Collective theme; however, the idea of sacrifice in this novel is also more personal.

There are many examples of a bees willingly going to their deaths for the good of the hive, and even more examples of a single bee performing an act of sacrifice for one of her sisters. The elderly bees are asked to sacrifice themselves for the good of the hive when it becomes apparent there is not enough honey to get them all through the winter. The male bees are involuntarily killed off in order to help reduce the number of bees that must survive in the hive through the winter.

These tales of personal sacrifice fly in the face of the hive's insistence on Collectivism. As many bees die for the Queen, even more rebel in a quiet way, giving themselves for their sister.



# Styles

## Point of View

The Bees is written in third-person exclusively from the point of view of Flora 717, the main bee character. Many of the bee characters are grouped collectively, which echoes one of the novel's strongest themes; however, for the narrative's purpose, Flora tells her story because she is an exceptional member of her kin, with abilities that count her as gifted.

## Language and Meaning

The most noticeable aspect of the author's use of language is how sexual it is. One may not think of bees as sexual creatures, but Laline Paull's spin on the bees are worth a second look. Particularly in describing how a bee obtains pollen and transfers it into the hive, she paints the process as a sexual act between flower and bee.

In addition, the story is written like an ancient story; the bees have their own practices, their own language, and even their own form of Scriptures. Paull's language used in describing these lend an almost alien feel to the world she has created.

## Structure

The structure of The Bees is not unusual: 45 shorter, highly descriptive chapters that move chronologically through the seasons. The story begins in late summer and ends in spring.



## Quotes

As she followed, the vibrations in the comb floor became more insistent, stronger and stronger, as if it were a living thing beneath her, energy running in all directions. With a buzzing sensation through all her six feet, a torrent of information rushed up into her body and her brain. Overwhelmed, Flora stopped in the middle of a large lobby. Under her feet spread a vast mosaic of hexagonal floor tiles, the patterns scrolling across the lobby and down the corridors. Endless streams of bees crisscrossed all around them, and the air was thick with scent broadcasting.”

-- Flora (chapter 2 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote describes how the hive communicates with the bees. Much of the themes of this novel hinge on controlling, and this is an early indication of how scent pushes the bees.

We deliver one outcome here: identical care for identical brood. There is no improvising, no requesting a transfer, and, until you were forced upon us, no exception to the immaculate kin of our nurses.”

-- Nurse Teasel (chapter 4 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote is a perfect example of how the hive thrives on collectivism rather than individuals. All brood must be identical.

“Flora entered the sacred refinery of the Fanning Hall and beheld the genius of her people.”

-- Flora (chapter 7 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** As a reminder, bees are a brilliant species that are masters of engineering and industry. This quote reflects Flora's recognizing this truth.

“No use to the hive, no use for life!”

-- Lady Burnett (chapter 10 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This quote is said by the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, and demonstrates the overwhelming truth of the hive, that a bee that is not useful to the whole is not worth having. This is borne out in the many times bees are disposed of for being old, infirm, or deformed.

“I read flowers, not scriptures. But I know our hive is in grievous need of food and that you have wings and courage and a brain.”

-- Lily 500 (chapter 12 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** As a rule, Floras are not allowed to forage; however, the main character is a study in gifts and differences. And because her aberrations are useful, they are allowed. Here Flora is told her gifts will help find food for the hive.





“She had committed a crime, yet she felt no guilt, only love for her egg.  
-- Flora (chapter 14 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This is Flora's thought after laying an egg. Her maternal feeling, one of uniqueness and individuality, overcomes her loyalty to the hive.

“They compared their feelings during and after Devotion, and there was more than a little competition over who felt her Love most strongly, for ecstasy was piety.”  
-- Narrator (chapter 18 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Devotion, both as a feeling and as a symbol for one's closeness to the Queen, is used as currency in this novel. If a bee can prove her closeness to the Queen, she is more respected in the hierarchy.

“This is a place of freedom!” Flora called out as she danced...she looked directly at the officers. “How can anyone dance freely or give her best if the air smells of terror? Respect this place or leave!”  
-- Flora (chapter 25 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** In this scene, Flora challenges the police by declaring the Dance Hall as a place of freedom. This is bold, for the police are controlling factors in a place of control, and Flora is boldly saying that the bees' need to dance is more important than rules and laws.

“Ego is the great peril of your occupation. You begin to believe what the flowers will tell you, instead of the Holy Law. Only Queen and Colony matter.”  
-- Sister Sage (chapter 25 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Sister Sage has her reasons to feel threatened by Flora's gifts, and in this quote she attempts to put Flora in her place by asking her to lower herself and confine her talents only to those which benefit the queen.

Filled with consecrated anger and every insult and humiliation, every wasted forage and sullied passageway, they avenged themselves on the wastrel favorites, the sacred sons who did nothing for their keep but brag and eat and show their sex to those who must only labor for them and never be loved.”  
-- Narrator (chapter 27 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote is a description of how the Sage were able to control and manipulate the workers into a bloodlust that rid them of the male drones.

“The memory of her egg rose again, perfect beauty in a raw wax crib. Flora clutched her empty belly and wept for her lost motherhood, richer than any Queen's blessing.”  
-- Flora (chapter 29 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Here Flora specifically states that being a mother outweighs any devotion



to the Queen; and Devotion was the most lofty emotion to which any bee could attain. It is a strong statement, choosing her own individual joy and pleasure over the laws.

A thousand flowers' sweetness burst upon the bees' tongues, and great euphoria filled the air as they fed and felt their strength return. The honey made them sing with boldness and joy: the Sage were good, and priestesses cared for them and would never let them starve. The wind might blow and the frost might bite, but Holy Mother kept them safe and the Sage were her beloved envoys!

-- Narrator (chapter 30 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote clearly demonstrates how the Sage manipulate the bee population through food and mind control.