

The Invaders

by Stephen Heger

“Elaine, what's that bee doing?”, asked Jonathan as he slid his reading glasses down and turned his attention from the morning paper to a bee that had landed on the his Nesbitt's Lime soda bottle. The bottle sat on the small, hand-made table in their back yard where they spent many an afternoon whiling away their golden years enjoying the moderate weather and the shaded sun through their Montezuma cypress. Jonathan set the newspaper down and focused on the bee teetering in circles around the lip of the bottle.

“Dammit, Elaine. Pay attention. This bee ain't right.”, Jonathan stated.

Elaine set down her stitching in her lap and looked at the bee that was still circling the mouth of the bottle. After a few seconds she looked at Jonathan and said, “It looks like a normal bee to me. You better shoo him away before he falls in and ruins your drink.”.

“No, no, no. Don't do that. I've seen a lot of bees in my day and this one. This ones different.”, Jonathan said.

Elaine reached for her ice tea that was now more tea than ice due to the warm day and the bee, startled, flew away. “Dammit, Elaine.”, Jonathan said as he watched the bee fly to one of their many flower beds, landed on his lantana, and got back to work with the other bees. Elaine set the glass back down and went right back to work on her cross-stitching.

“I think we may be getting overrun.”, said Jonathan as he slowly stood. He wobbled a bit and squinted but kept his old eyes on the bee in his flowers.

“Over-run? By bees? We always have loads of bees, Jonathan. I think you may be cracking up a bit in this heat.”, Elaine said without looking up from her cross-stitching.

“I’m telling you, this ones different. It looks different and even seems to be flying a bit different.”, he said and started walking over to the garden.

Jonathan walked through the lush, immaculate grass that had just been cut the day before. Onto the path that led him through his rangoon creepers and golden dewdrops. Past his oleander and the angel's trumpet until he arrived at his lantana and the suspect bee diligently at work gathering pollen.

Jonathan bent at the waist and brought his face closer to inspect the suspect bee. He looked at the other bees flying around and gathering pollen and compared the bee to the others and said, “It is. It *is* different.” to no one but himself.

Jonathan stood up and yelled, “It is! Dammit if it ain't different, Elaine!”. He turned to Elaine who was still busying herself with the cross-stitching. “Elaine! Get over here and look at this!”, he yelled again and waved his arms beckoning her to come over.

Elaine looked up, visibly irritated, set her stitching down on the table and headed his way.

As Elaine made her way over, Jonathan brought his attention back to the invading bee. “Where'd you come from, you little bugger? Ain't never seen anything like your kind before.”, he said and then felt his wife's hand rest on his back. “Look at it. It's not like the other ones.”, he said turning to her.

Elaine looked at the bee and then to the other bees and then back to the suspect bee again. "I guess it looks a little different. Not by much. Probably a different species or something." she said.

"Well, I don't want it in my yard. Probably some damn Africanized bee or one from Mexico or something. Some weird hybrid that's gonna play havoc with the others.", he said.

"Oh, let it go.", Elaine said. "It's not doing any harm."

"I don't want no damn foreign bees in my yard!", he yelled, grabbed a nearby rake and raised it high above his head, took aim, and brought it down as swiftly as he could. The bee easily darted away as the rake came crashing down on his lantana, immediately destroying one of the plants. Jonathan lifted the rake again, relocated the foreign bee trying to land, swung at it again and missed. "Go back to your own home!", he yelled as he swung wildly with the rake another two times before becoming winded. The bee flew up and over his fence and disappeared from sight.

"Oh, Jonathan. Look what you did.", Elaine said shaking her head and pointed at the destroyed plant.

"Doesn't matter. We can get another plant.", he said after he caught his breath. "Can't have no foreign bees in here taking all the pollen. What would happen to the other bees? What would they have if I just let the garden get over-run?".

"You're being silly.", Elaine said and latched her arm in his. "Let's go sit down before you give yourself a heart-attack. Honestly, Jonathan. All this over a simple bee.". She led him away from the garden back to the table under the cypress and set him down in his chair. "Let me get you another soda and you just relax.", Elaine said as she disappeared into the house.

“Man's gotta do what a man's got to do.”, Jonathan said as he picked up the paper, gave it a good shake upon opening it, and got back to the sports section. He read through last night's scores and a piece about the recent draft pick when he heard the slider open and Elaine coming back out. He lowered the paper to see her coming over also noticed there were now two bees sitting on the lip of his lime soda bottle.

“Jumpin' Jesus! Elaine! It's back and he brought one of his buddies!”, Jonathan yelled. He quickly curled up the newspaper and swatted at the invaders sitting atop the bottle. The bottle flew off the table into the grass and he managed to knock the half-filled glass of tea over, spilling its contents. Angrily, he watched as both bees flew toward his garden and landed back on the remaining lantana. Jonathan squinted his eyes and scanned his garden. To his surprise he noticed that there were at least another three foreign bees over there.

“Five! I count at least five of them.”, he said and slammed his fist into the puddle of ice tea on the table.

Elaine had made it over to the table and set the new bottle of soda on the down and stared at Jonathan. “This is ridiculous!”, she said. “Look at the mess you've made over a bee-”.

“Five *foreign invading* bees!”, he said, interrupting her and standing up. “That's what happens. You let one in and before you know it, you're over-run. Well, I'm gonna put a stop to this. Right now.”. Jonathan disappeared into the house as Elaine removed a dish towel from her apron and began wiping up the spilled tea.

“What is wrong with that man?”, she muttered to herself as she cleaned up the table. “All over some lousy bees. A bees a bee. Have to replace a plant now and all over some ridiculous idea that we're being invaded.”. As Elaine reached down to pick up the soda bottle,

she heard the slider slam shut. She turned and saw Jonathan at the door loading two shell cartridges into his shotgun.

“Jonathan!”, she yelled. “What do you think you're doing? You go put that gun back in the house.”

“Know your place, woman!”, he said and closed the double barrel to the stock with a loud click. “Comes a time when a man has to defend his home and drive back the invaders that would destroy his life and livelihood.” Jonathan stepped into the grass and over to the beautiful flower beds. He firmly planted his feet and brought the stock firmly into his shoulder. Jonathan lowered the barrel and, putting at least three of the bees close to his sights, pulled both triggers with a loud 'BOOM!'. Jonathan lowered his weapon and, as the smoke cleared he saw he had obliterated the remaining lantern. It also tore through the oleander and the creeper. It also shattered the birdbath beyond the plants and the buck-shot tore into his fence splintering at least five boards and ruining another six. Dozens of bees circled in the air and eventually went over the fence. This exodus included the five bees that were the root cause of his frustration.

“God! Damn! It!”, Jonathan yelled and threw the shotgun to the ground.

Behind him he heard Elaine, “My god. Are you all right?”

He turned toward her. His face was beet red and the veins were pulsing in his forehead all the while as his temples throbbed.

“Yes, I'm all right and so are those damn bees!”, he screamed at her. Half out of frustration and half out of further damaging his already waning hearing with the shotgun blast.

She stood next to him and surveyed the damage. "Look what you've done to our beautiful garden. And the bird bath. And the fence.", she said shaking her head before burying her face in her hands.

"All of that can be repaired!", he said throwing his arms up into the air. "What you don't seem to get is that those damn bees that don't belong in our yard are still out there. Alive. Probably recruiting more bees to immigrate into our yard and eventually take over!".

Elaine raised her face from her hands and said, "Jonathan, you are out of your mind. Do you know that? There are no Africanized bees or immigrant bees or anything like that. And one other thing- Oh, great. You hear that?".

He strained to hear what she was talking about and, in the distance, he could hear a siren.

"That'll be Sherriff Tucker. How are you going to explain all of this?", she asked and walked over to the mess that was her garden. The siren stopped in front of his house.

"I'll handle Dale. Me and him, we go back.", Jonathan said as he reached down and picked up his shotgun.

There was a knock on the fence and a voice asking, "Is everything okay in there?"

"Yeah, c'mon in Dale.", Jonathan said as he started towards the gate.

The gate creaked open and Sherriff Dale Tucker walked in and then stopped for a moment and surveyed the damage. Dale took a handkerchief out of his pocket, removed his Stetson and wiped the sweat from his face. He put the Stetson back on and looked at

Jonathan. From Jonathon he looked at Elaine then to the damage again and then back to Jonathan. "What in the *hell* is going on here?", asked Dale.

"I'll tell you what's going on here. I got some bees. Not normal bees. Bees I ain't seen before and they're invading my yard. First it was one then three then five. Pretty soon it ain't gonna be anything but.", said Jonathan. "So, I was trying to get rid of the bees and one thing led to another and this is what we got right here."

"George Bush's soul. You got 'em too?", Dale asked and his face lit up. "I was over at Billy Spicers place and he was showing me them bees before the call of 'shots fired' came in. I'll be damned."

A look of disbelief came over Elaine's face as she stared at the two men. Her shoulders slacked and her mouth opened as she tried to find the right words but found that nothing came out.

Jonathan turned to Elaine with a look of condemnation on his face and said, "I told you! I told you there was something wrong with them bees.", and then turned back to Dale.

"Damn skippy. They seem to be spreading everywhere.", said Dale. "Near as we can tell they crossed the border near Naco or Pirtleville, overran Bisbee the other day and have been branching out from there. Doesn't seem to be any way to stop them. Heard reports that they've made it as far north as Cochise.". Dale removed a tattered pack of Marlboros and lit one up.

"So, what do we *do*?", inquired Jonathan.

"Not sure there is much we *can* do.", said Dale. "I've contacted ICE and the EPA and even one of them bug scientists."

"An entomologist.", piped up Elaine.

Dale turned to her and said, "Yeah. One of them. An emptyologist. They aren't taking this very seriously."

"Well, I'll be damned if I'm gonna let some south of the border bees come and free-load off my hard work.", said Jonathan.

"You're hard work? I'm the only one out here doing any work except for the gardener. And he's Mexican. You realize that, right?", Elaine said.

Jonathan turned his head quickly and just stared at her. Right at that exact moment, a group of bees flew in between him and Dale. Jonathan's fists and teeth clenched shut in anger as he watched more and more bees flying over his fence and descending on his remaining flowers.

"Whoa. Calm down there.", Dale said and put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder. "Me and Billy had been mulling over a few ideas and the one that seemed to us that might work is to smoke 'em out."

"Yes.", said Jonathan.

"No.", Elaine said immediately.

"Yes!", said Jonathan emphatically.

"No!", Elaine yelled. "It will go wrong. It always goes wrong. And besides, it will only work for a while. What happens when the smoke goes away? They'll come right back. No.". Elaine shook her head and said, "No, no, no-".

Jonathan turned from Elaine and looked over at his garden. Over half of the bees in what was left of his garden were now the invaders flitting from one flower to the next. It made Jonathan's blood boil.

"Let's at least hear it out.", Jonathan said to Elaine then turned to Dale.

"Well, we take some of your firewood, put it in, oh, that metal trash can over there.", Dale said pointing near the shed. "Get that going nicely and then throw some green stuff on top of it. You can use the plants you already shot up. It's kind of like a smudge-pot."

Jonathan stood there silently as he mulled it over. "Let's do it.", he said after a few moments.

Tears welled up in Elaine's eyes and she said, "That's it Jonathan. I'm done. This has gotten so ridiculous. I can't even believe that you're following through with this.". Before Jonathan could say anything, Elaine turned and went into the house.

Bees, both foreign and domestic, continued on their merry way oblivious to the plan that was about to be put into action.

Dale wet his forefinger and held it up. "Well, what little wind there is seems to be coming from the west so we need to place the can about here.", Dale said, dragging the trash can to the designated spot. Jonathan had gathered some kindling and a few logs from the stack of wood he kept year round and set them in the can. Jonathan left and returned with an armful of creeper and lantana and set it down near the can.

Elaine opened the slider and seeing that the plan was still in effect said, "I'm going to my sisters. I'm not going to stay here and watch you and Mister Irresponsible Sheriff over there continue with this ridiculous idea of yours."

“Fine. Go. And when you come back you'll see nothing but American bees in this yard, Elaine.”, said Jonathan proudly.

“That doesn't make any sense! You may as well build a bigger fence or ask for their passports! They're bees, Jonathan. Bees!”, Elaine said. “And if you *do* manage to get rid of what you claim to be foreign bees you'll get rid of the rest too.”.

“God dammit, Elaine, it doesn't have to make sense!!”, Jonathan yelled back at her and raised his fist and shook it in the air with self-righteous ire.

“You, Jonanthan, are an ignormaus.”, Elaine stated plainly.

“You- You- You Communist!”, Jonathan said and shook his fist more.

Elaine turned and re-entered the house. A few seconds later a car started in the front and drove off.

“Women. All started when we gave them the right to vote.”, Jonathan said and then turned back to the task at hand. “C'mon. Let's go. We ain't got all day.”

Dale crumpled and lit the sports section from the table and placed it under the kindling. It promptly went out.

“Damn thing won't start.”, said Dale as he crumpled up another section of the paper, lit it and set it under the kindling.

They stared at the flame as it tried to take hold and then, like the first attempt, went out.

“Where'd you learn to start a fire? Girl Scouts?”, Jonathan asked. “Go get the hose. I'll get the gasoline.”.

Jonathan walked over to the shed and grabbed a can of gas and returned to the trash can. He unscrewed the cap and poured what he considered a good amount of gas onto the contents and stepped back.

Dale turned on the hose, pulled it over and laid it on the ground and said, “Get the rest of that gas out of here. You trying to burn the whole place down?”.

As Dale crumpled up another piece of paper, Jonathan placed the can of gas near the house and quickly came back.

“Here goes nothing.”, Dale said lighting the newspaper. He dropped the lit ball of paper into the can with a big 'FWOOSH'. “Jumpin' Jesus!”, said Dale as they both jumped back. “How much gas did you pour on the damn thing?”, Dale asked.

“Apparently enough to get the damn thing going.”, Jonathan said grabbing the plants and tossing them on top of the fire.

A big plume of white smoke instantly rose from the fire and Dale, panicky, picked up the hose and pulled to get some slack. This unknowingly cause the gas can near the house to tip and empty its contents. The wind shifted direction and the smoke engulfed the two men.

The fire, having burned through the green in a matter of seconds, began spewing up embers that flew high and came back down into the yard. One ember landed in the the puddle of gas near the house and caused the spilled excelerrant to ignite.

By the time Dale and Jonathan had stopped their coughing fits and regained their vision, the entire back of the house was on fire.

“What in the Sam Hill?!” Dale said as he dropped the hose and ran to the front of the house. “I’m calling the fire department! Use the hose!”, he yelled as he turned the corner.

Jonathan grabbed the hose and sprayed it at the fire that was engulfing his home and producing less than stellar results.

Dale came back around and said, “Fire trucks on its way!”. The fire began eating at the second story and worked its way to the innards of the house. Dale and Jonathan ran to the front and all they could do was watch his home become fully engulfed and eventually turn to cinders and ash.

By the time the fire department had arrived and doused the fire, there was little more than skeletal framing and the charred remains of everything Elaine and him had owned. In the front beds, Jonathan watched as both the foreign and domestic bees jumped happily from flower to flower in the late afternoon sun.

“All right boys, get them hoses rolled up so we can get out of here.”, the fire chief said before turning to Dale and Jonathan and asked, “What in the blue blazes happened here?”.

Jonathan turned to the chief and, for the first time today, finally had nothing to say.

