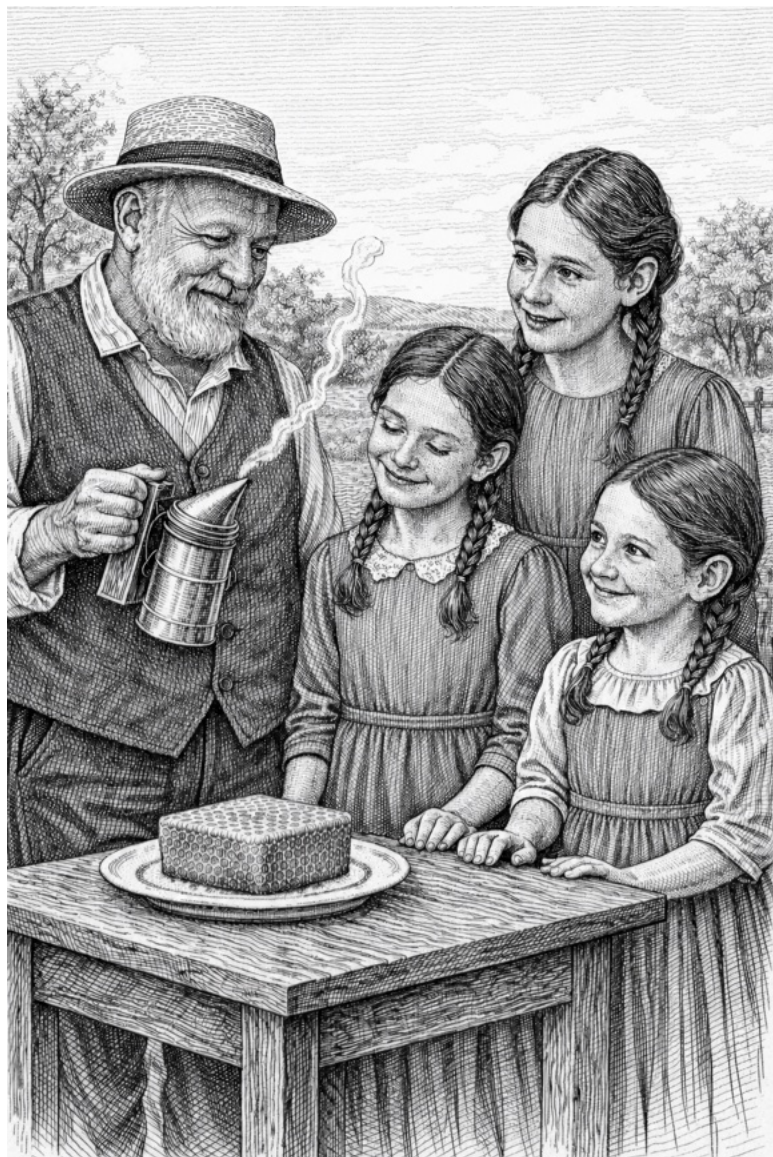




The Bees in the Attic



Three Years Later

The first time Louisa heard the hum, she thought it was wind. The old courthouse made all sorts of sounds: shifts in timber, birds in the eaves, and the river whispering down the hill after rains. But this was different. A low, steady murmuring, as if the house had drawn a breath and was holding it.

She didn't mention it at supper. Beckie was busy describing how she'd out-jumped a boy at school, and Sallie had a new theory that dandelions should count as flowers if picked with care. Their mother smiled and sliced potatoes without offering judgment.

But the next morning, when Louisa climbed the stairs into the attic to fetch dried apples, she heard it again, closer now. The sound buzzed gently beneath the rafters, warm and alive.

She reached the top of the stairs and stepped inside.

The attic had no windows, and only a little light entered the room from the third floor, so she lit a candle that highlighted the floating motes of dust. The air smelled sweeter here, faintly like clover. And in the far corner, just above an old wooden beam, she saw them: bees.

A cluster of them. Not swarming, not angry, just moving, working, whispering in their thousand-winged way. She froze, eyes wide, heart steady. They seemed to take no notice of her at all.

That afternoon, she whispered her discovery to Beckie, who had to see for herself. Later, Sallie was told under strict promise not to squeal.

“They are beautiful,” Sallie whispered, crouching on the attic floor. “Do they know we are here?”

“They do not seem to mind,” Louisa said. “They have work to do.”

For three days, the girls watched in secret. They took turns sketching and writing in the margins of their lesson books, tracing bee shapes and trying to remember which was the queen. They named her Temperance, for her calm and deliberate sense of purpose.

“The bees are like a community,” Louisa wrote. “Every bee has a task. No idle stingers.”

“Like church,” Beckie added. “Only with more buzzing.”



Then Sallie said what they all feared to hear: “We have to tell Uncle William.”

They did, over stew and brown bread.

Uncle William set his spoon down slowly. “Bees? In the attic?”

“We have been studying them,” Louisa said carefully.

“Observing,” Beckie added.

Sallie smiled. “One looked at me.”

He blinked. “Well, I will have to see about that.”

The next morning, he went up with a lantern and came down ten minutes later with a firm expression and dust in his hair.

“We will have to clear them out,” he said. “We cannot risk them spreading.”

Louisa's stomach dropped. "But they are not hurting anything."

"They will. Bees nest, they swarm, they rot rafters. Best to be rid of them before they cause damage."

"But, " Louisa started, then stopped, realizing this was talking back.

Sallie was quiet, but not still. Her brow furrowed, and then her eyes lit up. "Mr. Dodge."

Uncle William raised an eyebrow. "The grocer?"

"No, his brother. He came to our class last winter and brought a smoker and a whole beehive frame. He keeps bees. Real ones. He knows how to move them without hurting them. Maybe...maybe he could help."

Uncle William looked unconvinced. "I do not know..."

"Please," Louisa said gently. "We have been watching them. We are learning from them. They are not pests. They have purpose."

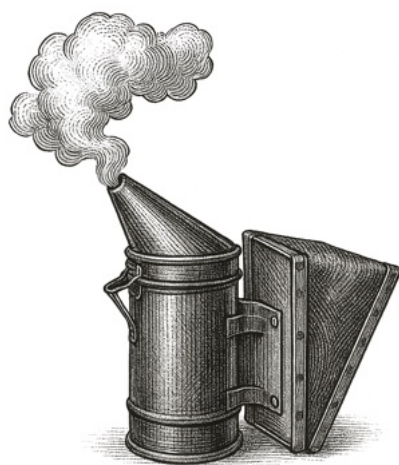
He sighed. "Write to Mr. Dodge. If he agrees to come before the week is out, I will hold off."

Mr. Dodge arrived two days later with a calm smile, a round belly, and a broad straw hat. "So," he said, as they led him upstairs, "I hear you have some guests in the rafters."

In the attic, he lit his smoker and sent a soft cloud of sweet smoke drifting across the hive. The bees quieted almost instantly.

“Some say that bees can smell fear,” he whispered. “And curiosity. These girls must have been very still.”

He gently reached out and lifted part of the comb. “Healthy. Settled. They have chosen well. But we can give them a safer home.”



The girls watched wide-eyed as he worked, gently capturing the queen and guiding her companions into a wooden hive box lined with fresh straw.

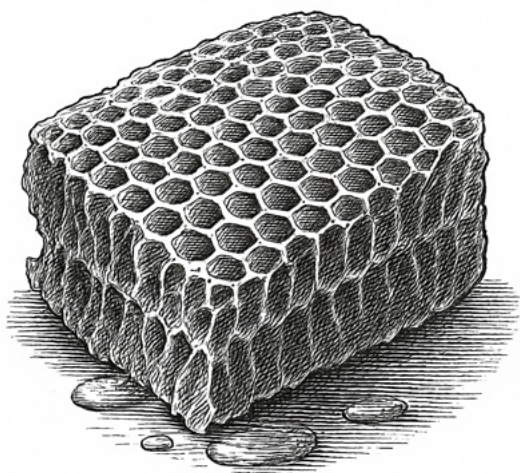
When it was done, and the bees had been safely moved to a glade near Mr. Dodge’s farm, he returned to the house and placed something on the table: a golden slab of honeycomb, still glistening in wax.

“You have earned this,” he said. “Not many folks, young or old, would stop and ask what a thing is *for* before deciding what to do with it.”

Louisa blushed. “It just did not seem right to destroy something so ordered. They were working, like when we do our chores.”

Beckie nodded. “Like how not all weeds are weeds.”

“And not all buzzes mean danger,” Sallie said, dipping her finger in the dripping honey and tasting it.



That week, with a bit of help, the girls melted part of the leftover wax and made their own candles, the kind they could hold proudly, knowing where every bit of them came from.

And Louisa, in her journal, wrote:

“Today we helped save a hive, and in doing so, saved something of ourselves. Sometimes, even grown-ups need to be guided. Even bees deserve a home.”

