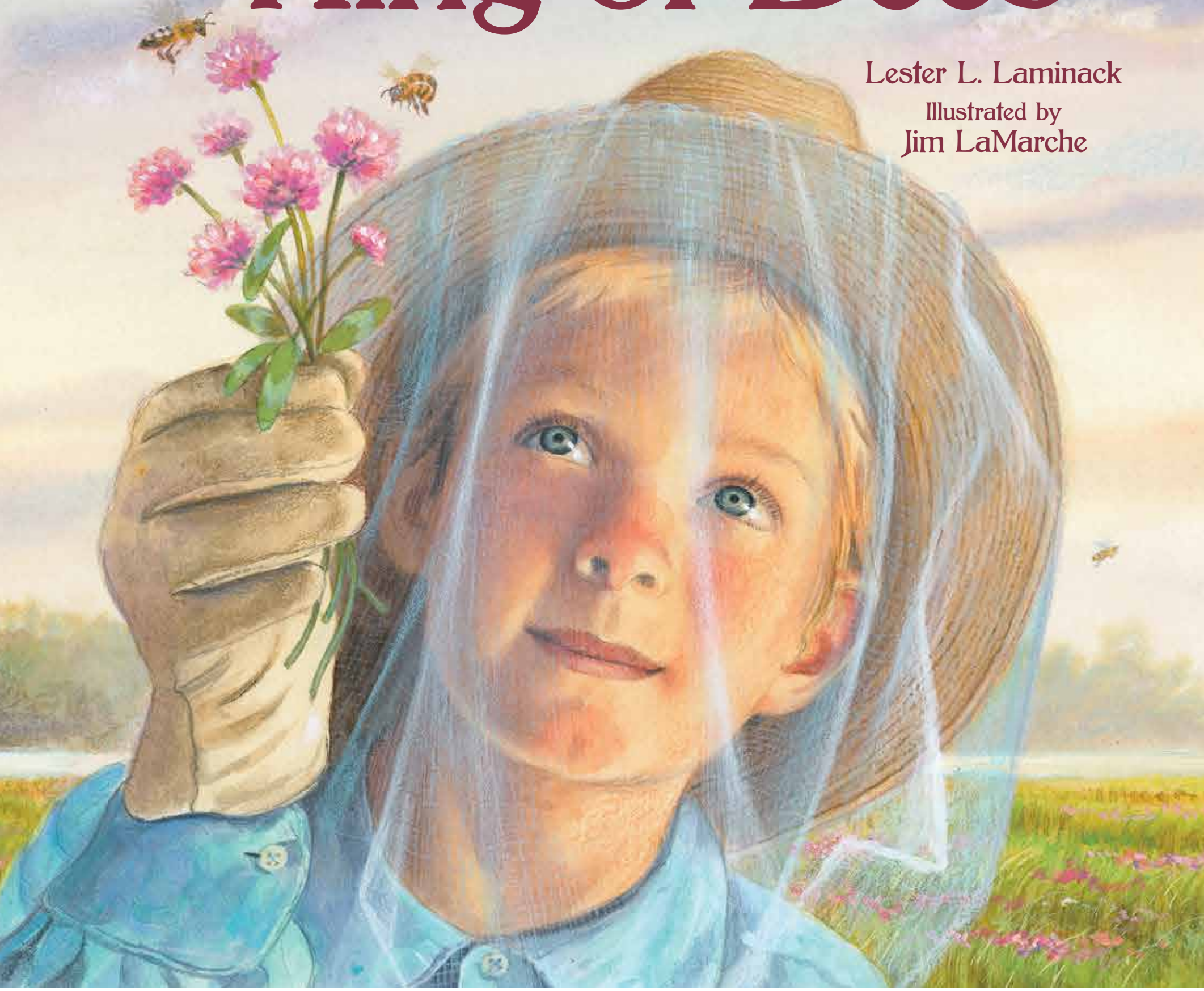


The King of Bees

Lester L. Laminack

Illustrated by
Jim LaMarche



The King of Bees

For Everette,
May you always find wonder in nature
—L. L.

To Taylor who served enthusiastically as the model for Henry, and in memory
of his loving father, Michael “Howie” Mandell

—J. L.

With special thanks to the #502 writers for reading drafts and offering your insights; to
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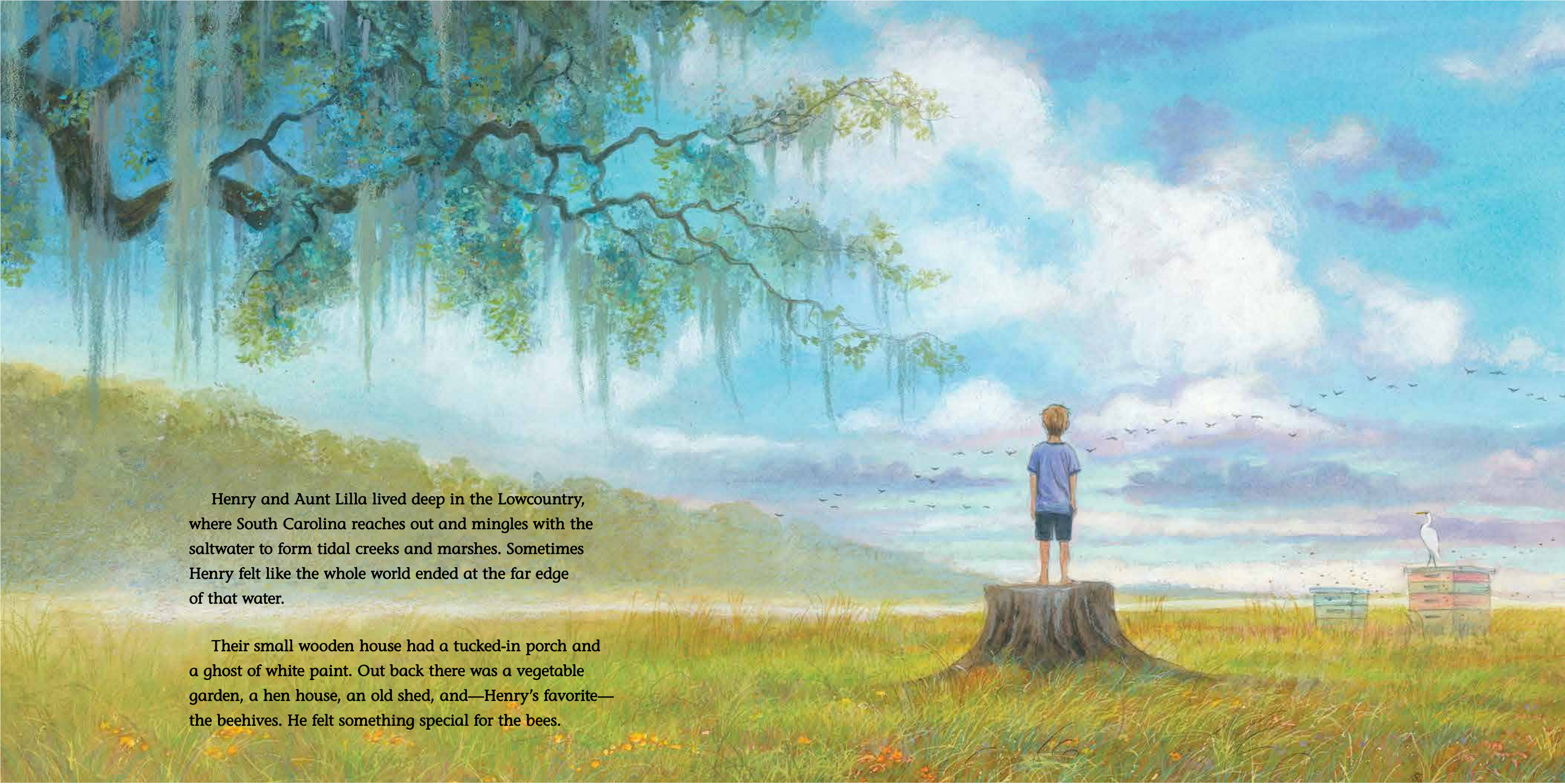
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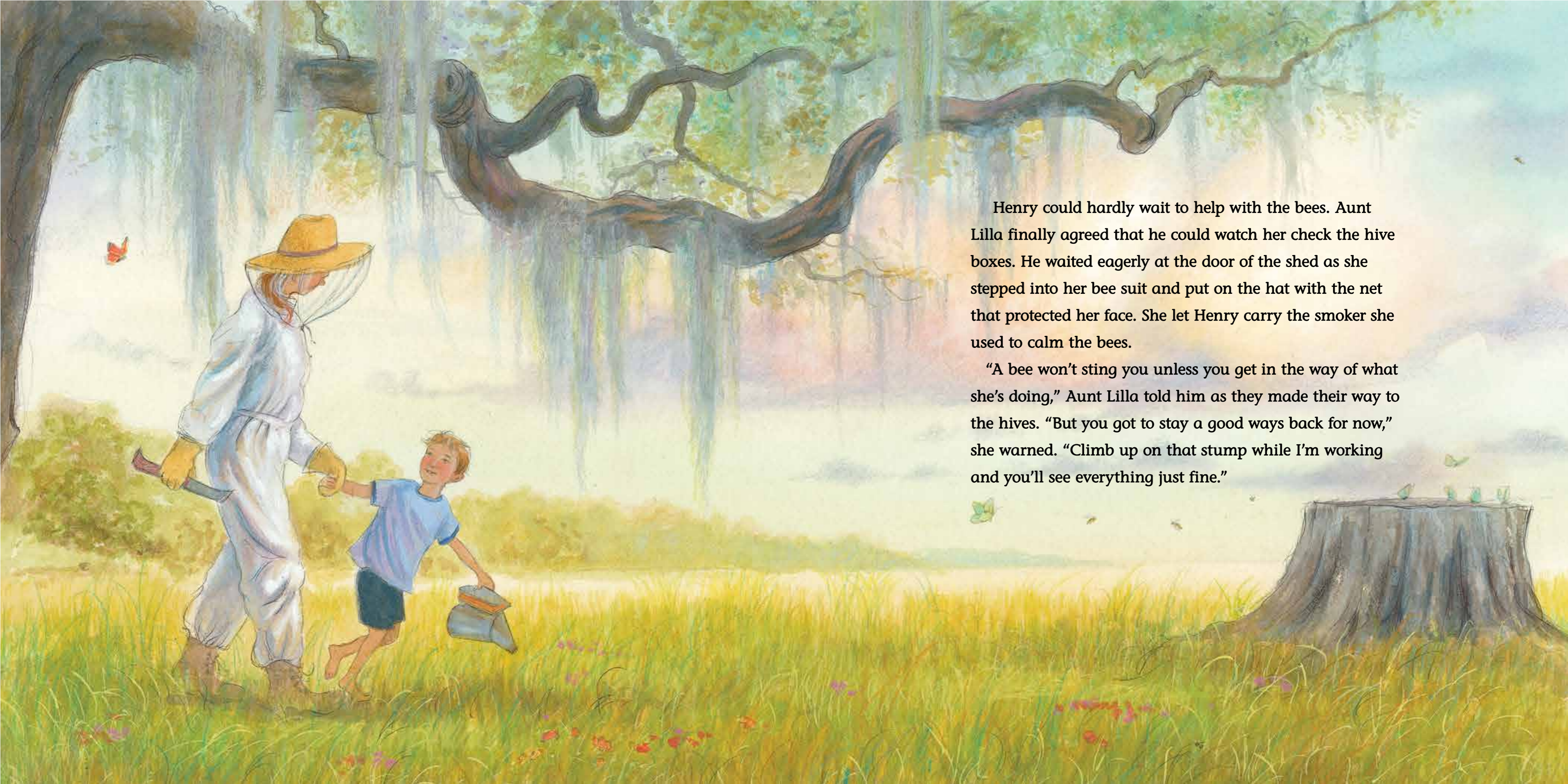
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PEACHTREE
ATLANTA

A painting of a young boy with short brown hair, wearing a blue t-shirt and dark shorts, standing on a large, dark tree stump in a grassy field. The background features a vast, misty landscape with tall, thin trees on the left, a body of water in the distance, and a sky filled with soft, white and blue clouds. A flock of birds is flying across the sky, and a white egret stands on a wooden crate to the right. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

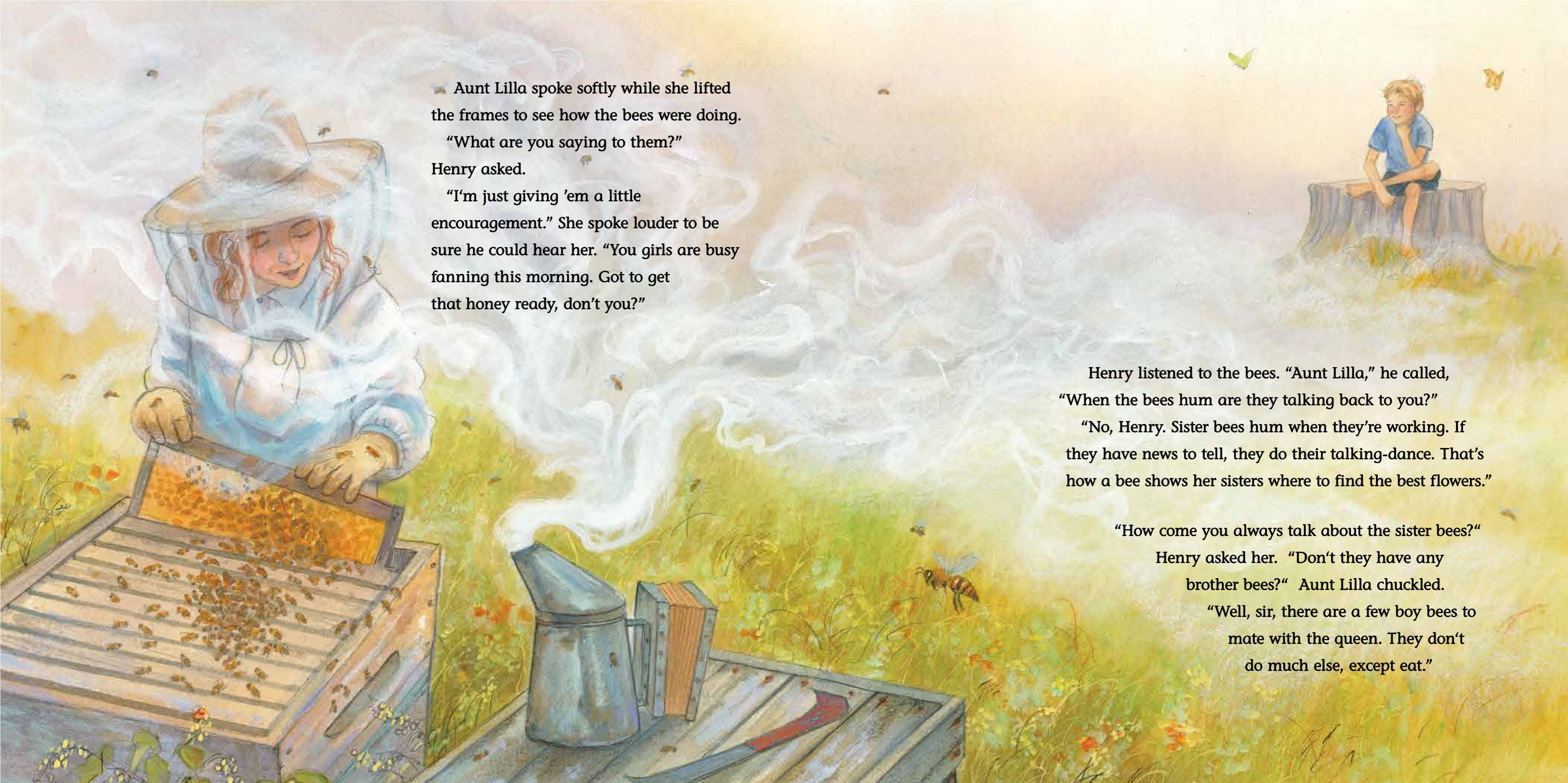
Henry and Aunt Lilla lived deep in the Lowcountry, where South Carolina reaches out and mingles with the saltwater to form tidal creeks and marshes. Sometimes Henry felt like the whole world ended at the far edge of that water.

Their small wooden house had a tucked-in porch and a ghost of white paint. Out back there was a vegetable garden, a hen house, an old shed, and—Henry’s favorite—the beehives. He felt something special for the bees.



Henry could hardly wait to help with the bees. Aunt Lilla finally agreed that he could watch her check the hive boxes. He waited eagerly at the door of the shed as she stepped into her bee suit and put on the hat with the net that protected her face. She let Henry carry the smoker she used to calm the bees.

“A bee won’t sting you unless you get in the way of what she’s doing,” Aunt Lilla told him as they made their way to the hives. “But you got to stay a good ways back for now,” she warned. “Climb up on that stump while I’m working and you’ll see everything just fine.”



Aunt Lilla spoke softly while she lifted the frames to see how the bees were doing.

“What are you saying to them?” Henry asked.

“I’m just giving ‘em a little encouragement.” She spoke louder to be sure he could hear her. “You girls are busy fanning this morning. Got to get that honey ready, don’t you?”

Henry listened to the bees. “Aunt Lilla,” he called, “When the bees hum are they talking back to you?”

“No, Henry. Sister bees hum when they’re working. If they have news to tell, they do their talking-dance. That’s how a bee shows her sisters where to find the best flowers.”

“How come you always talk about the sister bees?”

Henry asked her. “Don’t they have any brother bees?” Aunt Lilla chuckled.

“Well, sir, there are a few boy bees to mate with the queen. They don’t do much else, except eat.”