

A watercolor illustration of a large green tree with a brown trunk. The tree's canopy is filled with green foliage, and several pink and white flowers are scattered throughout. Two bees are flying around the tree, one on the left and one on the right, with dashed lines indicating their paths. The background is a light blue sky with soft white clouds. The ground at the bottom is a vibrant green grassy field.


8th Grade State Winner

Bees & Almonds

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Illustrated by: Florin High School



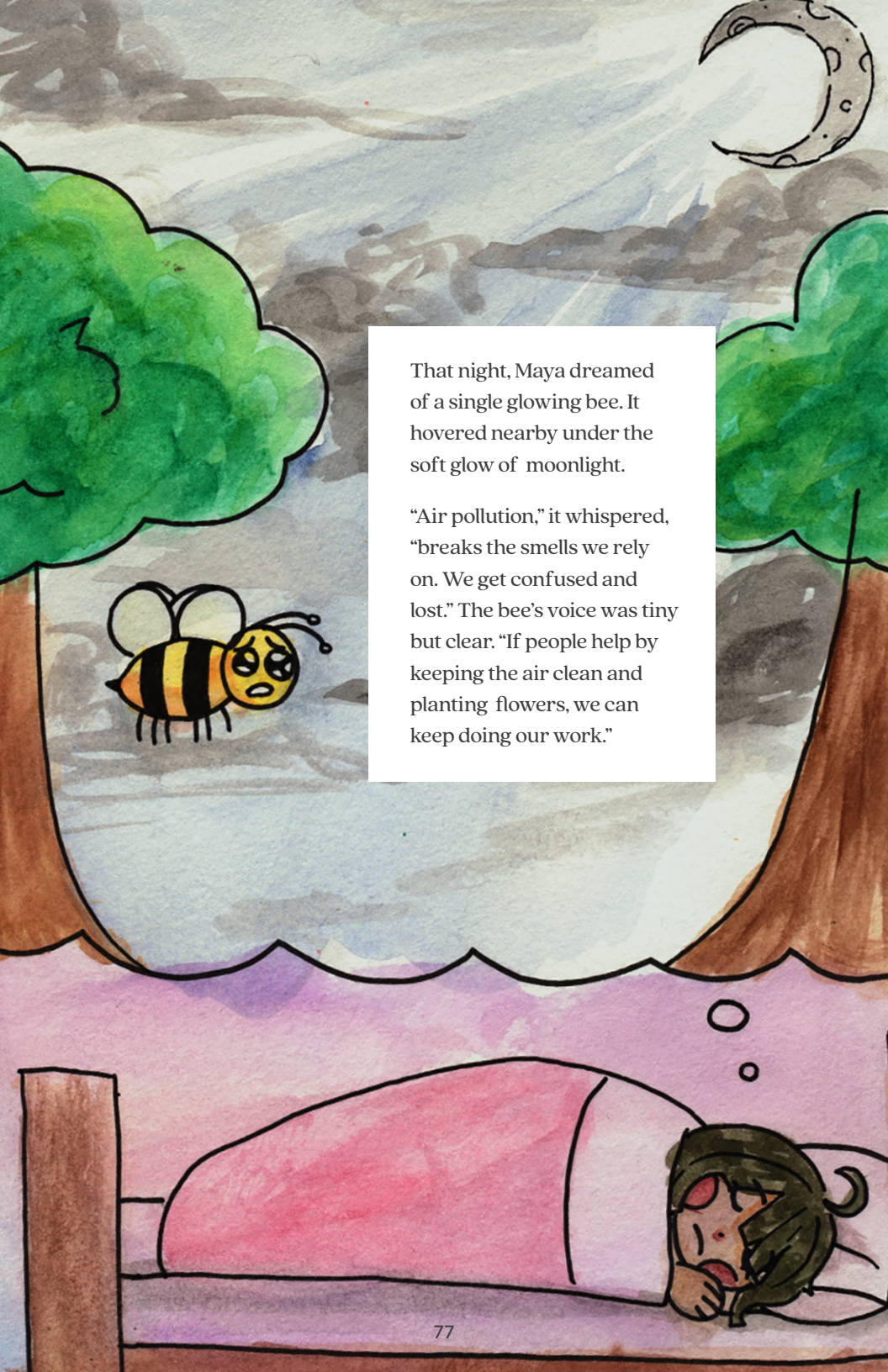
It was a bright spring morning on the farm, and Maya walked slowly between the almond trees, listening to the gentle hum of the bees. She smiled, she always thought of them as tiny neighbors helping the tree bloom.

Her father always reminded her, "No bees, no almonds."

This year, though, something was different. Maya noticed fewer bees buzzing among the flowers. The air felt dull, and the orchard seemed quieter, missing its usual buzz.

“Air pollution makes it harder for bees to find flowers,” her father said, his voice gentle but worried. He explained that when particles in the air grow thick, the sweet scents of blossoms fade, so bees struggle to navigate between flowers.





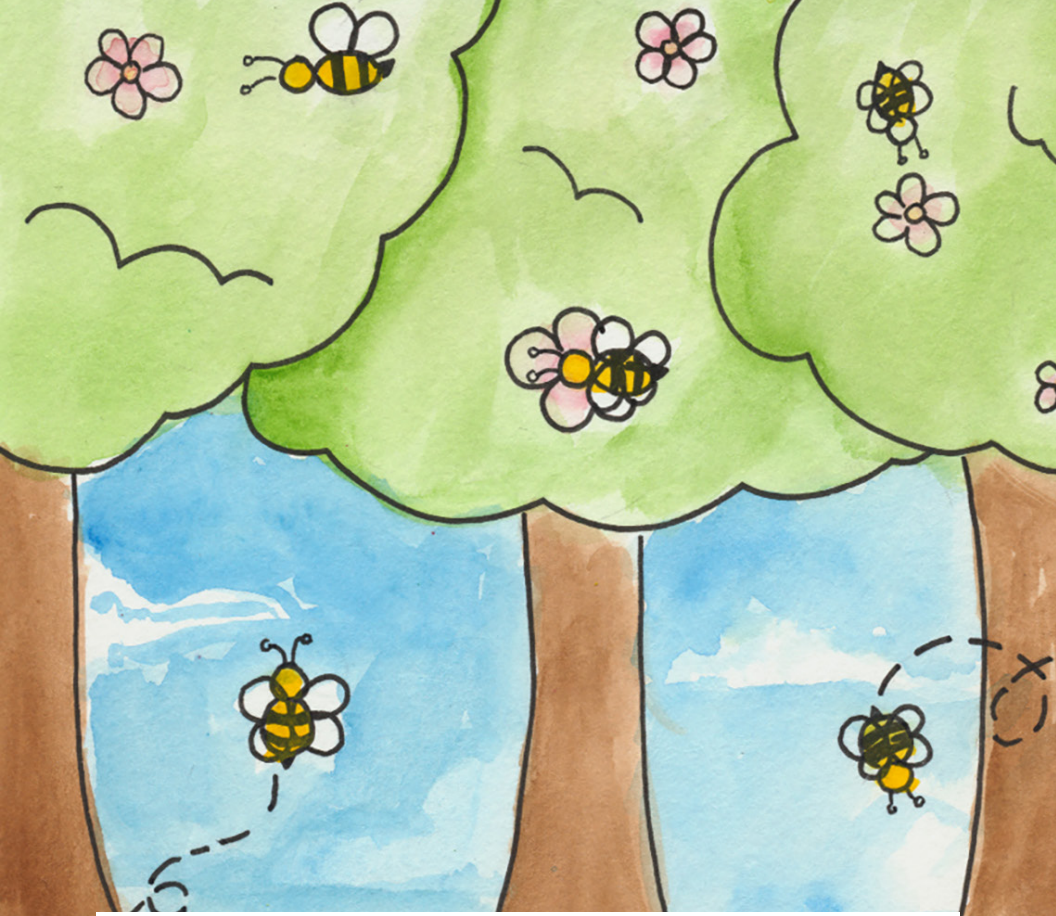
That night, Maya dreamed of a single glowing bee. It hovered nearby under the soft glow of moonlight.

“Air pollution,” it whispered, “breaks the smells we rely on. We get confused and lost.” The bee’s voice was tiny but clear. “If people help by keeping the air clean and planting flowers, we can keep doing our work.”



The next day, Maya felt determined. She planted bright wildflowers at the edge of the orchard, reds, yellows, and purples, all fragrant and welcoming. She even set out bowls of water on smooth stones so bees could stop and rest. Over the next few days, she noticed the humming return. The bees buzzed between blossoms again, their song growing louder each day.





By early summer, the almond trees were heavy with nuts once more. Maya's father gathered the first basket and smiled quietly. "The bees came back," he said, looking at Maya with pride. Maya returned his smile, knowing it was her care, and her bees' resilience. That brought balance back to their farm.

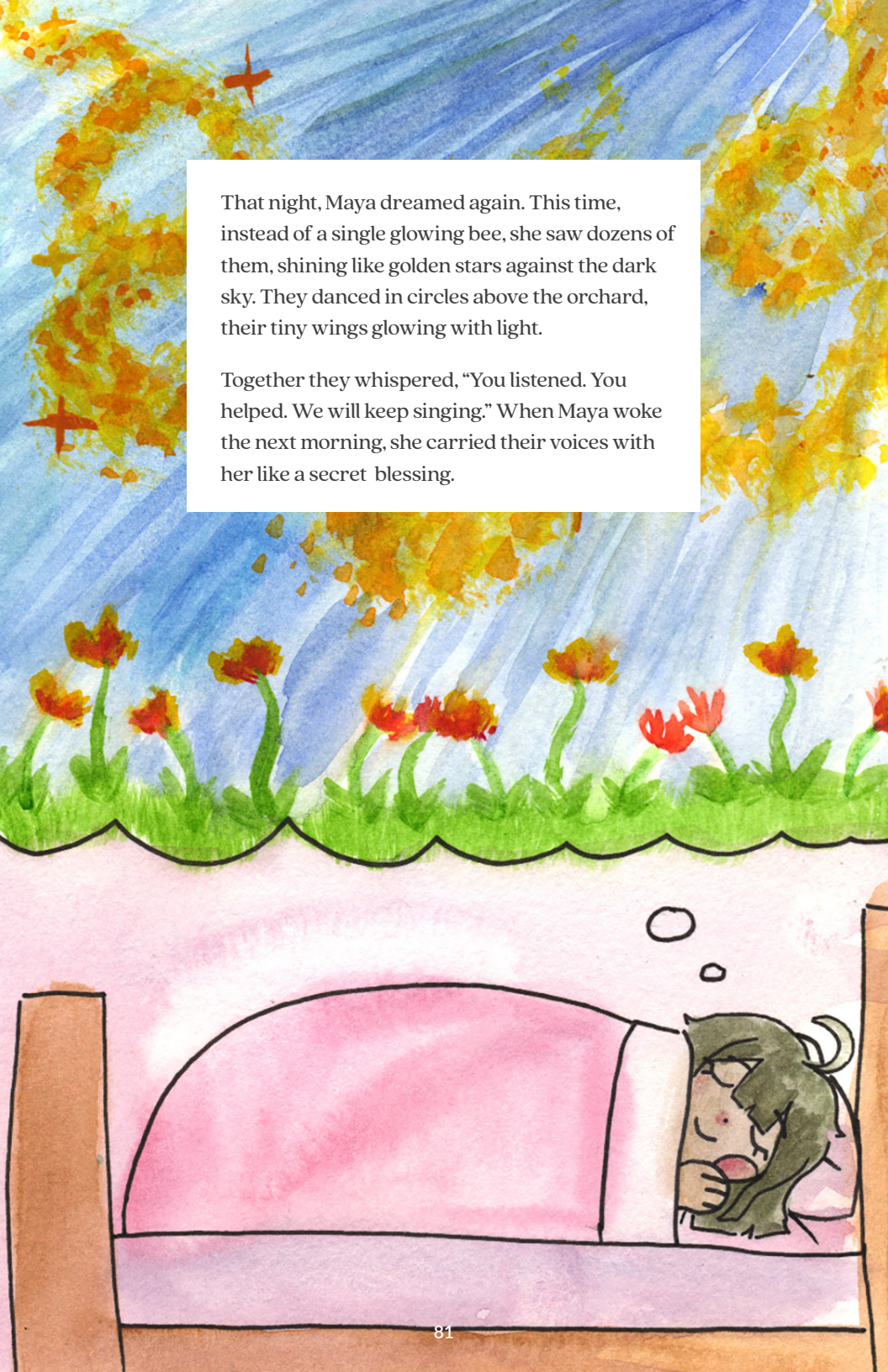
As the days passed, Maya noticed even more changes. The orchard, once hushed and empty, now seemed alive again. The bees moved quickly from blossom to blossom, carrying with them the promise of life. Their hum echoed like a soft chorus through the trees, reminding Maya that even the smallest creatures could make the largest difference. The almonds ripened under the steady summer sun, and the once worried air of the farm was replaced with quiet joy.

One evening, while sitting on the porch with her father, Maya asked, “Do you think the bees will always come back?”

He thought for a moment, then said, “As long as we take care of them, they’ll take care of us. It’s a partnership, Maya. Nature gives, but it also asks us to give back.”

His words stayed with her, weaving themselves into her heart just as firmly as, “No bees, no almonds.”



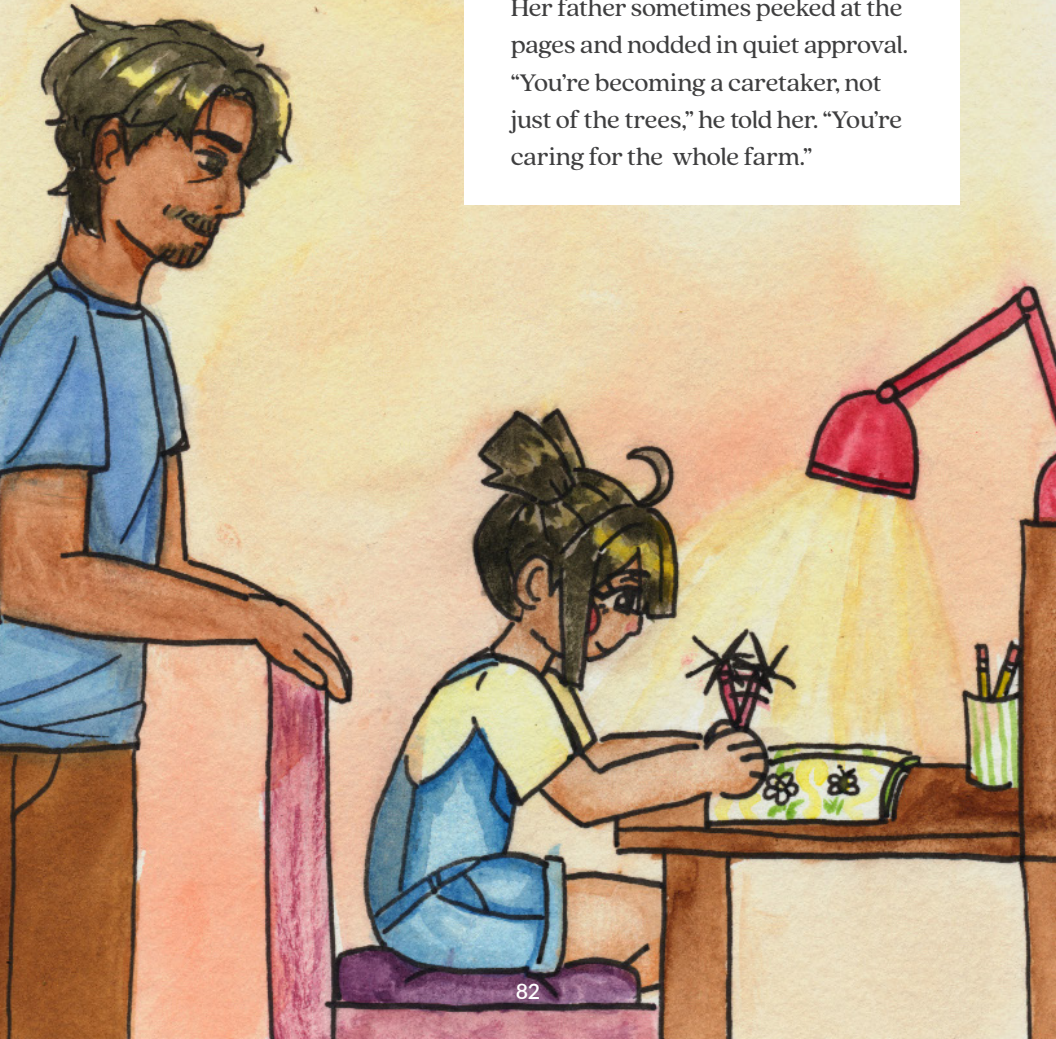


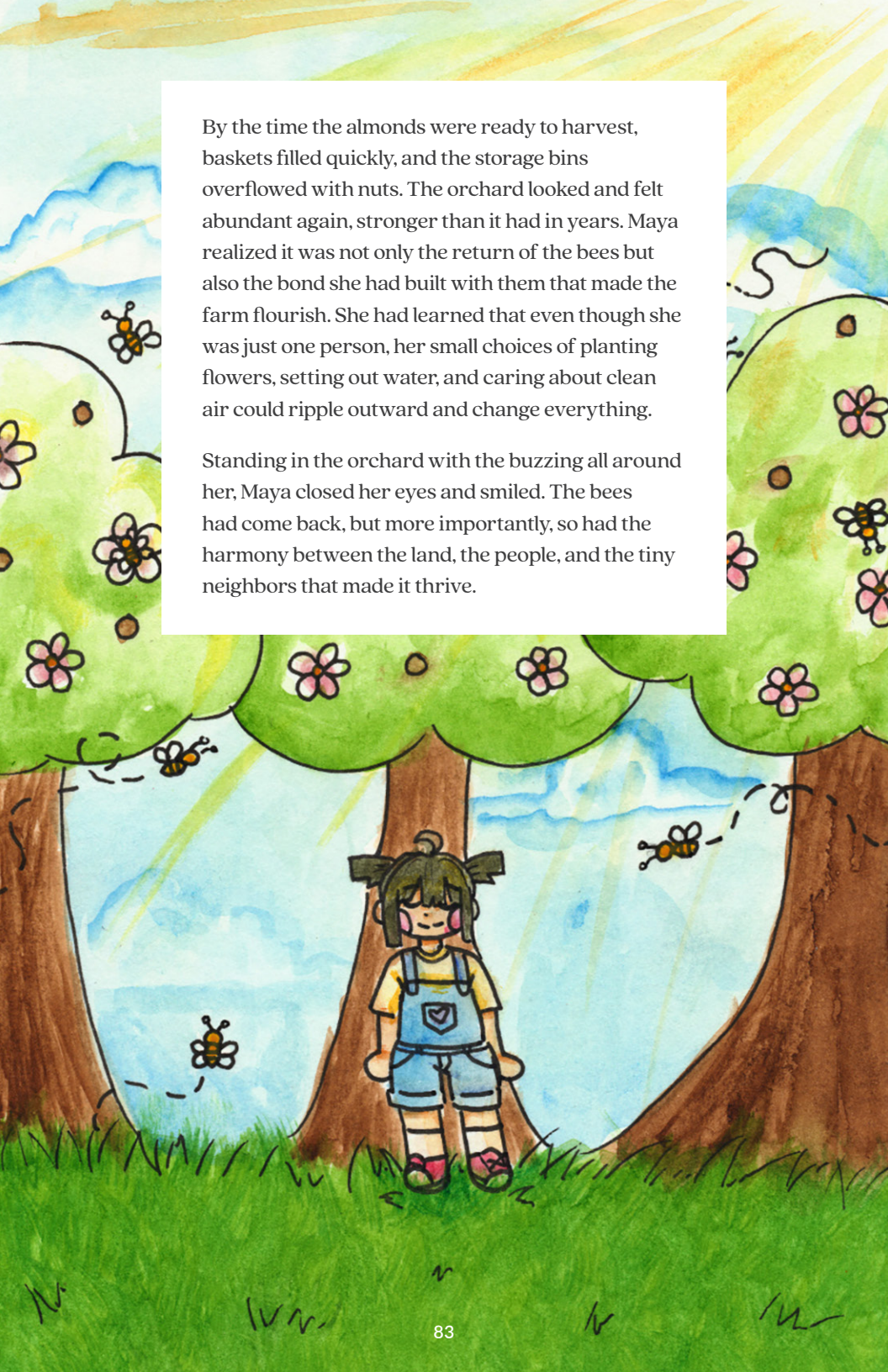
That night, Maya dreamed again. This time, instead of a single glowing bee, she saw dozens of them, shining like golden stars against the dark sky. They danced in circles above the orchard, their tiny wings glowing with light.

Together they whispered, "You listened. You helped. We will keep singing." When Maya woke the next morning, she carried their voices with her like a secret blessing.

The following weeks brought more work, but also more hope. Maya began keeping a journal about the bees, writing down what flowers they visited most, how many she saw each day, and the way the orchard seemed to respond. She drew sketches of blossoms and bees, labeling them carefully so she could remember.

Her father sometimes peeked at the pages and nodded in quiet approval. "You're becoming a caretaker, not just of the trees," he told her. "You're caring for the whole farm."





By the time the almonds were ready to harvest, baskets filled quickly, and the storage bins overflowed with nuts. The orchard looked and felt abundant again, stronger than it had in years. Maya realized it was not only the return of the bees but also the bond she had built with them that made the farm flourish. She had learned that even though she was just one person, her small choices of planting flowers, setting out water, and caring about clean air could ripple outward and change everything.

Standing in the orchard with the buzzing all around her, Maya closed her eyes and smiled. The bees had come back, but more importantly, so had the harmony between the land, the people, and the tiny neighbors that made it thrive.