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Danielle Nauss

Of Bees and Girlhood

The day is warm and bright when my friend Taylor and I get to the park. We had just come from the gas station where we packed small, clear bags full of nickel candies. Now it's time to delve into our spoils while sitting in the cool grass. We lie there, staring up into the sky as the clouds lazily pass by, each of us popping mounds of sugar into our sticky mouths with one hand, the other gripping each other's.

I breathe heavily and close my eyes, feeling the heat from the sun warm my face. With my stomach full of candied sweetness and my friend beside me, I feel sated and at peace. I let go of Taylor's hand and flip over onto my stomach. Looking over at her, I see strands of her dark hair stuck to the stickiness of her mouth. Giggling, I pull off the strands and she smiles before rubbing at her face aggressively with the back of her arm.

"So what do you want to do now?" she asks once her face is sufficiently clean. I simply shrug my shoulders as I tear grass from the ground, forming a small pile in front of me.

"I dunno," I say staring at my ever-growing pile, "what do you wanna do?" Taylor looks pensive for a moment as she wracks her seven-year-old brain for ideas.

"Do you want to go hunt for clovers?" she inquires after a pause. A grin spreads across my face and I nod eagerly. Clover hunting had become the new fad at school, one that I had to catch up on. She smiles back at me and we both stand and dust the few clinging blades of grass from ourselves. I stuff the syrupy bag into my jean's pocket while Taylor runs off in search of the nearest garbage bin. Grass and dirt are stuck on my fingers

so I vigorously rub my hands together to clean them. When Taylor prances back, we are ready to begin our search.

We meander slowly through the park, taking care to check every patch of clovers for the elusive four-leafed treasure. We walk for a time, sometimes holding hands, sometimes going off on our own, our eyes always on the ground scanning the grass and weeds. I crouch by a particularly large patch and tuck my hair behind my ears. Narrowing my eyes, I peer at the clovers carefully. Taylor squats down beside me, not caring that she's wearing a dress, and we both look over the tangle of grass and clovers for the only one that matters. I let out a sigh and fall backwards to sit in the grass.

"I don't think we'll ever find one," I say dejectedly as I pluck a small, pink flower from the ground. "Maybe they don't even exist."

"Of course they exist, Danielle," Taylor says, rolling her eyes. "Connor found one at school during lunch. I saw it, so they're real." I scowl at my flower as I twirl it between my fingers. Picking one of the long petals off, I examine it in front of my face.

"We can eat these, right?" I muse while still staring at the petal. "My mom told me we can eat these." Taylor falls to the ground in front of me, now also staring at my flower.

"Um, I don't know. My mom never told me that," she says with a worried expression on her face. "We probably shouldn't."

"Yeah, but," I begin as I continue to twirl the petal in my fingers, "I think we can. My mom says the bees like them because they're sweet, so if they can eat them, can't we?" Slowly, I bring the flower to my face and smell it. It's sweet, just like my mother told me. Cautiously, I move it to my mouth and bite it with my front teeth, only picking off a couple

of petals. I look over to Taylor for encouragement and find none, yet I continue with my plan. With the petals now firmly in my mouth, I timidly chew and swallow them.

"Well?" Taylor asks after a short silence. I purse my lips and shrug my shoulders.

"I couldn't really taste anything," I reply. We stare at each other before we both begin to giggle at the daring stunt I had just performed. We lie in the grass, laughing and smiling, and stare up into the sky once more. When we finally quiet and lie still, I roll over again onto my stomach. As a natural reflex, I pull and tear at the grass and clovers to create a small mountain.

We both lie there in the silence, content and warm in the sunlight. I lay my head on my arm and close my eyes. The wind blows gently overhead, rustling the branches of the tall pine trees that surround us. I suck in a long breath, smelling the sweet, cool air and exhale peacefully. Opening my eyes dreamily, I look out over the sea of grass before me. I scan the shallow horizon when my eye catches a stark white shape in the green grass.

I gasp and turn to Taylor. "Oh, look at that!" I exclaim pointing. "Look it's a white bee!" She curiously looks over and we stare at the bee from where we lie. It's sitting a few feet away, perched upon a flower not unlike the one I still hold in my hand. Neither of us say anything and we continue to stare at the alien creature. It buzzes its wings but does not fly away.

Slowly, Taylor and I crawl our way closer to the insect, expecting it to fly away at any moment. It doesn't. We continue to crawl until we are only inches away from the bee. Mouths slightly agape, we peer curiously at it. Normally, I would never come so close to a bug, but I find this bee to be mesmerizing.

"I've never seen a white bee before," I whisper so as not to scare the creature. Taylor nods her head in agreement. The bee hasn't moved since we approached it and I have a fear that it might be dead. Once more, though, the bee buzzes its wings. I smile at it and marvel at its strange beauty. It is fat and fuzzy like the bees I've seen and run from in my mother's garden, but lacking in the bright yellow colour I'm accustomed to.

"Why doesn't it fly away?" Taylor asks puzzled. "Do you think it can't fly?" A trickling of horror crawls into my heart at the thought that the creature has been grounded. I say nothing and continue to study the bee. I begin to wring my hands and I remember the flower, now wrinkled and wilted, that I clutch in my fingers. Carefully, I reach forward and place my drooping flower next to the one that the bee is resting on. Neither of us move. Patiently, I wait for any movement from the bee, any sign of its wellbeing. Cautiously, it takes a couple steps forward, then stops, still remaining on the original flower. Taylor and I both let out a breath. This is enough to placate our young hearts.

Still staring at the white bee, Taylor and I sit up onto our knees. "It's so cool," she says breathlessly. I nod in agreement. The bee buzzes its wings again and I wonder if it is as curious about us as we are of it.

"We can't just leave it here on the ground," I say after a pause. "Something could happen to it." Taylor looks at me worriedly then back at the bee.

"Yeah, you're right," she agrees. "We have to stay here to protect it." So we sit there, steadfast in our decision to protect this bee from unknown dangers. Like two stone statues, we watch over the white bee as the sun slowly crosses the sky.

After a time, we hear something that grabs our attention- the distinct and sharp sound of sprinklers. Just as quick, the freezing spray of water is at our backs. In shock, we

both react, the shrill screeches of girlhood ringing across the park. But still we hold strong, a barrier between the bee and its watery demise. I grip onto the grass in front of me tightly to brace myself against the water as I shut my eyes. Our screams turn into laughs and we are screaming and laughing as we are being assaulted with water. On such a warm day, the cold water is appreciated, but through the joy and the excitement we still have a duty.

As we wait out the barrage of water, I open my eyes to check on the bee. I see the fine mist of water spraying gently overhead, lightly dusting the grass in front of us. But the bee is still there. Eventually, after what seems like an eternity, the water subsides and we are left there with our hair dripping down our faces. We giggle quietly and shiver. I can feel water dripping down my back, and my jeans are itchy and uncomfortable. But it's worth it. The bee is safe.

We sit there and giggle to fill the silence that has filled the park. Then we are joined by the sounds of buzzing wings. We watch the bee in awe as it finally takes flight. "Bye, bee!" I call after it as it floats into the air. Taylor waves her goodbyes as we lose sight of it. We look over at each other and fall back into the wet grass laughing. The clouds continue their journey across the sky and the trees sway in the breeze. The world is good, and it's time to go home.