

**FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL**

Story Material

# The Last Beekeeper

*A powerful story about a teenager who discovers her grandmother's bee colonies are the last surviving wild population and fights to protect them.*

**Level:** B1 (Intermediate)**Age Group:** Teens (11-16)**Skill:** Reading**Topic:** Nature & Ecology**Duration:** ~45 minutes**Pages:** 14 story pages

## Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and understand a B1-level story about ecology and advocacy
  - ✓ Learn 20 vocabulary words highlighted in context
- ✓ Practise vocabulary through matching and fill-in-the-blank exercises
  - ✓ Test comprehension with a 10-question quiz

## The Story

---

### Chapter I — The Beekeeper's Garden

The garden behind Gran's cottage was the most alive place Elara had ever known. While the rest of the village of Thornwick — a cluster of stone houses in the Yorkshire Dales — moved at its usual unhurried pace, Gran's garden hummed, buzzed, and vibrated with constant activity. Six wooden **hives** stood in a neat row along the south-facing wall, each one home to a **colony** of tens of thousands of honeybees. Elara had been visiting every summer since she was small, but this year was different. She was fifteen, and Gran had decided it was time to teach her properly.

"A beekeeper does not own bees," Gran said, pulling on her white gloves and lifting the smoker. "She serves them. And they, in return, serve the entire landscape." Gran — whose real name was Margaret Ashworth, though nobody in Thornwick called her anything but Gran — had been keeping bees for forty-seven years. She understood their language: the pitch of their hum, the pattern of their dances, the mood of the hive on any given morning.

She taught Elara to read the frames — the wooden panels inside each hive where the bees built their wax comb. She showed her how to spot the queen, how to recognise healthy **larvae** curled in their cells like tiny white commas, how to judge the colour and consistency of the honey. "These bees are special," Gran said one evening as they sat on the garden bench watching the last foragers return to the hives in the golden light. "Most wild **colony** populations in this part of England have collapsed. Ours are among the last. That is why we have a responsibility."

Elara did not fully understand what Gran meant — not yet. But she could feel it: something precious and fragile in the steady hum of the garden, something worth protecting. She pressed her ear against the warm wood of the nearest hive and listened. Inside, sixty thousand bees were working, building, feeding, communicating. A city in a box. A world in a garden.

### Chapter II — The Warning Signs

Three weeks into the summer, Elara noticed the first sign of trouble. She was inspecting the hives with Gran when she saw a scattering of dead bees on the grass in front of Hive Four. A few dead bees were normal — workers lived only six weeks in summer. But these were too many, perhaps two hundred, lying on their backs with their legs curled inward. "That is not right," Gran said quietly, kneeling to examine them. Her face was calm, but Elara could see tension in her hands. "Healthy bees die away from the hive. They fly out and do not return. When they die at the entrance like this, something is wrong inside."

Over the following days, the problem spread. Hive Four's population dropped visibly. The bees that remained were sluggish and disoriented, crawling in circles on the landing board instead of flying. Then Hive Two showed the same symptoms. Gran spent hours on the phone to other beekeepers, to the local farming association, to the National Bee Unit. Nobody had

answers. "It is not varroa," she told Elara, referring to the parasitic mite that had devastated bee populations worldwide. "I have checked every frame. It is not any disease I recognise."

Elara decided to investigate on her own. She walked the fields and lanes around Thornwick, mapping the landscape within the bees' foraging range — roughly three kilometres in every direction. What she found disturbed her. To the east, a large area of farmland that had been a patchwork of meadows and hedgerows the previous summer had been converted to **monoculture** — a single crop of oilseed rape stretching to the horizon in uniform yellow. And at the edge of the field, she found a sign she had never seen before: MERIDIAN AGRICULTURAL SOLUTIONS — CONTRACTED CROP MANAGEMENT.

"Meridian Agri," Gran said when Elara told her, her expression hardening. "They are a large agrochemical company. They supply **pesticides** and fertilisers to farms across the north. If they are managing those fields, they will be using their own products." She paused. "Including, almost certainly, **neonicotinoids**." Elara had heard the word before but did not fully understand it. Gran explained: neonicotinoids were a class of insecticide that attacked the nervous system of insects. They were effective against crop pests, but they were also catastrophically toxic to bees — even in tiny doses. "They do not kill immediately," Gran said. "They disorient. The bees cannot navigate home. They cannot communicate. They forget how to do the things that keep the colony alive."

## Chapter III — The Evidence

## Chapter IV — The Resistance

Elara knew that suspicion was not enough. If she wanted to protect the bees, she needed evidence — scientific, measurable, undeniable evidence. She contacted Dr. Amara Osei, a researcher in environmental toxicology at the University of Leeds, whose work on **pesticide contamination** Elara had found online. Dr. Osei agreed to analyse samples if Elara could collect them properly.

Over the next week, Elara became a field scientist. She collected water samples from the stream that ran through the farm and past Gran's garden. She took soil **specimens** from the edges of the treated fields. She carefully gathered dead bees from the hive entrances, sealing them in labelled containers. She photographed everything, recorded dates and weather conditions, and kept a detailed journal. Gran helped her package the samples and send them to Leeds by overnight courier.

The results came back ten days later. Dr. Osei's email was direct and alarming: the water samples contained neonicotinoid concentrations three times higher than the level considered safe for aquatic invertebrates. The soil samples showed significant residue. And the dead bees' tissue contained measurable traces of the chemical. "This is clear evidence of environmental **contamination**," Dr. Osei wrote. "The concentration levels are consistent with agricultural application within your described radius."

Armed with Dr. Osei's report, Elara and Gran approached the parish council. The response was cautious. Councillor Hughes, the chair, listened politely but explained that Meridian Agri

was a major employer and that the contract with local farmers had brought much-needed income. "We cannot simply accuse a company of this size without being absolutely certain," he said. "They will have lawyers. We need to be careful."

Meridian Agri's regional manager, a man named Grayson, issued a statement: "Our products are fully compliant with UK and EU regulations. We reject any suggestion that our crop management programme has caused harm to local **biodiversity**. Independent studies confirm the safety of our formulations when applied correctly." Elara read the statement and felt anger rising in her chest. "Compliant with regulations" did not mean safe. It meant legal. There was a difference — a difference measured in dead bees and dying **ecosystems**.

Some villagers were sympathetic but reluctant to act. "Meridian pay well," said Tom Barker, a farmer whose fields bordered Gran's garden. "If we lose their contract, I lose my income." Others were more supportive. Mrs. Chandra, who ran the village shop, offered to display information leaflets. The primary school teacher, Mr. Holloway, invited Elara to talk to his Year 6 class about **pollination** and why bees mattered.

## Chapter V — Building the Case

Elara refused to be discouraged. She created a website documenting the evidence: Dr. Osei's lab report, photographs of the dead bees, maps showing the proximity of the treated fields to Gran's hives and the village water supply. She shared it on social media, and within a week, the story had been picked up by a regional newspaper and a national environmental blog. Support arrived from unexpected places. A retired beekeeper in Cumbria sent data showing identical symptoms in his colonies near Meridian-managed fields. A wildlife trust in Norfolk confirmed declining **biodiversity** in areas where neonicotinoids were heavily used.

Dr. Osei published a formal research note linking the Thornwick contamination data to wider patterns of pollinator decline. She stated publicly that the evidence was "consistent with chronic neonicotinoid exposure causing colony collapse." The university's press office issued a statement. Suddenly, it was not just a village dispute. It was a scientific case study. The **petition** that Elara launched online gathered three thousand signatures in its first week.

Gran, meanwhile, was fighting her own battle. Two more hives had weakened, leaving only two strong colonies out of the original six. She worked tirelessly, feeding the surviving bees sugar syrup supplements, monitoring them hourly, and moving the hives to the far corner of the garden — as far from the treated fields as possible. "If we lose these," she told Elara one evening, her voice steady but her eyes bright with emotion, "we lose something that cannot be replaced. These bees carry genetics adapted to this landscape over generations. They are part of this place."

Elara organised a community meeting at the village hall. Forty-seven people attended — more than had come to any village event in years. She presented the evidence clearly: the lab results, the expert opinion, the pattern of decline. Tom Barker, the farmer who had initially been reluctant, stood up and admitted that he had noticed a dramatic decline in wild **pollination** on his own land since switching to Meridian's products. "My apple orchard produced half the fruit this year," he said. "I thought it was the weather. Now I am not so

sure." By the end of the evening, the village had agreed to request a formal hearing with the district council.

## Chapter VI — The Hearing

The district council hearing took place in September, in the civic centre in Skipton. The room was full: villagers from Thornwick, journalists, representatives from environmental organisations, and a legal team from Meridian Agri in expensive suits. Elara had prepared meticulously. She wore her school uniform because Gran said it would remind people that she was a young person fighting for her future, not a professional campaigner.

Meridian's lawyers presented first. They argued that their products met every regulatory standard, that no causal link had been legally established, and that restricting their use would damage the agricultural economy. Their presentation was polished, confident, and full of technical jargon designed to overwhelm.

Then it was Elara's turn. She spoke for twelve minutes. She explained what **pollination** meant — that one-third of all food consumed by humans depended on it. She described what a healthy **ecosystem** looked like, and what happened when its foundations were poisoned. She showed photographs of Gran's dying bees. She read Dr. Osei's findings. And she made a simple argument that cut through all the legal language: "We are not asking you to shut down a company. We are asking you to protect a **habitat**."

Dr. Osei gave expert **testimony** via video link, presenting her data with the calm authority of someone who had spent twenty years studying exactly this problem. Tom Barker spoke about the real-world impact on his farm. Mrs. Chandra described the decline in wildflowers around the village. And Gran — seventy-two years old, standing straight in her best jacket — told the panel what forty-seven years of beekeeping had taught her: "Bees are not optional. They are not a luxury. They are the mechanism by which this landscape feeds itself and feeds us. Without them, the fields are just dirt."

Meridian's lead lawyer attempted a rebuttal, citing regulatory approvals and economic necessity. But the room had shifted. The councillors were listening to the village now, not to the suits.

The panel deliberated for three days. When the decision came, it was **unanimous**: a two-year ban on neonicotinoid use within five kilometres of Thornwick, a requirement for Meridian to fund independent environmental monitoring, and the designation of Gran's garden and the surrounding meadows as a protected pollinator **habitat**. It was not a permanent solution. But it was a start.

## Chapter VII — Recovery

## Chapter VIII — Legacy

The following spring, Elara returned to Thornwick. The change was visible from the lane: Gran's garden was buzzing again. The two surviving colonies had grown strong over the winter, and Gran had split them to create four new hives. The meadow beyond the garden

wall, which the council had designated as protected land, had been planted with a wildflower mix designed to provide forage for bees from April to October — clover, borage, lavender, foxglove, and dozens of other species that turned the field into a tapestry of colour.

Tom Barker had converted half of his farm to **organic** methods. It was harder work and the yields were initially lower, but the quality of his produce had improved, and he had found new markets through a local food cooperative. "Turns out people will pay more for food that has not been drenched in poison," he told Elara with a wry smile. Three other farms in the area had followed his example.

Dr. Osei's research had attracted national attention. She had received funding for a three-year study on pollinator recovery in areas where neonicotinoid use had been restricted. Thornwick was one of her primary research sites. Her preliminary data showed a 40 percent increase in wild bee diversity within the protected zone — evidence that ecosystems could recover when given the chance.

On her last evening in Thornwick, Elara sat with Gran on the garden bench. The air was warm and sweet with the scent of clover. The hives hummed steadily — the sound of sixty thousand small lives, each one part of something larger. Gran handed her a gift: a beekeeper's journal, leather-bound, with Elara's name embossed on the cover. "Write everything down," Gran said. "What you observe, what you learn, what you feel. A beekeeper's knowledge is a **legacy**. It must be passed on."

Elara thought about the year that had passed. She had learned to read a hive frame and to read a lab report. She had learned to speak at a village meeting and to stand in front of a council panel. She had learned that **resilience** was not just a quality of bees — it was a quality of communities, of ecosystems, and of people who refused to accept that nothing could be done.

She opened the journal and wrote the first entry: "The bees are not just insects. They are a measure of everything — of the health of the soil, the purity of the water, the balance of the landscape. When the bees are thriving, the world is working. When they are dying, something fundamental is broken. My job is to listen, to notice, and to act. Gran taught me that. The bees taught me the rest."

## Key Vocabulary

Term	Definition
<b>Colony</b>	A group of bees living and working together in one hive
<b>Pollination</b>	The transfer of pollen enabling plants to reproduce
<b>Pesticide</b>	A chemical substance used to kill insects or pests
<b>Ecosystem</b>	All living things in an area and how they interact
<b>Biodiversity</b>	The variety of plant and animal life in a habitat
<b>Habitat</b>	The natural home or environment of a species
<b>Contamination</b>	The introduction of harmful substances into an environment
<b>Organic</b>	Produced without synthetic chemicals or pesticides
<b>Hive</b>	A structure where a colony of bees lives
<b>Larvae</b>	The immature, worm-like stage of an insect's life
<b>Neonicotinoid</b>	A class of insecticide toxic to bees
<b>Petition</b>	A formal written request signed by many people
<b>Advocacy</b>	Public support for a cause or policy
<b>Sustainability</b>	Meeting present needs without harming future resources
<b>Monoculture</b>	Growing a single crop over a large area
<b>Resilience</b>	The ability to recover from difficulties
<b>Specimen</b>	A sample collected for scientific study
<b>Testimony</b>	A formal statement of evidence or experience
<b>Unanimous</b>	Fully agreed upon by everyone involved
<b>Legacy</b>	Something meaningful left for future generations

## Comprehension Quiz

---

### 1. Why did Elara's grandmother keep bees?

- A) To sell expensive honey commercially
- B) Because she believed bees were essential to the local ecosystem
- C) As a childhood hobby she never gave up
- D) Because the council required it

### 2. What was the first sign that something was wrong with the bees?

- A) They stopped producing honey entirely
- B) Dead bees appeared outside the hives and the colony became agitated
- C) The hives were destroyed by a storm
- D) The queen bee disappeared

### 3. What did Elara discover was causing the bee deaths?

- A) A natural disease spreading between colonies
- B) Contamination from neonicotinoid pesticides used by Meridian Agri
- C) Climate change making winters too cold
- D) Local farmers destroying the hives deliberately

### 4. Why was Dr. Osei's analysis important?

- A) She proved the bees were a rare species
- B) She provided scientific evidence linking the pesticide to bee deaths
- C) She discovered a cure for the contamination
- D) She offered to buy the bee colony

### 5. How did the community respond to Elara's campaign?

- A) They ignored her completely
- B) They supported her — farmers, shopkeepers, and neighbours signed petitions
- C) They asked her to stop causing trouble
- D) They moved away from the village

### 6. What argument did Meridian Agri use to defend their pesticide?

- A) That bees were not important to agriculture
- B) That their product met all current safety regulations
- C) That the bees were already dying from disease
- D) That organic farming was impossible

### 7. What was the outcome of the council hearing?

- A) The council sided with Meridian Agri
- B) A unanimous vote to ban the pesticide and create a protected zone
- C) The hearing was postponed indefinitely
- D) Elara was told to move her bees

### 8. Why are bees described as 'keystone species' in the story?

- A) Because they produce honey for humans
- B) Because their pollination supports one-third of the food supply
- C) Because they are the largest insect species
- D) Because they live in every country

**9. What does 'monoculture' farming do to bee populations?**

- A) It provides abundant food for bees
- B) It destroys the diverse habitats and varied flowers bees need
- C) It has no effect on bees at all
- D) It makes bees produce more honey

**10. What is the main message of the story?**

- A) That beekeeping is an easy and profitable hobby
- B) That one person's determination can protect nature and inspire a community
- C) That pesticides are always safe when properly used
- D) That bees will survive without human help

## Answer Key

---

#	Ans	Question
1	B	Why did Elara's grandmother keep bees?
2	B	What was the first sign that something was wrong with the bees?
3	B	What did Elara discover was causing the bee deaths?
4	B	Why was Dr. Osei's analysis important?
5	B	How did the community respond to Elara's campaign?
6	B	What argument did Meridian Agri use to defend their pesticide?
7	B	What was the outcome of the council hearing?
8	B	Why are bees described as 'keystone species' in the story?
9	B	What does 'monoculture' farming do to bee populations?
10	B	What is the main message of the story?

---

Thank you for reading! Visit [www.fleydo.com](http://www.fleydo.com) for more stories and materials.