

Intimate Detail

By Heid E. Erdrich

Late summer, late afternoon, my work
interrupted by bees who claim my tea,
even my pen looks flower-good to them.
I warn a delivery man that my bees,
who all summer have been tame as cows,
now grow frantic, aggressive, difficult to shoo
from the house. I blame the second blooms
come out in hot colors, defiant vibrancy—
unexpected from cottage cosmos, nicotianna,
and bean vine. But those bees know, I'm told
by the interested delivery man, they have only
so many days to go. He sighs at sweetness untasted.

Still warm in the day, we inspect the bees.
This kind stranger knows them in intimate detail.
He can name the ones I think of as *shopping ladies*.
Their fur coats ruffed up, yellow packages tucked
beneath their wings, so weighted with their finds
they ascend in slow circles, sometimes drop, while
other bees whirl madly, dance the blossoms, ravish
broadly so the whole bed bends and bounces alive.

He asks if I have kids, I say not yet. He has five,
all boys. He calls the honeybees his girls although
he tells me they're *ungendered workers*
who never produce offspring. Some hour drops,
the bees shut off. In the long, cool slant of sun,
spent flowers fold into cups. He asks me if I've ever
seen a *Solitary Bee* where it sleeps. I say I've not.
The nearest bud's a long-throated peach hollyhock.
He cradles it in his palm, holds it up so I spy
the intimacy of the sleeping bee. Little life safe in a petal,
little girl, your few furious buzzings as you stir
stay with me all winter, remind me of my work undone.

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Poet Heid E. Erdrich, a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, was born in Breckenridge, Minnesota, and raised in nearby Wahpeton, North Dakota, where her Ojibwe mother and German American father taught at the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school. With her sister, the writer Louise Erdrich, she founded and lead the Turtle Mountain Writing Workshop and The Birchbark House, a fund to support indigenous language revitalization efforts. Since 2010, Erdrich has directed Wiigwaas Press which publishes Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) language books, films, and other media. Erdrich teaches at Augsburg College and lives with her family in Minnesota.