

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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