

Jo Shapcott

I Tell The Bees

He left for good in the early hours with just
one book, held tight in his left hand:
*The Cyclopedia of Everything Pertaining
to the Care Of the Honey-Bee; Bees, Hives,
Honey, Implements, Honey-Plants, Etc.*
And I begrudged him every single et cetera,
every honey-strainer and cucumber blossom,
every bee-wing and flown year and dead eye.
I went outside when the sun rose, whistling
to call out them as I walked towards the hive.
I pressed my cheek against the wood, opened
my synapses to bee hum, I could smell bee hum.
‘It’s over, honies,’ I whispered, ‘and now you’re mine.’

The Threshold

I waited all day for tears and wanted them, but
there weren’t tears. I touched my lashes and
the eyewater was not water but wing and fur
and I was weeping bees. Bees on my face,
in my hair. Bees walking in and out of my
ears. Workers landed on my tongue
and danced their bee dance as their sisters
crowded round for the knowledge. I learned
the language too, those zig-zags, runs and circles,
the whole damned waggle dance catalogue.
So nuanced it is, the geography of nectar,
the astronomy of pollen. Believe me,
through my mouth dusted yellow
with their pollen, I spoke bees, I breathed bees.

The Hive

The colony grew in my body all that summer.
The gaps between my bones filled
with honeycomb and my chest
vibrated and hummed. I knew
the brood was healthy, because
the pheromones sang through the hive
and the queen laid a good
two thousand eggs a day.
I smelled of bee bread and royal jelly,
my nails shone with propolis.
I spent my days freeing bees from my hair,
and planting clover and bee sage and
woundwort and teasel and borage.
I was a queendom unto myself.

Going About With The Bees

I walked to the city carrying the hive inside me.
The bees resonated my ribs: by now
my mouth was wax, my mouth was honey.
Passers-by with briefcases and laptops
stared as bees flew out of my eyes and ears.
As I stepped into the bank the hum
increased in my chest and I could tell the bees
meant business. The workers flew out
into the cool hall, rested on marble counters,
waved their antennae over paper and leather.
'Lord direct us.' I murmured, then felt
the queen turn somewhere near my heart,
and we all watched, two eyes and five eyes,
we all watched the money dissolve like wax.

CCD

My body broke when the bees left,
became a thing of bones
and spaces and stretched skin.
I'd barely noticed
the time of wing twitch
and pheromone mismatch
and brood sealed in with wax.
The honeycomb they
left behind dissolved
into blood and water.
Now I smell of sweat and breath
and I think my body cells
may have turned hexagonal,
though the bees are long gone.

The Sting

When the wild queen leads the swarm
into the room, don't shut the door on them,
don't leave them crawling the walls, furniture
and books, a decor of moving fuzz. Don't go off
to the city, alone, to work, to travel underground.
The sting is no more *apis mellifera*, is a life
without honey bees, without an earful of buzz
an eyeful of yellow. The sting is no twin
waving antennae breaking through
the cap of a hatching bee's cell. The sting
is no more feral hive humming in the stone
wall of the house, no smell of honey
as you brush by. No bees will follow, not one,
and there lies the sting. The sting is no sting.