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## A Handful of Bees

Dzvinia Orłowsky

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## Morning

Nothing can disturb you now —  
your sleep is the sleep  
of a basin of water  
where a woman  
has washed her face.

This is the hour  
of churchyard haze,  
the pale pink sun  
around heads of saints.  
It must be their slow light  
that carries here  
to the grassfields, the cornfields,  
the hand-carved wheat.

If only I could wake you!  
The steam in barns has started to rise,  
and there behind the wooden shed —  
the last piece of moon  
in an empty pail.

## Burying Dolls

The camps have long stopped burning  
when Mother toasts my birth with cognac;  
Father films, the dog sniffs my crib.

Barbie is sent to work camp in my closet.  
The officers like her pony tail.  
Ask Mother.  
Ask her how they'll come at night  
to choose their women.

My children will bury  
dolls in the garden,  
whisper masses for processions of shoe boxes.  
I'll tell them: women have to look strong  
to stay alive.

Ask Grandmother.  
Watch her every morning  
lightly slap her face  
to give it color.

## Poland

The light on Mother's face  
divides her in half.  
Outside a garden hides its shadow,  
a summer blouse  
folded once. The moon guides light,  
thread sliding through  
the silver eye  
or the thin white blood  
of the Eucharist:  
some eternal secret  
passes from hand to mouth.  
I want to feel the interiors  
of churches,  
breath of stone,  
ancestors I can't touch.  
So I watch the sleep  
of my mother's face.

## To Our Cosmeticians

1.

You want us to believe  
there are only two kinds of women:  
the Before  
and the After.

In the Before Woman's life  
it's always raining.  
If you blow on her,  
a parachute desperately opens.

She has no lips to speak of.

2.

Turn the page  
and the After Woman appears.

She survives the hijacking of her heart.  
She is match-lit.

Her blush is the red of a bull's death.  
Her hair bounces back for more.

She's been known to bite.

3.

If you ask me what season I am,  
I would say late fall —  
just at that time  
when trees give up  
and drop their leaves.

My best colors are:

file cabinet,  
highway,  
Ohio,

I wear them the way  
the wind wears what it passes.

I like my meek mouth,  
my no-grapes-on-the-stem look.  
It makes me hireable.

4.

But thank you  
for your day of beauty.

If I change my skin  
it'll be gradual,

the rest of my life.