

## Bees Too Cold to Fly

In the early Spring mornings, bees lay on the black concrete of the play yard. “It’s too cold for them to fly,” my friend explains to me, so we pick them up and hold them in the palms of our hands. We protect them from the wind until they are warm. We do not yet know enough to be afraid of the sting.

We play house in the bushes. The boys throw a ball at us and we whoop and jump from its path. We hold hands and sing songs about the morning sun. Our knees are dirty and bruised and we are proud, so proud. We climb the trees and giggle from the high top branches.

“Will you be my best friend?” We stand on step stools to wash our hands with sweet-smelling soap and I think I need a best friend. At the end of school, we hug goodbye.

Teach me to make flower crowns. Hang upside down on the monkey bars and giggle when our shirts fall with us. Play hide and seek and we’ll find the very best hiding spot together. Run and squeal and turn red, bury our hands in mud and we’ll tell the teacher so we can go wash them together. Pick the daisies from the dirt and pretend we are princesses, they are coins, they are food, they are jewels and we are fairies. The whole wide world is open for us to play in.

Colorful bracelets cover our wrists and arms. Plastic and rubber and clicking beads. We dance and wiggle our arms so that they shake and we are filled with laughter. We sit on the hot pavement and trade the most valuable things we have: a marble, some string. She promises she will teach me to make friendship on a loom.

The Spring evening is cool and misty to the touch. It is filled with birds. I practice weaving for all of my many friends. Tomorrow, I think, we’ll play tennis on the icy courts.

Summer is hot, so hot. Has it ever been this stifling?

I can’t wear “those” shorts to summer camp. But it’s hot. My mother won’t let me dye my hair green. I think it would be neat. She says its unattractive. We don’t bring dolls with us for our friends anymore. We don’t bring toys at all. I should think of something to tell her when I get there. She always has something to tell me.

I don’t know the celebrities you talk about. I don’t think they’re cute. We don’t go outside much anymore, the heat is too much. They’re afraid of the bees near the bushes. We sit on comfy cushions and talk about nothing. I don’t know what we’re talking about.

We sit in her room and she tells me about a boy. She says she is in love with him. We have never known heartbreak. We talk about old friends- but we don’t call them friends

anymore. "They're so weird." Am I weird? I hope you don't think I am weird. We laugh, I don't know what we're laughing about.

If I were a boy, you wouldn't think I was in love with him for thinking he's a good hockey player. If I were a boy, this wouldn't be to impress anyone. If I were a boy, this would be father-son bonding. "I love this sport," I say, over and over. I think we're a third-period team, I think Couture is talented, I think Meier is fast. You think it's amusing. You ask me to tell your friends what I think. They laugh, share a knowing look. Was anything I did ever not for a boy?

The boys in class are loud. When did I stop being loud? Why didn't they stop being loud? They're going to get in trouble, why aren't they in trouble? I wish I could be loud with them. Would they let me be loud with them? Will they like me more if I do?

I learn to braid my own hair. My mother never learned how. I sit on the bathroom floor and practice so that someone will admire it. Maybe they will even ask me to do theirs. I learn to paint my nails. The polish gets everywhere. It never really washes away.

Everything is about boys. Everyone needs a boy, to like, to love, to follow, to think about. Everyone I see needs someone. The girls on TV are beautiful, especially for a boy. They have a lot of friends. All their friends also have people by the end of the story. Do I have someone? What happens if I don't have someone? I need someone.

Autumn has come, and more than just the leaves are falling. Everything I know is falling.

I make my handwriting beautiful. Every part of me is refined with rough sandpaper. Just take a look. I learn to do mascara on youtube. I have no friend close enough to teach me. I never learn to apply bronzer. I have to pick- silver jewelry or gold. "It girls" always have a signature look. I choose gold.

I brush the wildflowers gently with the tips of my fingers as I pass them. I do not pick them. They are still growing and I wish them no harm. I do not want to snuff their lives for my own pleasure. The boy walking behind me picks them for me, a gift. Soon he snuffs me too. I keep the flowers in a vase of sugar-sweet water until they are long dead.

My mother says I am too young to wear that. But I want to be beautiful. Everyone else is wearing it, or something better. I can't be left behind, please don't leave me behind. She stares at herself in the mirror, she proudly announces she is counting calories and working out more. She hates her body, she says, she is going to fix it. Doesn't she know her body is my own?

My father and brother mock me gently for what I think of movies. I cannot think too much of the female heroine, can't be too excited about her progress. I can like the music, the comedy. I learn I don't like to be belittled. Do you know how belittling the things you are? This is love, this is okay. They let me into their club and I pay the price.

We talk about friends as strangers in the dirtiest of tabloids, but we whisper about dangers too. A network of spies and warnings. We don't sit very close together anymore.

Winter is the death of everything.

Leave me my androgyny to hide in. "Raise your hand if you've ever been afraid..." I raise my hand. I don't need to look around to know exactly who is raising their hands with me. Do I know a single person who wouldn't raise their hand?

I do my laundry and balance the basket on my hip. Somewhere, centuries ago, a grandmother of mine is doing the same. I learn to make bread with rosemary for memory, I learn what garlic tastes like and how to use it. I learn my way around steel and wood.

Drunk girls in the bathroom trade compliments. "Beautiful," "Stunning," How long has it been since genuine admiration? We don't hear those words much anymore. Mirrors exist even if we don't look at them, we see. Femininity is an inherently exhibitionist existence. I am tired, we are tired, this topic is tired. I am welcomed into the bedroom. I am pushed out of the boardroom.

A girl I know stands in front of the mirror, examining her skirt. The carpet is dirty, the walls a dingy yellow. Her golden hair falls over her shoulders as she twists to see every angle. "It's okay," she says, "I just won't eat tomorrow." She wants to look good going out. I eat the rest of the cookies in quiet retaliation.

"Women aren't as capable of violence, they just don't have it in them." I hit him because he wouldn't leave her alone. I hit him because I wanted to. I say sorry to every bug squished under feet on the sidewalk, flowers I see picked. I wear flowers in my jewelry, an engraved bluebell in my ring. I am full of rage. Do not make me small, I am not afraid of your sting.

Why am I robbed of prolonged adolescence, the luxury of modernity? The boys chase each other across the lawn, they wrestle each other to the ground. We walk each other home. We share hair ties with strangers, keep an eye out. Strangers with a common knowledge, a shared season. This winter of girlhood, this enduring period of womanhood.

But I weave blades of grass into bracelets for my daughter, I am braiding her hair with daisies. I sit on pillows on the floor with a book. I am sitting in a parking lot giggling. I am a gossip. I am a bitch. I am too quick to judge, I am rude. I am ruined. But oh, I am goddess-like in her eyes. I am a sister, a mother. I am a friend. I tie my hair back and get out the ingredients. The warmth of the oven almost feels like Spring after the snow.

Sit with me in the divinity of woman, in a nest of blankets made with endless love. We'll make beautiful things with our rage and our burnout. Outside it is cold, but we have always held warmth in our hands for bees too cold to fly, we will find a way to use it for each other.