

Honey

by Laura C. Alonso

Third time that day, he was on me. On me like bees to a flower (or flies on shit, he'd correct me, no doubt). Sucking sweet nectar and breathing that breath — damn that breath — 'round my head, in my ear, pestering, bugging, like a bee he annoyed me.

But I knew not to swat him away.

"Don't swat, hon," my mother, she told me, "just stay really still, yes, be statue-like still, and it'll fly straight away. Only sting when they're threatened, those bees, honey, really. They don't want to hurt you — don't want to sting, honey, really, they don't."

Hope this one will fly soon, then I thought to myself on that day ('cause I *was* hurting, really).

Not enough nectar for all that damn buzzing, my flower was dry, then, just like potpourri, only just not so tough — not so dead it could crumble.

Almost, but not dead I said to myself on that day (like on so many others).

And how could I threaten him, big as he was? But I didn't swat, no, just lay still, didn't move (never do), and my sticky, sweat-spackled hot skin, under him, longing to breathe, was then touched by cool air, like a breeze.

Insect-man flew away.

He flew, looking more like a hive than a bee. Not a hive like a nest, but a hive like skin lesions, ugly and red, all puffy and chafed (like his breath), and all that you want is to scratch it. To scratch, scratch, and scratch with your nails and your knuckles, the stone on your ring — just to scratch, but you can't, and it's maddening.

Mother, she told me, "Don't scratch, honey, no, it'll only get worse. Just think something else — don't dwell, just be still. Scratching a hive won't help, dear," she sighed. "Please just trust in your mom and be still, honey."

And like hives will dry up if you stay very still, I dry up (every time) and it's over. The bees fly away, not meaning to hurt me — they don't want to sting me, really, they don't.

It's honey they're after, I know.

I do trust you, Mom, yes I say to myself on these days (if you can't trust your mother, then who . . .)

When they all fly away, I curl up like a bud. Dried up like flowers, petals close, folding in.

And I've never been stung, never swatted or scratched . . .

. . . never blossomed.

"Be still," Mother said,
and I am.

