

The bees: A fable

by [Ned Balbo](#) in the [January 27, 2021](#) issue

*“Tiny bees found in woman’s eye, feeding off tears” (CNN, April 10, 2019): “She thinks the insects blew into her eye at a relative’s grave site when she visited it with her family.” Known as sweat bees, they are attracted to the salt in human sweat.*

Stranger than it appears,  
four bees living off her tears  
sought brief shelter in her eye  
where they stayed, impossibly.

Before whose grave did she kneel?  
What discomfort did she feel?  
Specks of dirt she’d brushed away  
seemed to linger stubbornly.

In the dark beneath the lid  
four bees fed on tears and hid,  
stinging her with constant pain—  
flecks of ash or burning rain.

Still, she knelt and cleared the weeds,  
swept the grave site, planted seeds  
in remembrance of the dead—  
tears withheld and tears shed.

It’s said the eye swelled up—  
Through the slit lamp’s microscope,  
a doctor, shocked, could see  
small legs wriggling to be free:

bees behind the eye, half trapped . . .  
One by one, the doctor slipped  
each one out; the four bees hovered,

caged in labs. Their host recovered.

There are others who insist  
she got used to them at last;  
that the bees live in her eye,  
sheltered, to this very day,

nourished by her tears, their sting  
milder than the pain we bring  
to each loss we hold inside—  
tears we cannot shed or hide.