

Stings

Sylvia Plath

- Bare-handed, I hand the combs.
The man in white smiles, bare-handed,
Our cheesecloth gauntlets° neat and sweet,
The throats of our wrists brave lilies.
5 He and I
- Have a thousand clean cells between us,
Eight combs of yellow cups,
And the hive itself a teacup,
White with pink flowers on it,
10 With excessive love I enamelled° it
- Thinking 'Sweetness, sweetness.'
Brood cells gray as the fossils of shells
Terrify me, they seem so old.
What am I buying, wormy mahogany?
15 Is there any queen at all in it?
- If there is, she is old,
Her wings torn shawls, her long body
Rubbed of its plush°—
Poor and bare and unqueenly and even shameful.
20 I stand in a column
- Of winged, unmiraculous women,
Honey-drudgers°.
I am no drudge
Though for years I have eaten dust
25 And dried plates with my dense° hair.
- And seen my strangeness evaporate,
Blue dew from dangerous skin.
Will they hate me,
These women who only scurry°,
30 Whose news is the open cherry, the open clover?
- It is almost over.
I am in control.
Here is my honey-machine,
It will work without thinking,
35 Opening, in spring, like an industrious virgin
- a strong glove*
- covered with enamel*
- silk or cotton fabric
with a thick soft
surface*
- hard worker*
- containing a lot of it*
- to hasten*

- To scour° the creaming crests°
 As the moon, for its ivory powders, scours the sea.
 A third person is watching.
 He has nothing to do with the bee-seller or with me.
 40 Now he is gone
- In eight great bounds, a great scapegoat°
 Here is his slipper, here is another,
 And here the square of white linen
 He wore instead of a hat.
 45 He was sweet,
- The sweat of his efforts a rain
 Tugging° the world to fruit.
 The bees found him out,
 Molding° onto his lips like lies,
 50 Complicating his features.
- They thought death was worth it, but I
 Have a self to recover, a queen.
 Is she dead, is she sleeping?
 Where has she been,
 55 With her lion-red body, her wings of glass?
- Now she is flying
 More terrible than she ever was, red
 Scar° in the sky, red comet
 Over the engine that killed her—
 60 The mausoleum, the wax house.
- search a place or
 thing thoroughly; top*
- a person who is blamed
 blamed for sth sb else
 has done*
- to pull sth hard*
- to shape a soft sub-
 stance into a particu-
 lar form*
- a mark that is left on
 the skin after a
 wound had healed*

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