

SUSAN KAY ANDERSON

The Problem

How to keep
from keeping
a few difficult
problems
to solve
while carrying on a vocation

I mean avocation
I mean the swarm

is a most inconsistent
place
too heavy
to handle well.

So
surprises
increase
naturally.

We could be an ordinary story
told in books. A teacup
would hold it. A little
each day.

ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

“The Problem” was created from Anna Botsford Comstock’s *How to Keep Bees* (1905). About the poem and the process of composing it, Susan Kay Anderson writes:

It can be intimidating to write about bees, honey, butterflies, and flowers right now because they seem to be everywhere in writing, and what can be said as we find ourselves on the verge of extinction along with bees? For this poem, I scanned the chapter “How to Keep from Keeping Too Many Bees” for a story underlying what is explicit. I first read the whole book but came back to this chapter because I thought it was interesting that too many or too much of what you have or keep can be a problem. I picked out words and phrases which spoke to me, erasing the rest of the text in my mind as I went. I wanted to use this fantastic book for the found poetry project suggested by *Heron Tree* in the fall of 2020. I saw Sarah Ann Winn’s poem “Nature, Chrome Painted” (published by *Heron Tree* in October 2016) and was inspired. *How to Keep Bees* is so practical, but its language is so distracting that it is hard to understand. It is a foreign language of a century ago, a strange, fancy world where every single thing seems to matter and must be taken into account. I thought about this and was knocked over by the immense responsibility of beekeeping and also by the immense love and art it takes to get this food, which needs no processing by us to be consumed (just as milk is). Maybe this is why writing about bees and honey and butterflies is so popular right now. What is simple or a simple fact about life on this planet as a human connects so directly to bees, of course, and to this handbook.

Susan Kay Anderson is the author of *Mezzanine* (Finishing Line Press 2019) and *Please Plant This Book Coast To Coast* (Finishing Line Press 2021). Her work has appeared in *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Gnashing Teeth Publishing*, *Sleet Magazine*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Voice Lux Journal*, and elsewhere. She also serves as a poetry reader for *Quarterly West*. She lives in Sutherlin, Oregon, and can be found online at pw.org/directory/writers/susan_kay_anderson.

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