

How to Winter Bees

do not put too many bees in a cellar

in the northern latitudes

there are so many
unhappy vicissitudes

one must needs be a true prophet as well as good beekeeper

in a climate like that it is hardly safe

to keep the colonies strong
it is hardly safe
before the last of April or the first of May
to take the hives from the cellar

wait
the willow the alder the soft maples are in blossom

wait
the glowing banners of the red blossoms give signal

wait
keep the cellar dark and the air sweet

several times during the winter
sweep the dead bees off the floor

ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

Rebecca Patrascu created “How to Winter Bees” from *How to Keep Bees* by Anna Botsford Comstock (1905). About the poem and the process of composing it, Rebecca writes:

I have been a beekeeper for several years, so I was especially excited to have *How to Keep Bees* as source material. Chapter 13 (“How to Winter Bees”) describes a much harsher climate than that of Northern California, but I wrote this poem not long after I’d buttoned up my own hives for winter. All of the words come directly from Comstock’s text, which is full of surprisingly evocative phrases; I wanted to use so much of her language at first that my early drafts were quite long. Eventually, I distilled those down, changed word order slightly, and introduced repetition to build the mood of the poem and allow it to hint at something beyond the original subject matter.

Rebecca Patrascu is the author of *Before Noon* (Finishing Line Press 2014). Her work has also appeared in *Pidgeonholes*, *Bracken*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere. She lives in Sonoma County, California, and can be found online at rebeccapatrascu.com.

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