

# Rose Petals and Dead Bees

a reply to Robert Hass' *A Story About the Body*

*for Joyce*

by Susan Duncan

If there are enough,  
deliver bowls of dead bees  
to the Grim Reaper.

Save the rose petals  
to lavish on gentle nurses  
on the widowers and children.  
Keep some long-stemmed  
for the graduations and recitals  
some mothers won't attend.

Tomorrow night  
use your young composer's shame  
to our advantage:  
insist he write only requiems  
until cancer's gone the way  
of polio and the plague.

And each morning,  
with both hands,  
clasp the blue bowl—  
the shape and heft of what you've lost—  
fill with milk  
(some mornings salt with tears)  
and swallow in three gulps.

