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Task

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Task

I haven't wasted my life yet.
I'm starting over again, with you.
It's 6:30 am. Electra, Texas.
A couple of sparrows are sitting
on the wire that feeds electricity
into the Westward Ho Restaurant sign.
Westward Ho in green, *Restaurant* in red,
and an arrow at the top pointing
west, small white lightbulbs flashing
on and off in sequence so the light
seems to be streaming eastward,
where the sun is coming up, and the sky
is turning blue over the motel
where we slept last night, where you
are still sleeping.

I yawn, pick up yesterday's paper,
read about a swarm of bees
at a shopping center parking lot.
For hours the swarm frightens
customers, disrupts business. People
run back to their cars, roll up the windows,
drive away in terror of bees.
Others look on from the fringes, curious.
Maybe a boy begs his mother
to stay so he can watch the dark swarm
changing shapes in the air
just outside the car. The merchants
don't know what to do. They call
the police. They call the fire department.
They think about insurance, law suits
as the swarm drifts before their windows
like a cloud of black smoke.
I am that boy, now, in the car
watching as the swarm, tens of thousands
of bees, settles, finally, in the parking lot
in a great writhing cluster nearly
a foot deep. And I imagine I am the man
who knows about these things, who understands
bees, who walks calmly up with a white
box, sets it down on the asphalt,
bends over, and puts his hand
into the swarm.

I put down the paper. You are still sleeping.
I pick up a pencil, pull my chair
closer to the window. I can see cars
and pickups rolling by on highway 287,
a fence and fields, unusually green
for this part of Texas this time of year,
and one of those mechanical rocking horses
pumping crude in a field of thistle
and sunflowers where the worker bees
are at their task, ignoring everything else.

Greg Page