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## A Sense of Belonging

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Arthur Westover

## A Sense of Belonging

During the spring in Texas, the usual summer crews of orange-vested Mexicans, the tractor mowers and weed whackers, by the order of unknown Austin men in air conditioning, leave the highway grass tracks for the wildflowers—Bluebonnet and Indian Paintbrush.

On my once-yearly drive home in April, I leave Interstate 20 for Highway 6. I mention this because my only attachment to home is this drive through the towns, their two street-lights, or maybe one caution yellow, the small oil derricks like donkeys, heads-bobbing—these places I never grew up in.

Academia failed my father, or vice versa, another Ph.D. who ate inordinate amounts of rice and beans to pay for his two-bedroom home in a neighborhood free of a single native tree. Chinese Pistachio, Fruitless Mulberry, Black Plum and Fig—my father digs around the roots this Saturday morning, mulch, manure, organic treatments.

*I'm moving the hive in the backyard in a few minutes, he tells me, knees shifting over sod, not looking up, to out by that shed on Wellborn Road. Huisache—He picks up a grub, tears it in half, drops it in the mulch. Huisache's in bloom over there. Do you want to help?*

For two years my father has kept bees, five or six hives—Buckfast, Cordovan Italian, a couple feral queens—all as if the manifest metaphor of his own words: *I finally put God first in my life, after fifty years.*

Yellow-mesh veil, suede gloves to the elbows, a white bee suit, pant legs rubber-banded at the ankles. The hive is just a wooden box with the holes drilled near the bottom, comb-heavy top bars cut from crates left behind a supermarket, set on cement blocks. Drunk and full, like leopards, leg-heavy with pollen from Indian Hawthorn, they return to the hive, a low humming, a mantra.

*Will you be staying a while?* he asks, drops a match into the smoker, squeezes the bellows, flips the cap shut. *Your mother and I will be going to church tomorrow. You're welcome.* Lifts the lid, a spray of bees released, throws pine smoke over brood and sister workers. Takes a top bar, a strawberry-shaped cluster of bees on the comb, sets it in the cradle. *See the queen? Isn't she beautiful?* She lowers herself backwards into the cell, fat abdomen first. A singular transparent egg.

My father returns the top bar, wraps the hive with screen and duct tape, I carry it to the pickup. Far from the city, the truck bumps over gravel-filled potholes, my father not yet aware that tomorrow morning, as I drive north on Highway 6, he will find a cluster of bees, a couple dozen, in the cinder block in the backyard. He will plan to move another hive there, and the stragglers will join them.