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The Envoy

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THE ENVOY

If I touch a certain place on
My leg I am a child again
Wading a cold mountain stream.
No water clearer, but to the parallactic eye none
Less certain. Sunlight scatters like orange peel
Over the surface. In the depths a molten swell
Lifts rags of sand. Water beads
Skitter in dimples about
Legs which trail away like flat
Long underwear toward the mere blue blur of feet.

Then I see something bitterly white push
From the bank mud through scarlet tree roots, pause,
Then move again slowly out toward
Me. If a serpent it is faceless; if a worm it is wide
As my wrist. It moves beyond my leg, not quite
Touching me, then the tip curls back and for
A moment nuzzles the calf. Colder than space
The touch is nevertheless a kiss
In which there is no wish to possess—
Only some antique courtesy, as though
Cold were sending an envoy to Warm
To tell him some of the customs of snow
And learn some of what it means to burn.

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