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The Companion: Baltimore, 1988, 1949

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The Companion

Baltimore, 1988, 1949

The city was good, became rotten, became new. My old home.
Its longer then even longer bay was wide too, almost a sea—
In it what swam was murdered, or chased to exhaustion
And in what we might call addition,
The heat the city poured into the water
Was from making new rot new for new people.
What could I do? I had my own person to make good. He
Had been here a whirligig of fear in a blink.
He was inside me or sat beside me in my car
And everything I used to know went with us
And was in my eyes as even a cheap sparrow's eyes
Have the knowledge of the streets of the sky
And it has the right to turn anywhere anytime,
So I hunted for the place I couldn't remember and went across
water
And between water as if my three decades with cars
Could make this one choose for itself gravel or asphalt
Or which mall to turn after,
The cornfield a manicured ballfield, but the bay tightening
Around the roads until choice was a smile of gratitude
As when a young woman gives a young man to himself
And there is only one thing he can think about it
The rest of his life, when she knows without ever having done it
Before to hold for a long time his red exhausted penis
And to be sure he knows she is watching him
And to continue smiling so that his memory would be inevitable...
Before that there was a child's story...
Writhing on my eyes like a child
Disabled by a band of homicidal adults who have surrounded
him...
I mean as I drove wrenched I smiled

When a final road *had* to bend to a familiar house,
Peeling columns' paint scraped in piles and a wounded roof
That was before the time I will tell you about,
House in whose yard three lone workmen
Stirred concrete or plaster in a trough.
Were they preparing to slap gobs of white
On the thin fleshy lips of the beach
That was shared by the bay and the black woods?
They knew I was from some other city that had always been
good—
By the un-fur on my collar, by my voice self-trained in all
implication
To keep safe the person hiding in the car—
And they knew by my question about fishing
Which any fool could hear I didn't give a damn about—
The question that led to the embarrassing question about swarms
of turtles.
Did you ever know something was true and have people think you
were crazy?
It was friendly enough—I knew how to project many empathetic
personalities
And I did not stare at the only remaining house
From the other time I'm going to tell you about:
In its yard they had a pretty big sea turtle upended on the ground
With its heart beside it which the crowd returned to
Over the whole day—the idea was to stare at it as it pounded
Then go off a little way and eat and drink. Not to touch.
Someone explained some bullshit about its special chambers
And a little boy like an idiot swirling from idea to idea
Falsely brilliant led each remark down a socratic path
Inevitably to the turtle's thickness and strength
As a necessary and sufficient condition for everything
Or as a vicious noise that could blind everybody
Instead of make them deaf and could hide everything.

There was a time shortly after that I hooked one my size
Which had the consideration or the cunning to move sideways
 slowly
Because it didn't care to pull me in or didn't sort out yet
My arms like a little girl's or a little boy's
(They are the same). I prayed that the turtle was a girl—
We found the one in the house's yard was a boy—
When we prodded its cluster with an oyster knife, we could see
 easily—
So for an instant after I clicked the drag I prayed for it to be weaker
Then I threw the rod and line into the water
That the giant turtle would see completely and learn—
They chew up the hooks, leaders, and lines—
You could cut apart a perfectly healthy one
And see a hundred-year-old hook shattered, dull, and relaxed in its
 gut—
There is a time after that—
You know how it is when other men watch you look out over a
 body of water
Even for a few seconds. Against wind
You pull up and tighten your hood lined in non-coyote pieces,
You take yourself and you take the person who's afraid
Back to the car, to the center of the city and the hotel's warm pool,
You take him down into the water in the empty room very
Deep so your eyes meet pressure.
Four decades are nothing—
Swimming anywhere it is a young woman or man of its species.