Way Back Home

riffing the title from The Crusaders, *Scratch*, 1974

I’ve been in a lifelong struggle
to keep war and boredom.
You think that you are leaving
on a quest
leaving everything that is holding you back:
home, the sameness of nine to five,
a car payment, the promise of unfulfilled
love, books whenever and wherever
you can get them,
when it all follows you
from place to place
that necessity to repeat.

It doesn’t matter on which island
or peninsula
or with a different man
it’s the same losing.
You want to nest
and still walk that sword edge,
but it is never enough
where you are,
until you find there is
no place like home
no place like home
except inside you.
What you know is true.

The loss of what is familiar
is all that is left of home
more than ten years gone,
as the oracle foretold
loves have wandered off or died or married,
grown nieces and nephews
with babies of their own,
friendships outlasted,
aunts and uncles dead or dying
and buildings torn down
with only the ghost remains
in my mind,
searching for the foundations
Whiskey gulches are filled in
with hotels and the odd Ikea;
and paved new roads that my old map,
does not account for
because the map is not the territory.
Neighbors have grown rich on
and oblivious to my absence
on both sides of the Bay
in million dollar homes that fetched
only thousands forty years ago,
though I must rebuild
something more lasting
than before,
with the accumulation of gray in my hair
and lines in my skin,
but youth
always youth in my heart,
waking to risk and
waiting to learn sense
at last

It’s never too late
But just right on time
to dream
of going home in triumph, with fanfare
unfurling like a sail with each step,
and wind and friends at my back.
and above all,
to be a lasting book of songs
with page after page
of winning
instead of losing
I won’t have prizes
or heads
in my possession,
not even my 500 books
that were sold out from under me,
except self- knowledge
and a few words I’ll have painted
on the prow of my ship
that I have not yet decided upon,
not even an incantation
that all be well;
though my spear and shield
are at the go
like pen and paper,
ready for the charge up hill
and down like Bullitt’s chase
through the City.
I will come quietly,  
walking on flat, dry land,  
no more gods  
or monsters  
from without,  
or even the lack of 500 pounds  
blocking my way.  
Because the tapestry was all my idea,  
the wool unraveling in my fingers  
like a comb through the untrained  
strands of my hair, singing  
*Did I really do it?*  
*Did it really happen?*  
In one night I will finish with it all.

I promise I won’t slaughter anything,  
not even my dream,  
where I walk barefoot in the rain  
easier than I would in snow  
and the neighbors will mind  
their own business, or won’t  
My house keys will jingle in my nervous fingers,  
while the dogs in their houses and backyards  
are barking welcome,  
and I will shed the armor  
that held everything back  
including the imprint  
of all my scars  
before the waiting laptop  

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