

Urgencies

by Mathew Paust

One good thing about my earworm is its obedience to exterior sounds relevant to my well being, in this instance a slight rustle in the twigs and leaves near my position switching the scope of my attention from macro to micro so abruptly it banished the tune and any echo that might have told me if the break had come amid vowel or syllable. Only thing I'm wondering is how long it took for the rustling and scratching to seize my attention, because once focused I quickly became aware it was moving toward me from an oblique angle somewhere behind, steadily, relentlessly. Compounding the awkwardness of my situation, besides the need for continued vigilance to the front, was the pain keeping me from turning my head enough to allow peripheral surveillance in both directions. A sudden acute regret for not having found a stick or large stone to keep handy as weapon challenged control of my bowels at nearly the instant I saw out of the corner of my bulging eye a slight movement of something orange and black a few feet away under curled dead leaves. Another thrust through the leaves and I knew the cause of my escalating trauma. A damned box turtle. I was still agape, my heart celebrating silly good fortune, when something cold and hard prodded my neck under the collar. A voice hissed so close its moist, rank breath invaded my ear and nostrils: "Don't even twitch, peckerhead, or that log will be your gravestone."

