

abstensions

1970

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A PLAY ON WORDS IS A PLAY ON WORDS

I am the poet,

I am the fool

I am the prophet.

He who would be a poet
be a rogue

He who is a poet
be a cheat

It is the poet who through
his license
announces
and
pronounces

The rueful wail of the tunes,
he needs no proof, no lethargic braille,
his cleverness throating in my choke.

It is a dream to be a poet
a lazy state of unchallenged mind
Imposter to literature pooney patterns of padded bras
Hating WAR POVERTY and mother truckers.

Nick Roome

a year ago
he was drinking wine with us
and licking strawberry papers
and laughing
and singing along with James Brown
and making love with his girl
and nodding out
 leaving unfinished phrases
to be imagined.

a year ago
he clutched his punctured pacifier
and opened a can of worms
to shoot into his stream of thirsty blood
 bruised and bribed
by the soothing nothingness
cloacked
within his habit.

a year ago
he was alive
now his veins are cracked dry
and his folded hands hold a laced rosary
instead of a bottle
or a girl
or a fix
as his flesh lies dreaming and dead
hushed
below gentle earth.

Cindy Newsom



Lib Mason

Arms of the sun
carried me
to the lips of the earth
and
ate me alive

Robin McGrath

We

lie hidden,

sandwiched.

a sheet above

a limp mattress

politely shaping

below.

limbs.

endlessly tied

over

and

under,

wallowing about.

a mirage of comfort

dreams.

perfectly dreamed

romp forever...

morn-ing.

fog.

light.

goodbye.

dream

Thom Moore

A DREAM

Half-dead, I see the world in colors through a veil
Of fog; through half-closed lids and half-crazed mind,
My life is just a dream in misty visions stale
With time, that only heightens what I've left behind.

And once the afternoon, in colors blue and gold,
Made no more difference than a rainy day
To me; Now I see a world in shadows dark and cold.
The midnight of my life is here to stay.

Light! I cannot see your face behind my wall of tears.
Do you laugh or cry when you look at me?
Am I myself the darkness that smothers me in fears
Of things I cannot touch and sights I'll never see?

I even touch your face, And still, I cannot see.
But you, who never even looks, are only half-alive like me.

Chris Coates

RAMBLING THOUGHTS

I was tired. My brother suggested that I go to bed early. I threw my books on the desk, flopped on the bed, kicked my shoes off and turned on the radio just as Big Dan was signing off.

"Bye now Kemo Sabel!"

Well, I lay there silently, eyes open, staring at the ceiling thinking about upcoming mid-years, college applications, deadlines, grade point average, class rank, the whole numbers racket.

I was tired of life stalking me getting faster, faster, faster. Ease it. Ease it. Get this garbage off my back. Please. Got to be a good student, got to work weekends, got to do well on mid-years, college boards, got to be accepted at college ... where are you applying? ... Oh!? Got to. Got to. Got to.

"More MUUUusic on W A B C!"

I was tired. I closed my eyes.

Remember specialize to make money. Versatility can make life a pain in the ass, but less boring perhaps more demanding. Do many things well and you pay for it. Mediocrity is the saviour of us all. I was told one should do something very well. I suppose so.

Sleep, eat, drink, walk, run, learn, play life, then live it. Do you want to play WAR? It can be arranged.

Gradually I couldn't see and as my senses left in procession, I couldn't hear, I couldn't speak, I couldn't touch, I couldn't smell; I was scarcely breathing, yet my eyes rolled in their sockets and my mind was working at a feverish pitch ... I woke up, but I was still tired.

Scott Rollins

AS YET UNTITLED #999999

I am lingering

on the edge of ecstasy.

My thoughts are suspended

and my body is tense with expectations

of the madness that flickers past my eyes.

The scene is set,

The lights wait only

for the hand's motion

that will bring them up to full rapture.

The props are in place,

but the stage is empty.

My lover is away,

My friends are in bed

with one another.

Is there no one to speak to?

No one to add his spark

to the powderkeg in my mind?

I am waiting on the edge ...

On the edge of ecstasy ...

R. Alan Rhodes

PROGRESSION

Faith lights the fire of uncertainty,
The human soul is incapable of such
whole hearted belief,
.....to remain stationary in opinion
requires narrowmindedness as well as
a greater portion of adamancy,
But if faith kindles the fire what
fuel infests this doubt, causing it
to grow larger and larger, until overwhelming,
.....it remains uncertainty
no longer but becomes total and
irrevocable disbelief,

Is it better to not have faith and
be made joyous by a sudden miracle,
whereas if faith possessed the knowledge
of a miracle all along no joy
would be necessary,

Is faith a lasting sentiment or does
it become more saturated and of
less strength with each new intrusion
of the environment?

How can we escape faith when all
along life's prime goal has been a
search for something to believe in,
but why believe when in reality
nothing remains stationary,

.....faith lights the fire of
uncertainty,
Change is its fuel reversing belief
into disbelief.

Rob Papp

love temple

imprinted on his door

scrawled on his dashboard

tattooed on his brow

he seeks a worshipper

who knows how to engrave

as a sideline

Cindy Newsom

tree bloated

from rich rain

hatches moist buds

that sprout lime.

wrinkled infants clinging

suck the heat

from the air

and lick the showered branches.

their raw wings spreading

stretching tender veins

impatient to ripen.

Nancie van Sciver



Ann Brostrup

i walked into the small room and sat down on the coarse blue carpet next to the wall. an unseen power pushed the sliding door shut. there has to be a reason. i think it is locked. i tucked my chin between my knees and waited. i know i have to wait for something to happen. i am trying to erase all thoughts from my mind. i will become a vacuum. if i can do this something will rush in to fill the emptiness. i am waiting. i can feel myself starting to drift. i am vaguely aware of something being wrong. my head feels too heavy. it is pressing hard against my chest. i stood up and tightly grasped the iron rail that runs beside the wall. an invisible power is pushing me downwards. i am unable to fight anymore. i fell onto my knees then face-down onto the carpet. i dug my fingers into the loops in the fabric and hung on tight. i can feel myself moving very fast. i hope i can ride this out. i can hear a sound like the roll of faraway thunder. i think it is right outside the door. i think it is locked. i hope so. i have no way of knowing. the floor is shaking violently beneath me and i am losing my grip on the carpet. i can feel my stomach becoming tight and knotty and my hands are slippery with sweat. i can't hold on any longer. i drew my legs up under me and coiled them into a spring, then shot forward and fell crashing into the opposite corner. i just saw the ceiling. it is coming down onto me. there isn't room to stand up any more. i try to reach up and push it away, but my arms are too heavy to lift. i am panicking. i don't want to wait anymore. i can see numbers flashing at me from the ceiling. i think i saw my phone number. if i scream they might be able to hear me at home. i open my mouth but my throat remains silent. i can't force a sound. i can't even breathe. the ceiling is pressing down on me. i am being crushed. the iron rail has detached from the wall and wrapped

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Bruce

itself around my chest. it has become a snake. i can fight this. i have a knife. i slash at the cold snake around my body. i can cut off its head. i can't find it. i am too tired. i know i am losing. i can't wait anymore. i can't win this one now. but i can stop it

the door slid quietly open. a faint odor of death drifted into the empty hallway. the elevator paused a moment waiting to discharge its passenger. but he had already chosen not to wait anymore. the door slid shut and the elevator started back down to where it had come from.

Bruce Millar



GOD OCEAN

The sea, calm, waving,
Swaying in the spasmodic wind,
And verdant under peeping sun.
Boat, small, swiftly runs his course.
Water, wind and sky; blending; all become one:
Boat becomes one.

The sea lies quiet and still, imperturbable,
While the waves of the water and the wind flow.
The sun is brilliant, making green the sea.
The freely clouds float gently by, inbetween sea and sky.
The sea, air, and sky: all unite in the waving action.
But one.

The Ocean, God Ocean.
Boat, Child of the God Ocean,
Gently rocks in the arms of him.
Boat, willing Child, sees, feels, hears, the calling.
Boat, knowing Child, warms to the understanding.
Sometimes, the sky of Ocean is hot and oppressing,
Or cold and apart,
And Boat makes to cover himself.

Other times, the sky is warm, and attracting,
And Boat is comforted.
Or sometimes, the sea of Ocean is tormented and
unsettled,

And Boat is concerned.

Or at other times, the sea is calm and peaceful,
and Boat is soothed.

Sometimes, the clouds mar his vision,

And he knows not of anything:

But when they all leave, he is all-knowing.

Mostly though, the clouds are apart, and Boat
knows part.

Often Boat follows the tide,
And he does not trouble himself.

Often Boat forces himself against the tide, and
rebels against himself and Ocean.

Many birds fly by him,

But some alight upon him, and one day,

One does not leave.

Each night, Ocean sleeps, and so does Boat.

The sun eases down to the horizon, and the waves
of the sea and air diminish.

It is the time of peace for Ocean and Boat; before
darkness descends

Bringing wild fancy and, on occasion, restless nights,
stemming from

The worthless day.

One day, Boat finds the sunset more peaceful, while

Ocean is contained only in restrained suffering.

And one night, Ocean is heavily grieved,

And in his inner agony,

The sea rages and the wind blows fury;

And Boat is swallowed whole in the sea, sinking to
the depths,

To the bottom.

The bird is left to cope with the wind,

Only to be caught in the sea also,

And to become a part of the sea,

Sometimes touching Boat, who lies heavily on the bottom.

But the sun rises next day, a dim yellow enclosed in
Black clouds.

Ocean lies still.

Adrian Spratt

All withered away

old lady

sitting in a chair

flesh dripping

off where used to be fat

eyes sunken to the

back of the babbling skull

moody murmurs reflect

the failure to relate

waiting

to hear the clip-clop

of his carriage outside

to smooth her dress

and laugh goodbye

and run outside to meet him

and dance till dawn

on an always summer night

with all her teeth.

Dave Miller



Arlene Rizzo

noon

no clouds no shadows

a bird rising in the sun

flaming till it's gone

a wave came crashing

and swept the sand clean again

leaving it for man

a branch of a tree

burdened with the grasp of snow

sighed as it snapped off

a flower wakes-up

lifting its petals skyward

is burned by the sun

a girl stands alone

waiting waiting for someone

suddenly he comes

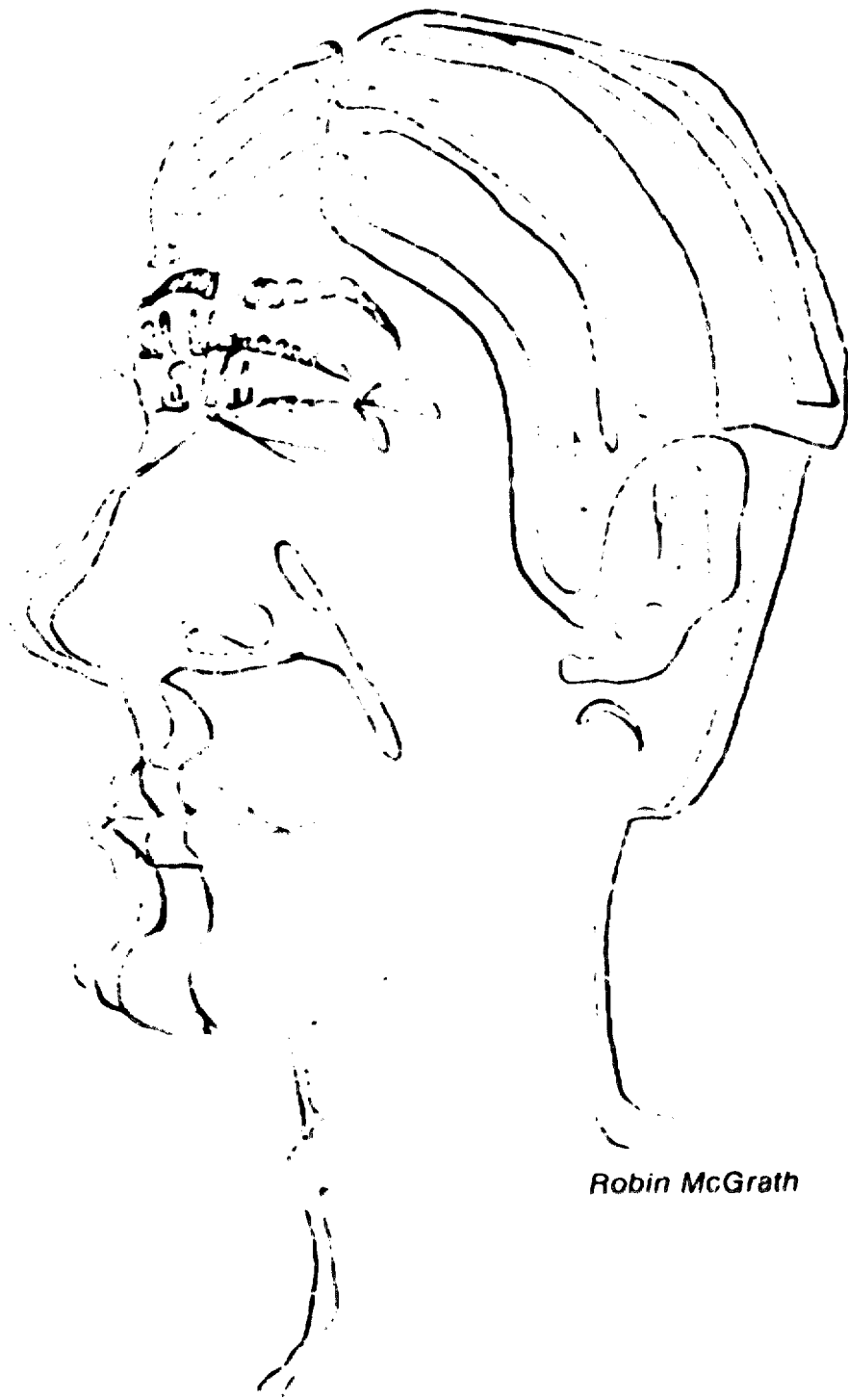
Bill Hamlin

haiku

The blossom sailing
Lazily in the puddle
Suddenly sinks.

The storm, the dragon
Threatens and roars from the sky
At us in gardens.

Debbie Prim



Robin McGrath

AN IN-DEATH STUDY OF AN OLD WOMAN

"Mom?"

The young woman rushed down the hall.

"Mom?" she cried again, hoping to hear something, anything that would pass as a reply. The old floorboards were creaking constantly in an open warning, but she didn't listen. Her hand nearly passed through the rotting panels that covered the walls when she rounded each successive corner in that ancient house, but she ran corner after corner, leaving marks in each floorboard she touched along her path to the sickroom high above her. She hurried the last darkened and dusty hallway and broke into the must of the bedroom she had been looking for.

The old woman, her mother, was lying on her back, enveloped in the victorian surplus of the bed, looking somehow as if she were curled up. The knobby knees lifted the covers out of proportion, and her neck was oddly twisted, her tendons and bulging veins dumping her fatty skin out onto the pillows stacked high around her. Her arms were up around her face, trying to foreclose on the demons surrounding her. They alternately clutched at and tried to push away the blankets and sheets pulled up tight around her neck, strangling her with warmth, or the weight of wasted security.

Insulators can insulate cold, too. When the muscles no longer contract; when the liver is wasting away in the bowels, producing no more heat than the two sticks being rubbed together by the dying arctic explorer who never learned to use them; when the thin blood only pulses slowly through the hardened arteries and veins, more out of eighty long years of habit than any

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present force; when movement comes only rarely, and the energy-filled foods taken intravenously serve only to torture the exhausted intestines into spitting them out, then there is no heat to insulate from the cold, and mountains of the thickest wool will not generate enough warmth to comfort a drowning rat.

The grayish sagging bags under her eyes rustled with terrific effort as her daughter ran into the room in her anxiety. "Prissy?" she called in a sandpapered voice which revealed not so much expression as simply the age of her tired larynx. "Prissy?" she repeated out of her tiny world, "Is that you?"

"Mom! I came as soon as I could. Dr. Simpson said you didn't feel too well again, so I came. Are you okay?"

"Better and worse," was the familiar response coming not from good humor but from habit. Her eyes were rolling around the ceiling, searching for something in the embroidered patterns above her that she could fix on. It was useless, since even the reddish-orange dragons, eternally locked onto each others' tails, which outlined each square of design were nothing but grey blobs to her brain.

"Would you hand me my glasses, Prissy?"

The bare-rimmed glasses would be of no material importance to the wilted flesh in her eyes, but once on, the familiar weight of the steel and glass held a soothing power over the old woman's failing mind.

"Mom, are you feeling any better since Dr. Simpson left? Is there anything I can do for you right now?"

"Oh, yes, much better," she managed to wheeze out between the faint little exclamations of air that denoted her coughs now. "I'm fairly comfortable now, thanks. You could get me some tea... a nice cup of hot tea would fix me up fine right now. Lemon... and no sugar... and lemon... not too strong... the way I like it... you know."

"Okay, I'll do that," Prissy agreed softly. "Will you be all right while I'm downstairs?"

There was no reply, at least none that Prissy could properly interpret. Her mother had gone back to sleep, or lapsed back into that semi-conscious state to which she was always returning. Her eyelids fluttered to a close amidst the masses of excess tissue heaped into the wrinkles around her face. Her breathing was a little less erratic now because the subconscious mechanisms in her brain had learned for eighty long years how to fill and deplete her lungs, so that the thin blood pulsing slowly around them could be renewed and start the journey around familiar arms and legs again.

A shadow of repose seemed to gently ease across the battered old contours, darkening the already oppressive contrasts of the bed and room. The scraping of the rising and falling chest continued to flow from the area around her head, and her rumped figure became a part of the sheets and blankets covering her until nothing could seem more natural than this union of bed and body.

Prissy turned from her and slipped quietly out of the sickroom. The hallway outside was brightened where a little of the life and sunlight of the spring day outside had seeped through the heavy wooden walls. The brass light fixtures reflected a glint of warmth as she walked slowly past them, over the unpolished floor once more and down the two flights of curving stairs which creaked and were echoed by the thin sounding boards in the walls.

Why hadn't Mother chosen a lower room to stay in? For the past twenty years she had slept in the oak room on the first floor which looked out on the flowers in the back garden. She knew Mother couldn't make the trip up and down those stairs even in times of good health, so fragile were the hardened bones and so emaciated were the muscles needed to move them. Whenever she got sick, she always moved her quarters from ground floor to third floor nowadays. Why did she want to break in a new room at her age?

Once in the kitchen, Prissy prepared to make the tea. The utensils were mostly gathering dust now, because for two weeks before Prissy had been told about it, her mother had been up in that lofty room, being fed by neighbors and nurses. She rummaged through the cabinets until she found a half-empty box of old tea bags. They wouldn't make the best cup of tea in the Commonwealth, but the old woman wouldn't be the strictest or hardest to please taster either.

The kettle sat interminably on the gas stove, refusing to boil or even to show hope of boiling by raising a little steam. It sat there, staring at Prissy and crackling where the flames flowed around the lip of the bottom as if the welded joints were shifting to prepare to give out and spill the ever-cold water to douse the flames. But as she looked out the window to the unrepaired

garden and lost her thought in its tangle, the steam rose unnoticed and a shy whistle came from the reluctant pot.

She poured the water slowly into the cups and watched it saturate the brown bags. She got up, looked around for some cookies, found only some old biscuits, and prepared the tray she would have to cart all the way up those two flights of stairs. It wasn't a perfect example of the well-set aristocratic tea set. It was two worn china cups on matching saucers. The section of lemon was the only break in the ornate but colorless designs of the tray.

Prissy never did understand the unusual quality of this old house. Its designers had intended it to be elaborate in every detail, as indeed it was. Every inch of wood trimming, every foot of baseboard around innumerable corners was carved with the indelible imprint of the architect's imagination. But none of this came through to the observer. The net effect of all the tiny etchings and carvings was a cumulative whitewash. Everything fashioned itself in black and white on the mind. There was nothing remarkable about any of the thousands of details. There was nothing to halt Prissy's gaze as she looked ahead to the stair; as she climbed slowly so as not to upset the cups; nothing was distinctive enough to take her eyes off those cups as she climbed higher to the second floor and the third; as she rounded the last corner to the sickroom and saw the twisting body of the old woman throwing up the sheets and covers to try to grab a little more of the air which she could no longer force into her feeble lungs.

The whole bed was writhing with her as her muscles, which had been for so long so slow and so painful to move, now jerked in a few spasms to sway the pivoted bed.

Prissy dropped the tray in a chair with clumsy speed, knocking the china cups off onto the floor. "Mom!"

She knelt at the side of the bed as the old woman was calming into the volumes of insulation around her.

"What's happening...?"

Prissy no longer knew why her mother was acting the way she was, but she knew she couldn't do anything about it. "...Dr. Simpson..." she muttered and ran out of the room, pounding years out of the wooden structure of the house as she reached for the ground floor. She picked up the phone in the drawing room and waited centuries for the town operator to answer.

The old woman heaved in her bed again, and felt her heart stabbing the life out of her chest. The collapsing lungs only provided a thin trickle of the thinner blood for her mouth, which gurgled slightly in place of any sound of speech. The garbled efforts in her throat served to flatten out the mounds of double and triple chin onto the bed around her.

Her eyes were wide open, reaching out into the air for the dragons running front of her—and then came to a close and sealed themselves with the last of her tears. The wool and silk closed themselves around her, insulating the flicker of cold. She became an inanimate part of the bed, in the third story, a little nearer to heaven.

R. Alan Rhodes

Simple Song

Once upon a time I was locked up in jail
they killed my wife and cut off my mail
my house they sold for silver and gold
of this news I was never told
my mother outside a window was singing
while atheist church bells are ringing
on the calendar I strike off another day
I'm glad to be alive in the U.S.A.

Roses and Thorns

someone said love today and I didn't care
they said help and I walked on
someone said please and I said thank you
a friend called out and I was in
someone said I can't see and I was blind
people were walking and I ran by
someone said he's dead and I said
am I?

G. Dolan

Lost

I said that I would leave
and did
or at least tried
For she had left in spirit
sometime ago
Her shell remained
and I conversed with it
for the past two hours
and made love to it on
that wide, wide bed
Later, that shell rose and
with ripe fruit hanging
and silken hair winding
in her nakedness shining
asked that fatal question
and I said that I would leave
and did
or, at least tried

Ron Festa



Lippman

Lippman

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NEXT TO THE EMPTY STYROFOAM CUP OF INSTANT COFFEE

Next to the
empty styrofoam
cup of instant coffee
polluted with a stainless-steel spoon
is a crinkled can of
no-cyclamate Diet-Pepsi
with saccharin and
phosphoric acid,
which has conveniently
placed a ring on the first of
seventeen sterilized mimeo sheets on
the advanced technology of
someone or other
to be read by yesterday,
lying over the garbage heap of an
ash tray which seconds as a
wastebasket filled with
empty sugarless gum wrappers,
nic-filled butts,
a leaking never-leak
Bic pen, and
one dried up
very dead
Pound Ridge picnic flower
found between pages of
some dictionary while looking up
paramagnetism
or something-
flattened there since last fall.

L. Hawes

The Graduation

Simon's long brown curly hair lay tangled on his pillow, while the sunlight caressingly weaved its way forward in hopes to eventually enclose and smother his face with the light and heat of an early day in June. The rest of his body was arranged in a sprawled-out manner which encompassed the bed. A position only acquired when a person is blessed with the innocence of sleep. Although his size was somewhat on the small side, he still had a very masculine build, and his fair skin was slowly turned from pale to brown and would soon turn black.

Although Simon vaguely sensed its existence, the sun suddenly was staring down into his eyes with a mean rudeness of awaking. Slowly, he turned, still enrapt with the joy of sleep and its undisturbing and problem-solving qualities which made him well aware of the fact that he hated to leave this dream-like world. However, he knew he had to get up because as his mother put it, "he had a very big and important day in front of him."

He remembered how she had gone into great detail last night, explaining which relatives were coming, and what was going to be for dinner. Suddenly the thought entered his mind that there was a cousin of his, who with her family, would be coming to see him graduate and would be spending the night. He laughed softly, and wondered whether she might be attractive and what he would do if she was. Well.....maybe, it was possible, after all it was his big night. Yet he dismissed the thought from his head and quickly got up and dressed. This was followed by a bowl of cereal and then his quick exit into a sun-filled day of questions and answers.

II

"Simon! Quick, they're here!" she cried in a horrified and somewhat joyous manner.

Simon thought and realized that the ordeal had just begun and slowly went to the front door to greet his animalistic relatives. They're a bunch of self-centered pigs, he thought, as he smiled and greeted each one as he done hundreds of times before. Then he was introduced to Lucile, one of the cousins whom he had never met before because she lived too far away. However, now she was on vacation from college with her family, which made it possible for them to make it out west, to California. Her family, who lived in the East, decided to send Lucile to Smith. She had the grades and liked having her home on weekends. They were extremely over-protective, yet Lucile did not seem to mind.

She was attractive, Simon thought over and over again in his mind as he was talking with her. He had also readily noticed her well developed figure and that her face, with somewhat high cheek bones and a rounded-off nose, was highlighted by her light blonde hair. Yes, she was definitely good looking, he kept thinking.

III

It was late when Simon climbed the stairs to his room and threw his car keys on the dresser. He was still pleasantly high from the after-graduation party and was slowly undressing when he heard a faint knock at his door. He opened the door and found Lucile standing in her night gown. Yes, he thought she was extremely beautiful as he stood gazing at her. She came in and while he finished undressing he asked no questions, nor did she. As he eased himself into bed next to her, she softly laughed and said that she had come to give him a graduation present.

Suddenly all of Simon's problems—his mother, school, the whole fake town and all the people in it—vanished from his mind, and he was seized with only the pure joy of graduating.

~~Sue Rich~~

Bill Hamlin



Sue Rich

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WHEN SILENCE SPOKE

When the canvas-backs glided over the swamp
and the cattails wavered in the wind
 that pushed the rotting canoe upon the silt
 i thought of you
when without warning the shot echoed
 through the swamp's silence
and the duck cried in horror
 and fell fluttering
 struggling in the water
and all was quiet again
it was then
 i realized
 how quickly something can end.

Lynn Reische