Time to Think

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Time to Think

IT WAS so sudden. The blast of the shotgun and the yelp from Old Mac. Then he was lying there, half sitting up, his back against the wire fence, his chin on his chest.

His eyes stayed open, and he looked straight ahead. There was no sound yet. Just the tall weed stems jerking in the breeze. The dead, yellow foxtail and withered, almost colorless Indian tobacco looming up vividly, crisp and dry. The erratic flight of sparrows, flitting across the blue sky and disappearing in the still gray trees a hundred yards off.

Sound came back. It came with the retriever, as the dog whined and approached, head down and tail beating uncertainly. The dog came to within a few feet away and stopped. It looked at him, then whined, and shifted its feet, as if facing an unseen barrier.

Ray looked at the dog and felt his mouth twitch. Poor Old Mac. Couldn't figure what was wrong with him lying here not moving. He opened his mouth to speak, and only a rasping whisper came out.

The dog backed away, watching the man. Ray lay still, staring at the dog. So sudden. And so crazy. After trying to be so safe, then something like this. He turned his head slowly to the left and looked down the fence row. There it was. The shotgun lay about three feet away from the next fence post, the barrel still pointing in his direction. He should have commanded Mac to sit, once he'd lifted him across the fence. Then Mac wouldn't have pawed the gun and it wouldn't have fired.

The dog whined louder. Its tongue flicked out and it
crept closer as Ray turned his head toward the front again. Ray blinked. Funny. He'd never noticed before when his eyes blinked. It must have been the first time since the accident.

The dog minced around him in a semicircle, searching the air with his nose.

Ray grunted, and the sound came out as a clipped moan. The dog danced away, then looked at him quizzically, head tilted to one side. Fool dog. He ought to know by now what a critter acts like when it's shot. He'd retrieved enough wounded game.

The dog trotted in a semicircle again watching from the corner of his eye, then turned his attention to the shotgun. Ray watched, fascinated. Old Mac didn't touch the gun. Must have been jarred when it went off. That would teach the old mutt to chew and lick guns.

The dog sniffed the shotgun, then trotted off a ways and looked back at Ray. Then it looked intently toward the farmstead and lowered its head to the ground and started sniffing, trotting in a zig-zag pattern.

Ray looked across the field, barren and dark gray. Good thing most of the fall plowing was done. Not long until Thanksgiving and the first freeze. The gray haze of trees around the buildings made the white barn and cribs almost glow in the fading daylight. The trees hid the house.

The sound of a car horn drifted across the field, and the traffic on the highway a half mile in front of him caught his attention. He could list the makes of the cars as they went by. At one point on the road the sun flashed in the car windows.

Must be the sun was setting, if it caught the car windows. About chore time. The cars sped by in a continuous stream. Strange how close they were, yet so far away. Each driver watching the road ahead, debating on whether or not to pass. Maybe turning on the car radio.

He tried to pull himself up, but there was no strength. He looked down the length of his body, his chin still resting on his chest. There it was. That tattered rough area on the right side of his coat. The blast must have twisted him
clear around and dropped him facing the opposite direction. So close. Another second, and he would have been off the fence and out of the shotgun blast. It would be interesting to hear the neighbors argue on how it must have happened.

He looked for Mac. The dog was gone, either home or to look for game in the woods out of sight. All the talk about man's best friend—sticking with his master. Ray smiled faintly. That might be the answer. Little Conrad was the dog's real master when you came down to it. There was no reason for Mac to stay with the "old man" when there might be fun with Con.

A gust of wind sent a chill through him, and the fabric of his coat felt rough on his chin. The sun was sinking behind the trees. It would be dark soon. Someone had better find him before they'd need lights.

The air suddenly got colder, and the dampness of the ground crept through the lower part of his body. He looked at the gunshot wound. It was kind of lucky that the nerves were destroyed. No feeling of pain or cold, even with the wetness of the blood. The stain hadn't spread far. The coat and denim trousers had absorbed the blood, and little of it actually showed.

He began to stare at the farmstead a half mile away.

An icy finger touched his chest. Surely someone would come. Anne would know something was wrong and would send the boys or neighbors out to look for him. Old Mac would be home by now.

The light faded and it became difficult to pick out the silhouettes of the buildings. Someone would surely come. He tried to move again, but his limbs wouldn't obey. The gun. If he could only reach the gun. What was it? Three shots in a row; the signal for help. That's all it would take.

Then the laughter welled up inside him. So ridiculous. So stupid. The whole thing was absurd. The very farm he grew up on and farmed the last 20 years. The house waiting there only a half mile away. The highway and traffic; the fences he'd built and repaired; the field he'd just plowed. Old Mac. 

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Art Section

In our effort to bring to the reader a sampling of campus art, we, in our Winter Quarter magazine, are presenting a progression of artistic ideas. On the first page there is a collage representing simple spacial design. Using a ink wash on rice paper, the next entry is an experiment in technique as well as idea. A water color is found on the third page utilizing line design and water color. The idea is a bit more complex as the picture sets a definite mood. In the last picture the reader sees an abstraction in idea and form utilizing mythological symbology mapped against a simple subject.
It would be embarrassing to remember how he lay here on his own place with all the normal activities going on around him. Yet he was so completely away from it all. He was shaking silently, but then stopped laughing as suddenly as he had started. His teeth began to chatter until his face drew tight across the cheekbones.

The barnyard light went on, and the sound of the dinner bell drifted over the field. Anne thought he was late as usual. Damn, why hadn't he been on time when he'd hunted before? Then she'd know something was wrong now. She must know something was wrong. It was after dark. She had to know by now. Soon someone would be coming toward him with a flashlight and they'd have him in bed with a doctor beside him.

A light went on in the barn, and the faint voice of a boy barely sounded. Ray felt his chin drop lower on his chest.

What the blazes! Anne was having Conrad do the milking. She ought to be sending the boy out to look for him. Fool woman. She had to know something was wrong.

Ah. Old Mac and Con were coming toward him. No. No, they were heading for the cow pasture gate. That damned dog! Why didn't he bark or something and lead Con to where he was lying? The boy's voice faded in and out again. The cowboy ballad on the phonograph record. He was within shouting distance. If he could only shout. Just one shout. Just once. He opened his mouth—or wanted to. It didn't open. The cold held it closed as if it were tied shut.

By following sounds, he knew Con rounded up the cows and shut them in the barn. So weak now. So helpless.

Something rustled in the weeds, then padded softly in front of him. It stopped, sniffed audibly, then moved on, unhurried. Probably a fox. Ignoring the object that just lay there in the weeds by the fencerow.

He felt the soundless moan, and his eyes smeared as it racked through him. Anne. Anne. For god's sake, come. It can't all end like this. Not like this. All you've got to do is find me. Find me—now.

The chill changed into the same numb nothingness he felt before getting cold. Only now it drugged his thoughts.
until there were none. Then there were just his eyes, watching the lights grow dim and sensing the sounds of traffic and night fade into nothingness, until the eyes lost their luster.

The fox’s mate passed. She stopped to note the smell of death, then trotted on, intent on the night’s hunt.

Arthur Hill, Eng. Sr.

Projection

"MY, MY, another day," sighed Mr. Allison as he contemplated himself in the bathroom mirror. "Hmm. Whiskers haven’t grown much. They haven’t been growing as much as usual for the past few weeks. Hardly need to shave some mornings. Maybe I’m getting old. Gonna be 68 this year. My, my. He reached in the cabinet for his razor and a tiny black blur darted around the toothpaste tube. Involuntarily he jerked. Grabbing a kleenex, he snatched up the bug and studied the writhing thing between his fingers. A filthy cockroach crawling over his things! How he hated it. His stomach tightened as he crunched it between his fingers and flung the thing into the waste basket. There. He smiled; satisfied. Though he hardly seemed capable of hating anything, bugs were the one and probably only thing in the world he hated. He had spent his life studying bugs—and hating them.

If only he could destroy every living bug. Wipe the hideous crawling things from the face of the earth. His hand shook as it clenched white around the razor. "Urn-ouch! Bless you, razor. Wonder why my skin has been getting so dry and hard? Must be the cold weather."

Mr. Allison’s pudgy, round face was usually nice and soft—and slightly pink.

Ahh, yes. Time for breakfast. Martha had the coffee perking. He rubbed his plump belly absently and his hand