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No Harpoons, Unless . . .

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No Harpoons, Unless . . .

'Twas a question for a barefoot boy:
Was it better to walk that
half-mile
to the mail box
(down by the country school)
on the warm, dusty road --
or in the grassy ditch?

In spite of thorny
prairie roses
and a few thistles,
the ditch held fascination.
There were, for instance,
several secret spots
of blue-eyed grass
only a very few special
people would ever see.
There were "Butter'n Eggs"
to brighten patches
here and there.
Later in the season, HARPOONS!

That graceful grass stood out
from other prairie partners.
It bowed its shining sheaths,
inviting me to gather
a handful
of brown harpoons for
practicing my skill at
playfully spearing my
unsuspecting friends.

The seeds slipped easily
from the glistening sheaths.
The incredible "tail" fastened to
the brown, barbed, and pointed
seed
made a perfectly balanced
harpoon
that would stick tightly
to cloth of
shirt or
jacket or
overalls.

Sometimes the "tails" were
twisted,
and not good for throwing.
Grown ups liked them better
that way.
They said the tail was a good
indicator
of humidity when it
twisted up into a corkscrew.
They also said that the
twisting,
and the very pointed seed,
enabled the harpoons
to spiral
their way into the loose soil
of gopher mounds.

How I wish I could walk
that ditch again,
and look closely at all
the kinds of grasses and
prairie flowers that
flourished then.

They're gone now.
There are no barefoot boys
to marvel at harpoons; no
boys or girls who share
blue-eyed grass secrets.

When I'm gone, even the
memories
of those prairie-filled ditches
will have vanished.

The mystery of prairie plants
whose varied numbers
grew
in synchronous harmony,
will never be
talked about --
much less
lived with
and loved.

Unless . . .

--Arnold H. Webster