Contrast

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am going to pay him back.”

She stood up and fiddled with the fastenings of her gown. It slid to the ground. The rest soon followed.

When we had finished and were dressed again, I realized that I still didn’t know who she was. Then she began to cry softly.

“This is the first time I have committed adultery, Mr. Bernhardt. May I please have a cigarette?”

“Of course.” At last I’d find out who she was. I lit her cigarette. Well I’ll be damned, Mary Conant.

She inhaled deeply and between sobs asked, “Now what have you to say for yourself, Mr. Bernhardt?”

I lit my own cigarette. As the lighter illuminated my face, her features registered shock.

“All I’ve got to say for myself is that my name is Swenson, not Bernhardt and what’s more I’m a bachelor. But please don’t think that I don’t appreciate what you’ve done for me.”

I left her there crying bitterly and went back into the party. I had to find Lillie Bernhardt. I’d been having an affair with her myself for almost a year and just now I find out about Bill Conant. What timing on Lillie’s part! He must have been going just as I was coming. I don’t mind being one side of a triangle, but being the fourth side of a square makes things a little too complicated for my taste.

CONTRAST

The whitecap crests spit bubbling foam.
Squalls thrust the sloop. The air is full
Of wind-whipped, prickly, salty spray.
The ocean swells to meet the hull,

And gulls swoop, screeching, as the flaws
Impel them sideways, off their course.
And lashing rope, and thrashing sail
Reveal the violence of its force.

Wind turns to breeze; then breeze is stilled.
The orange sunset falls below
A smooth horizon. Mirrored, are
Dusk-softened clouds and liquid glow.

And silent sails lie slack, and there
Is not a fall and not a rise
Of quiet sea. The boat submits
Its static sculpture to the skies.

Joan S. Popke