

Thunder Snow

by Gary V. Powell

Slipped out at halftime, planning to return before the end of the game, no one's parents the wiser. Rode in Mike's dad's Impala out County Road 30 past Detweiler's farm, turned off at the lane, and followed it to where the cornfield ended and the trees began—the corn long picked, the remaining stalks thrusting jagged through soil softened by a late January thaw.

Up front, Tracy's best friend Suze had her tongue in Mike's ear and her hand on his thigh. Tracy figured Dennis wanted the same or more from her. Mike's buddy who needed a date—she hardly knew Dennis outside of Chemistry class.

He'd pawed her all night.

Mike cut the engine and Suze unzipped his pants. Dennis crushed Tracy against the passenger-side door, his breath a pillow across her face. When she tried to wriggle free, something hard stabbed her in the kidneys. Dennis said, "Where you goin?"

All day, she'd snuggled into the embrace of a false spring, the air prematurely warm and soft. But, now, fallen leaves borne on a sudden gust of wind skittered across the Impala's hood. Grit scatter-gunned the windshield. A farm girl raised on fresh eggs and weather forecasts, Tracy knew—a cold front moving in, hard and fast off the big lake.

Dennis worked inside her sweater, fingers like icicles. He managed a knee between her legs and wedged a hand down her jeans, poking and prodding like a man searching for a quarter lost under the seat. An old song "American Pie," played on the radio, but Tracy didn't get that song anymore than she got what Suze saw in Mike or Dennis in her.

Thunder drum-rolled through and around the car and grabbed her by the throat. The lightning flash that followed illuminated Dennis's face. Not the Dennis always clowning in class or the Dennis throwing popcorn from the high-rise bleachers, but a scared-shitless Dennis.

He retreated to the other side of the seat and curled up against the door. Thunder crashed again, and in the next lightning flash great chunks of snow blew wild—thunder snow.

Mike groaned loud enough to be heard over that stupid song. Suze giggled and wiped her hand on the car seat.

Tracy eyed Dennis, balled up and trembling, head in his hands. "What's wrong?" "Thunder. It scares the hell out of me."

"You're kidding, right?"

"No. I can't help it."

She scooted next to him. "Really?"

"I hate it."

She lifted his chin and stared into his eyes, his fear igniting a surge of confidence.

"I love it," she said with a fierceness that surprised her.

A blast of wind rocked the car and she forced herself onto his lap

"Don't. Get off of me," Dennis said.

But Tracy didn't. Instead, she mashed her breasts into his face. "What's wrong? I thought you liked my boobs."

"Stop. You're smothering me."

She laughed before nipping his ear. "Thunder snow," she hissed. "Thunder snow, thunder snow, thunder snow."

