

# Abyss

by David James

When Lois finally found him down there, Johnny was wedged between a large rock and the trunk of an old, long since fallen, cottonwood tree. She said as she got to him, she heard his gurgling breath, fighting fiercely to stay alive. When she saw the deep, gathering, red stains on his T-shirt she knew he wasn't going to make it.

School was out for the summer in Prairie View and each afternoon after their ranching chores were done she and Johnny would meet right at the cusp of the steep-edged side of the canyon that the locals called the “Abyss” and kiss until they were dizzy and drunk on each other. They were each fifteen. They just kissed.

We asked her not to gloss over what happened. Lois said OK, but her eyes moistened, as she told us. She said one of those freak, powerful prairie storms blew in, bringing with it a whipping wind so strong it caused the torrential rain to blow the raindrops so hard they stung like hornets. She said they were stranded, but Johnny yelled he had been through a storm like this before and he knew that things could get much worse because with no trees around they were sitting ducks for the creepy lightning strikes that were crackling all around them. Yelling to be heard over the thunder and lightning, he told her there was no time to waste, that when one of these things blows in the trick this was to seek cover down below the rim of the canyon, lower than the ground they were on.

She said Johnny kissed her cheek, gave her a light fist bump and told her to stay down, that he would ease down, over the rim, and check to see if that little ledge they saw just below was safe enough for both of them. It was muddy and he just slipped.

