

Cornfield

by Michelle Elvy

When a story begins with a blowjob in the back seat of a stolen car, you can bet how it will end. There will be a high-speed chase scene, profanity, cops, *those fuckers*, trying to fuck things up, and a broken heart, or at least one sore dick. But this is not that kind of story. This is a story not about the stolen car or the guy driving it or the boyfriend of the girl in the backseat, or the boy who gets the blowjob (who's not the boyfriend). This story's more about the boy sitting in the backseat who merely unlocked the car so his friends could speed away on a joy ride. This is the story about the boy who's not even sure why he's there. This is the story about the boy who goes along for the ride and sits in the back seat while one friend drives like a maniac and the other sits with feet on the dash and lights up a joint and the third eventually ends up with that blowjob, when the boyfriend of the girl, the one in the front seat, is too stoned to care. This is the story of the boy who sits in the car racing down the highway who dreams regularly of something so far away and so incongruous and farfetched he's never mentioned it.

This is not a story you expect to end at Cape Horn.

* * *

Only Stevie knows how to break into a car in record time. It's not that hard — you just need patience to maneuver the Slim Jim right, especially in the stone-grey pre-dawn of a winter morning. Anyone can do it, really. Except Stevie's friends, who stand off to the side and jabber about the cold.

“Shut the fuck up, guys!”

“Yeah, let the master work!” Lucky's a real card.

Stevie shoots Lucky a look. “Dick.”

Lucky replies with the best — and, if you're Lucky, *only* -- comeback for *Dick*: “Pussy.”

Stevie ends the conversation: *Click*.

“Who's calling my boy a pussy now?” says Manny as he pushes past Stevie and hops in the driver's seat. At seventeen, Manny is all bravado and bulging biceps, and imagines himself the leader of this unlikely group of bandits. Manny always drives.

The others climb in and are soon heading down Route 2, rolling through the old tobacco country of South County. They stop by Ellie's and she nestles into the back seat between Rick and Stevie.

Corn and sorghum speed by. Lucky rolls a joint and passes it back to Rick, hand over head, and they take turns toking, front to back to front again. Twenty minutes later Lucky's passed out and Manny drives faster while Stevie squishes himself into his own backseat corner and sees Ellie reach her hand down Rick's pants.

“Seriously, Manny, where're we goin'?” says Rick while Lucky's girl gets busy in his pants.

Just then, blue and red lights come flashing from behind.

“Hang on,” says Manny, and veers off down a side road, throwing everyone right. Ellie squeals and flops into Rick, but when the car straightens she doesn't come up for air.

Stevie is now struggling to keep his eyes forward. He's used to all the fuck-ups but he feels sick now, either from the swerving or the idea of Rick getting blown at 9am in the seat beside him. He rolls his window down and leans his head out into the freezing wind. His ears feel like they'll fall off. Lucky's sound asleep up front, and next to him they aren't even trying to be quiet anymore: Rick's making little sobbing noises and Ellie's head's bobbing exuberantly.

Even worse, Stevie's about to look despite his best intentions.

But he's saved from his own depravity when the car lurches hard to the right and the next thing he knows he's airborne, tossed like a ragdoll and soaring across acres of a desolate winter cornfield.

* * *

The dreams are always like this. He's lifted on a blanket of warmth, cushioned on cotton candy clouds while Great Grandpa Gus riots along in heavy seas below. Stevie reaches out a hand to grab the whaling ship's rigging but as he extends his arm the canvas tears with a screeching sound and he watches helplessly as first the

topsail flutters away and then the ship turns inside out, halyards howling and rigging wrenching angrily from the decks and flying up with the sails. The great heavy hull is the last to go -- lifted from the dark ocean and rising up, up, up, set twirling in the tornado-black air. Stevie tries to call for Great Grandpa Gus but panic rises in his gut because his voice won't reach from southern Anne Arundel County to Cape Horn where a great sailing ship is tearing apart at the seams nearly a century before.

The world slows and both ship and clouds disappear and all that is left is the cornfield now rising in a dizzy blur upward toward him. In one instant Stevie sees fire off to the side and he may even hear music — *Nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky* — underneath the screeching tires and burning rubber and crunching metal. But he's not sure because he closes his eyes, only for a moment, and things go black.

* * *

When Stevie wakes in the hospital two days later and his father says, "Where've you been, son?" and his mother covers him in kisses saying "My darling child!" his mind first flashes to Manny and Lucky and Rick and Ellie and then he reaches once more for Gus. He tries to recall the cornfield over Maryland -- or was it Kansas? -- and he wants to say something about dust or wind but instead he replies, "Cape Horn".

