

## Windows

Pam and Marty sat on the couch facing the big south window and watched clouds pile densely above the mountain across the valley. Lightning flashed down into the dark rock of the mountain. Clouds, hard rain, and lightning rolled down the east face of the mountain and invaded the valley. Even inside the well-insulated house, they heard thunder roll and echo across the broad valley. Pam got up and walked toward the kitchen. Marty said, "Get me another beer while you're out there, Pam."

His words stopped her in mid-stride. She turned half-around toward him, but then she turned back and walked out of the room.

Grass and shrubs around the house bent in the wind. Trees across the river leaned away from the mountain. Four ducks flew up from the river, labored into the wind, then banked, turned, and flew with the wind down the valley. Fast, dark forms disappeared into dusk.

Pam walked back into the room and put a beer down on the coffee table in front of Marty. He picked it up and started to drink, then realized she hadn't opened it. He fumbled with it and said, "Don't turn the light on, Pam. I want to watch this storm." He looked to his right. She sat on the opposite end of the couch.

Marty said, "Why watch t.v. on a night like this, when we can watch this storm coming at us? It's a good thing I put lightning rods on this house when we built it. God, look at it out there. There must be about ten lightning bolts a second, sometimes. I give it, oh, maybe about ten minutes before the storm hits us, the way it's moving. Time it from now and see if I'm right."

The storm marched across the valley toward them, dark as dark rain tore away from the clouds and drove down into the earth. "God, Pam, isn't it magnificent? Just look at all that power. Can you even begin to imagine how many millions of volts of electricity that storm is generating? God, we're puny and insignificant compared to Mother Nature. It's just awe inspiring. Can you, just for one minute imagine being out in a storm like

that, even for a minute?

“My God, Pam, there is someone out there. Look. Can you believe that? There is someone running down by the river. Whoever it is must be crazy. He’s dancing or doing something crazy down there. Pam. Pam, what in hell?” He turned to look, and she wasn’t there on the couch with him anymore.

Maybe she went upstairs. You heard the thunder really loud up there, even with a well-insulated roof. He thought he should look for her, but he couldn’t stand to be up there when the storm was right on the house. Thunder exploded completely through him, until he had no being left. He couldn’t bear that total explosion and scattering loss of self. She’d be all right. She’d been funny lately. Maybe she needed some time alone.

He watched the storm through the double-pane glass. He didn’t see anyone down by the river anymore. Maybe he had imagined that. Some of the willows blowing in the wind and lighted up by the strange, dancing blue light of the lightning, and several beers and his imagination going wild, and he didn’t feel so enthusiastic anymore. He needed someone to talk to.

Maybe he should look for Pam. Maybe she was in the den. “Pam. Pam. For Christ’s sake, Pam. How could you leave the window when there’s a storm like this to watch? God, look at what you’re missing. Power. Magnificent. Awesome, Pam. Really awesome. If I ever had a doubt about whether I did the right thing building this house here, when I see a storm like this coming down the mountain, that doubt is gone.”

He didn’t like being alone in this large room with the big window showing him the storm. He wanted Pam to be with him. She shouldn’t miss this storm. “Pam, what in hell has gotten into you? What is going on? Where are you?”

The vacuum around him echoed her responses from earlier conversations, when what she said didn’t register, when he didn’t really hear what she was saying. “You didn’t build this house, Marty. You paid other men to build it.”

“Same thing, Pam. That’s what people say. They contract to have a house built, and they say they built it. I planned most of it. They built it the

way I wanted it. I earned the money to pay to have it built. Pam, where the hell are you?" He walked over and shouted up the stairs. "Pam. Pam. Come down. Where the hell are you?"

"The Hales have lived for sixty years up the valley with no lightning rods on their house."

"They're crazier than I am, that's for sure. Did you get yourself a beer when you got mine?"

"Marty, I haven't had a beer in over three months."

Lightning cast brilliant light through all the windows. Thunder roared and shook the house. Marty stumbled into the kitchen.

"Pam, where in hell are you?" He drank a shot of whiskey and cooled the burn from it in his throat with a rapid beer. He could turn all the lights on and draw the shades. But it was scarier yet when he couldn't see the storm to know what it was doing. He had to see it.

Scary? He'd never been scared of a storm, of a storm falling off the mountain into the valley like eagles in a predatory dive toward the deep grass in the valley, toward the house in the valley. He wasn't afraid.

What had Pam said? "Let's go up on the mountain, Marty."

"I'm happy enough sitting here and looking at it. That's why I built this house right here. To look at the mountains."

"Let's walk in the storm, Marty."

"Let's stay inside where it's warm and dry and lightning never strikes and watch the storm."

"Marty, why don't you taper off on the beer a little?"

"Pam, if you're going to the kitchen, would you bring me back another beer?"

"Marty, why don't you get off your butt and get your own damned beer?"

"God, Pam, look at the lightning. Listen to that thunder. It rattles my bones. What did you say about the beer? Are we out of beer?"

"No, Marty. We're never out of beer. I didn't say anything about beer that you'll be able to hear until morning, and in the morning, you'll be too hung-over to hear me, and then you'll be too wrapped up in your job that pays for the house that looks at the mountain."

“God, Pam, look at the way that wind bends the trees down. I’d hate to be out in that wind and rain. It would blow you right off your feet.”

Another whiskey and two more beers, and he didn’t care anymore what Pam was doing. He wasn’t afraid anymore. Lightning and thunder blew east. Hard rain blew against the house in powerful wind.

In the morning, he didn’t remember the conversations he had begun to remember. His head hurt, and he felt uneasy. He didn’t know why he felt uneasy. Maybe because he had a hangover. It didn’t really feel like that. He wanted to talk to Pam. He phoned in and said he wouldn’t be coming to work, and he slept again.

He got up about ten and walked into the kitchen. Rain poured down from the dark sky.

Pam stood at the counter and looked out the window. She’d been out in the rain. Her hair hung wet down her back, and her wet clothes clung to her. Windows stood open. Rain blew in. Marty shivered in the cold wind.

Four ducks flew up from the river, labored into wind and rose toward dark clouds, banked and turned, then flew rapidly with wind down the valley.

Fifteen geese flew down the valley in wind, calling. Their wild voices sounded high in the sky, then blew away in wind. Wind blew through the house. Marty heard rain and geese and wind. Wind filled the house with the smell of rain.

He said, “God, Pam, think of the geese and all the animals out there in the storm, cold and wet, without shelter.”

She turned and looked at him. He was so startled by her eyes, he stepped backward. In her eyes, he saw the mountain with the storm walking down into the valley, lightning and wind and rain pouring down wind; lightning striking down into the valley, ducks and geese flying in wind.

She said, “They love it. Don’t you know that? They aren’t cold and miserable. Don’t you hear what the geese say to each other? They love the wind and the rain and the storm. Listen to what they’re saying.”

“Pam. What happened? Where were you? Pam? Pamela?”