

Fiction

Spring Snow

by Tom Bentley

Snow fell in large, floating flakes. The sun broke through for a moment, then gray clouds returned.

Jim, my husband, was restless, getting up, poking around in the woodstove, going to the window, back to the sofa. A long, quiet Sunday afternoon at the end of a long winter. I was trying to read, but I was getting bored with that, too. I put my book down and looked across the sofa at Jim. He stretched out his legs and looked at me. We just sat like that a while.

"You know what this weather reminds me of?" he asked. "When I was a kid in college. You know what they call this snow?"

I shrugged, sipping from my wine.

"The Shropshire snow," he said. "This is what they call the Shropshire snow. The old farmers. It's the next to last snowfall of the year."

"How do they know that?" I asked. "How can they tell it's the second-to-last, or even the last? How can they tell that?"

"They just can. Those old Vermont farmers, they know what's up."

I wasn't sure if he was serious or not. He might be making this up; I could never be sure. Half the times when he's make

things up they'd turn out to be right anyway. He's a good lawyer.

He stood up, sauntered to the window, and pulled back the curtains. "Look at the flakes," he said. "How big they are, big and round and fluffy." The snowflakes floated down past the window, rank after rank, one after the other after the other. They were big enough so you could watch each one fall, follow it from up in the sky where it would appear out of the gray, watch it come down all the way to the ground.

"I've been thinking about when I was a kid," Jim said. He went over to the woodstove, swung open the door, put on the big, leather glove, and poked around inside. "This was when I was in college. I was living on campus, but I'd come home on weekends to work. This was before my Dad stopped talking to me. I'd work for him in the shop on weekends. I was playing it very low-key then. I couldn't let them know what was going on. You want more wine?"

I said sure, and he went out into the kitchen to pour another glass for each of us. I was, what - trepidation - I was trepidous about what was coming next. Jim doesn't talk much about that part of his life. Some things he doesn't want to say. Some things I don't want to hear.

I looked out the window. The snow around us had stopped, and the lace of detail of trees and fence posts snapped into focus against the light white blanket on the ground.

Jim came back into the room with the wine. He handed me my glass, then stood by the window. We watched the snow clouds moving across the tops of

the mountains.

"So anyway," he started in again, "it was about this time of year; I remember it was a late Easter, so it must have been the middle of April, and these people came up from downstate, Long Island probably. They were building a summer house, and they were talking to Dad about doing the building. Well, they had a son, and they wanted to find something for him to do while he was up here, so Dad volunteered my services. I was elected to entertain the kid. Seems he was a couple of years younger than me, so the idea was I'd arrange a date for him, and we'd go do something innocuous together.

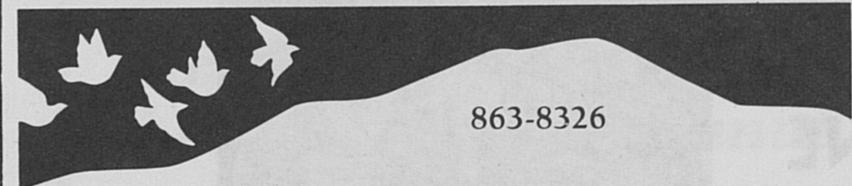
"So I called up Evan, this guy I'd known in high school - he was really straight - and he called his girl, who knew someone else, and I called this girl named Kathy I used to know, so now it's a triple date. We don't want to go to a movie or anything like that, so we decide we'd really show the kid a real Vermont image; we're going to have a sugaring-off party.

"Evening rolls around, and I went to pick the kid up at the hotel they were staying at. He comes out, and he sort of knocks my socks off. A good-looking kid. Excuse me, but he was my type. You know what I mean?"

I knew what he meant. "He was a blonde." It's a wise wife who knows her own husband.

"Yeah, and to top it off, his name was David. I'm a real sucker for that name David. Now I start to feel like I'm likely to get into some trouble here. I've got to watch myself real carefully.

"Well, we get Kathy and this other girl - I forget her name - and we go over to Evan's place, and then we all get into Evan's
(continued on next page)



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