

# **THE THUNDERSTORM**

**by**

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## THE THUNDERSTORM

That? Hell, that's just an itty-bitty storm way over by Ambleigh. 'Taint nothing like the storms we get here. Don't know *why* we get 'em. Something to do with the moors out back, mebbe. Why, half the village has *soundproofed* their roofs, never mind insulated 'em!

Mind, the storm they all talk about happened twenty year ago, and the funny thing was, it only had one flash of lightning, and one blast of thunder. Pretty tame, as storms go hereabouts. Want to hear about it? Yeah? Lemme fetch a pot of coffee to keep us going.

Right. So twenty years ago a summer storm brewed itself up, but there's some things you gotta know about happened before that. First off, old Mrs Brewster bought herself a cat, 'gainst everybody's advice. She lived on her own - had done for years, got lonely I suppose and that's why she wanted a pet - but everyone said a pet would be far too difficult for her to manage. Especially a cat when you never knew where the blamed thing would turn up next. Anyhow, she gets one, just a coupla days before this storm I was telling you about.

She lived next to the Simpsons, Mr and Mrs, and their daughter Amy who was just twenty that year. Whee-hoo! What she did look like! Blonde hair and blue eyes and the sweetest smile you could imagine - *and* she went in and came out in all the right places! Know what I mean? Not that she seemed to know, or care. She had a pet too - a horse kept out back of her parent's bungalow, and she spent all her time riding and cleaning the thing.

Anyway, she's on her own at this time I'm telling you about. Mum and Dad off to Spain or some such place for a coupla weeks, leaving her to fend for herself. She's there looking after her horse, and over the hedge next door Mrs Brewster's getting to know her cat. And the weather's gettin' hotter and hotter, and so are all the guys in the village for wondering who young Amy might finally settle on.

What else? Oh yeah, there was a guy in an old-fashioned Ford - a student, on holiday. He was driving down towards the coast, and he aimed to go right through the village. Wasn't

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planning to stop, though. Why bother? It ain't exactly night-club city now and it sure wasn't then, either.

More coffee? You got it.

So. It was one of them hot, sticky days. You know, time seemed to string itself out, which was just as well because everything seemed to take longer anyway. A plane buzzed - no, *droned* overhead, and took a whole day to get from one horizon to the other. Know what I mean? It left this white trail on the blue sky, and that took another day to thin out and disappear. Nobody did anythin' much. Only Amy mucked out her horse and made a huge pile of manure ready for her parents to spread on the garden when they got back from Spain.

Spain! I bet it wasn't any hotter in Spain *that* week, anyhow!

Late on it started to get real heavy and close. All the old locals sort of tapped their noses and said - *aye, there's a storm coming, right enough*. The student guy must of been driving straight into the sun, and must of seen it get blotted out by the storm building up. That's how they always come, great huge black thunder-clouds a-piling up until you think they're gonna fall smack on the village and swaller it up. And they do, by God! Or it seems like it when they reach over and turn day into night, and the winds lash rain up into places where rain never oughtta go, and you can't see more than a coupla feet away, 'cept when the lightning jags light up the world.

Getting ahead of myself here. The cloud was coming, but it hadn't arrived yet. The sun was still shining but - you know how it is? - it didn't seem to be *doing* much. It was like it could see what was coming and turned away so it didn't have to watch. Young Amy packed in and went inside to have a bath. But Mrs Brewster chose that time of all times to let her danged cat out of the house for the first time!

Well. Everybody said she should never of had a cat, and this just about proved it. Of course as soon as the cat felt the electricity in the air - and maybe it saw this damned black cloud coming up, who knows what cats see? - it decided that it didn't like it and wanted back inside. Only Mrs Brewster had shut the door. So it promptly scooted up the wall of the house

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where there was ivy growing, looking for a way back in. And when it couldn't find one, it sat on the top of a drainpipe gutter and just about mewled its head off.

I found out about all this afterwards, o' course. Mrs Brewster mightta been old, but she wasn't deaf, and she heard that mewling all right. Out she went and tried to call the fool creature down. It was darker by now, and a wind was prowlin' through the trees. Maybe it was that or maybe it was just cussedness, but the cat wouldn't move. It just stayed right were it was. Can you see it? This old lady standing out under what looks like the granddaddy of all storms as it builds up, and a cat clinging to the top of a drainpipe all ready to be blasted off into oblivion once the storm really got going. Yeah?

Well, you might not believe it, but Mrs Brewster opens her garage, drags out a ladder and manages to prop it up. The cat still doesn't come down, so Mrs Brewster starts climbing right up! You gotta hand it to her. Not many old ladies would of had the strength to do that, never mind the nerve. Up she goes, one step at a time, dot and carry, until she reaches where the cat's still squallin' away.

Can't remember it's name, after all this time. Pity. I owe that cat plenty.

By the time she gets there, the storm's piled up all over the village and it's almost like night. Lights come on up and down the street. A car starts nosing in from the moors. Heavy splats of rain start coming down, making the ladder slick an' slippy. I reckon Mrs Brewster must of got nervous then, whatever she said afterwards. She reached out for the cat with one arm and then.....

Well, then it all happened! Lightning smashed down in the centre of the village, right in the middle of the children's playpark, in their sand-pit! We figured that out next day when we went to look - the pit was there all right, but twice as deep as before and no sand in it. Anyway, as you might expect the cat spooked and took off, over Mrs Brewster's arm, over her shoulder, and down the ladder - so quick you might've been able to see it while the lightning still split the sky. It was okay, by the way. We found it later in the garage.

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Mrs Brewster? Well, she *wasn't* okay! She sort of lunged after the cat, only because it went over her shoulder she lunged backwards and outwards and the ladder went with her. Over she went - over the driveway at about twice your height, headfirst into the storm and darkness! I wonder what she was thinking? I wonder whether she was cussing the day she bought the cat, or wishing she had never gone up the ladder, or thinking about the shopping she was going to do the next day only now it looked like she wasn't gonna get the chance. She never told us. She went hurtling through the storm, over the hedge, and plumb into the horse manure which Amy had piled up that very afternoon. Sort of lucky, eh? She was okay after that, 'cept no-one went near her for a week.

That left the ladder. It bounced off the hedge and somersaulted over Mrs Brewster, into the road, just as the student was driving past. It landed on his bonnet and shattered the windscreen. I guess he'd never been taught how to deal with that! I mean, it was dark and wet, with the windscreen wipers going away like the blades, and then all of a sudden there's this almighty *thunk!* and the wipers ain't there any more and nor is most of the windscreen. He gave a terrific yell which was drowned out as the thunder came, booming and crashing all round the sky. He wrenched the wheel in a panic, drove straight across the Simpson's nice front garden, straight through the bungalow wall and lodged halfway into the entrance hall.

At which point, young Amy Simpson came outta the bathroom looking for a towel.

Well! I'll say that young man was thunderstruck! Hey - that's not bad! Thunderstruck in a thunderstorm! And so was Amy, because she hadn't heard the car come in on account of the thunder. She came out the bathroom and found a car in her hallway and a man in the car staring at her with his mouth dropped open. Well, she just forgot all about the towel and scooted back into the bathroom, and when the young man climbed out of his car he was shaking with more than just the shock of the crash.

*That's* the thunderstorm they all talk about round here. Like I said, just one flash of lightening, and one blast of thunder. The thing was, Amy and that young man took to each other like ducks to water, much to the disappointment of the village boys. In fact, she took to

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him so well that she married him and for nigh on twenty years they've had one of the best marriages you could ever hope for.

How do I know? Don't ask.

I just know, okay?