

THE SPINNETS WEATHER A STORM

by Cara Prill

Mr. and Mrs. Spinnet could sleep through anything—traffic, construction, sirens, or storms. Located in the heart of Bloomington, they passed the time quietly and were never disturbed. Mind you, they didn't share a mattress. Mr. Spinnet had sharp elbows and Mrs. Spinnet had cold feet, but as long as they were a yard apart, neither of them complained. They had spent a handful of decades that way, side-by-side and pointed in the same direction, without snoring. It was a good arrangement.

Illustration by
 Larry Buchanan



Last Monday, late afternoon, was no exception. All around the Spinnetts, Bloomington was on the move, trying to get somewhere before the storm. Take, for instance, the more lively experiences of four friends scattered about town. One, a tired man, pulled his car into his apartment complex under swirling clouds. He passed by many parking spaces as flying leaves caught in his windshield wipers. His usual spot was empty, so—being a man of habit—he parked there, grabbed his umbrella and the newspaper, and dashed to the stairwell. He locked his car from under the eaves and climbed two flights to his door. The cat met him at the coat closet, winding around his feet as he watched the rain through the window. Only then did he realize that parking his car under the largest tree in the complex might be a problem. It leaned in the strong winds like an act of God waiting to happen.

The Spinnetts put a lot of faith in acts of God and had always been ones for prayer. Not so for the thirty-something woman who dashed across Third Street for an appointment with her therapist. She didn't believe any God would saddle her with the problems she faced, and that's why in her opinion prayer was useless. Nevertheless, like many people her age when dealing with gusts of wind and road dust, she yelled out to Jesus Christ and told God this sucks. During her mad dash to the building, a rock had flipped inside her sandal and her foot hurt. It brought to mind a comedian who said low-level depression was a pebble in his shoe. Severe depression, she decided, was a bag of pebbles in both shoes. Outside the waiting room, rain began pounding the rocks embedded in the landscaping.

There were no such complaints from Mr. or Mrs. Spinnet, who had weathered rocks in their shoes for a long time. A relationship like theirs could endure hardships, and that sort of steadfastness was on the mind of a woman who sat atop a pillar at the entrance to Rose Hill Cemetery. She was listening to the storm grumble and watching for lightning. A few blocks away, a stack of papers sat on the dining table, evidence of the financial trouble her husband had let fester as a dirty secret. She was days past their confrontation, wanting to remember the important things in life. A snap in the sky broke the west in half with a sharp white light as thick as her thumb. For a second she couldn't believe that lightning hit the ground, and then it hit again, exactly where her eyes were fixed. She suddenly remembered her husband's fear of

storms, and she ran back down the street to meet him at their door.

He was walking home, in fact, toward her and the Spinnetts. Neither he nor his wife knew the Spinnetts, of course, but the couples had some qualities in common like sleeping separately and, well, being from Bloomington. He was thinking of what it means to be a husband and persuading himself that the thunder and lightning weren't a punishment for lying to his wife about money. With every crack and flash, his heart ran sprints. He didn't dare put up his umbrella because ten percent of him believed being struck by lightning was what he deserved. The other ninety percent of him hoped that his wife wouldn't want that to happen. He should really take their friend's advice and start seeing his therapist again.

The trouble with young people these days was that they told everyone their problems—or so Mrs. Spinnet might have complained to Mr. Spinnet if she knew what was going on around town. After an hour in which the thirty-something told her therapist all the insecurities she faced daily, the rain had stopped and she drove home to her apartment. She parked her car next to her boyfriend's, which was in his usual spot under the tree, and brushed a twig from the hood. She looked up two stories and saw their cat in the window. Another storm was rumbling in from the west, and she hurried upstairs for supper. Across town, a wife and husband sat down to supper on the end of the dining table that wasn't covered in paperwork. When the next storm started up midway through their grilled pork chops and sweet potatoes, the woman reached over to touch her husband's back. To get their minds off the storm and the finances, they made plans to invite their two friends over tomorrow.

The Spinnetts, on the other hand, had just been—of all things—disturbed. It started once the woman left the pillar at the cemetery's entrance soon after the two lightning cracks in the sky. Of course, noises and light like that weren't a bother to the Spinnetts. They were resting peacefully a yard or so apart, pointed uphill toward the west, with rocks in their shoes. In their decades together, the only event to happen to the Spinnetts was a slow growing root that pressed its way through their boxes and over their elbows and torsos. Now, above them, a great rotting tulip tree, the source of the interloping root, bent in the gale. Dirt shimmed around the root as the tulip, which stood over three stories tall, leaned too far to the east and snapped in half. Two centuries of wood crashed down on top of the Spinnetts and their bones rattled simultaneously. The storms wore themselves out a few hours later.

The next afternoon, the married woman sat on what remained of her favorite tree. The great big tulip, she noticed, had been hollow not just in its trunk but up inside its giant limbs as well. These were now tangled over broken grave-stones. She climbed among the limbs, careful of deep holes gouged by the tree's fall. Poking out of the debris was a set of limestone spires, identical in style and last names. The Spinnetts, she read, dead for a hundred and fifteen years. Surely they had chosen this spot because of the tree, and today, instead of standing above their graves, the tulip lay across the Spinnetts in full bloom. She picked a flower off the tree, marveling at how it must have danced yesterday high in the wind. Then she took a few more to decorate the table for company that evening. It would be a good arrangement. ✧

