

THE STORM

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT

By Donald Payton

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THE STORM
By Donald Payton

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(TWO MEN, THREE WOMEN)

JEFF MULKEY (m)A tall, slender young man of about 27.
Five years ago he was involved in an automobile accident on a snow-swept highway, and since each snow brings the event to life again, He's attired in plaid shirt, jeans and heavy shoes. *(65 lines)*

MARY (f)Jeff's understanding wife. About 23.
Pretty, sweet, but very plainly attired with house dress, sweater buttoning down front, heavy hose and fiat shoes, *(61 lines)*

THE HUNTER (m).....A large burly man with deep voice and penetrating eyes. He has a scar on his face and walks with a limp. He's around fifty years of age, wearing heavy trousers, mackinaw, overshoes, and hunting cap. *(33 lines)*

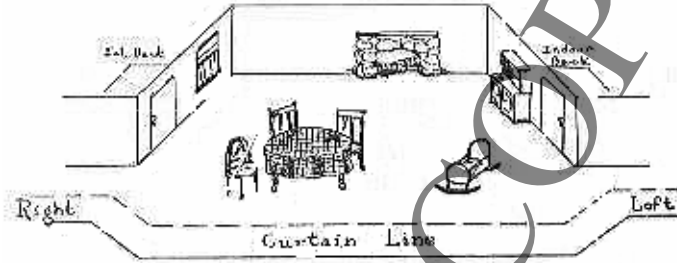
THE WOMAN (f).....Perhaps 40 years of age, she's plainly dressed. She was probably a very pretty woman at one time, and still has a warm smile; a soft voice and affable nature *(30 lines)*

THE GIRL (f).....About fourteen—pretty. Like her mother she's bundled up from head to toe. *(17 lines)*

BY DONALD PAYTON

NOTE: All characters and situations herein depicted are purely imaginary. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is a coincidence.

PRODUCTION NOTES



THE PLACE: The mountain cabin of Jeff Mulkey.

THE TIME: Late afternoon of a snowy winter day.

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ACT ONE

SETTING:

The room is furnished simply. There's a table right, covered with oil cloth. Wooden chairs are around it. A wood heating stove is up left center. (NOTE: If unavailable, fireplace will suffice.) Left is a playpen or baby crib. A cupboard is upper left. A window is on the wall right, covered with plain curtains, a door right leads outside, and the door left goes into the rest of the house.

AT RISE:

The stage is rather dark as evening is fast approaching on this cold wintry day. Jeff Mulkey is standing at the window, peering out at the ever-deepening carpet of white. Jeff is tall, slender and his furrowed brow and slight slouch give hint the appearance of being older than his twenty-seven years. He's wearing faded jeans, a plaid wool shirt and heavy shoes. A beaten leather jacket hangs on one of the table chairs. Jeff is of a restless and nervous nature, especially on days like this. His quietness and deepening Mood have gathered like the storm, and his wife, Mary, looks at him uneasily from her position by the stove or fireplace. She's simply and plainly attired, wearing a house dress and sweater that buttons down front, heavy hose and plain flat shoes. She's perhaps three or four years her husband's junior, sweet, understanding, and pretty. Her life consists of two parts: one is at the window and the other is in the crib, as in Mikey's crib. She watches the former intently as he stands at the window, his thumbs in the hip pockets of his jeans. A shiver passes through his body as the wind outside howls belligerently.

JEFF: *(Peering out, quietly.)* Looks like it's sorta closin' in on us.

MARY: *(Softly.)* Last time I looked out I could barely see the barn.

JEFF: Can't see it at all now. Blowin' too much.

MARY: Probably going to be the biggest snow of the year. Maybe twenty-four inches.

JEFF: *(Turning.)* Maybe more. Maybe a lot more. *(He crosses slowly and silently to table, pulls out chair, sits.)* You just never know about snow.

MARY: *(Crossing left.)* I'll go warm up the coffee *(Exits left.)*

JEFF: Snow's somethin' you just can't tell about.

MARY: *(Entering, shaking coffee pot at ear.)* Oughta be a couple cups left from dinner. *(Looks in crib as she passes.)* Hi, Mikey, you sleepy head. You little fuzzy-headed sleepy head.

Wind howls.

JEFF: *(Looking up.)* Wind's blowin' harder,

MARY: *(Shivering.)* Cuts in through the window and door. Maybe oughta put another quilt on Mikey.

JEFF: *(Rising, crossing again to window.)* Gettin' dark real early tonight. Can't see anything and it's barely five o'clock.

MARY: *(Holding coffee pot, looking away.)* Five o'clock. About time for Dad to come up the drive — and honk — and Mom to rush out — and Sis — and hug him all the way up the steps.

JEFF: *(Tuning.)* You miss it, don't you, Mary?

MARY: *(Crossing quickly to stove, putting coffee pot on it.)* I'm sorry.

JEFF: I shouldn't have said that — or even thought it.

JEFF: You haven't any business being here, Mary, You of all people shouldn't be trapped in a farm house — *shack* — a hundred miles from nowhere in — a blizzard. *(Mary moves to him,)*

MARY: *(Her hand on his shoulder.)* I wouldn't want to be with anyone but you, Jeff, be it in the Waldorf Astoria — or Bradyville — or anywhere.

JEFF: *(Turning away, bitterly.)* Your place is in the city, Mary. A big, fine home *in* the city.

MARY: My place is with you, Jeff.

JEFF: No, Mary. A hundred times I've asked you to leave.

MARY: And how many times have I refused? *(He slumps at table again. She crosses to him quietly, her hand on his shoulder.)* It was for better or worse, Jeff. Remember?

JEFF: One thing about it. It couldn't be much worse.

MARY: It could be a lot worse. We have a home.

JEFF: *(Rising, bitterly.)* You call this a home? *(Motions with hand.)* A shack.

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MARY: We have Mikey. (*Quickly.*) And we have each other. That's more than lots of people have. (*He turns away.*) Those people in the big homes — the lights burn in their windows, Jeff, but not in their hearts.

JEFF: (*As if reaching a decision.*) The trains will be running again when the snow melts. You'll take Mikey and leave.

MARY: (*Softly.*) No, Jeff.

JEFF: When the snow melts, you'll leave.

MARY: We've gone over it before.

JEFF: My mind's made up, Mary and you're going. (*He turns, walks left.*) We can't just run and run. We can't hide when there's nothin' to hide from. (*Turning.*) I can't just drag you and Mikey all over the world. First it was Bradyville — home — then another state. The coast. It's hard runnin' and hidin' when there's nothin' runnin' after ya. (*Mary watches him sympathetically as he crosses to table.*)

JEFF: Then we took off for the mountains. We'll get a farm in the mountains somewhere . . . not many people, we'll be happy there. (*Slumping in a chair.*) We'll never be happy.

MARY: (*Ever so softly.*) Jeff.

JEFF: Now there's nothing left. No place to go. Because this is the end of the line.

MARY: Don't talk like that. Jeff.

JEFF: The end of the line. (*He stops, listens, the wind howl*) There's the whistle blowin', Mary. Hear it? People get off at the end of the line.

MARY: (*Sharply.*) Jeff.

JEFF: (*Slumping.*) Maybe it **is** my mind, Mary.

MARY: (*Quickly.*) It's just the storm, Jeff. You get this way every time there's a storm.

JEFF: (*Looking up slowly.*) Yeah — the storm. That's what started it all. We were happy until the storm, (*Rising.*) I had a job at the lumber company. It didn't pay much but it was a job. (*Crossing left again.*) I was home at seventeen after five and you were always there.

MARY: (*Crossing to him.*) We're together all the time here, Jeff.

JEFF: All that summer we were happier than any two people in the world. And fall. The leaves changed but we didn't. Then came winter — and the storm (*She watches him silently as he crosses again to table and sits.*) It's gettin' darker. Just like that day when it came — the storm,

MARY: (*Quickly.*) I'll pop us some corn tonight. Good night for pop corn. I'll put some sugar on it, Jeff, And I'll read Longfellow. Whittier and Longfellow. What a night for "Snowbound." Poetry isn't like a book. You read a book and that's it. But not poetry. It's never the same. Sorta like a day. The sun comes up, people go to work, come home from work, the sun goes down, and yet it's never the same two days as a row.

JEFF: (*Bitterly.*) Except around here. Nothin's Different, unless the oatmeal's burnt more one day than the other.

MARY: (*Quietly, hurt.*) Jeff.

JEFF: (*Sincerely.*) I'm sorry, Mary. I didn't mean it.

MARY: I know you didn't, Jeff.

JEFF: I don't know why I said it. I wouldn't hurt you for anything in the world.

MARY: I know that, too.

JEFF: It's just — the snow. (*He crosses to window, peers out.*) It happened about this time, Just about dark. (*Turns to her.*) I couldn't see where I was going, Mary.

MARY: The fire's about down. (*At stove, feeling coffee pot.*) Coffee isn't even hot yet.

JEFF: (*Crossing toward her.*) They can't blame me for something I couldn't help.

MARY: I'll get another stick of wood. (*Exits.*)

JEFF: (*Turning right.*) I wasn't going fast. It was just that the snow was blowin' toward me and I couldn't see. (*The wind howls — he sits.*) The wind just gives me the fidgets (*Hands against side of head.*)

MARY: (*Enters a couple of steps, with sticks of wood.*) I guess the best thing to do is just go ahead — get it out of your system. It's always the same thing every snow.

JEFF: That's why I'm sending you home when it thaws.

MARY: And that's why I'm staying right here, Jeff Mulkey.

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JEFF: We'll see.

MARY: We'll see. (*She puts wood in stove.*)

JEFF: (*At window again.*) It was an evening just like this. The snow was blowin' hard and hittin' the windshield and stickin'. That's why I didn't know I was on the wrong side of the highway. I saw the car right in front of me. I jerked the wheel. (*Both fists clenched, then they relax and he slumps.*) But it didn't do any good. The woman was dead. The little girl wasn't. And we sat there — all night. Me and the girl — and The Woman. The little girl kept talkin' about her locket. Her daddy gave it to her before he left, she said. The woman didn't say a word — all night.

MARY: Maybe the coffee's hot, Jeff. (*She moves to stove.*)

JEFF: It was cold that night and the little girl whimpered. Then she stopped whimperin' and they were both quiet.

MARY: The coffee is hot, Jeff. I'll get some cups.

She crosses to cupboard. He rises, moves to window, stands gazing, his hand on back of neck.

MARY: (*Crossing to table with cups and coffee pot.*) You'll feel better when you drink some coffee.

JEFF: (*Looking at his hand, fingers apart.*) She died with that locket in her hand. (*Slowly clenching fist as he talks.*) With it frozen in her hand.

MARY: (*Pouring coffee, at table.*) Mmmmm, smells good.

JEFF: They hang you for killing people. It's quick that way. You don't suffer every day — every night — every time it storms.

MARY: Drink it while it's hot, Jeff.

JEFF: I stopped driving. Sold my car — my gun — anything that could cause an accident. And I ran. I got away from people, but I couldn't get away from the woman — and the girl — and the locket.

MARY: (*Softly.*) Please drink your coffee, Jeff.

JEFF: *(At window.)* It was en evening just like this. The snow's hittin' the window just like it did the windshield —and it's stickin'. That's why I couldn't see the car. *(Pause, Mary starts toward stove with coffee pot.)* The snow. It's stickin' on the windshield. *(Tense.)* I can't see. The snow's stickin' on the windshield and I can't see.

MARY: *(Running to him.)* Jeff.

JEFF: It's freezin' on the windshield and I can't see. *(He draws his fist back to the Window; Mary catches him in time. He slumps at the window.)*

MARY: Jeff. *(No answer. She shakes him, loudly.)* Are you all right?

JEFF: *(Straightening up, softly.)* I'm all right.

MARY: You sure?

JEFF: I'm sure.

(She helps him to the table. He sits right.)

JEFF: *(Falling into chair.)* I'm sorry Mary.

MARY: I understand, Jeff. *(Takes his hand.)* I know what you've gone through, whether anyone else knows or not. That's what wives are for. *(She sits.)* I've learned to expect it ever storm. Just like the wind and cold and everything else that goes with it. *(He looks at her — their eyes meet.)*

MARY: Some women have this to go through Saturday night. I just experience it every snow.

JEFF: I suggest we part when it thaws, Mary.

MARY: I suggest we move to Florida.

JEFF: It's been harder on you than anyone. You and Mikey. I've dragged you all over the country — up here where there's no people — you haven't complained once.

MARY: At least you smile once in a while here. One smile from you is worth all the people in the world. And it won't always be this way. I know it won't, Jeff. *(Their eyes meet again.) Drink your coffee. (They each silently sip their coffee. Jeff has cup to lips as there's a sharp knock on door. Mary looks up quickly, cup in hand.)*

MARY: Someone's at the door, Jeff.

JEFF: Don't know what anyone's doin' in the mountains — lest it's some hunter got lost.

MARY: *(As knock is repeated. She stands.)* I wish we had a gun,

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JEFF: *(Taking another drink.)* Should have more sense than to traipse 'round here this time o' season. *(He moves to window, pulls back curtain.)*

MARY: He have a gun?

Jeff nods affirmatively. She crosses quickly to crib, stands there as Jeff moves to door.

He opens door. The wind howls as the Hunter steps in quickly. The Hunter's a large hulk of a man, and his mackinaw hunting cap pulled over ears, and overshoes, make him look even larger. He's red-faced, has a week's growth of beard. He moves with limp to the stove, stands with back to audience, shivers. If we could see his face, we'd notice a long scar extending down his cheek from ear to mouth. He rubs his gloved hands together. Jeff has closed door, walks slowly to stove, he and Mary register glances.

JEFF: Lucky you found us. Couldn't have in another half hour. *(He waits for a reply. There's no response.)* Storms get mighty severe 'round these parts. *(Silence.)* You must be a stranger. Don't figure anyone but a stranger would dare venture out.

MARY: Maybe he's a hunter, Jeff. A hunter — and he got lost.

THE HUNTER: I was huntin' — and got lost in the Snow. *(He turns, limps to table.)* For miles I been trackin' somethin'. *(Sits facing audience.)*

JEFF: *(Crossing to Hunters right.)* I'm afraid we're in for a rough night, Worst blizzard of the year, or I miss my guess.

MARY: The coffee's hot. I'll pour you some.

THE HUNTER: *(Looking at her a second before speaking.)* I'd ... *(Pause.)* be much obliged. Most froze stiff, I am. *(She moves to cupboard, gets cup.)*

JEFF: Drifts up deep and fast, especially 'bout this time.

THE HUNTER: That's what they said at the lodge. That's what they told me. But when a man's huntin' somethin'. *(His voice trails off.)* Looks like maybe it was intended, don't it? Like I was just led here. *(Mary pours his coffee; he sips it.)* I was huntin' and it looks like I was led right here. *(He looks around room, with Mary and Jeff watching him doubtfully.)* What's that you got over there *(He looks at crib.)*

MARY: *(Proudly.)* That's Mikey. He's the spittin' image of Jeff here. As spittin' as anyone could be at the age of five months, anyway.

THE HUNTER: *(Looking out front.)* I had a daughter once. Once. Spittin' image of her mother, she was. *(Shifts weight.)* But that's neither here nor there. *(To MARY.)* Good coffee. *(Turns up cup, drinks.)*

JEFF: Where you from?

THE HUNTER: The sea. I'm from the sea. Wherever it goes — that's where I'm from.

JEFF: *(Extending hand.)* I'm Jeff Mulkey. This is Mary. *(He slowly lowers hand as the Hunter ignores it.)*

THE HUNTER: And the sea goes lots of places. *(Stares out front.)* Lots of places.

The wind howls. The Hunter raises his head, listens.

THE HUNTER: Listen to the wind. It can be lonely in the mountains in a snow storm. It can be lonely anywhere. No matter where you are it can be lonely. *(Still looking out front.)* How long you reckon it's gonna last.

JEFF: Maybe two — three days.

The wind howls belligerently. Jeff turns quickly, up right, his back to audience. The Hunter gazes out front.

THE HUNTER: Snow. Funny things happen in the snow. Like this evenin'. Us three, fer instance. Never seen each other before. But here we are trapped — in a blizzard. Not knowin' each other but trapped.

Mary turns quickly, moves to stove, holds her cup of coffee.

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THE HUNTER: (*Cont'd.*) Reminds me of a story I heard once. Seems that this feller — Frank — couldn't get along with his wife — both was too stubborn to give in you bein' husband and wife I reckon you know what I mean. She went back to her folks — took their daughter — and each went their own way, him carin' for her and her carin' for him and both too blamed stubborn to admit it.

MARY and JEFF have their backs turned to him. He continues.

THE HUNTER: (*Cont'd.*) Well sir, this went on fer sometime. Finally, she swallowed her pride and up and started back fer him, clear cross country, him still not knowing nothin' 'bout it. Well, sir, (*he shifts his gaze to JEFF.*) they was suddenly in a snow storm (*Leaning over, gradually getting louder.*) and some durn fool was drivin' on the wrong side of the road and — smacked 'em.

MARY drops cup to floor. JEFF turns quickly. THE HUNTER rises, loudly, not taking eyes from JEFF.

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