



## Winter's Bloom

**John Wemlinger**

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*Far from a standard romance novel, Wemlinger's book showcases contrasts and human connections.*

In John Wemlinger's *Winter's Bloom*, a frozen, solitary Lake Michigan shoreline provides the perfect backdrop for an unlikely friendship between a wealthy widow and a reserved Vietnam veteran. This is a thoroughly engaging story of love, loss, and the power of saving graces.

After returning from Vietnam, Rock Graham takes a job at the Flint General Motors, and he remains there for four decades, until the 2008 crash forces him into retirement. Still suffering from PTSD, he heads to an off-season rental cottage for solace and quiet contemplation.

There, courtesy of their respective dogs, Flotsam and Flower, Rock meets the wealthy Claire Van Zandt. They find themselves taking long walks together, having heartfelt conversations, and forging a connection, despite unfolding family drama.

A colorful secondary cast of characters enlivens the intricate story line, including landlords, concerned friends, feuding siblings, and a manipulative, sexy beautician who has her eye on Rock. Their stories provide layers of texture.

The plot is steadily paced and fluid, with creative chapter subtitles that effectively introduce new characters and events. Still, some hints at future plot developments, such as around a character's health concerns, are excessively delayed for effect; such choices come to seem overly dramatic.

The text is filled with rich, authentic details that capture events from the past and present, both good and bad. Developments are juxtaposed between periods: panic-induced flashbacks reveal Rock's traumatic and vivid memories of war-torn DaNang, while in the here and now, a dog's frantic behavior at the water's edge heightens the tension of the scene. Quieter, happier moments add balance to the text, such as through a picturesque farmhouse, "something out of 'Currier and Ives,'" where a friendly gathering of relative strangers shares intimate conversations and a bountiful Thanksgiving feast.

Far from a standard romance novel, Wemlinger's is a book that showcases both contrasts, in its settings defined by socioeconomic differences, and human connections, as people come to deep realizations about what they share in common. Kindhearted characters of conscience who strive for the greater good make this an appealing work.

A climactic surprise for the central characters helps preserve and continue the book's core themes about altruism and caring. While the final denouement is bittersweet, it brings the story full circle in a positive way.

*Winter's Bloom* is a poignant contemporary tale full of enticing and heartfelt relationships.

CAROL DAVALA (October 3, 2017)

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