

# Snowed In

By Nick Solari

He awoke again at 1:00 AM. *Thump. Thump.*

Mitch pushed the sheets off his body and followed the sound out of the bedroom. *Thump.* Alice stood by the basement stairs, her nightgown caught on the hallway table. He watched her from the end of the hall—*thump, thump, thump*—a silhouette in the moonglow, knocking against the wall with the consistency of a pendulum. Careful not to wake her, he slipped behind her swinging body and freed the white lace from the rosewood. Still she rocked as though nothing had changed. He placed his hands gently on her shoulders and led her back to the bedroom, the floor-panels groaning beneath their feet.

When she was settled beneath the covers once more, Mitch returned to the hall, assessing the destruction of his wife's unconscious wanderings. The wall clock had fallen from its place and lay upon the floor, a large crack marring its face like a scar. It was still ticking. He returned it to its place above the crooked portraits and quickly set to straightening their frames. Realigning a photograph from his wedding day, he paused at the sight of his twenty-year-old self, dressed up in a tailored tux beside his bride of forty in a flowing white dress. The image had faded in the twenty years that it hung on the wall, and the twenty years that it sat in his office before then, but Mitch still was struck by the youthful glint in his eyes and the tightness of Alice's skin. He smiled at the memory of her good health—at the possession of her faculties. He smiled at the memory of his young and eager hopes. He smiled at the memory of his happiness.

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Navigating the dark hallway back to his bedroom, Mitch wondered if he felt as his blind wife did, drifting through shadows with outstretched, uncertain hands. The thought lingered until his wonderings became pictures in his head, and the pictures became the dreams of deep and elusive sleep.

In the morning, Mitch stood before the window, where the dawnlight lent the curtains a subtle glow. He had risen before Alice or the dog, as he often did, and was intentional not to disturb them. He pushed the curtains aside and the light of the early morning filled the room. This ritual, which in a distant time would wake Alice, no longer disturbed her sleep. Instead, her chest rose and fell with her shallow breaths, their rhythm uninterrupted. It left Mitch with a sense of guilt—the fact that his unseeing wife gave him sole reign over the dawn—but he savored these moments nonetheless. The new-fallen snow, the pines, the sunrise—they belonged to him.

The pattering of paws in the hallways quickly tore Mitch from his trance. He turned his head reluctantly toward the bedroom door where his husky clawed needily at the oak. Mitch had no desire to walk the dog, or feed the dog, or do whatever it was the dog needed. It seemed to always be needing. Mitch sniffled, becoming suddenly aware of how stuffy it was in the room, how unbearable stuffy and dusty. He returned to the window and fiddled with the latch. The light hadn't woken Alice, but an open window certainly would—the frigid air and the sliding of the frame. Still, it didn't matter. Mitch craved fresh breath. He unlocked the latch and pushed upwards against the glass with flattened palms. It refused him. Again he pushed, leaning into the glass, fogging it up with his panting. It had frozen shut.

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He slammed his fist on the sill.

Alice woke.

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