

The Frigid

The sunny days of summer have passed alongside the crisp morning air of autumn. With winter comes a lasting darkness and never ending blizzard that stretches across the entire land. Every blade of grass and tiny pebble blanketed in the darkest white. A time where being prepared is life or death. Having the necessary supplies to survive during winter is critical, but also requires a means of defending it. There is always a chance for people who didn't prepare to come knocking. At first they're nice asking for a little bit of food, but soon they become desperate. They will fight to survive. And so must you.

"Can I please have some more bread?" my sister asked.

My stoic mother shook her head. Our rations were smaller than they had been in the past. Two of our sheep were slain by wolves two weeks before they were to be collected for their wool and meat. This put enough fear in my parents to have us ration our meals, particularly the meat and bread. My stomach gurgled gently as I ate the last bite of my bread.

"It's been like this for three weeks already," my sister whined, "Can't we just eat more already?"

My mother shook her head, continuing to knit what seemed to be another scarf. My sister stuck her lower lip out and crossed her arms. I watched on as nearly the same routine happened every meal. My sister shoved her chair away from the table and stormed off towards the toy chest. She flung the lid open and it cracked against the wooden wall. I winced from the sound. Then she stepped inside and slammed the lid shut. We didn't have many toys. Mother did nothing and luckily my father was outside grabbing a few more logs for the fire. If he had been inside, he would've screamed at my sister at this point.

Suddenly as if my thoughts brought him in, my father entered. Cold wind rushed through the house as he hurriedly shut the door. His boots were covered in snow. The light brown jacket he wore and his hair had a healthy amount of the white powder as well. He carried five sliced logs the length of his forearm. With heavy steps, he brought them to the fireplace, leaving behind a wet trail of white. A log was tossed into the dying flames and the other four were placed to the side. The fire gnawed away at the fresh

fuel, staining the edges black. He walked over to the table and kissed my mother on the top of her head. She didn't react.

"Where's Tarsi?" he asked.

"Playing with her dolls," my mother said.

He nodded then headed to his rocking chair by the fire. His book waited for him on one of the arms. He kicked off his snowy boots, discarding them haphazardly nearby. The snow would melt into the floor and leave a nasty wet spot. The book opened and he slowly began to read. He had been reading the same book for the past three weeks and had only made it half way through.

"Please get your father's boots," my mother whispered.

I nodded and stood from the table. My thick socked feet carried me quietly behind my father's chair and over to his boots. The cold wet leather made me cringe and the smell nearly vomit. I grabbed them and went over to the wooden latched window against the far wall.

Freezing air whooshed in as I pushed open the window. I shoved the boots outside and clapped them together repeatedly, knocking off most of the snow. The icy wind stung my face. Soon, the boots were fine enough to be inside. I closed the window and placed the boots upright by the fire to dry. My mother nodded for a job well done and my father hadn't even noticed I moved. He stared intently at the page, his mouth silently sounding out each word.

Then there was a knock on the door, two hard raps. My mother and father both snapped their heads towards the sound with worry and concern. Even my sister opened the chest lid slightly to see what would happen. The last time there was a knock during winter was four years ago and we ignored it. Even when a mother and small child started to cry outside, the door remained shut. My father told me that if we opened the door that would confirm people were inside and had supplies to spare. The best thing for us was to block as much light from the fire and be as quiet as possible to give the illusion we left the house for winter. Still that method had problems. If someone thought no one lived at a house, wouldn't they try to break in?

Another round of knocks hammered on the door, more forceful than the last. My mother and father got up and quietly started to move. My father brought a thick blanket

towards the fire. He handed me one side and silently showed me how to hold it. We used the blanket to block most of the light while making sure the blanket didn't catch fire. My mother went over to the three wooden latched windows. Her hands worked fast, securing each latch firmly in place. She locked the last one when the person at the door spoke up.

"I know you're in there!" a man shouted.

He sounded middle aged with a thick accent I didn't recognize. Sweat soaked into the blanket from my hands. The fire's heat was starting to get to me, but so were my nerves. My father and mother silently stared at each other in shock as my sister fully stood up from the chest. My father shook his head slowly.

Bash!

Something slammed into the door. It creaked and splintered from the impact. My sister squeaked in fear. A laughter came from outside, one mocking and laced in cruelty.

"Seems like there's a child in there!" he shouted, "Do the right thing and let me in else I'll break every one of her little bones!"

My father's face twisted with anger and hatred. He snarled and dropped the blanket. I moved it away from the fire before it fell in. Even when he'd been mad in the past, I had never seen my father make that face before. My mother was worried and nervous, but didn't interfere with my father's actions. He whispered something to her, kissed her cheek, then walked over to the kitchen. After looking through two drawers, he pulled out the only metal knife in the house. A long silvery blade fixed to a thick wooden handle. My parents wouldn't let my sister or I near it.

Bash!

The door physically indented like a bent playing card. Cold air started to seep in through the warped frame at the top and bottom. The voice was clearer than before. The man was breathing heavily and took a deep breath.

"Last chance before I smash my way in!"

My father stepped closer and closer to the door. His left hand slowly reached out for the handle, the other held the knife behind his back. My father hesitated then the door creaked open. Everything was silent for a short moment. My father blocked the

doorway enough so I couldn't see outside. My mother started whispering a prayer. He didn't say a word, just gave a hard stare outside.

"Looks like you found your balls," the man said.

"Why have you come?" my father asked, his whole body tensing.

The man let out a chuckle.

"The winter months are hard," he said, "Can't you spare me some supplies?"

My father shook his head.

"That's a shame..." the man said, "I'll have to take by force!"

Suddenly, the door flung open as my father was tossed back. The knife slid away from him as he struggled to stand. My sister screamed as my mother rushed towards me, grabbing my arm roughly and dragging me towards the chest. But I paid no attention. My eyes were fixed on the hulking man who walked through the fractured door.

He was taller and larger than my father. His features were obscured by a thick fur hood and a deep brown wiry beard. My father was up on his feet with his fists clenched as the intruder neared. He gave a crooked, toothy grin and continued his heavy footed approach to my father.

"Leave," my father said, his voice coated in anger and false bravado.

The intruder again let out a chuckle.

"Make me!"

He swung a punch at my father who raised his guard. There was a nasty thud that sent chills through my spine. The strike barreled into my father's crossed arms and sent him stumbling backwards. He shook his trembling hands out, staring at the man.

"Maybe your boy will have more fight in him than in you," the intruder said with a vicious cackle.

My father's face filled with red rage. He charged forward, his fist cocked back. The thumping of socked feet rattled the floorboards. My father threw the punch, yet the larger man didn't move. Instead he swung his trunk of an arm upwards, intercepting my father's blow at the elbow. Thedept parry shocked my father as he faltered back a step. The intruder closed the distance and was practically in my father's face, his left hand already a tight ball.

“Bastard!” my father shouted, throwing another quick jab.

Yet his strike would never land. Before my father could react, the man’s left arm shot up in an uppercut, clocking my father square in the chest. I swore there was a cracking sound as my father slumped over, gasping for air.

At some point, my mother’s grip had released me. She now held the knife with both hands, pointing it at the intruder. She couldn’t hide her fear which caused the blade and her entire body to tremble. The man showed his nasty toothfilled grin and stepped over my father’s collapsed body.

“Do you know what you’re doing with that tiny knife?” the man asked, “This isn’t the kitchen lady!”

With the declaration, he charged forward, closing the distance in only a few steps. His boots thumped against the floor and my mother let out a high pitched guttural battle cry. She lunged.

Thunk!

My mother’s body hit the floor with a sickening thud and ear splitting crack. She bounced off the wood before crashing face down at the man’s feet. He gave a small chuckle then took a step towards me and my sister. Despite the fear, I stood in front of the toy chest, holding my arm outstretched. My sister’s sobs echoed throughout the small house.

Suddenly, the man flattered in his step with a deep grunt, grasping at his right thigh. My eyes darted down. The wooden handle of the kitchen knife was sticking out in the middle of his right leg. Not a millimeter of silvery metal could be seen. Blood had already seeped into his pants, staining them with dark crimson.

“Damned wench!” the man hissed.

His meaty hand gripped the knife handle and yanked it out. The entire blade was coated in a thick layer of blood, zero silver visible. The man growled and groaned, clutching his leg. Even more blood spurted and flowed from the wound like a heavily leaking faucet. Despite his efforts in grabbing and holding his leg, the blood kept spilling out. Soon enough, a large puddle had formed under his boot. His face had gone pale and desperation was present in his once enraged eyes. With shaking hands, he took off his coat and attempted to wrap the sleeves around the upper part of his leg. Yet his

once immense strength was fading. Then he swayed a bit too much to the side. He slipped on his own blood, stumbled a step, and fell to the ground. One of his arms was pinned underneath his hulking mass. He struggled to even turn his head to look at me.

“K-Kid! Help me out here!”

His voice was coated with distress, agony, and most of all fear. Exactly like my mother’s cry before he brutally hit her. I stood still, glaring down at the bleeding man fueled by anger, anguish, and plenty of my own fear. If I closed the distance there would be nothing stopping him from punching me too. Then who would protect my sister? My trembling legs held me up for now, but the intensity of the situation was getting to me.

“Damn you all!” the man groaned.

His eyes fluttered as his grasping hand slowly sank to the floor. Eventually, it was only my sister’s crying that filled the room. I wasn’t sure what to do next. Blood ran out from the man’s leg, seeping in between the cracks in the floor.

Hastily, the chest squeaked open and my sister ran out, falling to her knees next to our mother. She bawled down into her back, clutching her dress tightly. My heart rate spiked and I noticed my face was wet. Tears streaked down my cheeks like an overflowing bucket. I ran to my mother and shook her.

“Mom! Mom!” I shouted, trying to wake her.

She wasn’t moving. Fear gripped me with its sharp talons. The whole world started to collapse around me. The monster who did this could have stood and bashed my own skull in, but I wouldn’t have noticed. My attention was solely focused on my mother’s motionless body. My shakes turned violent as I rocked her back and forth as fast as I could. The floor creaked and my sister continued crying.

I abruptly stopped, grabbed my head, and screamed. It drowned out my sister’s sobs in an instant. Sadness, anger, desperation, fear, all of it mixed in my head. I couldn’t believe it. There was no way. How could there be? But there wasn’t anything else it could be. My mother was...

A hand gently rubbed my cheek. My voice ceased. I knew this touch. My eyes flung open and stared widely. The world reformed around me. My mother gave a weak smile, caressing my cheek.

“Calm down children,” she said, softly, “Everything’s alright now.”

Instantly, my sister and I slammed into my mother's chest, letting out our tears. She soothed us till we each cried all our tears. Then her gaze shifted to the intruder. She stood and guided us away from the bloody mess. Her steps faltered when she saw our father still face down on the floor.

My father was dead.

After my mother patched herself up, we went out into the cold to bury him. My father's body was heavier and colder than when he was alive. All the strength he once held had all wasted away into a bitter nothingness. Snow started to fall as my mother and I shoveled dirt and ice over top of him. He looked discontent, yet peaceful. My father wouldn't have to worry about providing for us anymore. He defended us the best he could, he deserved this rest. At least that's what my mother thought. She gave a small speech while my sister and I clutched to her dress with frostbitten hands. My heart felt weak and small. I would miss my father, even though he could be cruel at times.

As for the intruder's corpse, my mother and I dumped him in the woods. The maroon blood trail was like a river leading from our front door all the way to the corpse. The snow had already started to cover the crimson in a blanket of white by the time we headed back. That night I heard wolves and the crunching of bone.

The winter would be tough, but we would manage to survive. However as one foul winter came to a close, we knew another was just on the horizon. Nothing could prepare one for the frigidness of the cold.