

When Hell Freezes Over

By Mary Goff

“It’s a blistering cold winter night in Wyoming tonight. A severe snowstorm appears to be on the move and will soon settle in this region. Advisory is that everyone stay in their homes, do no unnecessary traveling and make sure you have what you need to stay warm. All stores are on mandatory shut down. Emergency assistance will still function as best it can to serve the town --”

“But don’t count on it, right?” Linda muttered as she turned her cracker-box size television off. She glanced over her shoulder at the blanket she hung to block the room in; an attempt to keep the temperature as warm as possible, Linda could see in her mind’s eye the dimly lit hallway leading to her living room and beyond, to the bathroom and the new rows of windows, covered in foggy plastic wrap that now lined the walls. The trailer-home rattled beneath the furious shrieks of wind. Snow slapped hard against the windows; many of them new, and Linda clapped her hands across her shoulders with a shudder.

“Wonder if those windows will hold.”

She wrinkled her forehead and shrugged.

“Well, they best hold. I paid good money for them.”

She shuffled to her favorite chair and settled into it. The wind continued its assault on the outside of the trailer. Linda eyed her bed and momentarily wondered if she should go to sleep when a strange pounding noise came from the direction of her bathroom.

“Now what in blue blazes?” Linda pushed the footrest of her lazy chair down and moved towards the dividing blanket. The pounding came again and Linda felt a cold streak of coward race down her backside. ‘What if someone were trying to break in?’ Her mind flooded with images of men dressed in dark clothes wielding guns and knives and other weaponry. She pushed back the blanket just slightly, and caught a glimpse of the dim, empty house. Her own breathing caught in her ears.

“I swear, Linda Garrison, if you make a fool of yourself!” She clenched her teeth together and before moving on, grabbed a broom just to be safer-than-sorry.

She inched past the hanging blanket and suddenly felt exposed against all the uncovered windows. Her mind told her that the plastic skewed any real view but she knew her outline was still seeable. She swallowed and picked up her pace. The pounding came again and she realized that it was coming from the door next to her bathroom that led to the outside. She shuddered as she thought about who, or what, could be knocking at her door...at this hour...in a blizzard.

She came to a stop in front of the door and shook as she curled her hand around the icy brass doorknob.

“Hello? Who’s there?”

The sound of her own voice brought her back from near panic but it did nothing to settle her stomach as she waited for a reply.

A single “THUMP!” came so hard against the door that Linda almost fell backwards. A weakened voice moaned from the other side, followed by a rapid scraping sound. Linda squeezed her eyes shut, swallowed, then opened them as she swung her door open wide enough to peer outside.

“Please! It’s fr-eezing... My car...” A very tall man, clothed head to toe in black, leaned forward and chattered. His eyebrows and eyelashes were encrusted in frost, his skin was an ashen shade of white and he ticked with the force of his shivering. Linda eyed him, carefully noting any strange bulges on his sides or malicious gesturing.

“Ma’am. Please. It’s— so c-c-cold.” He stepped forward and reached out one hand. Linda instinctively stepped back and screwed her face up.

“Why are you here? What do you want?” Linda tightened her grip on the broom handle. She knew how to handle a man. Her late husband Heath had seen to it that she knew how to defend herself. “A warm place — a warm place to sleep... please.”

Linda could see the man’s eyes dart past her and size up the refuge that was her trailer. The chill began to get to her and before she could say anything, a strange feeling balled up in her stomach. Linda swallowed and glared at the man.

“You should have been listening to the news, young man.” She forced herself to sound certain. Strong. Unafraid.

“If you would have listened, you would have known not to travel! I have no room for you here.” Linda slammed her door closed just as the man lunged toward her. She recoiled as her door began to violently rattle on its hinges.

“Damn fool.” She double-checked her locks and backed away from the doors, eyeing each one in turn. “He’s a damn fool!” Her heart flip-flopped in her chest as she passed each window.

Linda jumped back screaming as the man slammed himself against one of the windows.

“PLEASE!” It was shrill and almost pained sounding.

“Go away! Get in your car and wait for help! Leave me be!” She pushed herself into the makeshift sanctuary of her warm bedroom. A few thumps and cracks were issued against the windows around her here, but after a few short minutes they stopped. Linda shifted her eyes side to side for several minutes before finally relaxing and climbing into bed.

Some hours later, a loud THUMP came from the direction of her bathroom again. Linda wiped her eyes and blinked. ‘Now what could that be?’ she climbed out of bed and pushed her feet into her slippers. Three more loud thumps sent her heart jolting to marathon speed. She stopped and widened her eyes as the image of a man dressed in black came back like a frightening memory. Linda stared at her floor a moment and realized it was still dark outside.

“THUMP! THUMP!”

She flinched at each report and once again, shuffled for the safety of her broom. She wrapped herself in her bed-robe and pushed aside the blanket just enough to peek beyond. The plastic on the windows seemed to be breathing as they moved in towards the windows then moved away again. Linda curled her hand tighter around the broom handle.

The thumping sounds continued to echo throughout her trailer home.

She jumped at each sound and as fast as her aged legs could carry her she ran down the hallway towards the door. She leaned towards it, holding the broom high.

“Go away! I told you there is no room for you here! I ain’t afraid of you! I’m armed!” Linda waited for a sound. Nothing but the sound of the wind wailing outside. Linda looked down at her feet. Something hard and definitely determined rammed into the other side of the door. She jumped and screamed.

“Alright! You asked for it!”

She squeezed her eyes shut, swung open her door, and thrust her broom outwards towards what she thought was the man. She swung the broom end side to side and made a big circle so that he couldn’t pass.

A swift breeze swooped against her legs and Linda opened her eyes, horrified. Nothing but swirls of blinding snow illuminated the pitch night. She whirled around and faced her bedroom.

A few clunks and bangs told her that something did indeed slip past her and was now in her bedroom. Linda sucked in a stuttered breath and closed the door behind her. She thought about locking it but thought better of it. ‘If I hafta get away quick, I don’t want to mess around with the lock. You’re a smart girl, Lin. A smart, smart girl.’

She made her way down the hall and paused a few feet away from the blanket. A low, raspy grunt sent her hair on end.

“I told you I didn’t have any room!”

Linda whipped back the blanket and charged in swinging. She toppled her tiny television set and caught her last swing on the back of her blue chair. She stopped and took a breath. No one was in there with her.

“Oh, what a mess you’ve made. Look. Just look at it.”

Linda berated herself a moment, almost in tears, and bent over to pick up the television set. A quick brush came against the back of her legs, sending her into another swinging spree. In stark realization, Linda stared at her bed. ‘He’s hiding under there. Oh my God. He’s under my bed!’

She inched forward, stopping to observe the light rustles against the bedspread that hung over the edge, obscuring her view of the underside. She steadied her broom. The bedspread jumped to life with a high pitched shriek. Linda thrust her broom handle beneath the bed repeatedly.

“Why— do you— gotta— scare— an— old woman for? Why?”

Her voice cracked as she screamed. Her screams were almost overpowered by the screams coming from under her bed. Linda leapt onto her bed and gripped her broom by the straw, like she was going to churn butter. She thrust it under the bed-skirt repeatedly.

“Get out! Get out! Get out!” She could hardly stand the screaming and shrieking. It reminded her of a small child screaming in pain. Linda kept thrusting when her broom caught on something and she could no longer move nor control it. It ripped out of her hands and Linda watched as the handle slid and banged against the walls, back and forth. It spun in small circles and rattled violently. She tried to gain control of the broom and failed. Beneath the sound of the broom scraping against the floor as it moved about, the screams were starting to quiet down. As quickly as it came to life, the broom stopped and hit the floor with a clap. Scared into hyperventilation, Linda leaned forward, her lips numb and twitching, and stared at the motionless broom-bristles. She followed its length to the edge of the bed and swallowed.

“You still under there?” Her words sounded stupid and helpless but she had to say something or pass out. She could feel her blood racing through her body. She leaned over the edge of the bed, lifted the bedspread then began to laugh.

And laugh.

And laugh.

“I can’t believe you Linda! I just can’t believe you!” Tears welled up in her eyes and she blinked, squeezing them out and down her cheeks. She held onto her sides and fell back onto her rear trying to take in a full breath. It was her neighbor’s pet pig. “Prize winnin’ pig.” They told her. So she best not be kicking this pig like she did their beloved Doobie—(rest in Hell, Doobie!). She continued to laugh.

Somehow, the broomstick handle caught the pig just right: up the ass. She couldn’t help but ache all over from laughter, but from coming off of being scared damn-near-to-death she would gladly have this ache.

As she calmed down and wiped tears from her eyes, the thumping sound came again.

“I am never going to get any sleep, dammit!” She grabbed the broom but she quickly remembered the pig and swirled around in her room, more gracefully than you could imagine for a woman pushing seventy-two, as she looked for something else to arm herself with.

A single “THUMP!” sent her fist up into the air. She swung it in a mad circle.

“I swear! I’ll...I’ll call the cops if you don’t leave me alone!” After the words came out of her mouth, her tongue went very dry. What if the cops aren’t able to come in time...in time? In time for what? She thought. She shivered as she grabbed an umbrella, thought better of it, then a heavy hand-carved wooden eagle head. It had “Heath Garrison, 1928-1998” engraved upon the brass plaque tacked to a square wooden-base. This retirement gift had been a bad omen—her husband died the following year. Well, it was a bad omen for him, at any rate. Linda wished that he would have gone much, much sooner. Lucky for her, out in the middle of nowhere no one really misses a retired senior with no kids... A momentary flash of memory came to her; the last words that she ever said to him before he died.

“See you in Hell, honey.”

She clutched it tightly as she walked.

She swallowed and her throat felt like two stones rubbing together as she neared the door. Her heart hammered in her chest. If that man was out there, she was definitely going to be concerned for her safety. More thumps came, followed by a sound like leaves being raked. Her trailer creaked.

“Co-o-ld.” It was as if the wind whispered it. Linda stopped and felt her insides clutch.

“Cold...” It was a man’s voice. Her blood ran cold and her face suddenly felt as if it were carved out of ice. She couldn’t move.

“Cooold...”

She reached for the door knob. “I can take him. He’s frozen half-to-death.” She pepped herself as she opened the door. As she did, she swung the eagle head and didn’t connect. She fell forward and landed in the packed snow. More snow whirled and tore at her hair, her face, and her clothes. She tried to stand but felt as if someone were punching her around.

“COOOOOOLD!” it was a man’s voice, followed by a woman’s voice. It was quickly chorused by a child’s voice. Linda looked up and saw several figures walking past her, shuffling hunched over, toward her house.

“No...no room!” She said as the wind piled more snow into her mouth and eyes. She blinked and found the strength to stand. As she did, she saw the full horror of what was to come. Blue faces with ultraviolet lips chattered as the people shuffled toward her. They noticed her standing there and opened their mouths.

“Cooold!” they said, their voices chorusing the wind like wailing banshees, and they reached their iced arms out to her. Linda backed away.

“Stay back! STAY BACK!” She turned and saw her trailer being crowded with all the frozen bodies. They turned and opened their mouths at her. They all moaned, “Cooold”. Linda swallowed that stony way once again and turned around. She saw the others still coming. She turned again. The others were coming from inside the house too. She heard a scuffling noise. She looked down and saw the prize pig, broom stuck-in-ass and all. She screamed as several pairs of frosty hands grabbed her and pulled her in different directions.

Then she saw him: her husband. His body was in an obvious state of decay but the square-shaped wound to his head was still visible. He shuffled toward her and twitched, creaking like old wood, as he pointed at her.

“Hell...o, dearest. What’s for supper?” A sinister smile twisted the flesh around his exposed teeth. His eyes were pale and cloudy but they were definitely zeroed in on his wife.

Linda squalled as she felt her limbs go numb and her body twisted in agony as if it were being shredded to ribbons. She broke free from the grip of the pawing, frozen crowd then fell to her hands and knees. She crawled as fast as her aged body could move back to her house. A clicking-noise grabbed her attention and she looked up at the stairs leading into the house. The pig-sicle stared down at her; it snorted coolly. Something colder than this terrible winter-storm, colder-than-death, touched the back of her legs. Linda shivered so hard that she was sure that she broke bones. Her tears froze instantly to her cheeks. She closed her eyes to try and will it away, but the winter remained.

And all she could think about was getting warm again. Nice, and warm.