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Category: Flash Fiction

Frayed Edges

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It's oddly quiet today. Normally, the church bells would toll, and Ellen would reach over to hush Wyatt's whining.

But it's silent.

Ellen wraps herself in the checkered scarf that frays at the edges and traces the threads of fabric like they are veins. Lily, rose, orchid. Three flowers, limp and wilted, rest on the countertop behind her. Platters of old dishes are strewn in heaps. Shards of shattered glass lie there too, but Ellen has no energy left to sweep the clutter.

In the furthest corner, the paint that had once gilded the frame of the wall is beginning to chip, unveiling narrow patches of chapped drywall. Two pairs of shoes are propped on a rack, the smaller of which is blanketed in a fine coat of dust. Adjacent to the rack, a palm-sized framed portrait leans tilted.

It's cold. Like winter had stirred early to usher the creeping frost, wisps of snow streak down to the ground. The often dysfunctional heater hums and whirs below the staircase, but otherwise, the night is dreadfully frigid. Surging flurries slip through the window's seams, and lapping waves freeze into chevrons of ice.

The bitter air nips at Ellen's nose as she rises to pour a cup of hot tea. Winters are hard, and as she slides her hand to her side out of habit, she finds empty air, not the wispy blonde hair that she loved to tousle. She pulls her hand back and runs her finger on the slats of her chair, her sigh morphing to a misty haze.

On these wintry nights, Wyatt would be immersed in a deep slumber, far removed from the frigid season. Feet curled, arms wrapped, and embraced in the warmth of his spaceship quilt, he would press in close, in hopes that the faint thump of his mother's heart could soothe him.

But she is alone.

Ellen is frail. Her silver streaked hair is matted and snarled in groves. Her bones are thin glass and her face hides, veiled behind the scarf she wraps herself in. She tightens her grip on the faded fleece blanket draped upon her figure. The whistle of momentary gusts startles her, rattling her delicate frame, and she sinks in her chair.

"Smile, even when times are tough," father had once told her.

She cannot.

In the house engulfed in inky blackness, Ellen closes Wyatt's door. Tonight, the door creaks shut as the cries of biting gales fade to a soft purr.