

Snowed In

by Jack Swenson

Doc built a fire in the Franklin stove while I changed clothes. When I came downstairs, he was making coffee. He pulled a chair up to the fire and put his big feet on the bricks in front of the stove.

I brought a chair over and sat down. I told Doc that there was a bottle of brandy in one of the cupboards in the kitchen. Doc got the bottle and poured some of the brandy into his coffee cup. The brandy smelled like apples and cough syrup.

I went into the kitchen to get the coffee pot. I put the pot on top of the Franklin stove and sat down again. I picked up my coffee cup and held it in front of me with both hands.

"It's cold in here," Doc said.

"Fifty degrees," I said. I had looked at the thermometer on the wall by the door when I was in the kitchen.

"It'll warm up," Doc said. "This old stove throws a lot of heat."

I shuddered. "I hate cold weather," I said.

"You have to dress for it," Doc said.

Doc took a sip of his coffee. "You look better," Doc said. "You've got some color in your cheeks. When we got stuck, you were shaking when you got back in the truck."

"I should have let you push," I said.

"It's stress," Doc said. "You get beat up, and after a while, your body quits. You feel like you don't have any skin."

Doc wanted to talk. He talked and I listened. I wasn't listening carefully, though, because after a while, Doc asked me what I was thinking.

I smiled. "I was thinking about Mona," I said.

"Forget about Mona," Doc said. "Put her out of your mind."

"No, it's okay," I said. "I told you what she said, that she liked me better when I was drinking. Well, that's the way I feel, too. I liked *her* better when I was drinking."

"Mona's a twit," Doc said.

"Mona's Mona," I said.

"Let's talk about something else," Doc said.

"What do you want to talk about?" I asked.

"Tell me about the meetings."

I told Doc what the meetings were like. People sat around and talked, I said, and then everybody stood up, held hands, and said the Lord's Prayer.

"Is it boring?" Doc asked.

"Sometimes," I said. "Some people don't know when to shut up."

"What about the women?" Doc asked. "I've heard there are a lot of good looking women in AA."

I told Doc that you got a little bit of everything in AA.

Doc sighed. He didn't say anything for awhile. I didn't say anything, either. Doc looked as if he had something on his mind. Finally, he spit it out.

"I've been thinking that maybe I should quit, too," he said.

"Drinking?" I asked.

"Yes," Doc said.

I was surprised. "Why would you want to do that?" I asked.

"I think I'm an alcoholic," Doc said.

I asked Doc what made him think he was an alcoholic, and he said that when he started drinking, he couldn't stop.

"Look," Doc said, "we don't have to talk about this if you don't want to."

I said it was all right, that I didn't mind. I told Doc that sometimes I thought that talking about not drinking was almost as much fun as drinking.

Doc said he thought he would be a good alcoholic. He smoked cigarettes, he liked coffee, and he didn't like to do what he was told.

I asked Doc how he knew so much about AA, and he said that half his friends were in some kind of program.

An hour later, Doc was telling war stories. The bottle of brandy, half full to begin with, was nearly empty. Doc was telling about the time that he and Ed had picked up a girl in a bar in Minneapolis. I had heard the story before. I got up and wandered around the room while Doc talked.

Doc had put some books on a table in one corner, and I picked them up and looked at the titles. One was a book about geology, and the other was about the First World War.

I went over to a window and looked out. The snow was coming down every which way, like confetti, as if someone were tearing pieces out of the sky.

"So then I asked her to do something else," Doc said, "and she said, 'Oh, no. I'm saving that for my husband.' She was going to be *married* in two or three weeks!"

Doc laughed and laughed.

I told Doc that I was going to bed. Doc looked at his watch. "What time is it getting to be?" he asked.

Upstairs in the loft, I lay on my back and watched the shadows cast by the fire on the angled ceiling. I wondered if I would be able to sleep. If not, I would lie there and rest. Before, I had worried about not sleeping. Then I had learned that the way to fight it was to stop fighting.

I shut my eyes and listened to Doc downstairs poking at the fire.

