

The Fallen Snow

By John J Kelley

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★★★★★

The Fallen Snow is both a timeless and timely novel of the physical and emotional cost of war on those who fight them. In this case, it is the story of Joshua Hunter, returned from World War I to his home in Hadley, VA. He feels the need to keep everyone who knows him away from both his physical and emotional turmoil, presenting what he thinks everyone wants from him, from his ailing father, his mother and younger brother, and the girl everyone expects him to marry. *Snow* is told through alternating current chapters and flashbacks from WWI, letting the reader slowly tease out the cause of Joshua's wounds.

In those days, post-traumatic stress disorder was usually called shell shock, a debated term that could be physical or mental stress, but the military pressure at the time was to ignore it as a medical issue and one more of the lack of "moral fiber." For a period of time, the British banned it as a diagnosis and censored mention of it, even in medical journals.

The story is how one deals with injury, loss, and struggles with identity. Joshua's mother is glad to have her son alive, but also is preparing for the death of her husband from a cancer he doesn't want to acknowledge. Joshua's relationship with his father was poor to start with, and the two of them trying to "keep the peace" for the household's sake, while both have their own issues they won't divulge, create ongoing tension throughout the novel. And, while Joshua does ask his beau Katie to marry him, slowly through the flashbacks, the reader finds out the reasons for his internal reluctance to emotionally commit to her other than because it's expected by society and those around him.

The Fallen Snow is an excellent novel from a new author. The hills and people of turn of the 20th century Virginia are fleshed out into a strong setting for Joshua to come alive and face the challenges he's brought back from the war with him and those still waiting for him. A story deserving of a wide audience, especially during this time when we have new survivors of "shell shock" coming home from serving their country.

