

"I Married an Ice Man"

Whoever said igloos were warm has never lived in one. I was never warm in there. Not once in the twenty-three years Steve insisted we live in that frigid hut he called home. The polar-fleece long johns, hot-pocket hand warmers, and shearling ear muffs weren't enough anymore. I needed heat. Real heat. Heat only a space heater could provide. Just five minutes of it, that's all I needed. Right on my face. Five minutes of warm air caressing my Rudolph-red nose and pasty-white cheeks. Five minutes of not being able to see my breath whenever I would breathe. That's all I wanted. Five minutes of not being cold.

The second I turned on the battery-operated heater I was in heaven. A few minutes later, Steve was too. I didn't mean to melt him. I really didn't. I thought he was gone. To work, that is. It was 5 a.m. on a Tuesday. Steve leaves for work at 4. He's never once been late for a shift. Ever. There has never been an ice-plant farmer as committed as Steve. He got employee of the month nine times in a row last year. How could I have known his alarm was broke and that he would be home?

I know I should have checked under his mound of blue Ice Freeze Packs to see if he was still sleeping, but it never crossed my mind. I swear. My mind was focused on my heater. My As-Seen-On-TV, personal and portable, Hot Stuff heater that arrived by *Sasquatch Express* yesterday just minutes before Steve got home.

I don't know how Steve could have melted so quickly. The heater wasn't even on high. Not at first, anyway. But after the icicles on my eyelashes melted I unconsciously cranked the dial. I hadn't been this warm since the day Steve and I met on the ski slopes and I decided to never return to my beloved southern Texas home. Besides, you would have thought Steve would have made some sort of whimper or moan before he so easily turned into Mountain Spring H₂O.

The ceiling of the igloo began melting within minutes. It dripped right onto the center of my head. They were small drops though. The kind that never really do any harm. I didn't care that my hair was getting wet. I was also getting warm. I figured, once I was all gooey and glowy inside that I'd be more than eager to fetch a pail of that sleet-cold water from the fishing hole and toss it onto the roof of our home. The hole would have frozen closed in an instant and Steve never would have known. Things freeze fast when you live at the North Pole.

The coroner ruled Steve's death a drowning. He said Steve's lungs melted into themselves and he died peacefully in his sleep. It was an accident. They knew that. I knew that. You know that – right Steve? Right? It was an accident. I'm so sorry sweetie. I didn't mean to melt you. I loved you. And I still do. It just so happened that I married an Ice Man. I bought a heater. And I accidentally used it one day when you were still there. I couldn't help it. I was just really, really cold.