

...With Two Eyes Made Out of Coal

Their love was damned, and he cursed himself for bringing her into his world.

Night was almost upon them. Once darkness fell, they would have been free. But free to what. Her world, of buildings and rules and heat wasn't his, and his world- of ice and snow and nothingness- certainly wasn't hers.

He could have pushed the sled dogs further, and would have, but he knew she was cold- too cold to continue. He stepped on the brake and brought the sled to a stop.

"We need a fire," he said as he looked around the tundra.

"No. Please. They'll see it," Mrs. Claus begged a weak plea.

"They won't. Not out here," he lied.

He looked down at her in her blanket. She had stopped shivering some time ago. She was not cut out for this clime and was dying.

Their attempt at a life together-a life at all- was over. They were done running. He untethered the dogs and chased them away, then smashed the dog sled into kindling. His corn cob pipe caught spark from his flint, and he threw it into the woodpile. Soon, a flame grew before them.

It was a good fire, but no match for the cold which had already set into Mrs. Claus's bones. With a blaze crackling in front of them and arctic cold at their back, his core

temperature now rose as hers had dropped. Too warm for him and still too cold for her, they awaited their fate.

With blue lips that barely moved, her last breaths no longer steamed with heat. She pleaded with him to save himself. He still had a chance.

“Never,” he replied as he held her close. He remained vigilant her clothes didn’t catch fire, and he could feel himself melting under his own layers of clothing.

With her eyes closed, her last words were weak. “I love you, Frosty.”

He didn’t know the exact moment she had died, only that she had. And with this knowledge he hugged her closer and kissed her face. Melting snow and tears dripped to the frozen ground, becoming one.

By the time her husband and the Christmas Magi caught up to them, night had descended. The flames that had been their beacon had spent themselves into embers, barely bright enough to illuminate her bundled up corpse.

He gave himself time to look at the remains. To look at his Truly and Forever; pale, stiff, and still as beautiful as the day the day they married. He had taught her to hunt, read the stars, and decipher the Lists, but not to stay with her own kind.

“Santa?” One of the magi brought him back to where they were.

“Take her. Her place is home. The elves can say goodbye.”

“And the abomination?”

“Leave him. He wanted the ice. The ice can have him.”

Under and around her, empty clothes had been wet then frozen in bent shapes
where a man-a snowman- once sat.

And loved.