

# Hotter

by

Elizabeth Campbell

The bathroom is pleasantly steamy now. I reach in with my arm and feel the water, and it is perfect. The perfect combination of hot and cold. I slide the stark white curtain aside and step in, into the source of the steam and into the warmth of the water.

The flow of liquid is so warm it gives me goose bumps at first. They sprout on my spine and my arms, then leave almost as quickly. The water soaks into my hair, over my face, warming every inch of my skin it touches.

I shut my eyes, reveling in the pleasure of the warmth. It seemed so foreign, yet is like a well-known friend.

However the immediate warmth soon wears off. My flesh hungers for that warmth yet again. I open my eyes against the adjusting of my skin to the temperature. I don't want this. I want warmth so hot it almost burns, but not quite.

I reach down to the handles to reduce the amount of cold water. There are two handles controlling the shower, one with a red 'H' in the middle, the other with a blue 'C'. I can see my reflection in the top of the faucet, distorted by the curve of the metal.

The cold handle creaks as I turn it, diminishing the flow of cold water to a mere trickle. This is better, much better. The heat is back, scalding my skin red but not so hot it brings pain. Just right.

I enjoy the heated comfort once more. I wonder why I enjoy this, why I find pleasure in a temperature so hot it almost hurts. But I do, and I find refuge in the steamy waterfall.

Again, the heat is not enough. I turned the cold all the way off this time, so now only hot water is allowed to flow from the showerhead. It doesn't take long for this adjustment to take effect, and soon the water is boiling over my skin. I let it fall in my face, down my neck, through my hair, into my open eyes. The whole outside of the bathroom is thick with steam. Still, the heat isn't quite enough.

I try spinning the cold even farther off, yet it won't budge. I have reached my hot water limit. It will go no hotter than this. This fact disgruntles me. So I give up and let the cooling water flow over my face. I squeeze my eyes shut and suddenly a polar gust washes over my body.

My eyes snap open in the shock of the temperature change. My heart stops beating a moment as I am devastated by what I see. A subzero snowscape surrounds me, and I am still stranded at the summit of a mountain. I feel the dead weight of my frostbitten arms and legs. I'm still anchored here amidst the blizzard, right where I fell asleep. I thought it was the last time I would ever fall asleep.

No such luck.