

## The Ice Sculpture

By: Indi

Etcetera dropped his bag on a table and yawned. The tall ferret had been tasked with producing an ice sculptor for a party at his dorm in mage college. It was actually a fairly easy thing to do, requiring only a crystal ball and a well-known incantation. He'd spent most of the previous night studying, though, and was sorely lacking in sleep. All the exhausted ferret could think of was napping, not spellcasting. Hopefully he'd be able to get some in if he hurried.

The crystal ball was pulled out of the bag, along with a scroll, which Etcetera unraveled. He placed his right paw on the ball and held his left one out where he wanted the statue to appear. All he had to do was recite the spell and he'd be finished.

As Etcetera spoke the obnoxiously long and complex incantation, he felt a yawn coming on. Despite his best efforts he couldn't hold it back, and the final few words ended up garbled beyond recognition. A sharp chill surged through his right paw, prompting him to yelp and pull it away.

He frowned and shook his stricken paw, which felt like it'd been dipped in a bucket of ice water. No amount of shaking could fend off the persistent chill, though. And for some reason the paw was feeling stiff, too.

Looking down, Etcetera was shocked to see that two of the fingers on his paw had frozen over. No, they weren't just frozen, they were ice—solid ice. He could actually see through them a little. As he stared, the affliction began to slowly spread, more and more of his paw transforming.

"The spell was supposed to make an ice sculpture, not turn me into one!" Etcetera whined, in danger of falling into a panic. He frantically read all of the text on the scroll, searching for some kind of reversal spell or warning or miracle. Anything that'd save him from a frozen fate. But there was nothing besides the original incantation.

For a moment Etcetera considered fleeing the empty workshop to find help. Unfortunately he didn't remember seeing anyone else on his way into the building, and most of the day's classes were already over. Just getting outside would be a challenge. There was also the chance he'd lose his balance and fall, which would mean shattering either part or all of him.

With few options, Etcetera instead chose to remain in the workshop, which was well-stocked with magical tomes that might provide aid. *Might.*

The ferret scurried to the nearest bookshelf and began skimming titles, grabbing anything that seemed even remotely helpful. His right paw was useless, already a shimmering carving of ice locked into place. Only having a single free paw slowed him down considerably.

Slowly but surely the ice spread up Etcetera's right arm. He could feel the numbness rising. It was like a timer, reminding him of the consequences of failure. It was also distracting him from his search. He whimpered when he realized his elbow had frozen, that he'd essentially lost half his arm to the ice.

Pages were flipped with reckless abandon, indexes raced over, scrolls unfurled. Etcetera found plenty of ice-related spells, but nothing about reversing or even stalling them. Meanwhile, his entire right arm had transformed, and his chest was following suit.

Etcetera looked at the progress with dismay. His arm was immobilized, resembling an intricately carved sculpture. It'd have been impressive work if it hadn't been his own flesh minutes before. He swore the spread of the ice was hastening—or maybe it just had more room to spread now that it was trying to claim his whole chest.

Every new inch of ice slowed the ferret's movements a bit more, impeding his ability to carry, to search, to even turn or lean over. Etcetera was a strange sight to behold, an arm and the right side of his chest made of pure ice. It was beautiful, though the ferret understandably wanted nothing more than to be rid of it.

Time was running out. He doubted he'd be able to walk for much longer, so he had to choose his next move wisely. Either he could check another shelf in the workshop, or risk the storage room, which also had a fair amount of resources. The choice had to be made swiftly.

On impulse Etcetera made for the storage room. With his waist starting to turn to ice he was practically dragging himself along, going only as fast as he dared. He was nearly immobile by the time he reached the room, the door mostly closing behind him.

At last the lower half of Etcetera's chest—waist included—froze. The fleshy parts of his body were separated by ice, leaving him half-statue, half-ferret. Though his legs hadn't frozen they couldn't move, trapping him in place. His one good arm went for any book and scroll in reach, fumbling whatever it didn't drop outright.

The ice went for Etcetera's neck, forcing him to angle his head downward to read before he lost the ability to move it at all. But no matter how hard he tried to read, he couldn't. His thoughts were overwhelmed by the creeping progress of the ice.

It reached his knees, and his shoulder, and his chin. His jaw and mouth froze over, the entire lower half of his head turned into a sculpture, a fragile decoration. His remaining paw was shaking as it continued turning pages.

Etcetera was on the verge of giving up when he heard the door to the workshop open. "Etcetera? Dude, where are you!"

"Maybe he already finished the statue and left for the party?"

Voices of friends! He cursed his inability to shout for help. He knocked at a book with his paw, but couldn't manage enough force to make much noise. No matter, they'd check the store room, they'd have to!

"We should've run into him, then. And I think that's his bag on the table."

"Yeah, and that's the crystal ball and the spell. Bet he cast it and rushed to deliver it immediately."

*No, I'm here, I'm in here!* Etcetera screamed in his head. Most of his face had become ice, including his eyes.

"Probably. Let's just grab his stuff and head out, then. I'm sure he'll be glad to not have to come back for it."

The sounds of the bag being packed and the two friends leaving reached Etcetera's ears right before they froze over. He was nothing more than an ice sculpture.

Though transformed, Etcetera retained his consciousness. He was aware of his body, but nothing beyond it, as if trapped in a void.

*Someone will find me. Someone will find me. Someone will find me.*

Etcetera repeated to himself over and over again just to prevent from falling into complete despair.

*Someone will find me. Someone will find me.*

His body was starting to slowly warm up, the initial spell's chill fading. Without the chill, he began to melt. At first it was merely a trickle of water here and there, pooling beneath his footpaws and dripping down his outstretched arms. But it was constant. He was losing definition, impressive details starting to fade.

*Someone will find me.*

Etcetera wasn't sure exactly when he realized he was losing ahold of his memories, but knowing didn't help. The more he melted, the harder it became to concentrate and maintain his sense of self. Bits and pieces of his mind were falling apart—just like his body.

*Someone will...find me.*

The withered tips of melted fingers fell to the ground, mere slivers of ice. The statue was hard to recognize, enough features smoothed away that it could've once been anything from a weasel to an otter. The ice cracked as it melted, an arm snapping off and shattering on the floor.

*Someone...will...find...*

As time passed, more and more of the statue collapsed, falling apart before ultimately melting into a puddle that covered most of the storeroom floor. Over the course of a day some of it dried up, but when the door finally swung open there was still plenty remaining.

“What the?” A wolf looked at the unexpected water and the scattered books with confusion. He rolled his eyes. “I bet *this* is why Etcetera bailed on cleanup duty. Real great of a friend to leave me with his mess while he wanders off partying or something. He’s gonna owe me after this!”

The wolf begrudgingly mopped up the puddle and dumped the water down a drain. He never did figure out where Etcetera had gone.