

Christmas Eve

by tommy klehr

It was Christmas Eve. Time for the ghost to visit. Just one ghost in this story. The ghost of a Christmas past. Just one Christmas for just one ghost.

He looked out the window. Under the distant streetlight the snow was falling. He turned on his porch light. Saw the flakes steadily drifting down, covering the world in white. Cover the browns, blacks, greens. The dead and live alike. Smothered them in this white purity. A frozen tomb.

He went outside. Stood in the safety of his porch. He watched the huge snowflakes fall from the dark sky. Appear magically before him. The blanket of snow on the ground made the world quiet. He could hear the light sound as the flakes nestled in on the ground, joining their brothers and sisters. Nothing to distract him now.

He held his hand out from the protection of the porch. Watched as the flakes settled on his skin. Each one unique. Watched them melt into little dots. Now all the same. Replaced by another gift from above.

And then he remembered. The quiet always made his mind go back to that night. It was a night similar to this one. Another Christmas Eve. Snow falling quietly. Alone. Tonight, as he was then. Still, perhaps. Oh, there were others around him between then and now, but he was all alone. Alone with his regrets. His own disappointing failures.

The ghost was coming now. He could feel it. The man went inside to get warm. Await the arrival. It didn't take long. As soon as he sat on the couch, saw his coffee table before him, the ghost appeared.

"Remember," the ghost said.

"I do," the man said to no one. He closed his eyes. He heard the clock chime 11:30. Was it real or his memory? In an instant he pictured the scene from so many years ago. So many changes had occurred, yet it was all just the same.

He opened his mind's eye and saw the small plastic bottles lined up on the table in front of him. He saw his hands, his own two hands, with minds of their own, reaching for the first plastic bottle, the man's name on its label.

He opened the bottle, shook the contents. The small pills ricocheted off the sides and each other. He poured the contents in his hands. Thirty synthetic snowflakes, all exactly alike, which, together, would quiet his world too.

He dumped the contents of his hand on the table. Started counting them. He lay out fifteen columns of two. Then ten columns of three. Six by five. He arranged them so that the mark "*X20*" was lined up correctly on each one.

Delaying the inevitable. He scooped the thirty snowflakes in his hand. Jostled them about. Heard them gently kiss each other in his palm. Brought them closer to his head.

The clock began to chime again. He counted. After the twelfth chime, the sound began to fade. He listened as it disappeared. He had made it. He poured the contents of his hand back into the bottle. Screwed the cap on tightly.

The ghost said *"Do not forget."*

"I won't," the man said. Then added, "I can't."

He opened his eyes again. The table before him was empty.

He got up from the couch and returned to the window. The snow was falling even harder now.

"Merry Christmas," he said to himself. Or was it to the ghost? He turned out the porch light.

