Christmas Loneliness

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Abstract

The streets are wet; Sparkling neon signs Glisten in pools of melted snow...
“C’mon! Jump! You’ll never catch anybody like that.”
Barry said nothing. He swallowed and checked the distance with his eye. His left knee shook and he hoped they didn’t see.
“Jump!” they called again.
Barry tensed and made a start—something cold and hard squeezed into his stomach. His hands were sweaty. He stopped and his knee shook harder.
“Aw! He’s afraid,” yelled one of the bigger boys. “I knew we shouldn’t have let him play.”
“You afraid?” Duane called.
“Scaredy-cat—scaredy-cat. He’s scared,” the others chanted.
‘I am not—I am not—I am not!’ Barry yelled, feeling alone and a stranger again.
“Well. Jump then,” they called back. “You are, too, scared!”
The cold hard thing in Barry’s stomach pressed harder and his middle felt weak. But there was another worse feeling. The one he’d had all week—before he knew anyone. His stomach held back and his loneliness pushed. He had to try to jump. He had to.
Barry swallowed what felt like a mouthful of cotton, tensed, took a short run, and leaped. The last thing he saw was the edge of the loading dock rushing up.

—Austin H. Phelps, Jr., ME. Jr.

Christmas Loneliness

The streets are wet;
Sparkling neon signs
Glisten in pools of melted snow.
The evening crowds surge along the streets,
Window-shopping, stumbling,
Looking into every crack and crevice
To find something, nothing.
Overheated interiors beckon,
From behind the window’s cold unfriendly glare;
Beckon to us to shop or browse.
Only 15 more days to Christmas—
Buy today, buy now.
It is getting colder now.
The large white flakes settle
December, 1948

On the frozen brown slush.
Walk through half-deserted streets,
How can you be lonely?

The bright lights shining on the snow,
The crowds pushing past you
In twos and threes,
Carrying a present to Aunt Mildred,
A new pipe for Uncle Sol,
Can you still feel lonely?

Pull your muffler tighter around your neck
As you walk on through half-deserted side-streets.
Kid yourself that only your body is cold.
A thin frail mother in a blue raincoat
Walks slowly out of a department store.
She pulls three boys after her,
Carrying nothing.

The sun is very far in December.
Do you want to be absorbed
Into the surging mass, the crowd?
Become a homogenous texture
Of molded character?

Why do you think of loneliness,
When you remember other crowds rushing
In and out
Across the cold gas lit streets
Of another town?
Remember that couple hand in hand—
It was warm for them that December
Standing, watching the big Christmas pine
Lit up, majestically, on the square.

Do you know how it feels
To be one falling snow-flake
Among the millions
As they hit ground and melt?
To be for a brief while
A member in a crowd, a particle,
Falling alone, yet
Fusing together to make more snow.

—Martin Hoffman FO Jr.