

Empty Christmas
Joe Bruner

I stand at the ice-glazed gate,
watching the silent house.
A puff of frosty breath freezes,
its crystals lingering in the frigid air.
Snowflakes whirl gently, dusting my coat
in their icy velvet. One lands on my cheek
and melts into a running tear.
I imagine a house, once festive
and brightly lit – alas no more.
In the past, two young boys – brothers –
shrieked and giggled with delight
while ripping pristinely wrapped
presents into green and red shreds.
A tree, drooping with
sparkling ornaments, wordlessly
watches over this annual ceremony.
That fuzzy scene melted away
to the bleakness of the snowy world
as my boot scraped against
the salt encrusted sidewalk.
Looking down, a handprint,
name, and date sunk
in cement are the only
artifacts that remain, obscured
under salt and ice.
The streets are silent,
only the wind whistling
is audible. So alone...
I nestle my face into my scarf,
but the wind, with its spindly fingers
slips through the cracks,
scratching at my face and neck.
Cars are parked in others'
driveways, resting from
the numerous visits to "Santa".
If I could ask for only one thing
this Christmas,
it would be to have my brother back.