

COLD

BEN McAVOY

Cold.

Burns my nose,
 my cheeks,
 my fingers,
 frosts my breath,
 and stings my eyes.

I. Lights shining
 on a winter night
 stare through the
 icy blackness,
 and people stare
 at them
 in turn
 with blurred and
 watering gazes
 quietly thinking,
 wondering,
 asking themselves
 questions
 forced upon them
 by the lights.

II. In winter
 I walk
 with my hands
 in my pockets
 and my elbows
 hugging against my ribs.
 The crisp air
 bites against
 my nostrils,
 and I remember
 times lost
 in warmer arms.

III. I see faces,
 cold faces,
 pass by me
 quickly
 without ever
 glancing up,
 wearing cold smiles,
 blank expressions,
 and always vacant eyes,
 their features
 burnt upon
 their faces
 with some
 grim and horrid
 iron—
 scars set there
 forever.

IV. Nothing is honest
 any more,
 not even
 childhood.
 Christmas is gone,
 prostituted,
 clothed in tinsel,
 great and ostentatious,
 led around
 the nation
 on a leash
 and stored away
 after a long
 and thorough
 milking.
 Children too,
 are shackled

and led quickly
 to the marketplace,
 sheathed with
 dubious values
 and taught
 to buy
 (but mostly sell)
 and shown that
 everything
 has its price.
 Mommy and Daddy
 wall them in
 and tell them
 how,
 and when
 to smile
 and love,
 then let them go,
 off in search
 for happiness.
 The children go
 and never speak
 to strangers
 and do their best
 to hide their feelings
 and are always
 on their guard
 against love,
 and charity.
 Too late,
 they find themselves
 left out
 in the cold.

V. What greater sign
 is there
 of our dishonesty
 than that we teach

our children
 that it is wrong
 for men to cry?

VI. Sometimes
 it seems
 as if there is
 just winter
 for us all.
 We walk
 with hands
 in pockets
 while the cold
 burns our noses
 and stings our hearts
 until
 they are numb,
 and we
 stare back
 at lights
 while dreaming of some
 favorite warmth
 and maybe ask ourselves
 if any of it matters
 any more.

Cold,
 comes, and stays,
 and I must go
 dive into it
 and beat it for a time,
 knowing that
 whenever I want
 I can draw away,
 cast off the cold
 and pull myself
 still closer
 to the warm.