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Man's Best Friend

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Man's Best Friend

Christy Mroczek

There is a young boy who is probably seven or eight years old who walks by my house everyday. Today is especially cold, and he pulls his red stocking hat tight over his dark, wavy hair. He wears a blue jacket that doesn't look quite warm enough for the freezing snow. The screaming and yelling coming from his own door doesn't seem to affect him. I can hear two voices crying and yelling profanities at each other along with other crashing noises. He walks down the street dutifully and proud that he is out all alone without his mother or father. He walks slowly,

occasionally tugging on the leash that he carries. I remember when he would walk past smiling, but he doesn't smile as much anymore. The boy's face is determined and downcast as he trudges through the snow, dragging the leash behind him. I can't quite see what he is leading, but he calls to it every so often. He doesn't reply to his mother when she screams at him to come back into the house. The boy stops walking and turns towards the end of the leash. He speaks into the air, but I can't hear what he says, and he moves his hand back and forth as if he is caressing something. It seems that his unseen friend has responded because

the young boy smiles and embraces the air. He takes a cookie from his pocket and waves it into the air and tosses it up. The boy picks up the cookie as soon as it hits the ground and tosses it again. This time he smiles when it hits the ground and pats his little pet again.

He sits on the sidewalk bench petting the air and talking. People walk by and stare at him and he reaches for his leash as if to hold back something from attacking the strangers.

He ignores more screaming from his mother to come inside as he sits alone on the bench. Maybe he can't hear her, but how can he not? A man drives by in an old and

neglected truck and commands the boy to get in. You don't want me to have to get out and put you in. "Okay, Dad," the numbed boy says. He jumps in the truck and cringes, putting his hands up in front of his face. He leaves his leash on the bench. It is too late when he realizes he doesn't have it. I watch him cry as he looks back out of the window.

The flakes of snow sting my face as I walk towards the bench. The boy's invisible pet sits curled up on the bench, lonely and shivering. I pick up the leash and go back inside my house. Maybe I will see the boy tomorrow.