

The Ward on Christmas Eve

By Sean R. Robinson

She has waited for Nurse to lay the battered playing cards down like an old fashioned Tarot. It signals that the Ward is asleep and the hours from midnight to dawn will crawl, uninterrupted by bed check and headcount. The sky is threatening to snow.

She is late to make her gifts.

She has hidden things over the last week as the nurses hung garland and set plastic fir trees. She gathers them in her lap. She is careful to watch out her door; the nurses have no tolerance for patients up in bed when the chemicals they take at bedtime should be caroling through their blood.

She lays the plucked poinsettia leaf in the hollow of her gown. She thinks they will make beautiful wings. She has carefully taken the mistletoe from the Ward's holiday decorations to make bodies. There is a bloody piece of tinsel to tie her homemade gifts together.

She has saved the pills whose names are the refrain Nurse makes her sing: Lithium, Lorazepam, Haldol. She will make their panacea a cider, mulled with her blood and spit. The self-made

scars that line her arms are the magic. She rings them like a boy might play the Christmas bells. Her gifts open sightless eyes. They are her dark elves, her yuletide faeries.

She lies back onto her bed and smiles. Some crawl, others skitter into the hallway. She imagines them dancing right into her neighbors' dreams. The screaming begins as midnight comes. Finally.