

Fireside Yuletide

By: Jefferson Marshall

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He was lost and found within the flicker of the firelight on the cold Christmas night. Like the sparks ascending upwards towards the heavens, his soul was lifted to places unknown. By the fire, so close to the heat as to singe, he felt most free and unbound by life. Only here, where warm waves of dancing light met creeping shadow, did he somehow find both rest and awakeness. It's as if the red, glowing embers were a comfort to his spirit, much like balm or blanket are to skin and bitter bones. In the blaze was the whole world wild. Within it were contained grace and destruction, mercy and longing. The crackles and whistles held a myriad of meaning. Both literal and metaphor were belted forth from the wise lips of the flame. Its blank verse spoke simultaneously of time hither and yon. And he was at last keen to listen.

Within the symphony of the fire was the melody of his youth. Visions of times long past sprung forth from the flame to enchant him. He saw with his waking eyes childhood wonder and wild belief. A boy awoke from vibrant holiday dreams. Eyes still sprinkled with stardust were quickly wiped clean. He arose and dressed tightly amid the frigid morning. Moccasins were donned upon both feet. He walked silently across the hardwood. In the living room he waited with legs crisscrossed in the quiet. Soon, the rest of his family would stir. With delicate ornaments suspended against the luscious, green backdrop of the holiday tree, he waited with pure ecstasy to open the panoply of brown-paper packages wrapped underneath.

Then, with a quick gust of ungodly wind, a firestorm began. More holiday memories flooded in. This time the visions were of the malicious and ravenous instead of the soft and joyous. Recollections of loved-ones lost many Christmases ago. Sad remembrances of still-born babies in the weeping hands of dear friends. Kith and kin departed over trivial and selfish woes. And a vision

from nowhere, neither he'd seen nor experienced, except in a dream, came rushing in. In this blue-black winter vision, harsh stark snow descended down. Mixed in the flurry of frosty white, ash descended every, turning the sky to a wicked blood red.

With troubled countenance, he quickly stepped back from the flame. His soul was in torment. He struggled to think that a world full of light, could also be so full of sorrow. How absurd to live in a land mixing misery and bitter-sweet delights. Apathy is surely a lighter burden than the heavy weights of empathy.

The fire song had relished its harmony and also its dissonance. Now for its final motif. The fire spoke without muttering a word: "We glory in our aching, for we learn to endure. Our own perseverance sparks strength of heart, which spurs the flames of hope to start. Hope is a blaze none can extinguish. For the secret is this: death is mortal, yet we, we are imperishable."