

THE BURNING BABE

by

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Based upon the poem by Robert Southwell

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

A dense blanket of snowfall coats the surrounding stone bursts of Gothic architecture. A plain crucifix, foregrounded and mounted atop a Protestant house of worship, overlooks the city center. In the distance, a lone black speck zigzags across the immaculate white canvas.

The speck is an English NOBLEMAN, stumbling drunk through the silent night, his cape flitting in the air behind him on gusts of swirling ice chips. He imbibes the remnants of his flask and reaches into his doublet, pulling free the Catholic rosary that hangs from his neck.

The nobleman unsheathes a dagger from his waistband and drops to his knees before the church. He poises the tip of the blade against his chest and shivers equally from the cold and his nerves.

NOBLEMAN

Forgive me. I may be a writer, but words escape me now.

An orange glow grows against the nobleman's back.

NOBLEMAN

Where words fail, action more than suffices. This injustice before us all...

Scattered embers blast against the nobleman, prompting a peaceful smile to creep across his conflicted face. He turns to their source, and his jaw and dagger drop in unison.

A flaming BABE hovers in the air above him: a majestic infant, thoroughly engulfed in ravenous tongues of fire.

THE BABE

Alas...

The nobleman shudders. Beads of liquid escape his tear ducts, matching those of the babe's.

THE BABE

But newly born in fiery heats I fry, yet none approach to warm their hearts or feel my fire but I!

EXT. VIA DOLOROSA - DAY

Calloused hands press a crown of thorns onto the head of CHRIST, sinking the pricks into His brow.

THE BABE (O.S.)
My faultless breast the furnace
is, the fuel wounding thorns.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The eyes of the babe stare into the nobleman, wide and ever-weeping, glossed with flame and tears.

THE BABE
Love is the fire, and sighs the
smoke, the ashes shame and scorns.

INT. THE GARDEN OF EDEN - DAY

A humanoid SERPENT strokes EVE's head as she obligingly bites through the red rind of the apple.

THE BABE (O.S.)
The fuel justice layeth on, and
mercy blows the coals.

EXT. ANCIENT FIELD - DAY

ABEL pets his sheep; CAIN rushes him from behind. Stone strikes brain stem as the brothers tumble in the dirt. The stone rises and falls a definitive time, and skull fragments leap up and hang in Cain's wild orange beard.

THE BABE (O.S.)
The metal in this furnace wrought
are men's defiled souls.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The burning babe's flaming eyes fill the screen.

THE BABE
For which, as now on fire I am to
work them to their good...

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The nobleman is alone, as before, on his knees in front of the Protestant church, with the dagger-tip pointed toward his heart.

THE BABE (O.S.)

So will I melt into a bath to wash
them with my blood.

The nobleman drives the dagger into his chest and death-rattles forward, staining the snow.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The nobleman and the burning babe face-off in silence. The nobleman finds his dagger in a bed of snow and holds it slack before the apparition in shame.

The flames in the air consume themselves, and the infant disappears with them. The nobleman considers the instrument of death in his hand and weeps.

CHILD (O.S.)

Sir? Sir?

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The nobleman awakens with a start. The town square is alive with the majority of the populace buzzing around the church at this early hour. A curious CHILD studies the nobleman sleeping in the street.

PARENT (O.C.)

Son! Away from the drunk at once!
Inside!

CHILD

(to the nobleman)
Merry Christmas, sir.

The child scampers away. The nobleman looks up at the church as citizens file through the entry doors. The plain crucifix on top has been heavily adorned with Christmas decorations.

The nobleman looks into his palm where he formerly held his dagger and finds it replaced with a writer's fountain pen. His eyes swell with tears. He bravely clutches his rosary.

Singing voices rise in harmony. They do not emanate from the Protestant church, nor anywhere else in this earthbound scene.

NOBLEMAN

Merry Christmas, Lord.

The ornate crucifix, foregrounded and mounted atop the Protestant house of worship, overlooks the city center. In the distance, a lone black speck rises from the snowfall and marches homeward.

THE END