Fall 1960

Down to Death

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“There is something in the autumn that is native to my blood.”

Autumn—when our Garden of Eden draws near the cloak of winter, shedding the dress of summer—is the most beautiful of seasons. Leaves of autumn, like the flowers of spring, add to the beauty of fall. Autumn leaves are etched into the mind as a little piece of fall, combining and merging with the season to bring out its integral, intrinsic beauty. The cold days of an October sun burn away the early morning sparkling silver-white shield of dew to reveal frost-nipped leaves drenched in autumnal hues. The rampant reds, purples, and yellows scream out their gauntlet of colors, if only for a moment. Then, one by one, they loosen their grasp and float serenely downward, laying a carpet of unrivaled richness. The once copious canopy of foliage has been transformed to a shroud of crisp, crackling leaves ready to be kindled into a roaring bonfire. Eager hands rake the leaves of the oak, the ash, the maple, into ridges—into piles—into mountains, brown and lifeless. Children, pink tinged ears with mitten hands, scamper through, crawl into, roll over, and play on these mounds of amusement with the greatest of gusto. Time after time handfuls of leaves are thrown into the air, blown and scattered—for sheer pleasure. Finally, as dusk approaches, they are again in a leafy conical pile ready for the torch. A match, a spark, a glow—a wisp of piercing smoke curls up—suddenly a flame bursts out. The first burns its way forward leaping from leaf to leaf. Like Mount Vesuvius, the whole pile is engulfed in tongues of fire. As chestnuts begin to snap and crack, bang and burst like the 4th of July, the shimmering heat of the bonfire disseminates the chill of evening. Then slowly, ever so slowly the fire recedes, retreats to the heart of the porous pile, eating itself up as it goes, leaving skeleton-like forms on translucent ashes to the mercy of the night. The leaves of autumn are gone. They have served their purpose well.