

Gift of the Nez Perce

Dan Evans, December 1977

Neither hoof-print nor sleigh rail had touched the carpet of snow,
That covered the only street in a little town in Idaho.
A biting wind was whistling-in from a moonless winter sky,
But the folks in town kept warm in their homes on a long ago Christmas night.

Down the middle of the street struggled a man at the lead of a spotted Indian mare.
On the back of the pony slumped the shape of a lady with a feather in her hair.
A light in the window of the pioneer doctor he sought but did not find;
Just the barking of some dogs and their shadows on the snow from a start shining extra bright.

Farther down the street a lamp he could see on the porch of a big grey house.
Passed the open gate the brave trudged up the walk, leaving the girl upon the horse.
Through a steamy window pane the Indian saw, many children 'round a tree,
With candles on its branches, popped corn strung like beads and a doll with butterfly wings.

A rap on the door stirred the children to wonder who their visitor could be.
'St. Nick,' shouted one, so to the door at a run, they opened it to see,
An Indian wrapped in an elk skin blanket, his deer-hide boots froze stiff,
And his red face featured by a fire from the parlor of the missionary orphanage.

In quiet amazement the little eyes stared at the man standing in the snow.
Then a white-haired lady walked past the children and stepped onto the porch.
In the floodlit street from the gleam of a single star hanging in the sky,
Stood an Appaloosa with the Nez Perce maiden soon to bear her husband's first child.

Sixteen smiling, little faces surrounded a pine-framed bed,
As the black haired girl stroked the wrinkled red arms of the baby at her breast.
With the proud young brave standing at the side of his son and Nez Perce wife,
Morning came to a pioneer town in Idaho after Christmas night.