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The Return of Light: A Christmas Tale

Dia Calhoun
Lisa Falkenstern, illustrator
Marshall Cavendish (October 2007)
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As renowned literary critic and editor Sol Stein once said, the purpose of nonfiction is to impart information, but the purpose of fiction is to convey emotion. By this deceptively simple-sounding but all-important standard, *The Return of Light* succeeds brilliantly as a modern Christmas fable.

When the Christmas Deer turns five-year-old Treewing into a Christmas Tree one year, promising him a special destiny, the young tree's expectations are high. But as he waits…and waits…in Lolly's tree lot with Longbough, his best friend, Treewing's branches seem doomed to droop with disappointment as family after family of "Jollies"—happy families with children—pass him by.

> *'Do you still believe in the Christmas Deer's promise?' Treewing blurted. 'Still believe he is all wise?'*
>
> *'Certainly!' Longbough rippled his needles. 'How can you doubt him?'*
>
> *Treewing felt ashamed, but doubt gnawed like a beaver at his bark…*

Treewing must learn not only to believe in himself and trust in the Christmas Deer, but also to think a little differently about what it truly means to be "special." A group of homeless people, a little boy who has lost his father in Iraq, and the grumpy Christmas tree lot owner all play a role in helping Treewing to realize his destiny as a bringer of light.

Readers will be particularly intrigued by the mysterious and unavoidably allegorical Christmas Deer, similar to mythological creatures from the Celtic "fairy cattle" to the magnificent stag said to have converted St. Hubert to Christianity. The book's first illustration—that of a deer decorated with bells, his antlers aglow with stars, is so beautiful that readers will return to it again and again.

This is a parable without preachiness; a story with each word carefully polished until it shines like a crushed aluminum can hung tenderly on a scraggly Christmas tree in a half-empty lot. *The Return of Light* is destined to be a well-loved classic in many public and home libraries and would be a good selection for those readers seeking to teach their children the true meaning of Christmas.

Dia Calhoun is a winner of the Mythopoeic Award for Children's Literature. She lives in Tacoma, Washington, and is the author of five young adult fantasy novels, three of which were selected as American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults. They are: *Avielle of Rhea*, *The Phoenix Dance*, *White Midnight*, *Aria of the Sea*, and *Firegold*.

HOLLY CHASE WILLIAMS (August 15, 2008)

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