

The Cold Within

Six humans trapped by happenstance
In dark and bitter cold
Each possessed a stick of wood--
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs,
But the first one held hers back,
For, of the faces around the fire,
She noticed one was black.

The next one looked cross the way
Saw one not of his church,
And could not bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch.

The third one sat in tattered clothes
He gave his coat a hitch,
Why should his log be put to use
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought
Of wealth he had in store,
And keeping all that he had earned
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge
As the fire passed from his sight,
For he saw in his stick of wood
A chance to spite the white.

And the last man of this forlorn group
Did nought except for gain,
Giving just to those who gave
Was how he played the game,

Their sticks held tight in death's stilled hands
Was proof enough of sin;
They did not die from cold without--
They died from cold within.

-- James Patrick Kinney