



One Christmas in Old Tascosa

Cassandra Firman

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“Quintille Firman grew up dirt-poor on a Texas Panhandle homestead during the Dust Bowl era. In 1931, she and a dozen friends experienced a special Christmas pageant at their schoolhouse in Tascosa that included a frightening blizzard. While the story, retold by her daughter Casandra, centers around one memorable incident, readers will feel the stunning strength and firm resolve these children of the Great Depression exhibited every day. Into this novella seeps hints of fathers who deserted, grim-faced mothers who stayed and children who could afford only one pencil for the school year. There are crumbling adobe shacks called home, threadbare clothing, schoolgirl crushes and unrequited puppy love. Kids and even adults will read this one twice.” —True West “Quintille’s story, so poignantly retold by her daughter Casandra, speaks volumes about the human condition on the High Plains in 1931. It is hard to imagine that anything so simple as a lead pencil could break a budget, or that using two in one school year could constitute extravagance. Yet children in Old Tascosa at the end of the Depression and on the cusp of even more desperate times were, like their counterparts elsewhere on the Plains, accustomed to hardship and well used to shouldering their share of the family’s burden. They had no reason to know that life anywhere, or what constituted luxury, could be different. Not knowing they were deprived, they found joy as children will in friendships and games, and in the wonders of the school room. And in the simplest of Christmas pageants they found the prospect of bliss.” —Red Steagall, from the foreword

It was Christmas time in Old Tascosa. The year was 1931—well into the Great Depression and on the brink of the worst days of the Dust Bowl. Tascosa, once a booming Wild West town complete with outlaws, cowboys, and gamblers, was all but deserted. Its only resident was Frenchie McCormick, a famous dance-hall girl from Tascosa’s glory days. In 1931 she was a frail and lonely woman in her eighties, living in a tumble-down adobe shack and waiting for Tascosa to rise again. This story is about Tascosa, the Christmas pageant of 1931, and how twelve children, stranded in a one-room school house by an untimely blizzard, met Frenchie. Casandra Firman lives in Port Orchard, Washington. Quintille Speck-Firman Garmany lives in Pensacola, Florida.



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