

AN EXOTIC CHRISTMAS SHORT STORY

Some years ago I was lucky to spend part of my Christmas time in an unusual place: Egypt, because I have a friend who was living there for work reasons. A group of friends decided, to visit him and cheer him up. Sadly, he had lost someone close recently.

My first big surprise was, when we arrived in El Cairo, we saw the whole city was decorated and illuminated too. The lights were a little weird and different from ours but with the same cheerful effect. There were some Christmas trees, dispersed through the city, even.

“Are these lights because of Christmas?”, I asked with the typical eastern prepotence.” Yes of course, some are”, answered my friend. In Egypt there are a big number of Christians, in fact, it was the first official Christian state in the world. Although they are Coptics and celebrate Christma’s Eve in our Twelfht-night date. But what the majority was celebrating was Aid-El Kebir(The Lamb’s feast). It’s more or less comparable to Christma’s Eve with the same emotional and familiar meaning and both festivites coincided.

The next day we went to visit the eternal Alexandria. It was very ornated too and it was really nice and strange to see the people conducting the lambs along the streets and killing them in the streets as it is traditional if the house is too small to do it inside. Afterward they share the meat among all the family members and a third part is for poor people under their religious law. Though it seems to us primitive and odd, it reminded me very much the swine’s slaughtering, not so long time ago that was done at home too, for its festive and happy atmosphere.

Anyway, what thrilled me most was when we went to celebretate New Year’s Eve in the desert. One of my best life experiences and possibly one of my best Christmas, too. The most unforgettable at least.

That night we were a lot of people. With us came a numerous group of Bedouins that guided us and prepared the night campsites. I have to say that the desert is magical in itself, and it was especially so on that occasion. It was a very nice experience because both, Christians and Muslims, shared their traditions together.

I was in charge of "beating the bell" with a huge fryingpan, in fact I had to do that twice because the different hours. The Bedouins looked at me between entertained and surprised. Probably wondering on its meaning but taking part actively in it. Next to us, they made a traditional Bedouin bonfire party with their magical and hypnotical chants and dances.

The night sky in the desert is amazing ... I could say, in a poetical way, that it seemed painted by God (I should say in this case Allah better) with his most brilliant and sparkling palette for thousands of stars and heavenly bodies overflow through that immense celestial dome, shining by the fullmoon light. And there, beneath that sky, while we tried to swallow the twelve grapes, without choking, I could see the same brightness of joy and good fellowship in everybody's eyes. We were spending Christmas faraway from our homes and families for pleasure and, the Bedouins, on the other hand, for work. Imagine how our mood would be if we had to work the whole Christmas without families and friends, and in spite of that all of them were all the time with huge and permanent smiles in their lips.

At this moment I thought Christmas goes beyond a religious feeling, no matter if you believe in God, Allah or if you are an atheist or agnostic. It is a universal feeling that dwells in people's hearts and gives us joy, companionship and love to the neighbour, it does no matter how we call it or where we live.

It was a very rewarding experience. It was great.

To make a long story short I will finish wishing everybody, no matter who they are or where they live:

M E R R Y CHRISTMAS !!! and أعيادا سعيدة!

Pablo GARCIA FERRERO

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