Retelling

SACRED

STORIES

OUR JOURNEYS TO A SHARED SACRED STORY

Retelling Sacred Stories

OUR JOURNEYS TO A SHARED SACRED STORY

The Fetzer Institute



A RETELLING OF THE CONFUCIAN SACRED STORY When the Fire Came

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Director of the Vraja Prakalpa

"This retelling... is needed for the survival of humanity and Mother Earth."

—His Holiness Sri Sri Sugunendra Theertha Swamiji, Abbot,
Sri Puthige Matha

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Narayanan, Professor, Department of Religion, University of Florida

"A profound range of Hindu concepts and practices."
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Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute

"The creative tension between the immanent and the transcendental...is the crest-jewel of the story." —Swamini Svatmavidyananda Saraswati

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When the Fire Came

A RETELLING OF THE CONFUCIAN SACRED STORY



When the Fire Came

PART ONF

The Fire

The girl stood at the end of the driveway, looking across the wooded valley toward the part of the sky that appeared to be burning. As the day had drawn on, the red of the wildfire had spread across the horizon, consuming the forest of old-growth cedars, hemlocks, and pines, and pushing a wind carrying flecks of ash, some of which lay on the ground before her like small black moths. She nudged one with her foot, wondering what to do, where her mother was, before being mesmerized again by the horizon.

In the days prior to the fire, the valley and hillsides had baked dry in the late July sun and a tautness had permeated the village. It seemed people waited helplessly, the girl felt, for an errant spark from a car, a discarded cigarette, for the sun to set alight a dry blade of grass. At the grocery store, she heard an old man say that it only took an ember to burn down a house. Her mother had rolled her eyes and pulled her daughter toward their truck for the drive home.

Yet, the following day it had happened, the fire beginning with a nameless spark in a tindery patch of brown scrubland, then growing and sprawling until it was an enlivened mass as tall as local houses, and taller. The flames climbed cedars, licked up at the sky and huffed out smoke so that midday seemed like midnight. The distant townspeople felt their throats tighten and their eyes sting, but they were told the fire was heading away from them. Their forest of cedars had been a presence for hundreds of years, perhaps a thousand, creating

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