of separate air across the vacuums.
The heat and pressure were enough to grow
diamonds as they measured hot
syrup into quarts. By supper the last jar
was set on the counter to cool
into isolation. Later in the night
each little urn would pop as it
achieved its private atmosphere and
we cooled into sleep, the stove now
neutral. The stones already
pecked clean in the yard were free to try
again for the sun. The orchard meat fixed in
cells would be taken down cellar in the
morning to stay gold like specimens
set out and labelled, a vegetal
battery we'd hook up later. The women
too tired to rest easily think of
the treasury they've laid up today
for preservation at coffin level, down there
where moth and rust and worms corrupt,
a first foundation of shells to be
fired at the winter's muddy back.

Woodsburn / Robert Morgan

Goes out digging through underbrush,
flushing thickets, throws ahead to pines
and lushing runs a footlog.
Shards of a castiron stove are
exposed in the gully.
Roots hiss and sap foams from
a burning stump.
I've fit flames all night
with a pine limb lest their rabid spit
touch the cedars.
Fire walks
on outcrops and rhododendrons
to the summit where an

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opposing wind throws it back
into the treetops.
The mountains stink
and smut curds stain the spring.
Wash redveins the bitter dust. The
tarbaby catches a shivering seed.

Through dry clearings the grass
carpet smokes and turns to ash.
The chemicals chew, fast
as you can run, a surf
hissing along as stitches and interlacings of
straw go one into the other
widowing roots like networks
of fuses that burn down to millions of
other fuses and never reach
explosives, but leave
the field blasted all the same,
the green skimmed away. The
waterhole cures white as a diploma.

When lightning touches its mangled wand
to timber and the acres lift
away in cities of smoke,
ravishing the undergrowth and deadening
the canopy,
that hell's been found to be
a perfect agent for regenerating the
diversity of forests, shrubs, and weeds.
Fire cleans up the too-old timber stands
and takes the nutrients from burned
logs for soil. Clears a new
settlement and like the best pioneers
begins by dumping ash
and potash, ammonia, calcium and
nitrates, along with rotting carcasses
more potent than manure or the
indian's fish, on the bare ground.
Lets sunlight in and seeds
of extra species.
New minerals leach out.
The fresh groundcover gives

protection from above to quail and
rodents, rabbits, which bring
proliferations of the bigger game.
Huckleberries fill the scalds
and seedlings kindle browse for deer.
Without destruction softwood
debris accumulates faster than rot,
and a uniformity of flora breaks
the foodchain, threatens the young
growth of trees, the health of land.

FICTION / RUSSELL BANKS

Escaping Christmas

1.

Ibo was the first to realize what was about to happen and he began to
scream, running frantically from the living room down the narrow hallway
to the stairs, scrambling up the stairs and into the room with the skylight
where the others—Saya, Deek, Odum, and Wiksa, the ambassador—were
seated in a square playing a four-sided game with black and white pebbles.

They had heard him coming, heard him shrieking the alarm, roaring
out their names, and when he burst through the door, they met him by
shouting, all four of them, angry, full of panic, bewildered. After a few
seconds of bedlam, Ibo's high-pitched voice again dominated, and though
there were still no explanations, he was allowed by the others to give
orders and have them swiftly followed.

He told Odum to stay in the room with Wiksa and to bolt the door
on the inside when they had gone out, to barricade it with the several
pieces of furniture in the room and not to open it again until he heard
the password from one of the other three.

Then, before leaving the room, Ibo had Deek break out a German
handgun and 12 dozen rounds of ammunition from the chest at the top
of the stairs, which he handed to Odum, instructing him not to fire the
gun until or unless he could use it to kill a man. "Don't open the skylight,

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