



The First Song

(from *This Winter's Night* by Mother Tongue)

Have you ever wondered why there's so much singing at Christmas? This is the story of the very first song. It's a true story just as all stories are, if you believe in them.

This story begins a long, long time ago when Earth and Sun made the first beings—the very first plants and animals and people.

It was springtime and the Sun shone warm and bright from His high perch above, and Earth, the proud mother that She was, held and fed Her newborns and relished them with tenderness and love.

It was a time of joy, it was a time of great delight. The Moon waxed and waned time and again in the night sky, and the children of the Earth grew well and strong through Summertime. They played and danced, and Earth and Sun watched over them.

Then Autumn came, and the Earth began to sleep much longer every day. She grew tired and pale. She could no longer feed Her children and had no strength to make new life. High above the Sun grew more distant and took longer to return each morning. The nights grew longer and cold winds blew where none had blown before.

And then, one day, Earth went to sleep and never did wake up. She wrapped Herself in a blanket of snow and rested Her tired head on pillows of dried leaves and She did not wake up. Her children could do nothing to rouse Her from her slumber. They prodded Her, they called Her, but She would not awaken.

In the sky, the Sun was nowhere to be seen and the children of the Earth felt fear and despair. This was the longest night that they had ever known.

“What shall become of us,” they pondered. “Earth Mother sleeps, and Father Sun is so far away that we can barely see Him in the sky. He is much too far to hear our call. What shall we do?”

So they brought their questions and their fears to the Moon, the sister of the Sun, for they knew not where else to turn. She closed Her eyes and took a slow deep breath and looked within Herself and awoke thoughts that had never been awakened until then.

She opened Her soft eyes and said “When hope is lost, the best way to get it back is with a song. Climb you the tallest trees, the biggest hills and the mountains and yule a song to reach the Sun.”

Now *yule* is a word from one of the world's oldest tongues. It is related to words like *yell* or *yodel* and it means *to call out in song*.

But the first beings had never heard a song; so once again they sought the Moon's advice. "How shall we yule?" they asked. "How shall we sing a song?"

"Take the best of what you have," she said, "the best of what you are. Take what you love; take what you cherish most. Take your joys, your dreams, your fondest hopes and weave them all together in a sound."

And so they did. They climbed atop the tallest trees, the mountains and the hills. They stood in all the places that would bring them closest to the Sun. They shut their eyes and thought and felt the best of thoughts and feelings and dreamt the finest dreams. And as they did, their voices rang out and made a bridge of song across the sky to reach the distant Sun.

The Sun heard, and turned, and smiled, and wrapped Himself in all His light and warmth and sped to where the yuling voices called. As He drew near, the sleeping Earth did stir and dreamed a dream of Spring. And so the wheel of life made its first turn, and hope and joy prevailed. And ever since, that time of year has been called Yule in honor of the song.



But the first song did not end. It had such power, such allure, that the first beings kept singing it throughout; and then the second beings born of the Earth took up the song, as did the third and so it ever since has gone, through years and years until this very day.

At times the song is very soft and scarcely can be heard above the din and clatter of our lives, but when Yule comes it rises and swells in memory of that night when the Sun heard, and light and life returned.

And so do we, upon that longest night, gather with those we love and who love us, and stand upon the body of slumbering Earth and light the log with last year's and lift our voices soaring to the Sun and join the song that first was sung so very long ago.

We sing our thanks to those who went before and sing our fondest wish to those who come after. We bask in the returning light of reawakened hope and welcome YULE.

A Family Celebrates Yule

Yule was coming! The family decorated their house with evergreens that stay green throughout the winter when so many other things seem dead. Conifers are a natural symbol of life during Yule celebrations. Some families decorate a tree, or if they prefer not to cut one down, they collect some discarded pine branches to create wreaths or garlands to hang in their home.

The family spent time with loved ones. In the middle of the winter when so many activities seem to grind to a halt, and anything that involves leaving home just doesn't seem that appealing, it's a great time to gather inside with friends and family to appreciate each other's company.

The family enjoyed the wintry weather. Sure, this might not be as easy as celebrating the Summer Solstice, but every time of year has its own natural charms. They went outside, for at least a little while, to go sledding or have a snowball fight (or, if there is little snow, go for a short hike).

Giving gifts isn't part of Yule, but this family lives in our city, where lots of people give Christmas or Hanukkah presents. The family liked the idea, so they made gifts by hand and shared them with one another. They also took small bags of treats to the elderly at a nearby nursing home.

Cooking and feasting are definitely important aspects of a traditional Yule celebration. On the eve of Yule, this family invited friends over to eat, drink, and be merry. The other families were pagan, too, so they cast a circle by sprinkling wine on the snow and saying special words of welcome to the spirits.

That night, they had a fire when they burnt a Yule log. A Yule log is a single large log that is traditionally burned on Yule. One of the family's friends can't have a fire in their home, so they have a Yule log candle holder and log-shaped cake.

This family stayed up all night. Since it's the solstice, the night is the longest one of the year. A traditional story surrounding this event is that the sun is reborn on the next morning, after which it will grow bigger and stronger until the next summer. In some cultures, it was traditional to stay up through the night to make sure that the sun would come up again in the morning, when they went to the top of a nearby hill to watch the sun rise.

