Spring 1973

A Fire

Gary Gildner
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I am building my father a fire in the fireplace we never use —the one for looks in the living room. He nods, rubbing his palms, but doesn’t speak; his cheeks are scarlet, there’s a grin trying to surface, trying to travel a lifetime. Oh I know he’s happy and the room’s so clean! I lay more kindling on, a split white pine as smooth as skin, and licks of flame surround the birch. Such extravagance! He’s really grinning now and I am too, in fact we’re clapping —softly so that no one knows we’re there.

Mother is the first, I think, to see the mouse bound out. Still, no one speaks— even when it lifts a leg and pees against the television. But something must be done. I have a can of insect spray and, as in former days, stretch and fire home a wicked fastball —but I miss. The mouse curls up beside my chair, Father falls asleep —he looks at peace— and Mother joins him with a nest of pine cones in her hair.