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A Fire

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A FIRE

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.