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Jim Kerbaugh

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Christmas Eve

by Jim Kerbaugh

Immobile under quilts
In an unheated bedroom,
I always waited for the stoves
To heat three rooms
Where I’d be trapped all day.
Grandparents are up at dawn,
Decades-later Dustbowl-grimness,
Modified by Christmas visitors.
Parents, in-laws, aunts came next,
Ejecting children so the aunts could make the beds.

At breakfast, all was fried,
Eggs brown-edged, potholder-tough.
Expected to listen quietly
To tales of county denizens
Who committed strange, illegal acts
And mostly went unpunished,
I ate, longing for their company.

Surfeited, grandchildren were dismissed
Into the stupor of the living room,
Speechless as the Big Ben on the mantel
Tortured every second of the eon-day,
The evening’s payoff hardly worth the wait.

We sat, hoping for the sun,
An hour’s release into the yard
When the men were stultified,
And the women didn’t want us underfoot.
The mixed-breed collie and air
Not thick with sausage, coffee, cigarettes