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Stoking the Logs at Dawn

by Walt McDonald

Ashes drift down like snow, smoke from the chimney
easy to breathe, split piñon from New Mexico.
Decades of nights come back on the breeze,
coils of memories like DNA—Jimmy swinging a rope

from his pony, Susan in bed with teddy bears
and mumps, teaching them ballet and tap
on a pillow stage. Now, from breakfast chairs,
we watch trees bloom before our eyes through the glass

and weeds turn green. So many miles to Susan's house,
an ocean between us and Jimmy's job, Seville a city
we learned meant Spain light years ago in school, a town
where exotic others lived. Grandchildren sleep

without us, now, always holidays to enjoy
scattered throughout the calendar, any excuse
to call, to hear their voices like wind-up toys
deep breathing in the receiver, then *I love you*

Mamaw and Pop, 'Bye, and later, teenage giggles
and granddaughters' often call-waiting clicks
and gushy love goodbyes. Pockets of pine sap sizzle
and pop in the fireplace, the bittersweet

aroma of smoke in the room, like our cabin
in the mountains decades ago, our fingers locked
on the sofa, now, big-knuckled and splotted,
a stiff coupling of fingers that still fit.