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Hanukkah at our House

MINDY WOLF-TAYLOR

Before we recited the blessing
and lit our first candle
against the dying light of December,
I insisted that we plug in the Hanukkah bush.
Aglow with blue Christmas lights,
it lit up the corner of the family room
and the family photographs
lined up behind it.
I thought we looked dreamy
in the blue-lit pictures;
my brother, older, wiser, said we looked
pitched up from the bottom
of a very cold lake to the shore.

Each season, I pushed for blue lights
on the tress outside but had to settle
for the Hanukkah bush
and a miniature Christmas tree
with plastic pine needles and ornaments
on the nightstand in my room.
Each year, I imagined telling Santa
my Christmas wish:
that he steal down our chimney
and leave my father
the best box of Havana cigars
he could find.

Santa never did come.
Each December we lit the candles
and we didn't do it
against the dying light in the window
as the sun set so the neighbors
could look in and see the yellow glow

softening our faces.
We put the menorah on the built-in bar
in the corner of the family room
and huddled around it.
My father whispered the blessing
like a secret,
my mother cupped her hand
around the quivering flame,
my brother and I waited to get our gelt,
then unwrapped the stiff gold foil
and let the chocolate melt slowly
in our mouths.

We ate until our throats burned
and our stomachs ached,
until the candles caved in
and burned down.