

# New Year's Eve

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BY PHILIP ELLEFSON

when my dad gets home from work he asks me  
to grab a beer with him. we drive to the bar  
in the gray Toyota pickup and as we drink  
i realize my father is trying  
to give me something – an understanding,  
a pillar to uphold me. he tells me  
he approves of my career choice though it may  
be unreliable. he tells me also  
that my plan may not be God's plan, and although  
i admit a distance has grown between God  
and me, i cherish what he's trying to tell me.  
but here's the thing: what he's really trying  
to tell me is unsaid, for we are not only  
American men but Scandinavian  
Americans by way of Minnesota  
and Seattle; we do not speak openly  
about the hard things, so what he's really  
trying to tell me gets buried. what he's  
really trying to tell me is that life  
is hard aloneness but he honestly loves me.  
for this i am grateful. we step outside  
into the searing crystal winter air  
and the sun has dipped between the horizon's mounds  
where a glow the color of embers yields  
slowly to a vast blue-black dome dotted  
with pricks of white. in the pickup truck  
with my dad i nearly cry at the beauty  
of a sunset.

around eight my parents' friends  
show up for the party, people who used to talk  
to me as a child and now initiate me  
into the strange, stale conversations

of working adults. most of the partygoers grow  
drowsy with mulled wine and leave before  
two-thousand-fourteen disappears. the countdown  
starts and ends and feels, as always, un-  
ceremonious despite the fireworks  
and cheap champagne.

i wait until my parents  
go to bed to finish off the sweet warm wine  
and make my way past piles of dishes (heaped  
with scraps of the smorgasbord) to what's left  
of the light framed in the mantel – searing wood  
glowing the color of a cloudless winter  
sunset in the darkened room and i'm drawn  
to it, i get so close it starts to hurt.  
this luscious drunk gravity would not be  
so strong if someone else were here – my dad,  
perhaps, the ember-glow glinting off his glasses  
and his hairless head, throwing the right half  
of his face into blackness. if he were here,  
we could cast off our heritage and say it:  
that togetherness can be only fleeting  
and forgetful, a holiday party  
interrupting the string of working days;  
that the only permanence we can hope for  
is the honest acknowledgment of shared  
aloneness, which is a rich swell of gold-orange  
fading into the ever-blackness – fathers  
and sons, mothers and daughters, friends and lovers  
glowing honest and alone with you  
at some odd beginning.