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## The Year of the Apocalypse

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Class of 2016

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# The Year of the Apocalypse

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# The Year of the Apocalypse

Pamela J. Thompson

Back then I thought death was beautiful,  
that there was an elegance in mixing the whimsical and tragic.  
My mind was a forever field, an apple of chaos,  
a child's closet after midnight.

The summer I learned to drive  
my father let me go two hundred miles  
on the highway in a car without brakes.  
There's no good way to say that.  
I remember the low grumbling  
as I smashed my foot down  
and nothing happened, just blankness,  
a hollow weight in my chest.  
I knew then he was indifferent to my death.  
My life was just another insurance policy to cash in on.

When I returned to boarding school in the fall,  
And saw you silhouetted against the blue mountains  
and the warm setting sun,  
I wanted to love with all the hunger and ache of a fever,  
I wanted to hold you in the marrow of my bones  
and innocently call the sky a window of marbles,  
but I wasn't ready to be vulnerable.

On an afternoon in February I walked  
through the tall weeds to your house.  
You were my high school sweet heart,  
though I didn't know what it felt like  
to say *I love you* and mean it.  
I was greeted by three wet noses,  
who met me at the edge of your driveway,  
and your mother,  
who was waiting in the doorway  
inside the gingerbread-brown house  
at the end of the cul-de-sac.  
She gave me candy hearts

and a pastel purple stuffed frog prince  
because you were too embarrassed to love me  
that way at school, a reminder that you  
were two years behind me in everything.

Later that evening, I cried in the dormitory  
because I didn't want to be a woman,  
but my mother told the counselor it was  
because my father raped me as a child.  
The dark looks and pained smiles  
I received from teachers on my way to class  
burned magnesium white in my chest.  
Therapist appointments, guidance counselor meetings,  
approaching court dates—  
I thought I would never convince anyone  
but you of the truth. You who kept my secrets,  
you who had visited the hellfire of my mind and returned.  
You held my hand on the front porch  
of my dormitory.

The day before, a prison fire in Honduras killed  
three hundred and eight. But I didn't know.

I didn't cry.

Later that month a train crashed in Buenos Aires,  
there were bombings across Iraq,  
the Syrian Army killed hundreds of civilians,  
and Al Qaeda orchestrated suicide  
bombing after suicide bombing in Yemen.

My mother wanted my father in prison.  
She wanted me to lie in a court of law  
because justice was more important than truth.  
Ten years of arsenic poisoning  
that couldn't be medically proven  
weighed in her blood like lead.  
I wanted to forget my family life,  
which had been daily attacks of biological warfare.  
Each meal an unspoken battle ground.  
I simply wanted  
to walk to class beside you,  
to smell your sweet sweat,  
to run my hands through your hair  
so that the oils would seep  
into my skin and perfume them forever.

It was unreal to be dispersed across these planes;  
My parents were divorcing,  
You wanted me to love you,  
It was twenty twelve, the year of the apocalypse,  
and Everyone was saying it was the end of the world.  
I drew a Mayan calendar for the class garment,  
which was later pasted on sweatshirts and yoga pants  
to be worn like a brand.  
It was the false symbol of our generation,  
our minds filled with dark images of asteroids and sun flares,  
as the real world crumbled in much less mystical ways  
all around us.

Eight months later I was in college,  
and you asked me to visit you for a weekend.  
I said yes because I still wanted to believe in fairytales.  
I remember you said you loved me,  
I remember you said you wanted me,  
I remember you were jealous of my new college life,  
I remember you were done waiting.  
In the dark I whispered, *I will never say yes.*  
You pressed me into the leather couch with certainty,  
This is what it meant to own someone,  
this was how a man became a man.  
Beyond the walls of your parents' house,  
a thousand miles away on a lake,  
my father played a banjo and sang  
old mountain bluegrass  
to a woman who wasn't my mother.  
Ten thousand miles away a fuel tanker  
exploded in Saudi Arabia,  
and I realized, sobbing *no* into your neck, that suffering wasn't  
beautiful.