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The Last Birthday

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The Last Birthday

Abstract

This poem looks back on the predicted apocalypse of 2012 in light of the poet's 12th birthday, which took place that year.

Keywords

poem, poetry, free verse, birthday, 2012

Disciplines

Creative Writing | Poetry

Comments

Composed for ENG 302: The Writing of Poetry: New Poems, New Poets

Winner of the 2022 Marion Zulauf Poetry Prize.

Natalie Dolan

The Last Birthday

At the time, turning 12 seemed like a big step forward,
my last year before the infamous teenage years,
which would bring high school and driving and
everything my classmates awaited eagerly
but which I dreaded.

So for this last preteen birthday, I clung
to my childhood, enabled by the
local AMC's specialty showing of
Finding Nemo and an assortment of
arcade machines.

I remember that I ended up in a
photo booth, disappointed to be
with my not-best friends
of the friends I'd invited.
We picked a border by accident and
framed ourselves with cartoon dinosaurs.
I remember that one friend won
a penguin from a claw machine
and gave it to me in the parking lot.
The penguin's name escapes me.
I remember that another friend
gifted me a pink bottle of perfume.
I never wore perfume, that was such a
girly, wannabe grown-up thing.

That was 2012, the year that everyone thought
the world would end.
My classmates had gone on about
the old Mayan calendar
or whatever it was
that had foretold the apocalypse
to the year. Supposedly, at least.
I never saw any scientific proof.
We had joked about it,
laughing at the believers who
spent their life's savings because
"you can't take it with you."
Christmas break? More like

infinite break, because January would
never come, get it?
Because the old Mayan calendar
or whatever it was had predicted
that this would be it. So long, farewell.

We laughed, but I think that each one of us
exhaled some breath of relief
when the clock ticked its way out of
that December day. Because who knows?
Because what if that had been it,
if I'd spent my last months fretting
about which of my friends
got a picture with me?
If I'd never grown up, if I'd been
left stranded, denying till the very end
adulthood's approach?
If I'd ended up lost, forever 12,
drifting in endless whiteness,
alone with the knowledge
that the people we'd laughed at
were right?