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The Last Year

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The Last Year // Brittany Clemens

That was the year of the 10-pack of Kleenex and cowboy themed playing cards. Mom stopped coming to the dinners so I was forced to perch on the edge of the church pew, squeezed between the too-strong cologne of my grandfather and my aunt who needed her own bench, trying to stop my aching stomach from crying out in hunger while the priest told us we were all Jesus's elves.

Or it might've been year of the glitter tipped nail file and expired dollar store gift card. I was officially assigned permanent dish duty and was desperately trying to prevent myself from hacking asthmatic spittle onto plates of half chewed pork fat, tripping over two homicidal cats and an ADHD rescue mutt in my rush to destroy as many photo-realistic reindeer paper goods as I could while the dessert was starting without me in the room next door.

It could've been the year of the Barbie princess card, the souvenir Las Vegas shot glass, and the portable tire pump. My cousin was too absorbed in her Walkman to say hello, but that was okay, because she plays the cello now and started taking German and was on this fascinating new diet, so I hid the newspaper cutout of my first place in the high school geography tournament behind my untouched block of meat from the turkey my grandfather had shot two days before.

It was the year of the fifty-dollar bill. My grandfather was in the ICU, my cousin discharged from the army, and my uncle diagnosed with colon cancer. My aunt made plans to sell the house over store-bought hoagies and Dad's girlfriend helped with the dishes. So I sat on the plastic-covered floral couch underneath the fake mistletoe garland that never left the ceiling and memorized the patterns with my fingers, perfectly still and silent to catch every last fragment of worried voice and anxious cough and engrain them in my head because I knew that was the last year.

Tell me to fuck off