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Rapture

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ELIZA SMITH

RAPTURE

- Runner-Up: Big Sky, Small Prose Flash Contest -

MY UNCLE SAYS the world will end when I am thirty-one years old. Or the world will not end, but the son of God will return and rapture the faithful, and either I will not live in the world anymore, or the world will not be the world. It will be a dark and frightening place. Something about gnashing of teeth.

I am eleven when my uncle makes this prediction: only twenty years to go. After school, I tell my mother that I don't want to be a veterinarian anymore; there's no point. I will die when I'm thirty-one, I say. Or I will cease to exist. Or I will levitate into the sky. Or I will be gnashed by teeth. I am supposed to be happy about my uncle's prediction, but I feel cheated. I want a whole life, even if that means I have to die at the end.

My uncle delivers his prediction on a white board during Chapel. Chapel is on Tuesday mornings at the church school where he resides as lead pastor. On Tuesday mornings at church school, I am required to wear a long khaki skirt with a navy or white long-sleeved button-up shirt, brown or black shoes, and a brown or black belt. There are no rules about my hair, so long

as it's a natural color.

I am generally relieved to go to Chapel because it means we get a break from the cubbies where we do our work independently all day out of little books called paces, as in *I am working through my paces so quickly, I'll graduate when I'm sixteen*. But one Tuesday morning we're held up, something about a plane in a tower where New Yorkers go to trade things. My cousin rolls a television set into our room and turns on the news, and no one goes through their paces anymore, we just stand in our skirts and ties and watch the burning of a city that has only ever existed to me in theory.

Eventually, someone decides we should move to Chapel, so we file to the sanctuary and pray until our parents pick us up, the same time as always.

“Did you gas up the car?” I ask. My mother doesn't understand so I say, “the terrorists!” and she thinks I'm saying something about a sleepover, so I yell “THE TERRORISTS!” and turn on the radio. My mother is a night nurse, she's been asleep all day, and I watch her face as she processes what the world has been processing since morning. I imagine it's a bit like the face I made when I discovered the world would end when I was thirty-one, or maybe it's the face I would have made had I learned that information the night before my thirty-first birthday.

My mother stares through the windshield and her face grows red and the

corners of her mouth begin to shake, and she stares and stares and stares at nothing, or our future, or our future of nothingness, and to this day she has never seen New York City as it is, as it exists now, it is always on fire in her mind. I try to tell my mother the city is beautiful, but what do I know? I've only seen it twice and I have four years left to live.