

**Paul Adrian Fried**  
**New Year's Shot, December 31, 1968**

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I don't know where Jaynie sat that night coming back from  
George and Millie's—my Dad's folks', our side  
of town. Usually back between Billy

and me, singing all  
the way and bouncing us out of our minds, her sweet  
revenge for teasing her, for being older, for *dibs*-ing  
window-seats.

(Then again, she'd let us comb her hair, almost  
dark as Dad's, but with a fire his never had...)

Or else  
she sat up front, head on Mom's arm, hands between  
her knees—maybe nestled on Mom's lap, back to the cold  
window—she was six, the rhythm of her breath a warm rosary-  
pulse against Mom's neck.

No, she probably sat in back  
between the dopes, alert but still, arms wrapped around  
herself, hunkered down, eyes shifting as pale streetlight glow  
swept in waves across us all along Grand Avenue.

The snapshot  
has us smiling from the timer Grandpa set: Dad's older sister  
in the convent then. His little sister, too, who fell down  
and never went back to school. His little brothers: The priest  
from Cincinnati; the chemist, finger-horns peeking up  
above his first wife's head. The youngest, with sideburns  
and long hair before the draft, holding the missing brother's  
uniformed portrait beside him, saving a space

for the war to be

there with us in the living room, a hole Billy and I thought  
would swallow us up one day. Grandchildren arranged by height,  
a short hill of human lace along the bottom border, with Billy  
in the middle.

Even Uncle Stan is there, his shoulder cut out  
of the shot, beat-up overseas by his own platoon, mental discharge,  
barely caught inside the picture's white edge, shaping a word no  
one remembers, about to breathe it toward his shoes.

I don't know  
how he touched Jaynie in the room by the upstairs bath, how  
she kept it to herself the whole ride home, then whispered it out  
to Mom on her bed—

or how my father got back in the car  
and skated that tightrope stretched from his little girl  
to his brother,

how the gunshot echoed as he closed  
the car door, stepping toward his parents' house, and in  
his mind, saw Stan alone out back with Grandpa's twelve-gauge  
in his chin—

ran through snow and jumped the fence only  
to find the neighbor kid, with a smirk and a pistol aimed  
at the sky—shooting air at midnight to mark the year—

or how  
long my father stood in the cold as sweat soaked like blood  
into his clothes before he went in the house.