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I'VE BEEN WAITING TWELVE MONTHS FOR A CALL BACK

Nicole Serianni

I've called my poppy twelve times since last December. I scrolled through my contacts, tapped his name with my thumb, and held the phone to my ear twelve different times. I called my poppy twelve times this year, and twelve times I heard the fateful message, "the number you have reached is no longer in service".

It's a funny thing, because he always remembers to answer his phone. His trusted flip phone sits in a leather case, worn with use, strapped to his belt, never more than two rings away from a bright "hello!". He never misses one call, much less twelve.

There must be something wrong with his provider.

I want to tell him about my day today at school, and how I'm excited to come home for Christmas. I want to ask him how his day was and how he feels about the Yankees keeping Aaron Judge. I want to describe something adorable that his great-granddaughter said today.

I want to laugh with him over a story that he's told before.

I promised myself last September to call him as often as I could, because I suddenly became poignantly aware of the fragility of existence, of the fleeting nature of life. I hadn't kept my end of the promise very well, but I am resolved now. So I've called twelve times.

In his home in Toms River, New Jersey, he is sitting in a rocking chair. This chair is upholstered with blue floral fabric, positioned a few feet from a TV that is playing some old black and white movie. A movie that he will describe to me in detail over folding fitted sheets and matching socks when he comes to our house on Tuesday. He is saying something about how his car will get an oil change on Monday, and he will need to buy more English muffins at Shoprite on Wednesday.

He is eighty-eight, and full of life, and never misses a beat.

It is almost Christmas Eve, and I am thinking about the stuffed clams and calamari he will offer to the dining table. I am thinking about tradition, and memory, and how I cannot remember a time of my life when there weren't clams and calamari and poppy on Christmas Eve. I think about how each year now my father says it's time for us to watch him cook and pass on the tradition. I think about how he hasn't said so yet this December.

In his home in Toms River, New Jersey, he is sitting at his desk. It is old and wooden, falling apart at its seams, but it still serves its purpose. On his right, a brass lamp with a frosted glass shade illuminates his blockish handwriting. He is doing his bills by mail, because he does not understand the internet. My nana comes in saying something argumentative, and he

responds by yelling something in Italian,
throwing a weathered hand in the air.

He is eighty-eight years old, and full of
life, and never misses a beat.

I call him for a second time this evening,
beginning to worry. I speak into the void
after the sterile message from at&t, telling
him that I am finally ready to watch him
make the clams this year. I tell him that
I can buy the breadcrumbs if he buys the
lemons, that we can be a team. I tell him I
am ready to sit in the kitchen with him, an
opportunity I missed so many times as a
little girl, to pull up a chair in front of the
oven, and watch them bake while the party
goes on downstairs. I tell him I have been
waiting to see him.

I sit in unprovoked silence, waiting for
a response that will not come, wondering
why it has taken him twelve months to
answer my call.

I turn to my bedside table, shut off my
bronze lamp with the frosted glass shade,
and end the call.

He will call me back tomorrow.

UNTITLED

Benjamin Gates

