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Born; 6:52 am; 6 lbs. 7 oz.

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BORN: 6:52 AM, 6 LB 7 OZ

JESS GREENWALD

when he was seven, he liked his sandwiches cut into rocket ships, and his favorite color was blue, blue like that artificial shit they put in crayon boxes, and when he was alone, when mommy was at work, and daddy was in the shower quietly fucking their neighbor Nicole, he liked to pretend that he was an astronaut, he would point out the window and say to his teddy bear, Mr. Buddy "look at that! a black hole!" and he would pretend that Mr. Buddy had asked what a black hole was and he would tell him what he had learned when daddy had taken him to the science museum, and then he would explain how a meteor had probably killed the dinosaurs, and then he would pretend a dinosaur had taken over the rocket ship, and he and Mr. Buddy had to fight it off. "Mission accomplished!" he would shout when they had dumped the t-rex into the black hole, and somewhere, two rooms over, his father and Nicole would pause, unsure who had yelled and why.

when he was twelve they placed him in advanced science, but he didn't care, his favorite class was art. he loved the way the acrylic paints felt under his fingers, the way the chalk stained his t-shirts, the way the paper smelled before he started, the way his art teacher mr. schultz said no matter what he made it was art, it was always art, and that was easy, easier than going home, thinking about mom and dad and the fighting and the name-calling and the whiskey, the crying behind locked bathroom doors, mom staying later and later and work, dad leaving to stay at motel 8 for a few days, dad forgetting to pick him up after school, mom forgetting that he had joined art club and getting him vanilla cake on his birthday instead of chocolate, even though he hated vanilla, and his favorite color was purple, purple like night, where somewhere, there were stars and black holes, orbiting and revolving, not knowing any of this, it made nothing meaningless, nothing too big or too empty, and didn't that make everything okay?

when he was seventeen he smoked a lot of pot and cigarettes. mom had gotten custody, but he was allowed to see dad at christmas. it was june, the nape of his neck was sweaty and his palms and his colored pencils too, and outside he could see the neighborhood kids playing in the sprinklers and he smiled a crescent moon in a purple sky, he hadn't heard from dad since christmas. he took a strong pull out of a cigarette, dabbing the end of it on his paper, he

watched smoke bloom and paper burn like an inkblot flower, then he continued his charcoal drawing around it, smoking quietly, listening to the CD his girlfriend had burned for him.

when he was twenty-two he had his own place with his girlfriend olivia, an apartment in a big city that smelled like the cigarettes he couldn't stop smoking, he graduated with a degree in visual art (a waste, mom had sniffed) and the walls were his canvas, the carpet paint-stained, and the galaxies were in the art, he realized. he found out olivia had gotten an abortion without telling him the same day his mother called with the news that his dad had OD'd somewhere in new mexico, and he didn't feel like crying, he just felt like smoking. he felt like he was finally feeling all the papercuts he'd gotten his whole life but had not bandaged, and he was bleeding everywhere, inside, outside, and what did

“Who was he to declare he felt more pain?”

any of this mean, who was he to declare that he felt more pain, when every twelve seconds someone died in a hospital somewhere, and that was somebody's mother or somebody's boyfriend, and there were wars and cancer and car crashes and seemingly random universe fucking that he couldn't explain, so all he did was smoke, smoke, and watch evening fall, thinking about the sound a black hole made, somewhere far and distant that was, but was not, here.