

**i.**

Second grade was a kaleidoscope of sensory details, the patchwork of what your underdeveloped mind found shiny. Perpetually glue covered fingers. Velvet tablecloth of Sunday school, oak pews. Brass doorknobs and the bus stop.

Among those days of skinned knees, one day stands out in particular. You'd gotten home from school and wanted to know why your pastor had lied. Genesis and the Ten Commandments were two of the pillars your small world heavily relied on, and science class a few hours prior had brought the former crashing down. Genesis. The Beginning. One of the older girls had written the story on the whiteboard. She made her "a"'s fancy. *Chaos*. Chaos in the beginning. And then there was light. God said so, Pastor Karen said so.

Which was why you'd objected in school that day. Ms. Goins was mistaken, surely, because you'd know if God was also known as the Big Bang. The Big Bang didn't create the universe, God did, you explain to your father at the kitchen table, ladybug backpack wildly discarded. Absolute truth existed, and you'd had it, until a few periods and one long bus ride ago.

His answer haunted you. Maybe the Big Bang created the universe. But who created the Big Bang?

**ii.**

Indra's net is a Buddhist and Hindu story describing an intricate spider web hanging in space. As the legend goes, the wondrous net is strung with precious jewels. At every intersection of the multidimensional web one will find a dazzling gem, bright as the stars. Each jewel reflects the others. Two mirrors reflecting. Infinite.

The Quilted Multiverse theory of astrophysics illustrates a possible explanation of what is beyond our known universe. Potentially, doppelgängers. Endless doppelgängers. Since the speed of light is finite, and the entire universe may not be, there is only so much of it we can observe. This is our known universe. We may never be entirely certain what lies beyond that orb. Which means the conditions that created our universe, our planet, could be duplicated. There are only so many known particles; the quarks, leptons, bosons, and on. They are cards in a deck. Shuffle that deck enough, the cards will start repeating their exact order, all 52 of them. The implications of this are massive. Our exact card order, the ace of spades following the seven of diamonds and so forth, creating your neighbor and Martin Luther King, could have been repeated. Our universe, with our light-limited boundaries. Elsewhere, the same thing. Two mirrors reflecting. Infinite.

**iii.**

At thirteen, you're sitting on a tweed couch in your therapist's office. A sand Zen garden sits in front of you. Her office is hot in the summertime, and your shorts are cutting red lines into your thighs. She's asked you why you've been having trouble falling asleep.

"Well, scientifically, we are searching for a unified theory, right? A theory that would unite all observations, explain our world. But if the logic is sound, then the theory itself would predict the outcome of our search for it. That is where discovery and curiosity would lead us. We're humans- we're curious. However,

we're limited by perception. Every recorded observation of our universe has been through experience, and with experience, there come predetermined boundaries. We process everything from within. How do we prove anything is real outside our own heads? We're just walking, talking brains, made of the same stuff as stars. The very laws of nature that restrict our self-constructed picture of the universe also determine our behaviour. Nothing within us deviates from trends set by neuron interaction. We love to promote individuality, yet there is nothing unique about humans as a species, as a form of nature. Science. nothing but science. And not even science we can comprehend; human nature is far too complex to be understood by humans. To be free means only we determine what happens to us, not why. Our desire to escape this flow is yet another way we fall victim to the cycle. we are similar in our singularity. We are connected by loneliness.”

Her prescription is melatonin and less reading.

#### iv.

General relativity and quantum mechanics are the two basic prototypes for the theory of everything. One, the former, controls macrocosmic quandaries. Einstein's solution to orbit. Niels Bohr fathered the latter. Microcosmic. Particle physics. Each of these theories have been proved time and time again. Their equations are worn and beaten. Unbreakable.

The singularity of a black hole, unfortunately, innocently destroys the possibility of these theories coexisting harmoniously. Black holes cause enormous gravitational ripples in spacetime. However, their very essence is a singularity, an infinitely small and infinitely heavy location where all known scientific laws go to die. Space and time become hopelessly intertwined. It goes about it's business as a macrocosmic microcosm, a marble wearing a trenchcoat.

And yet. General relativity and quantum mechanics, they coexist. Serve their respective purposes peacefully. When an equation describing Europa's loyalty to Jupiter, general relativity is relied upon. Voltage standards were determined using quantum mechanics. Contradicting. Valid.

This is what you ponder learning Taoism in confirmation class.

#### v.

You've reached high school.

“No one's interested, I'm sure, but-” catches your attention. Magistrate's gone off on a tangent about ocean animals and Perseus. He's somewhere off the coast of Ethiopia, in a fisherman's boat, feet away from the fin of a blue whale. Cetacea, Cetus. How the Greek name for this aquatic monster and our current categorization of ocean animals are so similar. Chicken, egg. Cycles run themselves through your mind, language, expression, categorization, presumption. The world makes sense for about seventeen seconds. He moves on the next vocabulary word, leaving you stranded at sea.

Watching fluorescent lights bubble at the corners of linoleum square tiles in some trigonometry induced haze, you're sorry. Who decided to domesticate light like this? These cannot be the same molecules that set fire to telephone poles just after six on your drive home from practice. You're very, very sorry, and you feel you should punish the interrogation-white cinder block walls for trapping the lights, for forcing them into repressed homogeneity. How fucking dare they. But not to worry. You'll forget about it by the time you come back from the water fountain.

Head propped up on your sister's jacket, you study the stars. Celestial flashcards written in the only language you can understand anymore. You consider the pinpricks of light. Think about how they may be decades, eons old, time staggered between chemical reactions in their cores to your corneas. Passing time, passing space. For all you know, those stars could be dead. That's what you are, you think. A burned out star. Relying on your past successes. Waiting for the inevitable day others will see you blink out. No longer fusing. This is what you are, because you haven't understood a book since freshman year. You're failing math. But you have the stars. You have your questions.

Finally, a test you can pass.