

POETRY | FALL 2021

## *infans infinitas*

By Molly Fessler

the pediatric geneticist looks at the baby and says  
I'm sorry  
she lines up the letters and it looks like an alphabet fell off a shelf, and was put back together too  
quickly.

I listen to the pediatric geneticist.  
she explains the letters and the probability and the physics; the way his arms and legs will fit together,  
based on this aberrant arrangement of C's and T's, G's and A's, this perturbation to his genetic code.

She places limits on this baby boy, as if he is a calculus problem.  
I failed calculus.  
But I nod along as she speaks, because I am supposed to be learning how to give  
bad news.

I find I am doing this a lot. (being party to bad news)  
standing at the door while the radio plays  
watching air turn the spent colors of fall.  
collecting canned goods. just in case.

Oh. this burnt new world,  
into which he springs, (instructions scrambled, limbs flailing like telephone wire, umbilical stump still  
wet) breaks into eggshells.

Standing between baby and parent; face mask and eye shield. They were supposed to have a doula. They  
were supposed to have a bris. They were supposed to welcome homemade casseroles at the  
front door. He was supposed to meet his grandmother  
before she  
died.

The pediatric geneticist turns to go. I ask if they have named him yet, this baby boy.  
Yes, his mother tells me, for a collection of stars, hung in the sky.

When I leave the hospital, all is dark. Moon, low, slung from the branches of a maple tree, stars  
blushing in the dust of bedtime. I wait. Until his namesake, his constellation, appears like a map over the  
skin of this cyanide earth. I watch as those suns, burn and fall, popcorn fireworks, celestial  
cartwheels tumbling over and over

and I exhale into that which is crumbling around  
us.

At least, his mother understands.  
He will be infinite.

---

**Molly Fessler grew up on a llama farm outside Detroit and studied at Bryn Mawr College. She is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, serving in Belize from '14-'16. She is currently a graduate student at the University of Michigan. Her work has been published in *Real Simple* online, *The Fairy Tale Review*, NPR.org and *Cicada* magazine, among others. Co-founder of *Auxocardia*, an online journal for health professional students, she can be found at [auxocardia.com](http://auxocardia.com) or [@molly\\_fessler](https://twitter.com/molly_fessler) on Twitter.**

---

© 2021 *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*