

Third Place Winner

general relativity

Dan Kasriel

—for Pop-pop

*We, too, are made of wonders, of great
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,
of a need to call out through the dark.*
—Ada Limón, "In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa"

exactly.

why?

how not to know:
before they even finish their ABCs
toddlers innately know
you don't need a billion-dollar telescope
to resolve life's greatest mysteries

*

my mind still gravitates toward the insatiable pull
of blackholes, with thoughts that spiral so fast you can see
their accretion disks from distances beyond meaningful
human conception—at least the fortunate few that escape
the event horizon—that nebulous demarcation;
smoke and mirrors on a universal scale

blackholes have a way of warping
words, too, making poets
of physicists, with their talk
of spa-ghet-ti-fi-ca-t-i—o——n
& infinitesimally small strings vibrating

celestial spheres into existence;

I just learned the formal definition of an event horizon:

*the boundary of the causal past
of future null infinity**

a poetically opaque capsule meaning:
a teleological nightmare for those star-
crossed souls who will eventually—
no, inevitably—end up on the ultimate wrong
side of history, for the boundary is one of causality,
not a fixed in time

point

or space

**

I inherited more than just my grandfather's thinning hairline
for I, too, have fallen prey to the snares of curiosity
that keep you up well past a prepubescent's bedtime,
your face, lit up like a stellar nursery,
convinced you could make me comprehend how one infinity
can be larger than another infinity, using not
the language of grade school grammar
 (infinity + 1)
but with the dignity these exponential concepts deserved:
graphs scrawled on dinner napkins

I may not have fully grasped that lesson then—
nor do I now—but I saw a glimpse of it,
just beyond your dilating pupils
& in the way your eyes seemed to say
what your intubated mouth no longer could
that day in the hospital,
before you took your last breath
as I held your hand & my mom
gently whispered,
as only mothers can,
 we are here;
 you are loved

to resolve life's greatest mysteries
you don't need a billion-dollar telescope
toddlers innately know
before they even finish their ABCs
how not to know:

why?

exactly.

* see *PBS Spacetime*. "We Thought Blackholes Created Event Horizons. It might be the opposite." *YouTube*, 19 Jun. 2026, <https://youtu.be/x4TdCololu8?si=yuhjSdAkwY7w3L4y>.