**Jupiter**

Sarah Normandie

The room is small, but I don’t mind. I sit on the chair that used to go with our kitchen table. I’m propped up on pillows to reach the top of the desk. I draw round swirly lines in red and brown. I do my best work, checking the photo in my science book for accuracy. I need to draw you the best Jupiter.

It’s raining outside so we can’t go to the park. You bought me Crayola’s, construction paper and scissors for my tiny hands.

The paneling looks drab and sad. I am determined that my Jupiter will make it happy.

Your bed is shoved in the corner next to your nightstand. It’s lined with a tower of Ivory soap bars naked of their wrappers. You’ve stacked them perfectly, a job that only a mason like you could do. I’ve never seen anyone unwrap so many soap bars before they use them. You insist it will be easier this way. I don’t understand, because I’m eight and don’t know yet how it feels to come home from work after a fifteen-hour day and want nothing but a warm shower. I do wonder what it is like to have to share a bathroom with strangers. You have to do this because you rent only this one, tiny room that fills up with your bed, nightstand, and my desk with the kitchen chair—the chair we used to take turns sitting on to eat eggs and cereal when you were still with Mom, and we were a family.

I wish you never yelled that day and that I never came home off the bus to find your goodbye letter. You promised me McDonalds, but you left my brother your Purple Heart. I don’t know yet what a Purple Heart is, I just know it feels more special than a hamburger. I want to draw you Jupiter so you’ll be happy.

I don’t know you slept in your car when you first left. I won’t visit your camp trailer in the woods until I’m seventeen. I always have a nice house with many rooms. You always bring the money in the Ziploc bag.

Your hair is funny and unkept. You wash it with that Ivory soap. Mom said you used to dye it with peroxide, and that it was your blond hair in that red Mustang that won her over. Now your clothes are mix matched and there is no Mustang. You wear polyester pants and work boots and knit beanie hats on cold New England days. You also wear big flannels and heavy gloves when you walk by the ocean at night. You build submarines when you aren’t laying bricks and the walk is your break. I wonder now, what did you think about on those walks?

It wasn’t supposed to be like this. You were supposed to be a baseball star. You were going to play for the LA Dodgers. They drafted you, but so did Vietnam. And so now I will see a million visions of you in my mind through the years. The images are scattered, like looking through a kaleidoscope. Pieces that don’t quite fit yet look perfect when you hold them up to the light.

I see you smiling there under the canopy of trees. We walk through the woods, and you shush me, telling me we might see a deer. The trees are like giants looking down at us. My feet crunch in the leaves.

I see you in the church, genuflecting, and I gaze up at Jesus on the cross.

I see you behind the screen door, the bag of money in your hand. I’m fifteen and I’ve forgotten about Jupiter. You talk, and I wish you would leave.

You are driving that creepy Chevy Caprice by the house. You drive slowly to catch a glimpse of me while I pet my dog in the yard. It feels strange and like I should be ashamed – because this is the only way you see me.

And then, there is the big, long pause. The part of my brain that is just white, like a blank slate. No picture, no Jupiter. Just emptiness. The days you were not on my mind, and I told my friends I didn’t have a dad.

But it’s not true; it’s a big lie. I have a dad, and he’s you, and now I see you now in every corner of the room. You smile, and you tell me knock-knock jokes. You push my daughter on the swing. You buckle my son in his car seat and say, *love you buddy*. You laugh when my nephews and my kids yell *Chicken Butt!* loud in the restaurant. I try to shush them. *Let them play,* you say. I stop scolding and laugh too. I remember when I was four, and you tickled me so hard I almost peed my pants.

I see you carrying our dog, Freeway, in that black garbage bag into the woods to bury him. My brother has socks pulled up to his knees. I drew Freeway a picture too. He’s gone to heaven, you say.

You sing *Somewhere over the Rainbow* off key. I don’t know why we don’t dance to it at my wedding, but it plays in the bank when I cash the estate check. I don’t care about the check. I only want you back.

Your knit beanie hat is packed in a box. I take it out sometimes and smell it. It still smells like you, like Ivory Soap and wood smoke, covered in Old Spice.

Sometimes I feel like I am eight again, finishing my Jupiter. I watch you hang it on the panel wall with Scotch tape and a smile. I have no idea that the giant red spot I drew is a spinning storm.

We are complicated, like Jupiter. Spinning fast, tilting even the sun. Yet we still shine bright and rain diamonds. Complicated and beautiful, all at once.