

Baseline

This is the baseline of my life. There are highs and there are lows, but they swoop above and below the baseline, kind of like a sine wave. Here is the scenario:

A baby, maybe about 9 months old, chubby, smooth, pale-skinned, not much hair, stares at what is right in front of it. What is right in front of it is glass, about a foot thick. The glass makes up a giant, clear ball, hollow on the inside. What the baby is staring at is what is inside the ball. A party is going on, like maybe an office party. People are dressed up, but not for a ball, where one dances. Instead they sit and stand in well-dressed groups, chatting and holding hors d'oeuvres and wine glasses. There is a sense of ribbons everywhere, of cheer, of belonging. This bauble, with its human load, pours light into the dark that surrounds it.

The baby looks at all this, the laughter that cannot be heard, because the walls of the glass globe are too thick. It looks at the ribbons, the ornaments that hang from above and can be touched by partygoers if they hold out their hands. Everything is shiny. Everything is golden. Everyone is happy. Women cross their ankles, high heels revealing their taste and their money. Some of them sit on sofas, their long legs stretched out in front of them, covered with long drapey skirts.

The baby stares at the party, its big eyes open to the wondrous scene, to the occurrence of such a thing as a party, to the occurrence of partygoers. The baby knows something very important about the inside of the brightly-lit globe. It is warm inside. Warm. The baby is hanging out in space, barely touching the ball. Outside the glass bulb it is black. That is because the ball is suspended in space. Space is dark, and cold. The baby is cold. It would like so much, so much, if only, if maybe, the people inside would let the baby in? Into the light? Where it is warm and where there would be the possibility of being touched by another human being. Into the light, the warmth, the love. There is love inside that glass ball.

But the baby is afraid. The people inside all know each other, and they like each other. They do not know the baby, and maybe they would not like the baby. Maybe they would view it as an interloper, someone to be un-invited from their party.

There is hope, though. Maybe the people on the inside like babies! Maybe they will take pity on the baby that is hanging on to the ball, from the outside. After all, it is alone, and lonely, and needs love, and wants to be held, and needs warmth, otherwise it will die, floating in cold, cold space.

So the baby knocks on the side of the glass wall that forms the bulb. No one turns. The baby tries again, knocks harder. Then harder. It becomes frantic. Knocking and knocking. And then! Someone inside hears something. She turns toward the knocking. She sees the baby! Surprised, intrigued, she moves over to the glass where the baby is floating. Other partygoers are looking at the same thing. They follow her, and stand in front of the baby, who floats and almost bursts with hope that now it will be saved. It will be brought inside and loved.

The ladies are pointing now, chattering animatedly to each other. Then one of them turns her head away, and a few of the men standing beside her begin to walk to the other side of the room. The women's animated conversation seems to calm down. More and more of them are looking back into the center of the room, where the party is still going on. They drift off. Finally the last one walks away. The baby was only of temporary interest.

It is as if, at that moment, the moment that the partygoers turn away, some switch has been flipped. With the result that the baby's hold on the glass disappears. Now it is an inch from the glass, but reaching out to it, unable to make contact. The distance widens. Now the baby is a foot from the glass ball. The baby does not struggle to get close again, it knows that it has no power to approach the ball or to leave it. Instead, the baby drifts, some power that is unseen, un-understood, wafting the baby through space. For a moment, the baby came close to coming in from the cold, to being held and being warmed and being talked to, someone might have tickled the baby's feet and made it laugh. Maybe there are people somewhere in space who like to make babies laugh. But not inside this glass bulb.

And so the baby drifts off into space, knowing that the one chance it had to become warm and to live, is gone. Everywhere it floats, it is surrounded by cold and by dark. No more baubles, no more laughter that can be seen but not heard. The baby will die of indifference. And as its wide-open gaze passes us by, we see in those eyes the recognition of its fate.

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