

hidden away, but put somewhere he wouldn't stumble upon, somewhere he'd have to ask her where it was, as if she were protecting it from him. When he imagined having sex with his wife again, he pictured the milky ghost of his penis, entering her swirling, snowy womb as if on the monitor at the doctor's office. It looked very cold in there.

He thought of the results. If they got them the baby would be normal, or the baby would not. Issue settled. But he couldn't do it, couldn't ask for the tests.

All he could think of was the old physics line:

How can you know the fate of Schrödinger's cat without looking in the box?

Throw it in the river. If it floats, the cat's a witch.

He wanted that box to stay shut.

"But why?" his wife implored.

He couldn't tell her.

Why, why, why, like steps, receding.

Not because if the baby was normal, it would make things worse (though it would).

But because, even if the baby wasn't, it wouldn't make things better. He didn't *want* to be relieved of this shame, when it was all he could feel, all he was allowed to. All he had left to remember her by.

That was why.

Because the baby was already dead.

There was a chance the baby was normal. There was a chance—tiny and miraculous—that they had killed their baby.

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Here was a thing about numbers, he thought for years after. The chance of a flipped coin coming up heads a hundred times is a half times a half times a half one hundred times. Astronomical. But on one flip, the first or the hundredth, the chances of heads are still just 50-50. The coin doesn't care how it's fallen ninety-nine times before. The coin doesn't give a fuck. That's what it is to be random. That's what chance is.

Peter Ho Davies's books include *The Fortunes*, winner of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the best-selling *The Welsh Girl*, long-listed for the Man Booker Prize. His stories have appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, the *Atlantic*, the *Paris Review*, and *Granta*, and been anthologized in *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards* and *The Best American Short Stories*. A recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, and a winner of the PEN/Malamud and PEN/Macmillan Silver Pen Awards, he teaches at the University of Michigan. This story originally appeared in *Glimmer Train*, spring 2012. It now comprises the opening of a longer work in progress.

SCOTT NOEL

Summer on Baker Street, 2008

Oil on canvas, 27 x 56 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST