

## SCOTT NOEL

*The Porch at 252 Pensdale, 2018*  
Oil on canvas, 34 x 54 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## PETER HO DAVIES

### Chance

**T**here was a chance the baby was normal. There was a chance the baby was not. Fetus, he told himself.

There was a chance the fetus was normal. There was a chance that it was not.

She, he told himself. That was the result of one of the tests on the fetus.

There was a chance that she was normal. There was a chance that she was not.

Jesus.

No one could tell them the exact odds, but there was a small chance the baby was normal. A tiny chance. BB-sized. No bigger than a bean. And there was a large chance she was not. A full-grown, adult-sized chance. Big as a whale, big as a house.

“Stretch marks,” his wife said, gazing at the pregnant women across the waiting room like distant mountains. “That’s what I used to be afraid of.”

The chances of what was wrong with the baby being wrong with the baby had been a million to one.

Before the test.

Except there was still that tiny chance it was wrong.

A million to one was a figure of speech, he knew. The condition was so rare there were no reliable statistics. It was so rare the genetic counselor hesitated to put a number on it. *But if you press me.* Fifty or sixty cases world-wide. Ever. So rare that even after a positive test the doctors couldn’t be sure the baby had it. But they thought so.

He was a writer now, this father, but he had studied physics once—the science of the unimaginably vast and the unimaginably small, as one of his professors boasted—and still the numbers meant nothing to him. Unimaginable. He didn’t like that word—as a writer, had a professional dislike of it. Sometimes, he wondered if the baby would grow up to be a scientist. If the baby might make sense of the numbers. What would the baby say in his place, what would the baby decide?

The list of things the baby might have was four pages long. Single-spaced. The list was not numbered. When he cried and stared at it, blurred, it looked like poetry, free verse. Short lines, long lines, run-on lines. He couldn’t make any more sense of it than language poetry. He would