

GINA WERFEL

Tumble, 2017
Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in



COURTESY PRINCE STREET GALLERY, NYC
AND MIKE TRASK PHOTOGRAPHER

WOODY SKINNER Atlantic Blue

Celia's Aunt Lucille insisted on delivering the gift a week before the baby shower—she said that would keep our cousins from getting jealous. And so, on an otherwise quiet Saturday, we arranged for Lucille to come over.

Before she arrived I sat restlessly in the living room as Celia tidied up around me. There were little knots on her temples, her head pregnant with thought.

I asked what she was thinking about.

"I'm wondering if I should have gone to medical school," she said.

Sometimes it was medical school, other times law. "The studio's doing fine," I said. "We're doing fine."

"I don't want to take portraits forever," she said.

Without a knock, Aunt Lucille came through the door. Her arms cradled a neatly wrapped gift.

I punched off the television, and Celia hugged her aunt around the gift.

"I hardly notice your belly," said Aunt Lucille. She's one of those family members who speaks in accusations—maybe Celia was faking the pregnancy for unsolicited gifts.

"I promise it's there," Celia said, as politely as she could.

I took the gift from Lucille—heavier than it looked—and hugged her with my free arm. She smelled like vegetable soup, bland but warm. Ever since Harold had passed, she'd been giving more robust hugs, muscled clasps that lasted, somehow, after she let go.

The three of us settled in the living room, and I held on to the gift. The wrapping paper was immaculate, crisp lines and sharp corners, its perfection unnerving. My own family had a history of wrapping gifts in scraps of newspaper or inside the knotted plastic of supermarket bags. This formal package, the stiffness in Aunt Lucille's shoulders—I could hardly bear them.

I passed the gift to Celia, my hands fumbling, somehow, in the easy exchange. She unthreaded the ribbon with wonderful grace, her thin fingers precise as a pair of Fiskars. And the paper—how she plucked it open and then folded it over, like a seamstress handling fine fabrics. What remained was a box of simple white cardboard, the kind you might find undershirts wrapped in.

She flipped open the flaps and lifted out a delicate contraption. It was a baby mobile, its tin pieces shaped