

The Space Around It

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Abstract—Summer aches: elbow bump at city museum, front flip back splat on water

Index Terms—absorb, release

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY JULY 15 2026

Early morning departure from Tucson. Sof picked me up just after 4:30am. Lola was already up practicing French. Before I leave, I learn that the French word for wand is 'baguette magique'.

Made it to the airport with Teddy and Mitch, arriving at the gate while they were calling the last group. First flight to PHX was easy. Started reading 'Lathe of Heaven' and felt inspired to write about the rock amphitheater with the hill. Thinking about portals and shapes.

At PHX airport went to Cartel Coffee and got a potato and egg burrito and a decaf latte. Teddy's cappacino cup said "Steve" on it despite the barista having called "Ted." Plane ride to St. Louis went by quick. Had a nap and read some more.

When we landed Teddy already has the England v. Argentina game on. Mitch's dad picked us up in his truck and already has gotten us lunch. Sweetheart.

We arrive at the house Mitch grew up in and have our lunch and finish watching the game. We meet the two puppers and experience heartbreak with Teddy as England absolutely bungles their lead. We take the dogs on a walk. Their neighbors have literally lifted and moved their entire house as a unit to install a fucking gigantic basement below it. I didn't know this could be done.

On our walk we visit Mitch's sister's house and get to meet her four kids, who all live nearby. One of them shows me her Pokemon cards and says she likes my nails. We pretend to flap our wings and fly in the kitchen. Having four kids seems like a LOT of work. They give us a tour of the laundry room and show me the best spot for hiding in hide-and-seek. Their basement is outfitted with various gymnastic things and she tells me about how she can go back and forth on the monkey bars three times. We leave just as she's finishing her PB&J sandwich.

Back at Mitch's, we get a tour of the house (I get to see the room Mitch grew up in and it gives me a glimpse into him) and get started on dinner. Tom (Mitch's dad) guides us through making home made pizza with an extremely impressive assortment of toppings, including basil from Mitch's sister's yard and rosemary from his garden. They have a beautiful garden. We listen to music from one of some fourty different playlist CDs their family has made. Tom starts the dough and I spear tomatoes and mushrooms for the grill. There were also peppers, dates, cheeses, sausage, arugula. The dough is coated with balsamic vinaigrette after it's baked on the grill.

Tom says he used to be worried about burning them but he said after his wife died, worries like these seem insignificant. He handles the entire dinner process expertly, serving me and Teddy a variety of delicious beers alongside his homemade kombucha and elderberry juice.

Hannah and Marina arrive just as the pizzas are done. Just before we were flipping through one of many photos albums that are spread across the house. There's a deep love and tradition in this family and it shows in the way Tom hosts us. I see this in Mitch as well.

We eat our pizzas on the screened-in porch and catch up. Ernie and Oliver come in and out, briefly barking mad at some scurrying critter out in the backyard. One thing about Mitch is that he always cleans his entire plate. There's a gentle old man trapped in Oliver's body.

We wrap up dinner and some of the group goes for an evening walk with Tom and the pups. I stay back with Teddy. He plays the piano in the living room, naturally. We make plans for tomorrow and begin to retire. One of the two twin beds in Mitch's room holds me now. Before sleep, Mitch pulls a long plastic storage bin from under his bed. A strip of masking tape with "boys' room ties and belts" written on it in black marker is on the lid. Inside is notebooks, old student ID cards, folders and binders and sketches from before. We flip through them together in the small gap between the twin beds before sleep.