

## Poems for Charlotte

### I Cradle Your Box at Night

Daddy brought you home today  
In a bright white bag  
I ran to you and held you close  
You've never seen a reunion quite so sad

I stood there in stunned silence  
Then I rocked you and I cried  
And when I sat you on the shelf  
I stood back and wondered why

I stared at you and closed my eyes  
Were yours a blue, like mine?  
Was your hair light, like your brothers?  
Like your dad, were you the calm and loving kind?

Or was my daughter different  
than anyone I ever knew?  
I will never know these answers  
But did you have one dimple or two?

Now, I find myself here every night  
Standing, staring, my heart stilled  
There has never been a crib as empty  
As the one that can't be filled.

### Units of Measurement

The hospital sent me  
the pathology report today.  
My hands shook as I read it.  
I should've never read it.

They weighed you:  
397.6 grams.

*That's something they don't warn you will happen.  
They'll stop weighing your baby  
in ounces with oohs and aahs  
when they become a fetus in a lab report.*

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They measured you:  
27.2 centimeters long.

I imagined you  
Cold and alone  
On a metal tray  
Next to my intubated body.

I will never hold you  
But the memory of you like this  
Will hold me  
hostage forever.

They recorded:  
“The extremities  
are symmetrical,  
each with 5 digits”

You were perfect  
10 little fingers  
and 10 little toes  
All a parent ever wishes for.

They left out:  
Your heart looked  
“Like a ballet slipper,”  
the pediatric cardiologist said  
as he tilted his head.

Now I walk around the grocery store  
Looking for anything  
That weighs 397.6 grams  
So I can hold it in my arms  
Close my eyes  
And pretend  
That it was you  
I was holding.

So I can play make believe  
So I can dream again.

Instead, I wander  
Up and down aisles  
Carrying loaves of bread  
In my empty arms.

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### The Women I Know

I know women  
who have hate  
as strong as bricks  
And they build houses with it  
And they kill men with it  
And they raise up their daughters with it

I know all women  
hold it tight  
to their chests  
And drown themselves  
in the river with it  
So as not to leave a mess  
for anyone else to clean up

### I Barter in the Shadows of Skyscrapers

You sat in the doctor's office  
listening to the litany of next steps  
and side effects  
You took a deep breath  
and became acutely aware  
of your lungs  
Inflating  
and deflating  
You thought of your daughter's lungs  
and wondered softly,  
with a fondness,  
what they looked like  
You guessed like regular lungs  
Only much smaller  
Pinker, perhaps  
You looked down at your notebook  
and smiled carefully.

You left,  
weaving in and out of hallways  
elevators  
and a set of revolving doors  
You staggered into the blindingly bright outside  
and stood very still  
on the sidewalk

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of the Upper East Side  
Where the air hung heavy  
and lingered too long  
You looked around at the rest of the world —  
at all the people walking to different parts of their lives.

In the shadow of the building,  
a doctor leaned against the corridor  
A cigarette hanging from the side of his mouth  
like a B movie  
You wanted to ask if you could bum one  
You imagined your mumbled thanks  
as you moved in  
at the flick of his lighter  
You could almost feel each drag  
Bringing you closer  
to becoming  
Someone else

You exhaled  
Your squinting eyes followed  
the shiny exterior upward  
You took a deep breath  
as you began  
your barter with the sky.

### There is Sand in My House

I live in sandcastles  
waiting to be washed away  
by the nighttime tide  
As the moon  
reshuffles the shoreline  
of my life  
again  
Scattering the sand  
I need to rebuild  
again.

I wash my hair in the sea  
and dream  
of a bright white kitchen  
Full of laughter  
and carafes of orange juice  
With messy calendars

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and muddy cleats  
and a thousand drawers  
Full of grapefruit spoons  
and salad forks.

I dry my hair with an old beach towel  
and stand at the sliding glass doors  
of my imagination  
And I watch my son  
push my daughter  
On the swing set  
of our green,  
green backyard.

Every morning I wake  
Rubbing sand from my eyes.