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Nearly Six Years

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It has been nearly six years
Since you were cut out of me
Since I first read the pathology report
Where I noticed your 1.5 cm foot
Consistent with 19 weeks' gestation (though you died at 20,
I feel it's important to note)
Six years since we named you
And cremated you
And I secured your ashes in a box
And rationed some into a locket
That dangles, a humble guardian from the doorframe in
the corner of a room
That has guided your surviving siblings to sleep
A tiny totem etched with a hummingbird
Though I imagine you now dark as a crow
And strong, and cawing, and clever, and majestic
Larger than life, certainly larger than allowed to be
Shiny, oily black feathers, a beak to pluck tools from the
ground
To dig graves and seek food
(Did you know that crows mourn their dead? I think I read
that once).



In these nearly six years
I have tried my best to grieve you
I have advocated and I have marched
I have therapized and I have narrated
I have written and written and written
And told your story
Justifying my choice
(To whom? Admittedly, I am my own audience).

I have sobbed and screamed into your memory and
I have used you as an excuse, tiny baby
I have tried my best to really grieve this loss
But you continue to be a step ahead
Your flaking pieces living in a box beside my bed.

A white box
With your name and date of death printed out
On paper that's now creasing and yellowing
And even the font is beginning to dilate with time and
 humidity
Standard issued by the Delaware Valley Crematorium
That I dust every few months
And reposition the delicate angel statue above.

One time Remy grabbed the statue and it fell
And it smacked against the radiator behind the table
And while I imagined some of the clay would snap off
Or that the muted face of the angel would pop off the body
It was only the bent wire wings that dislodged
So I frantically tried to stick them back in
But the hole they sat in was too big
And the wire was too thin
So I've given up on replacing them.

These pieces of you
They prove to me that you existed
That you had enough bone to burn



That you grew human pieces, though incorrectly
That stump of a trachea that blunted off
The overblown lungs, stretched to capacity
Maybe like fragile pink translucent bubble gum
The diaphragm traveling the wrong way like an inverted
balloon
Those were the broken pieces we could see.

The distorted chromosomes I imagine like ill-fitting puzzle
pieces
Jammed together by impatient toddler hands on a carpeted
floor
Creating a warped picture without much true fit
A mottled and forced collage
That lies flat on the ground, or a table, but cannot be picked
up or moved
Because the pieces will detach and cling half-heartedly to
each other like a barrel of monkeys
If you try to carry them.

There were also perfect, synchronous, seamless pieces:
Your sweet little fingers on the 3-D ultrasound
That covered your sweet little face in the darkness of my
body
Living and dying inside me, living and dying inside me.

I wore hospital-issued, baby blue fuzzy socks
With bubbly, sticky white V-shaped treads
And a seam along the toe that never sat in the right place
As I padded down the hall attached to an IV pole
Like an overwhelmed child guided by her mother at the mall
Amidst sensory overload
Holding the arm of the kind anesthesiologist
Because I'd already received the first dose
That would allow me to lie down on the table
Arms spread out and away from my body like a death-row
inmate



But beneath gentle, sympathetic, masked figures with kind
eyes
Who quickly set to work.

And then I woke up and you didn't exist anymore.

My therapist told me to let go.
To spread your ashes, because I'm stuck.
And the academic, the scholar of bereavement in me wanted
to scream at her
YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT GRIEF THE WAY I DO
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS PATHOLOGICAL GRIEF
IT'S HEALTHY TO HAVE THESE ASHES
(but the truth of the matter is I'm afraid she's right).

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