

## For You, I Have Tried

When I failed to grow a heart of my own, I stole pieces of you while you slept. Surrounded by sterile white walls, I put these parts in a petri dish: a locket of your hair, a purple bouncy ball, the Snap-On bracelet you refused to never take off, the first pair of shoes I bought for you when I learned you were growing inside me, a toy horse, a yellow baby blanket frayed at the edges, a whistle you blew at me when I would not hear you call.

When everything was tucked nicely into the petri dish, I tried to set the right conditions for growing a heart. A heat lamp for warmth. A plate of chicken fingers and apple slices. A doll with blonde braids and a race car with blue flames on the side. I researched lullabies to sing so my petri dish would know the sound of my voice. I would sing “I love you, baby” to the messy pink blob.

After weeks of singing and nothing happening, I became annoyed and sang, “Grow, baby, grow.”

Finally, the blob began to take the shape of something bright and intelligible. Understanding a heart needs room to expand, I transferred the blob to a scaffold made of glass and plastic. It was more solid now, easier to take with me when I left you at home to go out. On walks, I pushed my heart-shaped blob in a stroller and pointed out red cardinals perched on telephone poles. I explained, “This is a leaf” and “This is a cloud” and “This is a raindrop.”

While I pumped my legs back and forth on a swing, I sat my heart-shaped blob in my lap so that it would feel the thrill of flying. Only when we sailed too high in the air did I fear that my scaffold heart would break.

For a heart to fully be alive, it must be able to pump blood. I mimicked the rhythm of blood coming in and going out. I drummed my hand against my chest. Ba-bum. Ba-bum. Like this, I said. My heart did not move. You can do it if you watch closely, I said.

In a matter of days, my heart was pumping on its own, slowly and with great care. I stuck it in my chest, in the spot that had been empty since I learned you were beating inside me. At home, I tucked you into bed and knew you were beautiful. I was almost moved that you were mine. With all the pieces of you stored in my chest, I could almost taste the preciousness in your fingertips.

Soon after the transplant, my heart gave out. I tried to mimic the rhythm of love, but could not keep up with your races across the kitchen and you pulling on my sleeve, demanding my attention. It was too much strain, bandaging every cut and bruise. Kissing you every time you crawled into my lap. Holding you every time you cried, snot running down your purple face. Finally, I stopped holding you. I let you cry until you fell asleep, tears tucked in the corners of your eyes. When I gave up on trying to give back, I was sorry only in the way someone is sorry because they know they are guilty of something.

I wrapped my dead heart in your baby blanket and buried it in a chest. It rots with the dust and spiders in the attic. A thing that cannot beat on its own never lives for very long.