

NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

by Maya Jewell Zeller

In the beginning, we drove
up and down Monroe Street,
past Milford's Fish House and the county court
with its legal spires and the multitudinous
bail bonds stores where lovers and criminals
handle cash and we thought of you
in your dull bed of lights and cords,
your pricked heel and the wires where I,
your first organ, used to be.
I thought of tidewaters, of creek
colliding with ocean, the mess of life
that devoured itself there, gulls and shells
split open to reveal their soft contents
in that current where over three decades ago
my mother dipped her fingers, pressed them
to my forehead. There were no
complications.
In the beginning, I thought of salt.
Before the beginning, I spent
my nights in the hospital
pumping colostrum, occasionally sleeping
and waking to find the sweet yellow
dripping down my chest, none in the bottles,
and I was sickened to waste what you needed.
I woke your father and he syringed
what he could from the suction cups
and dripped it on cloths we sent up for the nurses
to place under your head and over your face
so you'd know me. So you'd know me!
On Monroe Street, the sky outside our windows
was always most lovely in the evenings,
pink like the inside of a body
we've never seen but have felt, growing and
shifting and pulsing. The clouds would open
for the light and the birds would press their dark
silhouettes into the rays and we would want to pull over
even on our journey to you, even against the possibility
you might open your eyes for us tonight.
We tried to take pictures from the car,
knowing none of them would turn out, and no one
would ever believe the beauty.