

The Second Trip (Charon Writes a Love Story)

Sylvie,
Two months old and already learning death.
Her first trip to the hospital, second trip back.

We fall into the darkness,
The soft sky too far above us for us to feel its warmth
Instead the cold tries its best to hold us.
It's like the night can tell why you're here,
Filing silently into the car,
Taste of pennies in your mouth,
Payment for the ferryman, for
The metallic chariot that will deliver you

To the children's A&E.

We sing distractions, we tell ourselves we are not here.
The man on the phone asks what breed our dog is,
He asks our address, where our father is,
He asks "how high was the dose?"
He asks "how old is your brother?"

"Two years older than the universe."

The universe is in the passenger seat,
The universe is sheltering her head in a plastic bowl
And trying not to vomit stardust.

I feel the colours of the world with my fingers, with my stomach.
Washed out teal-green.
Yellow bile.
Clinical white.
Rainbow walls.

Rainbow walls of the children's A&E
With rocket ships and one-eyed aliens and sunflowers in the bathroom
and numbing cartoons in every corner and forgetting why we are here
And her still, sleeping body and Sylvie,
two months old and outside at the edges of death and chalk-white tablets
Swimming in sickness and babies and mothers, mothers, mother,
On the steps, by the doors, penny-eyed and waiting.