

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

Pandora's Box

by Juliet Robinson

I cried all the oceans. All of them.

And still I cry, am broken.

Coarctation of the aorta, severe.

You're lucky to be alive.

\*

Ambulance to the big hospital.

I sent your cuddly pony to watch over you.

A small, soft toy horse, not your mother, but the best she could do.

Blue and yellow blanket wrapped round you like a shield.

Your first trip in a vehicle, blues and twos.

\*

The big hospital is otherworldly, like a spaceship.  
No dated, tired buildings here, no machines that sometimes don't work.  
No crowded corridors, no worn-down hallways.  
No sense of it all coming apart at the edges.  
Nothing frayed.

Here there is money, lots of it.  
Here there is talent, heaps of it.  
Here there is hope.

\*

Cool, quiet, and calm space.  
The background noise is water.  
Water pumping and cleaning.  
Suction draining wounds and aiding recovery.  
A calming gurgle.  
Four beds, with four tiny babies.  
Two nurses per bed, two parents per bed.

\*

I had thought the ambulance chase had been bad.  
Meeting the surgeon who planned to fix your heart, is worse.  
A betraying voice whispers, I had wanted to run away.  
I hadn't wanted to hold you.  
I hate myself.  
Your heart is the size of a walnut.

\*

I didn't want to leave you.  
I hadn't wanted to hold you.  
I had tried to run away.  
I didn't want to leave you.  
I didn't want you to leave.

\*

End-to-end anastomosis.

\*

Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds my frame.  
I put it on like a coat, under which I hide.  
Within which I pretended to be someone else.

\*

Won't look the parts of myself in the eye.  
I hadn't wanted to hold you; I had tried to run away.  
These parts become something else.  
Guilt and Pain.

\*

The phone rings, you're coming back from surgery.  
It went well, your heart is whole.

Expectant families wait in the lobby.

Hope lingers.

\*

We wait. We wait. We wait.

After a time, it is only us waiting.

I pace and I know. I pace and I know. I pace and I know.

Your heart has filled with blood clots.

They were rushing you back to surgery.

\*

Your heart is the size of a walnut.

\*

You're back.

Not a baby, some sort of machine hybrid.

A ventilator breathes for you.

A line enters your neck, tubes came out of your arms.

Tags. Tubes. Pipes. Wires, everything reporting to a machine.

You smell of antiseptic and blood.

\*

Wait and see. Give him time.

Unexpected. Unexplained.

Don't kill the surgeon, trust the doctors,  
the specialists, the nurses, and your baby. Wait and see.

Don't kill the surgeon.  
I still want to kill the surgeon.

\*

Life here is a two-sided coin.  
I am calm, but I am frantic.  
I am brave, but I am terrified.  
I am hopeful, but I am pessimistic.  
I am a mother, but I am not.

\*

Doctors, nurses and specialists all become familiar.  
I become practiced at crushing my feelings and fears.  
I can scream silently in the shower.  
I can smile while inside me continents are being smashed apart.  
I sense myself becoming something other.  
My insides seem bigger than the shell of my body.

\*

I feel bruised.  
I am a bruise.

\*

The 22<sup>nd</sup> of September.  
Reconstructive heart surgery.  
Exhausted hope.

No clock ticks, but time has never been so watched.  
I need you to be ok, I need you to come back.  
This can't be your life, hospitals and pain.  
I fear that this is it, that you will never leave this hospital.  
That it will be like you never existed.  
We wait. I don't cry.  
The phone rings.

\*

A ventilator breathes for you, drains pull fluids from your body.  
A thousand machines seem to hold you in their arms.  
You are ok.  
Hope lingers in the corner of the room.

\*

New children arrive, new mothers met in the breast pumping room.  
I watch a young mother crying in the hall, I remember when I was her.  
End of term feeling.  
Our friends start to trickle home, each departure a victory.

\*

Your first birthday, a milestone you almost didn't reach.  
Your second.  
Your third.

Your fourth, in lockdown.  
Your fifth and now your sixth has passed.  
A life, your life.

And me

I have become something else entirely.  
I am more fragile, but I am stronger.  
I am more afraid, but I am braver.  
I have lost myself, but I have found someone else.  
My insides are bigger than the shell of my body.  
I am Pandora's Box.