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Something So Simple as Breathing

For Emmanuel

by Ani Tuzman

In Cardiac Intensive Care, the chambers
of my son's blue heart swell under
translucent skin, no wall of bone.
They bulge and roll into each other,
the muscle kneaded by invisible hands.

Days pass, measured only
by the beating of his unsheltered heart,
while I sit on a tall orange stool, my heavenly post,
trying to keep my balance without holding
my breath or this baby—

his veins saturated, tiny plastic hoses
burrowing into his wrists, ankles, and
chest, a mechanical box giving him
breaths he cannot take on his own.
Something so simple as breathing.

I stroke small patches free of IVs,
a place on his thigh, his forehead,
sing to him
while he resists his sedated sleep.
For months, I guard his hours,
vigilant on my fence: Death on one side.

Life on the other.
Until my fear and my faith,
on opposite sides of that fence,
jump it—to meet in my heart
and dance with each other
like this was a celebration, not a vigil.