

Hands

By Katherine White

My hands remember every baby they ever touched,
though their names are long forgotten.

Premature male *in extremis*:

One hand holds the slender steel shaft
that shines a light on his vocal cords
while the other slips the plastic tube
inside the tiny V of cartilage.
Both hands tremble slightly with relief
as they attach the tube to the ventilator.
One hand feels for his wrist artery,
the other punctures it with a tiny needle
and blood pulsates into the tubing.
The index finger jams with the effort.
One hand in a latex glove extends
from the blue sleeve of a paper gown,
holding forceps with tips
the thickness of a darning needle
which pry open, ever so gently,
the tiny, muscular umbilical artery.
The other hand guides a thread-like
catheter into the opening,
and I exhale.

Full term newborn girl at delivery:
One hand rubs her back for that first cry;
fingers gently delineate the fontanel,
then skim the swollen skull,
walk tenderly over her neck,
seeking lumps or swellings.
One hand supports her back,
the other presses her abdomen,
assessing the kidneys' size.
Fingertips slide under the rib cage,
feeling for liver on one side,
spleen on the other, masses anywhere.
They rest lightly on her pulses,
Brachial, radial, femoral, pedal.

When baby's first physical is done,
one hand rests on her head,
the other on her belly as,
head bowed, I seal our encounter
with a wave of healing energy.

Years later, my hands grow warm with the memories.

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