
POETRY | SPRING 2013

Survivors

By Susan Kaplan

My husband sweats
as he watches the obstetrician
deliver two tiny boys
so premature, so fragile
he carries them in his hands
into the life-demanding world.

They hang in limbo in the NICU
those tiny twin boys
for days, weeks, then months
not sure which way to go--
toward life? toward death?
Unarmed, exposed, pierced
by invasive needles, bombarded
by beeping monitors, startled
by strange hands and voices,
alone in their incubators and frightened
(our parental presence hardly protective)
they fight their battle to live.

The first is released on Mother's Day--

at four pounds, 'the strong one.'

The next comes home a month later

with brain damage, 'the disabled one.'

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When a baby cries

a mother has a fantasy

of what it feels, what it needs

that guides her care.

When these two cried,

I could never tell--

were they recalling the trauma

of their battle for survival,

or did they simply want milk?

Susan Kaplan is a Clinical Psychologist and mother of premature twins who resides in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is associated with the Stanford Medical Humanities program. Her work has been published in Cell2Soul, the Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine, and Exceptional Parent. Her twins are a source of inspiration for her creative writing, including "Survivors."