Postoperative Day One

Ivana Viani, MD

his parents
    with eyes red and heavy-lidded
custodians of the bedside
murmuring about the vertical scar
    across his chest
    chest
    kept in motion by a mechanical device
endotracheal tube
tube devoid of nature
sucking in air from their lungs and from mine
and pushing it into his
    alone yet assisted
    a flightless bird
    unaware
tamed
intubated
sedated
magnificent

my fingers
    around his wrist to check the pulse
not his but mine
an investigation into my own existence
    in this room
    how did I survive
last night
tossing and turning
amidst sheets and shudders
fears of not having done enough
to save another day

a deep breath
a cough
    his eyelids briefly aflutter
    that is life stirring
    robed in the ventilator’s hum

This poem was written in memory of Forrest Bird, the creator of some of the first mechanical ventilators used in cardiopulmonary care.

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