Her glassy eyes search for me, 
glazed and unfocused.  
Her limbs move as if wading through the thickest of air 
with cheeks blazing red and splotchy. 
The fever is palpable even before 
I press her limp body against mine.

The rocker 
that had long been forgotten, 
neglected for the fast pace 
of the world’s discoveries, 
creaked back to life. 
Back and forth, 
in and out, 
we rocked to her labored breathing, 
as the sky that peeked through the curtains 
gradiually turned from 
dark indigo to hazy blue.

Cherish this, 
the voice in my mothering mind whispered, 
missing her infancy 
filled with these quiet predawn moments, 
my heart beating against hers. 
But louder voices interrupted this calm: 
echoes of other mothers 
who held their fireball babies 
before a ringer of tests and procedures 
provided alarming diagnoses. 
The angel on my shoulder, 
the voice of rationality and sensibility, 
whispered, It’s just a fever. All toddlers get them. 
While the devil, 
the mimicker of fearful outliers, 
parroted the results of recent children in clinic: 
Meningitis, sepsis, encephalitis, leukemia.

When my toddler emerges a day later, 
bursting with energy and curiosity, 
the rocker fades back to oblivion 
and my exhaustion is in keeping pace 
rather than worrying. 
And I reflect on those other mothers 
who I sat beside, 
holding their hands, 
watching as the wheels churned 
to process the medical journey ahead. 
I didn’t realize then, 
that all the while 
I was unconsciously, 
even secretly, 
praying 
to spare me, 
my babies, 
their fates.