Held by Mama

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You look at me, look at her, and say
that’s definitely not your child
because of my tan skin against hers,
because of my nutmeg knees that nestle
in my blanket.

but what if I were in the arms of my mama,
what would you say then?

four shades lighter, my mama, and four shades darker,
my daddy, to whom do I belong?
does the scab from the scratch in my ear dry the colour
of my skin? do you miss your mama? is your mama white
like you?

you look at me, look at her, and say,
but what if I were in the arms of my mama?

the rain that clings to an emerald leaf is clear,

and they both still hold one another, the leaf
cupping the breakable bubble
do you remember your mama?

I think she was the perfect colour to hold you
in her arms and caress your face
with her long, thin fingers

but where has she gone in your old age?
has she given you a new mama? one who is lighter

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than you? does she float like a whirlybird cupping its samara,

both holding one another? the leaf,
I think she was the perfect colour to hold you.
The Warning of Wards

I smudge my newborn’s eyebrows with kajal and dot between her two eyes with onyx, the symbol to ward off the evil eye, a protection of her beauty. My intention is for a photo-op, a keepsake of her adorned body in bright colours and baby makeup, but even this, my mother-in-law warns, might lure evil, as if radars are placed with each smudge bringing the devil dancing into the nursery like a third little pig, tugging at my little girl’s toes, twirling her hair in calluses and claws, signing a treaty in Tamil and sealing it in kajal.