

## 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.