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Sue Ellen Thompson, Winner
Naomi Shihab Nye, Judge

The Naming

Home from the hospital, I laid her in the bassinette
and thought of the great disservice I'd done her,
bringing her into this world with a name I could not
say. It seemed false, as if it still belonged
to the novel from which I had taken it,
as if she herself were a fiction. I carried her
with me for days, her head dense and fragrant
against my chest. She
was a pronoun that filled every space
in the conversation, a weight
in the bed, a sound that bewildered the cat,
whom I found with his paws
up against the upholstered railing,
staring over the edge.

For one whole day
she cried, her small face reddened and creased,
the clenched purple fruit of her hands and feet
punched at the flannel in which I had tried to confine her.
By late afternoon I was weeping myself, bereft
by my ignorance, my clumsy attempts to console her,
unable to do anything but stand there and watch.
Then I laid my huge hand, fingers spread,
on her torso and made a loose cage
in which her body washed back and forth. Her limbs
went soft, her wailing ceased, her dark eyes widened
and shone. In utter silence she stared at me, her gaze
a fact into which I sank like a body relenting in water.
Her flimsy chest rose and settled beneath
my palm and in relief and gratitude I
said it, I called her by name and knew that I had a daughter.