

Holly Painter

NEONATOLOGY

We call him Hugo Apollo
a science fictional name
perfect for the first space
he inhabits after birth,
a place out of time
where two-pound babies
held close in their capsules
sleep in the beep and
whoosh of machines.

Wires and tubes tendril around him
sliding chemicals into his scalp
and oxygen into his lungs.
Electrodes stick to his chest
as though Houston
is listening from afar
ready to radio in
with a lullaby
at the slightest blip.

A waning crescent glows
outside the hospital window
but his outer space begins
eight inches from his face
and the moon will have to wait.

Holly Painter

THE DAY THE AP CALLED IT

Leggings streak hot pink
against black afternoon trees,
his singsong carries back,

“Dabo! Look! Those squirrels
are having a dance party!”
He twirls as needles rain down,

fair curls floating around him
like a dandelion puff in the
trembling seconds before --

All of us have been holding our breath,
reading red-blue checkerboard maps
like tea leaves, refreshing Georgia,

and now

my pocket vibrates every minute,
celebratory memes bouncing
through group texts.

The country's in the streets
champagne running down
the bright sides of cars

dancers spinning at the 76 station
rhythm thumping, shrieking, honking,
lovers kissing through masks.

In the woods, he curls into me
on a bed of leaves. “I'm Baby Bear.
You're Dabo Bear. We're hibernating.”

The oak branches high above
are a spider's web, he says, and
the last quivering leaves are caught flies.

"What is else is beautifuller in the forest?"
Chickadees erupt across the dusk
and he cries "Ooh!" snuggling closer.

"Can we stay all night? We'll see stars!"
His body is soft, his dreams full of light.
He's the beautifullest thing in the forest

and now
he'll be safe here.