

## Five-Pounders

small babies, light as a bag of sugar  
or a trout, too eager to get out,  
to get going, first babies, babies of mothers  
who didn't give up gin or meth or lucky strikes,  
mothers who didn't know,  
babies who come in twos or threes,  
their heads squished like a peanut  
or potato, too weak to latch  
or using more calories nursing  
than they take in, sleeping again  
before they eat enough, babies who shiver,  
unable to stay warm even flannel-wrapped,  
a heat lamp over them, eyes bandaged  
against a burn, an IV in the head for glucose,  
a tube for oxygen in the nose,  
drops from a syringe after mom pumps,  
monitors attached to chest, legs, arms,  
tough babies, fighters who learn,  
after they get here, to breathe,  
to burn calories, to suck, babies  
named Reggie, Mia, Kyle, or Bao,  
babies finally hooked to no machines,  
wearing only their diapers, babies who kick  
and wave and gum their fists and thrive

—Susan Elizabeth Howe