LITTLE RED

To treat it, the doctor said, we don’t need a name for it. I picked up my basket, put her white coat inside. Folded, it smelled wild, gristle in ice. Lupus, Lyme, rheumatoid arthritis. Tied my good-girl hood across my head, like a saint’s caul, like a fever. Walked out through the cold woods toward my breathbed, toward my prone grandmother prayers—skin creased with hymnless pain, weak light in the wrists and ankles snarling. Snowdrops on the path of needles, torn teeth on the path of pins. By the time I reached that house, I’d be meat for heaven’s feast. See it: a plate swollen white, a table heaving too-late mahogany lust, tea steeped from stars. But out here, in the alders, a noise, anonymous as stained-glass hums on the tree-spines, dim growls from outer space, lunar lace. It could be the wolf. It could be the moon. Lupus, lupus, Lyme. We don’t need a name. Crumbs of light hunt through my elbows, weaving into their soft walls. Huntsman comes with an axe of names. Dawn comes howling down the path of pins. I want to move my hands from this wound, put down the basket, move body into bread, become a loaf, immobile. A name for it. Hide hunger, hide my hands. Hide. Path of needles. We don’t need.
RED TIGER PRAYER

Holy is the dried glue on the child’s
new picture, the cat already peeling
off the red construction paper. Holy the howl
of that paper cat, the child’s first scratch
with death bled from magic marker,
the night he’s up at four to say
the picture dreamed him sorrowed out
by tiger’s ink, his flesh
gone balloon-flat on the pillow.
Holy orange marker, clawing its way
through the seams of his dreams.
And the storm-glass eyes gleaming.
Then rain. Praise his faith
in my raised head: how could I
not rise to meet it?
Holy the whiskers, holy the waking,
the mother’s body glued by its joints to the bed,
her swelled wrists pinned to the sheets
by arthritis. Holy the body that can’t leap
to save the sorry tiger from his rage
or snarl down grief in sorrow’s son.
Praise the failed joints in the mother’s body,
in the roof of the sodden house.
Holy that roof’s crooked breath under rain.