

## Mother

I woke up at three in the morning  
to my cat gagging over my mattress,  
and as my hand moved over his back,  
I thought of how my hands were cupped  
like yours when you pressed your palms  
against your womb  
and now at three in the morning,  
you might have been lifting your daughter  
out of a sleep of bad dreams.

I thought of you  
holding your daughter's open mouth  
against your collarbone and  
breathing shh in between kisses  
on her soft, doughy head.  
You probably knew how to calm her  
because of instinct.  
You knew her since the day you told me  
that you were going to be a mother,  
and now, nine months later,  
she is in the crib you had bought  
after you first saw her  
on the doctor's screen.

For a moment,  
my cat was my baby and I  
was the mother paralyzed by the sound  
of her newborn kicking the sheets  
and crying.

Then I lifted him and his ribs  
contracted into my palms and  
hollowed.

You probably sang  
and rocked her.  
When her cries became whimpers,  
you probably used the collar  
of your pajama shirt to wipe her nose.  
When her whimpers became breaths,  
you probably laid her down  
and folded the sheets around her shoulders  
and thighs.  
I could not sing to  
or rock my cat  
so I let him run into the hallway  
and gag.  
He fell asleep on the top stair  
and I shut my light off  
and fell asleep.  
I could tell my dad the next morning  
about the mess on the rug.

If you were awake  
at three in the morning  
you were alone  
leaning against the crib  
and you probably waited to see  
that she settled into a quiet,  
dreamless sleep.