

Without warning, the bane of my being  
sends me a text about a four-inch-long scratch  
on my toddler grandson's arm, one that,  
swear to God, he already had when  
he arrived for our last visit.

I know she is trying to set my son up,  
document false evidence so he will lose  
privileges or the right to see his fragile boy,  
who runs on all fours, hides in the dog's crate  
the minute anyone sets foot inside the house.

When I think of her, this young woman,  
obviously lonely, who wanted to get married—  
a sharp-edged prickle inside my head  
repeats, *Beware!*

*She started sleeping with crystals,*  
my son says, scratching his head—  
*I mean actual rocks in our bed.*

On nights I drink too much wine  
I blame myself—my A-line skirts,  
Weight Watchers diets,  
my son growing up single-mommed  
inside small-town America,

lured off course by a spritz  
of patchouli, a flash of black lace.

Tonight I weep for all I cannot fix,  
wish for a newfangled deity to implore,  
a *let's make a deal* beyond altar and incense,  
a clearinghouse for the backlog of karma.  
I drape a makeshift veil over my head,  
one hand raised in supplication,  
the other shielding my heart.