

not a mother

—for Wanda

I'd never met
a woman preacher with green eyes

who wore a purple surplice
danced at my nineteenth birthday party to the Beach Boys

hung African masks on the walls of the parsonage
spread bedsheets with butterflies for me to sleep on

read my love-poems with a straight face
let me write my philosophy final sitting out in the hallway alone

took me out to lunch when I turned twenty-one & full of self-pity
watched me toy with my enchiladas for hours

talked me into grinning without hiding my mouth
told me bluntly, *you don't need a mother*

(married the man she loved
moved to the mountains to live with him)

taught me to run far away from home
taught me to use the front door when I came back in

bought me my first expensive black leather boots
offered to pay if I decided to go blonde

I never did take her up on that one
maybe this summer I will