**400 Cranes**

Melody Wilson

I tell the hygienist the crane tattoo marks

the year I saved my life.

The answer disturbs her routine.

She drapes me for X-ray, tells me

her story ending: *four little kids,*

*folding and folding. We only got to 600.*

Six hundred paper cranes, not enough

to grant the wish. Not enough

to save her mother’s life.

She hasn’t folded another. I can’t speak

to offer regrets but imagine the work:

the kite fold, the wolf head,

the book. Twenty-one folds,

each finer than the last, flat surfaces slip

through my fingers, each new sheet

a prayer. Then I’m folding for my own

mother, a red crane for beauty, a green one for wealth,

blue for tranquility. After each little head bows into being,

I pop the wings out, puff air into the belly,

start to fold the next. Cranes line the table,

the banister, the windowsill. How many does it take

to make things different? Ten thousand for a moment?

A hundred for an afternoon?

I press, crease, and pinch the past into shape,

thread each wish onto wire, dangle them near the window,

wait for them to take flight.