Little Red Riding Hood - by Olga Broumas (1977)

I grow old, old
without you, Mother, landscape
of my heart. No child, no daughter between my bones
has moved, and passed
out screaming, dressed in her mantle of blood

as I did
once through your pelvic scaffold, stretching it
like a wishbone, your tenderest skin
strung on its bow and tightened
against the pain. I slipped out like an arrow, but not before

the midwife
plunged to her wrist and guided
my baffled head to its first mark. High forceps
might, in that one instant, have accomplished
what you and that good woman failed
in all these years to do: cramp
me between the temples, hobble
my baby feet. Dressed in my red hood, howling, I went –

evading
the white clad doctor and his fancy claims: microscope,
stethoscope, scalpel, all
the better to see with, to hear,
and to eat — straight from your hollowed basket
into the midwife’s skirts. I grew up

good at evading, and when you said,
“Stick to the road and forget the flowers, there’s
wolves in those bushes, mind
where you got to go, mind
you get there”. I
minded. I kept

to the road, kept
the hood secret, kept what it sheathed more
secret still. I opened
it only at night, and with other women
who might be walking the same road to their own
grandma’s house, each with their basket of gifts, her small hood
safe in the same part. I minded well. I have no daughter
to trace that road, back to your lap with my laden
basket of love. I’m growing
old, old
without you. Mother, landscape
of my heart, architect of my body, what other gesture
can I conceive
to make with it
that would reach you, alone
in your house
and waiting, across this improbable forest
peopled with wolves and our lost, flower-gathering
sisters they feed on.