At night you keep to yourself you cover 
your windows with wrapping paper indigo blue so 
no one can see the light of the single 
light bulb over your mother’s knitting machine

everything is communal – you are told – 
even your grandfather’s blacksmithing workshop 
where the State lets him keep working 
because it is a wing of his house 
and the State lets his only son work there too 
until the State promotes the son, your father, 
to a foreman of gypsies who enamel white and avocado green pots and pans and stove pipes but he makes so little money that your mother needs to work too so we can buy bread and milk in the fourth week of the month with her Gymnasium education and a dream on hold for college the knitting machine stowed in a box labeled “rags” she drags into the house from the sawdust shed and tapes up all the windows in the room where you and your sister sleep and rare parties are held and hundreds of books make the shelf sag and the piano stood there too until it had to be sold she takes the same indigo blue paper everybody uses to wrap school books and notebooks or to complement the blue smocks every schoolchild wears over tattered clothes for a nice unified look and she turns on the radio to drown out the clicking and whooshing of the machine that first unravels clients’ nylon stockings with runs then from the same shimmery tan thread miraculously knits knee highs with a little looser pattern the ladies pick up in small brown bags as if they were seeds and the money is slipped into her hands in envelopes like birthday cards she cranks up the radio again and you fall asleep to Callas and Caruso by the light of the 100W bulb over her bowed head and shoulders so there’s bread again the next day and you watch your mother draw the cross above the brilliant brown steaming crust you know this is another thing you should never tell the neighbors.