Anarcha Appears Again and Again
after Rachel Eliza Griffiths

Once I was slave, then I was an Alabama woman,
a hushed experiment hidden between the damp thighs
of Tuskegee men. Too many times I was a newborn
next to my mother in LA General County Hospital,

her slick syllables said something in Spanish, something
in English, something about sterility, something about tubes.

I am plump and soft and have not always had this hair—
always damaged. Always ruined, sent away to be fixed

and corrected. I am America’s opaque shadow, tossed
like a dog rotting on every country roadside.

I’ve been HeLa cells passed around like Halloween candy.
Are the doctors still waiting

for their black offering? Me, a silk dress of skin?
Consider this:

each moment I am perched on an examination table
is my break, diseased heart, taken child.

This is how I feel: wide. Dark. Lumpy. Cotton
at the bottom of a pillowcase. My cartilage

has been trustworthy in its role,
how it performs its designed duty,

how it keeps fastened my flesh
to my bone. If I could be more

than a specimen, more than a collection
of daffodils, *flora* would mean I was not here.
Don't you see? I am still here on all fours.  
I was never bone, nor beast, nor symbol for suffering.

I am a compass for warnings, a cured tissue.  
They are still dressing me for the cut

and I prep for the familiar  
cold gauze turned warm, then wet, then red.