

Nocturne

I

After the black rain squall
of an argument has blown over
we talk about how we are
spirits with working mouths
a crazing of bones
and a scribble of red and blue
electrical wiring
heated by blood
from a four-chambered engine room
and we imagine a time
when the stripped-back finery
of our joints
the worn fibres of connective tissue
and the soft machinery
that makes us move
is shutting down
and all we have learned
from the hard-won narratives
of loss and solitude
has been reduced
to flashbacks and voiceovers
and we are known
as a minimalist Mr and Ms
and conversation
is ebb and flow
and we have become
in the words of someone
overheard beneath
their breath at a funeral
As influential as flowers
breaking through the skin of a dune
and considering this
we go to bed
to work on our differences
our bodies
the common ground
we attend to lovingly
and you remind me
that when struggling
with philosophy
I'll look up and away
as if trying to remember my lines
and I remind you
of your tendency to frown
when caught between annoyance

and holding back a laugh
and we leave the future to itself
if not caring for a likely loss
of memory and skin
then at least resigned
to the way love works
in the deep and on the flats
sight-casting to shadows
on the heart or lung
and together we pinch out flames
to darken our room
we unmake the bed again.

2

When fitful sleep turns to insomnia
instead of trying to understand
the blacked-out
chemical trickery or worry
we go to where
dusty bulbs of jasmine light the fence
and hold each other
and give names to constellations
and follow satellites
ticking away
below a fixative of stars
and having made of the sky
a private code
I'll retrace the outline of your mouth
as I do sometimes
while you're dreaming
your expression one
of surprise or alarm and how
before you sigh
and brush my fingers away
I am close to prayer
whatever that means
and you recall the night
you found lines of verse
in the braille
a cold draught had typeset
above my collarbone
the sky veined
like a crumpled sheet of cellophane
and that completes the scene
we return to bed and read
and when you fall
asleep on my shoulder

strands of your hair
 come loose and divide the
page like a bookmark
frayed at the ends
 and redolent of vanilla.