

On January 24th*

Lauren K. Alleyne

for Shirleen

It's been proven, they say—
 the bills like a line of ants,
 the glamour of the new year
 grown dull like a tin ring, dark
 taking the sky like a curve,
 half the continent huddled
 into scarves and sneezes—
 the small engine of the brain
 sputters and coughs, spins
 the wheel of our brightness
 to no avail. My friend tells me
 she won't succumb, not this year,
 that she's armed with a gadget
 to simulate sunlight, to trick
 her hothouse neurons
 into defiant, artificial bloom.
 It's her birthday, so I smile
 but I can't stop the images
 summoned up in my own light-
 lacking mind: her dendrites sprouting,
 crazed with the unseasonal brilliance;
 leaky synapses dripping dopamine,
 serotonin, overflowing the bowl of her
 —everything out of kilter, ready
 to blow. Her face looms over the cake,
 the candles spelling the years
 she has insisted on her own wild survival
 —a flaming sentence, an almost-sun.
 Her eyes squint their wish and flutter,
 look at the light disappear.



* *According to news reports, a psychologist in Wales created an “emotional” formula and calculated that misery peaks on January 24th.*