On January 24\textsuperscript{th}* 

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 24\textsuperscript{th}. 