Cleopatra Mathis

Lilacs

They open before we have had a chance
to be unkind to each other.
In the dark the tiny whorls
unfold around the stem, candlelit
against the window; the infrequent dark
where our bodies gather and fill.
The lilacs bloom in their time,
the flowers dry in the billowing tree
which I will cut back
and further back.
What is desire
but a stone to bargain with. That longing
between us says *be something else*
until each holds the other
against change. The year turns.
The tree's frame empties,

empties again. If I could need
only what is given—
the way the limbs protect themselves
in spite of the weather. Another dark
conceals the latent buds.
It's true when you say I'm closed
between a past and future winter;
any fear is made bearable when it repeats,
when it's mutable and brief.