First, know that roses are shameless there. Their red wallets unfurl along the streets year-round. Mornings stretch among the villas and banks and parking structures in tendriled fog and honeysuckle; by midday, the men begin wishing to be sculptures, and the women wake and remember staring up through their skylights at the wheeling cosmopolitan night, unable to sleep. Understand that they consider every memory holy—even these—the way one might consider the Bayeux Tapestry: the crowning work of many hands, a market spilling over with vegetables made radiant in the sun. But I too have stared upward in a vertigo of loss, unable to sleep in California as a streetlamp threads through the blinds and stripes the bed. Lying there I considered the sudden ending of desire: How a wanted thing changes form once it’s had, how Ariadne was left naked on one of the Cyclades with knots of bloody hair in her fists, thinking This is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone. She comes to mind, even now, crawling into view like the desiccated feral squash stealing over the patio wall: one morning and then the next and then the easy symbolism of spent yellow flowers. Lying there I also considered the act of distinguishing among passions—namely, love of self and love of another—and whether there might be a great synthesis of the two, or whether mine is an orderless world where a hundred moths circle a streetlamp, where curtains collapse between acts and the audience can only stare, unsure in the red velvet of their disbelief, where I walk barefoot to the window in the house where I was raised.
for the blurry comfort of another streetlamp,
where the bridge I have raised across this divide
is trussed with kudzu and roses,
where pattern ceases and doubt subsides.
What more could I know of that place?
I have seen the twenty sundowns of Santa Monica
and cannot recover from their seduction.