Plight / Fantasy

After Richard Scott & Kanye West

He says he gave up cigars for marriage / but we know Mother quenched the blaze in Father's breath / tamed what brought on his side-street fist-fights / didn't want a furnace beside her after-shower flesh / When she looked over her right shoulder / she saw our house in flames / beside the match-snuffed-mouths of in-laws who cursed their marriage / Over her left / she saw clouds columned like smoking omens over us / each child a sapling yielding to heat / such that she bound us in bible verses / hefted her young family onto her back and ran / through the fire / across oceans / to England / Though it happened years ago it haunts her still / those interior walls blackening / dolls melting to plastic soup / kernels cooking in their nuts / batteries blooming to balls of gas / In one version of this story / we drowned / Her hot feet broke the water's surface / The Tyrrhenian sea took us in its blue mouth / soothed our singed skin as if a final kindness before death / In another version / the colonisers who brought the gospel / its fire and brimstone to our sleepy fields / threw open their doors / welcomed us to royal chambers / to bedcovers plush as panther fur / In another our teeth are white as coal / We are laughing blasphemously loud / into the kiln of a living-room / which mother watches / her smile a stiff wound / poking in at us / tending the business of family / as if parting the charred remains of a home / lifting us from ashes / like fine femur or burnished bone