**Power to the Glens**

*In the Highlands and Islands in the early 1940s, it was estimated that just one farm in six, and one croft in a hundred, had electricity.*

On a clear day the knocking of hammers

bounces cleanly through the air

beating a rhythm

overlapping and dangerous.

Building the beams and rafters is a rebel act

that begins at the timber-yard, both men

stern-faced among the stacks of wood.

They shun the usual banter in the bar:

hard to talk about the common good

when their disgrace is known.

Tremors and upset, that’s what comes of

betraying their father’s will.

As they pound in foundation stakes

with heavy wooden mallets

birds fly up in startled flurries,

empty branches bobbing in their wake.

Apple trees flower pink and white while

they labour on, mixing mortar, laying bricks,

swifts wheeling through the empty frame.

The house is taking shape, still

there’s no getting round Roderick,

fixed in his belief that his sons will destroy

the crofters’ hard-won life. He won’t shift,

will never see their plans as anything

but treachery. Over at the old steading

their mother is tense, caught between

two sides. In truth, despite their father,

she’s had enough of guttering lamps

barely holding back the dark. She’ll move

when the time comes. She can see a future

beyond the end of a rutted track, scraping

a living from a poor bit of land

in a lonely glen. The brothers work on,

their jaws set, but their saws sing through

the yellow wood, floorboards fitting snug

together, a kind of harmony pervading

the new home. Even the dust glints

golden, lit up and swirling in the sun.

Soon the electricity will flow in.

They’ll face the consequences later.