

Six o'clock in the evening.

My name is Flora.

Some people think this is not a great name to have been landed with. They find it a simpering sort of a name, the sort of name that makes them smile an embarrassed smile; personally, I quite like it. My mother and father must have chosen it with care, well, my father anyway. I think though that my mother would have preferred another boy. She always preferred men to women, but still she would have chosen my name with care, because she knew he would have liked her to do that. Had he picked me up in his long hands and looked into my face with great love and said, 'She is like a flower'? I seem to hear his voice and her reply. 'A rose perhaps.' Roses have thorns, she might have thought, and smiled her secretive smile. I remember all his gestures so well; he would have pushed his hair back from his forehead, blond, floppy hair. 'It's easy to see I must be descended from a Norseman,' I heard him say once. 'None of this Anglo-Irish nonsense for me. I am a Dane. Hamlet the Dane. Look at my Danish hair.' I must have been very young as the joke meant nothing to me. Mother laughed. She used always to laugh at his jokes. Bad or good, they were always followed by the gentle tinkling of her laughter.

Jennifer Johnston, *Naming the Stars* (2016)