

Lighter

The sparks scatter everywhere . . . they flutter about in the movements
of the world, searching where they can lodge to be set free.

—Martin Buber

1. *Zippo*

Spark, pull toward the mouth
of small steady flame. Pale lipstick (Frosted Glow)
creped on a filtertip. My monogrammed Zippo,

twelfth-grade Christmas gift from my best friend,
in my pocket when we were caught
discussing her pregnancy over cigarettes

in the restroom before graduation. Lost
sometime that summer—one of many bright
things I've had and can't remember when they left

my possession. Love letters, jewelry. My friend,
the other Susan, who knew when she lost
the baby—smoke rings

we taught ourselves to make, sprawled
on her mother's couch, while her father's last
Jack Daniel's paled in our melting ice. Spark, then smoke.

2. *Fatwood*

Lighter wood, my grandmother called it,
fatwood, resin-stiff splinters of pine tempered
by fire—one spark and they catch. The loblolly

by my window didn't catch when lightning
gouged a channel last night and flung
wet pulp in ribbons onto my stoop.

But the sparks wait in everything now:
Inside the bark, resin boiled, distilled
to lighter-wood pitch, ready next time to flare.

3. Becoming Light

At dawn the air skitters. Particles
of light trapped in the almost-dark,
colliding. When they find each other,
they slow down. It's daylight.

Light on dandelions shatters
the globes. The filaments lift, floss
of milkweed lifts. They rise all day on heat,
and we never see the fall, its finality,
plunging seed through a crack in clay,
fattening into taproot.

Without the stone in her belly, Susan
lifted, lost as dandelion silk
in a milky sky. It was not
a matter of joy.

4. The Breaking of the Vessels

The universe began when God miscalculated, pouring god-light
into vessels of light, and they broke. God broke. Primordial error,
before Eden, before serpent and fruit and Eve mouthing the word

sin and thinking *how will anything happen if I don't know the taste of it?*
The breaking set everything in motion, necessitated the world of
matter: breeding ground for the good, who are born to gather up
and raise the sparks that scattered into chaos, into dark everything.
Their mitzvoth, says Luria, joining all the lost light, will make God
whole again.

5. *Spark to Smoke*

Centuries wore down my grandmother's house
into particles of light. The lightning

found it in sudden recognition—spark
and flame. They saved a chest,

a desk, lockbox of old deeds. The spoons
and drawer pulls melted to lumps, glass

ran in a river under the cinders and sank
out of memory. Like darkness

between the sparks of cigarettes that night
we finished the bottle Susan's father left her

when he shot himself and nothing
connected light to light but our smoke, rising.