

## COMBUSTIBILITY

When I asked my older brother what makes the crackle  
when fire meets wood, he didn't explain how gas escapes

and pops in oxygen. Instead, he said, "Exploding bugs."  
That summer, I was seven, pockmarked, and a nuisance.

One day, he took me to a field of cattails and handed me a knife,  
said he'd heard of a college in Tennessee that studied bodies: their melt,

their swarm of maggots, time marked by an ungrassed patch.  
When we found the cattle corpse, I wanted to push the flopped-out  
[tongue]

back in the mouth. I wanted to go home. I wanted to unhinge time.  
I handed back the knife, the warm steel too heavy. He fished a lighter

from his pocket and knelt beside the cow's swollen belly:  
"Watch this." Then, he drove the blade between two ribs,

cocked the lighter, and set fire to the heart of me  
as the escaping gas glowed hot and blue in the summer sun.