

## Origin of the Fire

1. *Lucifer: a proud, rebellious archangel, identified with Satan, who fell from heaven.*
2. (lowercase) *friction match.* (dictionary.com)

Nomads in houses, we moved state to state  
following father's work. We begged a space

from relatives and carried parts of home  
along with us like snails. Once for a time

we lived with my granduncle in his house  
on a small-town main street. He seldom smiled.

His house was dark. His wife was dead. He had  
no pets or children. In blurred memory

I see the narrow shadowed stairs, the slippery  
threadbare carpet. Near the cobwebbed wall,

wood chest with horse decals, the thick red paint  
charred on one corner. *Who had set the fire?*

I had begged for the stickers, patted them  
in ragged lines along the sides and lid:

wild ponies in pesade, their rippling manes  
scorched in a dark incendiary wind.

Inside the chest, a melted rubber doll,  
size of a baby, plastic eyes rolled back.

My father smoked. My mother burned with rage.  
No child was wanted. I do not recall

running outside for refuge from the flames,  
wondering how the room became alight.

Once a man led a pony, door to door,  
offered to take my photograph, disguised

with borrowed vest and Stetson. I can't find  
that picture--Mother must have told him no.

Mornings I woke, obedient to her call,  
came to the landing and stood frozen there,

knowing I'd fall, thinking, *I'm going to fall*  
and every day, I fell like Lucifer.