

sensed a hollow where
his small flame lingered

among ash. Now color
pours from my hands.

When I touch you,
the heat startles. You say:

Here are the miracles:
the fox, the berries,

the child, grown lovely
and gorged with light.

CONSTANCE, 1958

When asked what she wanted to be when she
grew up, my friend Connie said: a prostitute.
And I knew she was better than I was,
harder the way metal gets when it comes
through fire and I felt scared and unable
to fight back. I wanted to be a nun,
a calm woman in a sky blue habit,
and I feared prostitutes, gangsters, pimps,
like I'd feared my friend Connie when she ran
through the sprinkler with her clothes on and we both
knew she'd get a beating. Her father
was wild too, went searching for the Lost
Dutchman's Mine and sent his whole family
to the poorhouse. Connie's grandmother
was a matriarch, my mother said, but
it sounded more like the way I've heard
people say bitch since. She owned a house
in the country and she took her grand-
daughter in when her crazy son went

looking for gold, and later, when all his
money was gone. Connie grew dry-eyed with rage
I never understood. Her grandmother
made fun of me, served me raw hamburger
once and I ate it all then threw up
later, in private. She used to say
I was too innocent, naive, but the words
sounded more like disgusting and stupid
back then, the year Connie swore she'd grow up
to be a prostitute and I felt
inferior for wanting to be a nun
and helpless because I knew she'd die out there,
even if she was Connie, the one who
stabbed herself first, then took my finger
and with a flash of light, made us blood sisters.