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Cigarettes

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Cigarettes

All the science notwithstanding, it's still
a little like a kiss to me,
or what a kiss might lead to.
That first grand expulsion
of breath from the lungs hangs there
like metaphor given skin,
and we almost believe in ourselves
some new way. Now and then
I bum one, and the rush
of dizziness that results
turns me woman in memory.
Though I lived in the world
I hardly stepped outside myself at all,
and women seemed a miracle of confidence.
Once I crossed the street
to retrieve the still-smoldering butt
a high-heeled, tight-skirted woman had tossed away.
I touched the lipstick-tainted end to my lips,
drew, and the fire burned my fingers,
the fire she'd taken into herself and sent out
into the air around us like a spell.
The first woman who ever let me
touch her, a girl really, only seventeen,
kissed me so deeply I fell out of myself

and became her. In the moonlit backseat
I knelt upward and beheld my own eyes
in a body of perfection as vulnerable as a child's.
Quick-witted and foul-mouthed
ordinarily, she was silent now,
even as the moments stretched out toward pain,
even when I reached over the front seat
and took one of her cigarettes and lit it
for myself. When she moved at last
it was both arms rising toward me,
and absurdly, I handed her the smoke.
Perhaps some tatter of cloud passed
before the moon just then
and in that moment her hands ceased
imploring and began simply to accept.
Whoever we would be for the next twenty years
took residence behind our eyes.
With both hands she eased away the cigarette,
and the drag she pulled into herself
cast a light that left me blind.

—for Sara Vogan