

Thirteen Cigarettes

by Daisy Rogers

I.

Under the ladybug blanket,
his upper lip twitches with sleep.
In dreams, he answers
“After I sleep, I will wake.”
I let my cigarette die of cancer
on the counter by his couch.

II.

With the blue flame from his gas-station lighter,
he lit his last cigarette; he took a slow drag and asked:
“Where do birds sleep?”

III.

Behind the theatre,
she stands in tights, feathered headpiece,
babbling in Russian to an overweight stagehand.
Thick smoke issues from her frail frame.
Before the curtain,
she grinds the Camel into the pavement,
curling her toes deep underneath her.
A communal sigh with the chemicals.

IV.

Poor as fuck,
but he smokes a pack a day.

V.

A corpse in its grave still struggling to survive,
a Marlboro left in the dirty bar ashtray.
Fumes still rising through the crowded air,
choking itself and coughing.

VI.

After this electric sex,
escaping through the screen in the window
with his last sigh of smoke,
her technicolor screams.

VII.

Pollution, from my breath,
rising to the chemical sky.
More black tar heavy in my lungs.

VIII.

Before allowing me to drink of his leftover nicotine,
a perfume that desperately clung to my black hair,
Walt Whitman's boy gave me the morning.
Beneath us, stray cats fought in the streets.
One, patched with neutral color, missing his left ear.

IX.

Late fall's first Sunday paper
covering his war-torn teeth from view.
Kept warm by ashing the fighting American Spirit,
and cream, thick-knit wool sweaters.

X.

In the pounding beat of his penmanship,
existed fear, a terrible need for necessity.
From the tall, decided ts and is
to the long, sketched ys and ls
These sufferings quenched by a strong cigarette.

XI.

Like a steam engine,
24 Camel coals in the looking-glass ashtray,
so I can speak to my mother.

XII.

A wild radioactivity between their bodies,
being fucked like mad.
She calmly smoked her carton of Parliaments,
and lifted her head when she heard the cat at the door.

XIII.

When the light touches our faces, I open my eyes.
You smell of stale freckles and last night's first cigarette.
You like to let your fingers sleep on my ribs.
You know nothing of the morning birds, because you dream until
afternoon.