

The Cigarette

Your hands work as if on stage
a sudden graft of someone else's elegance
elbows relaxed and eyebrows arched
within the practiced context of props
and their finely scripted securities

Patterns change, of speech and gesture
as eyes squint through curling smoke
someone else's eyes
and the deftly lit cigarette fills your mouth
someone else's mouth

Cool words vent with the mouth's exhaust
no longer the oracle that sang to me like a kiss
Cool words and heated smoke
screening your face, and I wonder
How many people there are inside you burning?

Like a sparkler flashing on the Fourth of July
the end of your smoldering hand traces the space
the growing space that encircles your smoke
defining in the busy night air
the conversation's end

Looking offstage as if for a prompt
you try to say what is already in one eye
and take a drag, tasting the sound
then finally the words,
arrogant as a thrower's knives,
"I can't handle this yet, you know?
Not yet. Not me."

And it all seems so reasonable
as you nod, agreeing with yourself

And each promise made is lanced like a balloon
and each sweet vow is swallowed
as the scrolls of our moments,
poems all (I had believed),
are rolled and stuffed and turned into ash
then casually flicked onto the oncoming traffic
in the time it takes for another match to flare