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While Visiting the Dentist at Age Eleven

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He smokes; I thought you should know…
Like a grease fire, black clouds billowing –
or a chimney. Like two sticks rubbed
together in earnest,
the fireboard and spindle
or metal on flint.

I thought you should know he smokes…
When his body comes in contact with another –
Oh, the hot hot heat of friction. Grinding
particles to combustion,
the ardor and spark
or skin on skin…
the fervor and blaze
or sin on sin.

He smokes; I thought you should know…
Like electroshock therapy, grey tendrils coiling –
or a wood burning stove. Like bricks of coal stacked
against the odds,
the ember and conflagration
or fire on flame.

I thought you should know he smokes…
When a lit cigarette is between his lips –
Though he claims he’s trying to quit. Sucking
nicotine into lungs,
the formaldehyde and arsenic
or butane on battery acid…
the ammonia and acetone
or bloodstream on lead.

As the hygienist scrapes away plaque with her silver hook, her mask bobs
up and down as she talks about how beautiful my teenage sister is
who

Your sister has the most beautiful green eyes I have ever
seen. They are so big, and her eyelashes
frame them to perfection.

Have you noticed how gorgeous they are? Only
every time a lady at church would compliment her
then ask me about how school was going.

And when we visited my great-grandma in the nursing home –
she prattled on for twenty minutes about how much my
sister looked like my mom and how beautiful she was.

Then she turned to look at me and said Well, Kristin’s different.
She must have come from the Milkman.
And everyone laughed except me.

I grip the arms of the dentist chair and stare at the
plastic of the hygienist’s safety glasses. Please look
at my eyes, just once.

She pauses in her work and looks at my face.

I don’t think that I have ever seen eyes so clear
and green. Gosh, those eyes. I wish
I had eyes like hers. Don’t you?

I close my eyes against the burn of tears
and attempt to swallow before answering.

Ub-buh.