

CLAUDIA BICKEL

Camel's, No Filter

The cigarette
between his thumb and forefinger
is a tiny baton
he taps against his left palm.

The kitchen table is oval,
the wallpaper like chicken wire.
It is morning, and after my cereal is gone
my mother will pour the sweet milk from the
bowl
into a glass, and I will drink it,
like eating butter right off the knife.

My father sits to my right,
the chain of his pocket watch
a shiny loop through his vest.
The newspaper is folded beside his plate;
his shirt collar snug
and his skin folding slightly
over its thick edge.

The match's bright burst
snaps and flares,
a flag in the wind
he carries to his mouth.
The smoke rises from his fingers
a milky ribbon.

When he knows he will die
he will choose to be cremated.

His coffin on a dais in a square room,
the left wall lined with windows
and the curtains drawn, I will sit
my mother and sister beside me
neatly, front row.
Behind us, friends and family will file in, their
silence
an embarrassment
all shuffling feet and the scrape of coat buttons
on wood.

There will be complications about his coffin,
because he has broken Jewish law.
Although I won't know this at the time.

What I will wonder is why and how and where
he will burn.
As if he has just then opened a new pack,
piquing my nose, sour and sharp.
As if I am watching the cellophane
slide off with his hand.
His eyes almost closing
around this pleasure,
the flame drawn to him.

Claudia Bickel was raised in a secular household in New Haven, CT, and has lived in Toronto since 1986. She has published poetry in several literary journals, most recently in Event and The New Quarterly.

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SIDNÉ MADDISON, NURSE FROM BRANTFORD, ONT **BOSNIA & CROATIA**

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