

How the Smoke Lingers

Stale cigarette smoke on a dingy white
wife beater, encompassed like a hug around my small
shoulders, a smokeless exhale... *P a p a*

There are fleeting moments that I see your face:
behind closed eyelids, quick blinks,
and glassy-eyed stares.

But no matter how hard I try, you're shrouded
in a thick mist, blurred at the edges,
indistinct but in pictures and even then—

That's how I remember you, in puffs
of smoke and the faint glow of embers
on the tip of a candyless lollipop,
extinguished with a hiss as my tears slap
the worn photo of your crisp
face next to mine, hazy once again and blurred
at the edges

My throat burns when I think of the memory
of you – what little memories I even have, lost
in time and space. These tears
take me by surprise because I didn't know you
as well as I could have
as well as I should have – but I think that's why it hurts

I smell you in bars, at gas stations,
outside of a “No Smoking”
coffee shop and my stomach turns as I hold
my breath. Eyes downcast, disgusted,
my pure pink lungs burst
for clean air and yet– I hold
onto the smell that lingers in the fine hairs
of my nostrils, sticking like glue
to the broken childhood memories

It consumed you like you consumed it;
I wish I could say I hate you for it but how can I hate
what I barely got the chance to love? Instead, I place
my blame on the white puff of smoke that turned your lungs to coal