

Lovers and Smokers

My friend said he'd really blown it.
Just before moving to Paris
he had quit smoking.

If I had known
what would go on in California
during my two years in Paris,
I'd have quit my husband.

I was born in Paris in 52.
My father smoked
some of what the army issued; the rest
he gave out as tips.
My mother tried the art of smoking,
but coughed her way out of cool
and gave up.

There's a little piano bar
just a cobblestone street across
from George Pompidou
where a woman sang like Piaf.
My friend Andrea led us in
and my lungs took in
a pack's worth.

I leaned against the wall
and watched wine glasses, wet lips,
and fingers perch out at that
sophisticated angle,
balancing the cigarette
that separates it's owner from me.

We could have stayed, but the smoke
choked my will as it pushed me out
the French doors and into the night.
It's alright, she said.

My friend called.
Your husband's having an affair.
I stayed another year.

Just west of the Arc de Resistance

Nicole

there's a warehouse. Artists filled it
and for five euros
you could eat and dance.
*Enjoy well, they said, Sarkozy will kick
us out.* The band's African beat moved
me, as did the tall man with the
ponytail. We danced. My arms went
everywhere but near him. He caught
my hands. His warmth touched
the way I needed. There was fire, but I
stamped it out. The embers too,
ground under my boots – *ecraser*.
I was my own lover.

I left with Andrea,
through drizzling rain,
past the arc, down the steps,
into the metro.

On the street in front of
Alliance Francaise
Fernando lit a cigarette.
Madrid banned smoking
he announced, lifting his chin,
like New York.
He laughed. *We smoke anyway.*

I walked to the Luxemburg Gardens to
sit in the chairs facing the fountain.
Butts littered the ground.
I no longer cared.
Everywhere lovers embraced,
like my parents had, like they still do.

But I had blown it.
Paris passed the ban on smoking
in August '07.
I had moved back to LA in June
and for one night
my husband held
a ceremony to himself,
like sucking hard on that last drag
before you toss it.