

Five Poems · *David Ray*

A CIGARETTE LIKENED TO A SOLDIER IN WINTER WHITES

In Memoriam, John Kiely, 1946–1986

And this is the cigarette
that John plucked from the pack
when he lay down on the couch
because he was home
and just half drunk,
about ready to sleep
through to the dawn but not
forever and ever, leaving

his room with its walls black
and its furniture grey.
And the dawn that arrived
quite on time as it should
was one that John meant
to share with his friends
and more than one lover. John meant

to arise and to live on
with his charm,
on to next year and the next
and the next and not to be shipped
frozen like clay home
to the first ice of the season

on a Midwestern hill
where his friends would shove
till his coffin rolled in
for the ride under grey skies.
And this is the drink

that was enough of a drink
to sedate our friend John
till his cigarette burned
in the crack of his couch

and a black shroud formed
from the black smoke that swarmed
and blocked light forever

from his Irish eyes
that were smiling

each and every time we saw him.

FIRST ICE

I went to a death last week, what was left
of it, my friend John in his coffin, his face
looking like clay all powdered and pasted over
and the hair and eyelashes and mustache
fake because it had been a mess, and his old
father trying not to buckle as he stood there
crying, a ninety-year-old who at fifty had had
a son, and now was trying to absorb yet another
grief. "You'll have to bury me soon," he said
to a friend and she said "Don't be silly!"
and I tried to think of some reason to give
that old man for living. There was a small
red-velvet-padded prayer rail in front of
the coffin, and because I could not think
of anything else to do I kneeled and said
goodbye to my friend. "Goodbye, John,"
I said, noticing that the fake eyelashes
looked like two sleeping centipedes on my friend's
face and that the wig of hair gathered elsewhere