

## Smoke · Judith Moffett

C.H.D., 1909-1977

On doctor's orders you spent whole days  
in bed, your cough so tearing  
it wore you ragged. Double pneumonia.  
All that dark fall  
I brought your sickroom bright  
seasonal trinkets, red  
leaves or horse chestnuts I now see  
must have struck you  
as maddeningly beside the point.  
One raw afternoon your raccoon coat  
charged toward me in the street,  
hesitated, pushed on defiant.  
Out? In this weather? Guiltily  
you pleaded stir-craziness, but at once I knew  
from now on smoke would seep again  
under the bathroom door.

Should I have tried to stop you  
then and there? Beautiful, gaunt, smudge-eyed,  
brittle tree of a woman,  
as weak as furtive, might you have let me? I  
whom you permitted  
to nurse and shop, do laundry, make  
beds and soups, who would have moved  
mountains to have you well  
or fallen trying, could not be asked to help you kill  
yourself; but to stay by and keep still  
rather than shame you, *that*  
was possible—not that you thought it through!  
Simply, a live-in jailor suited you,  
and I  
proved manageable. Not love but trust went up  
in smoke forever.  
Simply, we lived your lie.

Knowing your own ways, you chose this.  
All the next autumn  
passed in a hospital bed.  
Cancer. Lung, then bone and brain;  
white-gray waves a rolling  
blur on the pillow, long shanks  
ridging the blanket. No more jailbreaks  
from pain, or nightmares—  
enemies, terrors—or the good intentions  
of friends. How  
many dozens of us  
had literally adored you? To this day  
I hate it that you loved and needed anything  
more than your crowded life,  
and family in Monza, and me. Tonight  
safe at home by a fireside  
you'll never share,  
from cold that won't again  
smoke with your breath, I miss you  
and am still angry.