Homestead

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College of DuPage

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When my father left my mother, she became smoldering paper. She didn’t fold, spindle
or mutilate herself. She didn’t crumble up into a ball and throw herself away. Instead she became
inanimate, flat, two-dimensional, with charred edges, silent and always smoking. She could inter-
face with things, pots that cooked meals, dishes that needed washing, hair that need to be braided,
she only conversed with our cat Dog, and she always had a lit cigarette. She became afraid she
would be swept away by a strong wind, or damaged in some way by the wetter elements, or
perhaps yellowed prematurely in the sun, so she rarely left the house. She would stare wistfully at
the television, or out a window for hours at a time, or listening to music. Even then I recognized
the way my mother waited for the familiar sounds of keys, and then footsteps, a heavy voice that
would call out and ask for something, food, water, the mail, anything as a greeting. She was wait-
ing for my father to come home.

For a while my mother could change shape and form and will herself to become various
things, mother, daughter, separated wife, and magically never showing where a previous crease
or fold had been. She did emotions as well, laughing at jokes, angry that something that couldn’t
easily be replaced had gotten broken, she hugged and smelled of Youth Dew... for awhile at least.
Then one day in the middle of the night she made a shape, so complicated with so many angles,
and tight corners, that she could barely move. Anna with the laughing eyes, suspended animation
and became her final self, ornamental, and fragile.