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Camel Cafe

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Why

How proud you were when they handed him over,
 fresh from the womb, unfolded into your palms.
 You wished his newborn wrinkles would flatten
 into your own image, his eyes open in your color.
 The clay you had always wanted to mold
 lay wet and fragile in your crusted hands.

He belonged to her only when his mouth lay on her nipple.
 He was not her project, was never her son.
 You claimed him as your own creation,
 your singular accomplishment.

And days and years passed before she again gave birth.
 This time to a daughter.
 But your hands were already wet with clay
 and you couldn't hold her.
 There wasn't room for two between your sculpting palms.

Now they stand together.
 A son and a daughter wondering why.
 Why you wouldn't let go and why you never held on.

-Lelei Jennings '95

Camel Cafe

The man in the corner of the coffee shop
 has no index finger on his left hand,
 so he holds the Camel
 between the ring and middle.
 He flips the bicycle playing cards slowly,
 waiting for a black nine
 to fill the space next to his ten of hearts.

In the ashtray A lipstick-ringed Camel
 looks so old and unwanted

in the ashes
 of today's second pack...
 as if he'd brought it along.
 He turns every third card,
 biding time with the smoke.

The chrome mug reflects his face,
 worn deep with sandstorms and age.
 Swallowing hard from his coffee,
 massages the back of his neck
 with his twisted left hand.
 He removes the solitary cigarette
 from the ashtray and stands.

-Jeremy Aufrance '95