

First Date
for SL, 1971

Like bombwork, my father
wrapped me in his American flag,
filibuster of scissors & comb, blond locks
scattered on faux tile, I died a day.
Clean-cut, square, Ralphie's Grill,
I spun the noodles in the belly of the spoon,
JoAnne pounded the ketchup,
we danced a Neapolitan shake.
Galaxies from the world of hairstyle & menus,
war unfolded, the politician's origami.
Cousins returned, itching their ribs & crooked creases.
I took a deep breath, pulled the pin,
lobbed an *I love you*. A kid,
you suck the cold spoon, giggle
over a brain-freeze, wait for your valentine
to toss that beautiful grenade
back in your direction. Later you learn
to nail a punchline while chewing a jackknife,
obey orders, disobey orders, lie awake
burning ancient temples in the dark
—don't misunderstand me, I'm not
giving you a story, I'm trying to work
my way out of one.