

Self Portrait as First Kiss

My braces cut you—
metallic scythe,

nicking your bottom
fat lip into another

ruby mouth drawing
caterpillar blood

three beads dripped,
spilling a tiny

river—liquid dahlias
and burning raspberries

on a stove. I felt your
tongue—a pink

dolphin arcing the pink
muscle in my mouth

to undulate. Years later,
I would see your cherubic

face again, this time lit
inside a box—frozen

bright from a mug shot
on the news, wanted

by the police for kid-
napping and torturing

a black woman. A black
woman you thought stole

the drug money hidden
inside the cotton lips

of your mattress and bed
frame. They said you tied

her to a chair and I won't
say what you did next. It's

too unbearable to say here—
inside a couplet that can't

stop the shattering glass
you broke inside of her.

I won't say what you said
to me—after I made you

bleed, opened you rare
as a new wound. I won't

talk about the scar I
scraped into the velvet

puckering of your lip
or how you called it

your *love nick*—looked
like a thin piano key

that you once tapped
like a sharp note

with your index finger
and I kissed you again

because I felt bad
for cutting you in this

manner. It takes a special
kind of cruelty to damage

another in this way. Lil'
Chris, do your lips still

itch for me or the dope?
—knocking and unknocking

your mouth for more
and more blood.