

## Kitchen Lessons by Brittany Cole

The man I love enters the kitchen  
and overlooks me for leftover Chef Boyardee.  
Sitting at the kitchen table, I clear my throat,  
grinding my esophagus  
to vie for his attention.  
His eyes stare loosely  
at the lukewarm alphabet noodles.  
Hey you, I mumble;  
the words are rough on my tongue.  
His shoulders rise and fall as he grunts,  
but no glance in my direction.  
He scratches his thigh through his stiff Levi's,  
standing at the counter while he  
spoons up the words he doesn't share  
into his mouth  
from a bowl.

I peek at the TV flashing in the next room,  
19 Action News rapping its latest scandal,  
I dismiss this story with a click of the remote  
while he remains  
stagnant  
like the faded smell of  
day-old tomato sauce  
congealing on the counter.

A bell tolls in my chest.  
It's my birthday, I whisper.  
He wags his spoon at me  
like a silent noisemaker.

His excavated bowl gets placed in the sink,  
and he finally looks at me long enough to bear to me  
his desolate eyes.  
I think of the Great Basin desert my family visited  
when I was seven,  
how the cacti were abundant.  
The man I love entered the kitchen.  
The man I used to love  
exits it.

