

Pepper Eating Contest

I disappoint my dangerous lineage:
my parents' tongues blacken with capsaicin.
My sisters order lunch in Scoville heat units,
consume peppers, stem first. When I eat one,
I worry I'm the one being digested—it singes
a path along my digestive tract. It's reckless
to eat members of the nightshade family.

With all the sweating, rapid heartbeat,
no wonder they think they're in love
with spicy food. Helping with dinner
stings. It set the house aflame
and I called the fire department.
I admit, later, it was only my mouth
that blazed. Firefighters hate this joke.

—Valerie Loveland

