

SARAH CARLETON

Timing

The secret of a good joke is scrolled inside a fortune cookie
vacuum sealed in crunchy plastic

at the bottom of a bag, on a countertop among dirty plates,
snapped chopsticks, and white boxes of hardened rice,

in a kitchen designed for people with no elbows
but good taste in tiles, high in a fourteen-story building

on a street near a park — you know the one —
with bikes whizzing by, runners, schleppers, knee-high shriekers,

and paths that wind around boulders placed just so, on which
couples sit, lucky in their first-world perch,

digging jokes from their mental databases, building a bedrock
of giggles so they will be happy with one another,

they will have a good life together because they know love means
saving dessert for last and laughing even when their partner

starts with the punchline.

SARAH CARLETON writes poetry, edits fiction, plays the banjo, and raises her son in Tampa, Florida. Her poems have appeared in numerous publications, including *Off the Coast*, *The Binnacle*, *Cider Press Review*, *Nimrod*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *New Ohio Review*.

