

ALLISON JOSEPH

How We Met

Not in a smoky club with me
in red velvet, décolletage heaving.
Not in a bird sanctuary,
no glossy feathers floating

down around our heads.
Not in church, no big-hatted,
big-bosomed ladies orchestrating
our union. Not on a beach,

no starfish, sizzled flesh.
No street corner, no streetlamp,
no halo of light blessing
our moment of meeting forward.

Not in Rockaway, Piscataway,
Biscayne Bay or Pismo Beach.
No Boston or Brazil. No, instead,
picture a sagging sofa

in a shotgun grad-student house,
keg party where old students
check new recruits: wary poets
circling each other, fiction

writers divvying up plots.
Eager, silly, 21, I plop down
next to you, extend my hand
at the instant you reveal

your hometown, and all I see
is a girl like me spat on by
whites, Elizabeth Eckford
caught in rabid crossfire.

Could they be your family,
your neighbors? But you
don't stutter, don't blanch,
don't redden or shrink in shame.

"Central High, 1957," you say,
drawing close the hand I pulled
back, pulling me into you,
past all that hurt called history.