

The Older Boys

Like the first time your child saw your husband do it, or as a child
you might have seen your father,

or the father of a friend
or, older, a lover

of your own, someone you trusted who
has not quite hurt you, exactly, but has told you

in the way
his fist has hit the space of wall

beside your face
what he is capable of, your mind,

in that moment, scrambling
to revise what you thought you knew

of him and how
with what you now know

you must step forward cautiously . . .

What happened that summer was innocent enough—
I was eleven. But already I felt it

even if I couldn't name it—
the unease at the way the older boys began to gather

as the girls approached, and the questions—*which one puts out—*
and the divvyng—*which one do you want—*the way I thought I was meant to

stand among them, and did, on top of Bark Hill, the red sun breaking
out across the surface of the lake, the girls walking toward us

up the slope, the sun, I remember,
 behind us,

so we must have looked to them as just dark
blank shapes, long shadows

the girls stepped inside of
before they could even see our faces