

When He Comes at Me

the first time, I'm still trying to decide
over-easy, scrambled, or poached,
yet already I'm bracing

the egg in the bed of my palm. Instinct
is a sea turtle lumbering toward open
ocean, a honeybee dancing

the knowledge of pollen, a newborn
rooting & suckling. I'm imagining
a dog with its tail straight

& its hackles raised the second time
his jaw locks & his eyes go black
with fight. Love is the absence

of menace, the urge to keep the fire
churned, the lock secure in its latch.
To move the stars around

the sky, close one eye, say something is
different. My son, you are not yet
a man, so when you come

at me a third time, I'm still trying to
decide which of us has grown
meaner. My hands are

shadows in front of my face, shapes
of anger you see when you look
in the mirror. Mother

is not a word either of us has
rehearsed. This is the world
I dare down into sleep

each night, in a bed I force myself into
with myself. Dressing in the dark,
we are fumbling with the lock.