

How His Fingers Trembled

We saw him once, crossing the street
to the Island Market, a short man
with a body like tinder, and my father said
that was the nervous boy from high school
who wore his face in his hands and had one
friend, an easy-going athlete, and the two
stayed close even after, the one under the wing
of the other. And once

they went bow
hunting in the faded trees
the light pushed away and broke
into fragments. Or was it the dark
and the hard luck of brushing against bark,
those seams of a forest that never stop?
And all the while the crackle and breath
of the tender trees and their own bodies
moving through. What is tenderness
if not the finger on the arrow? What is grief
if not the quivering gone wrong? The arrow sailed
past the ghost of some bright animal,
sailed into the heart of his best friend.
You know the story too.
How he carried his body
to the truck. How he drove
to his friend's house
to tell his pregnant wife what he'd done.
How he stayed for months in his room

and no one knew how to come close
or break the tether of his ache. How

years later he asked my mother
on a date in winter, washed his car the day
before, and all the doors froze. How he stood
on the curb next to her, under falling snow,
lighting matches, setting the flame carefully
against the keyhole.