

# LIQUID

The men of Cambridge jog  
shirtless this morning

like it's normal to be beautiful  
and looked at. Un-secreted

from coats but not-yet-tan,  
their meaty chests weave

among overdressed pedestrians.  
I'm suddenly shy

when the young guy  
with plum nipples, liquid

shoulders taps my shoulder:  
*You dropped this*—a post-it

I wrote on, between his finger  
and thumb. Coffee in my one hand

and a bag in the other, he pushes  
the note deep in my shirt pocket—

his knuckles to my nipple like they  
were always supposed to be there.

*So it doesn't fall out again,*  
he grins. He winks, palms

my shoulder like a father  
or boyfriend—he knows that

he knows how to dissolve me—  
*I better catch up with my girlfriend.*

The gesture raw, exposed  
as the hair on his flat, damp belly,

as the phone shoved in his shorts  
against his hipbone.

# POEM FOR STRAIGHT GUYS

who let me sit with them  
on the school bus, saved a seat for me  
at lunch, who knew who I was before I did  
and didn't care. Invited me to sleepovers—  
pranked me like one of the guys—  
all of us sleeping on the floor.  
Thanks for not picking me last  
for football, even though  
I sucked, for passing to me,  
high-five—*no worries*—if I missed.  
Not afraid to undress  
where I could see, and, yes,  
I looked. Thanks for letting me stare at  
what I wanted to stare at,  
figuring out how I felt.  
Thanks for flexing, wrapping arms  
around my neck, making a place  
when I needed a place.  
Thanks for going shirtless.

## LIKE HIM

I'm almost forty and just understanding my father  
doesn't like me. At thirteen I quit basketball, refused  
to hunt. I knew he was disappointed, but I never knew  
he didn't have to like me  
to love me. No girls. Never learned  
to drive stick. Chose the kitchen and mom  
while he was in the woods  
with friends who had sons like he wanted.  
He tried fishing—a rod and reel for Christmas.  
Years I talked deeper, acted tougher. Last summer  
I went with him to buy a tractor.  
*In case he needs help*, mom said. He didn't look at me  
as he and the sales guy tied machine  
to truck, perfect boy-scout  
knots. Sometimes I wish I could be a man  
who cares about football, who carries a pocketknife  
and needs it. The time he screamed: *I'm not a student,*  
*don't talk down to me!* I yelled: *You're not smart enough to be one!*  
I learned to fight like his father, like him:  
the meanest guy wins, don't ever apologize.