

How I Learned to Talk

The road had been oiled to keep
the dust down when the truck came that August,
and the man opened his door and asked
directions. I balanced a bowl of raspberries

against my hip, still straight, a thin tube
with a hole down the center, like a whistle.
He was kinder than I'd imagined he'd be.
Get in here, he said. Show me the way.

I thought strangers would look hard and eager
like my father, like my mother
when she caught you doing what she knew
you'd do, you were always doing or wanted

to do. He was more like me, dry mouth
tasting the tang of his idling engine, the blue
bowl impossibly bright with berries.
As though I could wake up now — suddenly.

A mouth
closed over my whisper. The flesh grew
around the hard white core of want.
And where I pulled the fruit away —

turned on my heel and ran, scattering
berries my mother would send me back for,
to pick out of the oily dust and rinse —

a hollow where I put my tongue.