

Bike Ride with Older Boys

Laura Kasischke

The one I didn't go on.

I was thirteen,
and they were older.
I'd met them at the public pool. I must

have given them my number. I'm sure

I'd given them my number,
knowing the girl I was. . .

It was summer. My afternoons
were made of time and vinyl.
My mother worked,
but I had a bike. They wanted

to go for a ride.
Just me and them. I said
okay fine, I'd
meet them at the Stop-n-Go
at four o'clock.
And then I didn't show.

I have been given a little gift—
something sweet
and inexpensive, something
I never worked or asked or said
thank you for, most
days not aware
of what I have been given, or what I missed—

because it's that, too, isn't it?

I never saw those boys again.
I'm not as dumb
as they think I am

but neither am I wise. Perhaps

it is the best
afternoon of my life. Two
cute and older boys
pedaling beside me—respectful, awed. When we

turn down my street, the other girls see me ...

Everything as I imagined it would be.

Or, I am in a vacant field. When I
stand up again, there are bits of glass and gravel
ground into my knees.
I will never love myself again.
Who knew then
that someday I would be

thirty-seven, wiping
crumbs off the kitchen table with a sponge,
remembering
them, thinking
of this—

those boys still waiting
outside the Stop-n-Go, smoking
cigarettes, growing older.

from *Dance and Disappear*, 2002

University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA