

*At thirteen,*

you stay in the shower  
long after the water has started to rain down cold,  
running the razor over every part of your body  
that has suddenly turned traitor & sprouted hair,  
desperate already to stop time & stand still here  
because somehow, part of you knows  
that everything is about to get much more vicious  
& you are completely unprepared to defend yourself

against the girls in your honors classes,  
eagerly winding the arms of the clock forward  
hiding their good grades like a secret they're ashamed of  
pitching their voices higher  
ending everything they say *with a question mark?*  
to win the approval of acne-riddled boys  
suddenly strutting the halls,  
ranking you by breast size.

the unfairness of your future  
clings to the side of the bathtub, trapped in a skin  
of diluted shaving gel

down the hallway, you hear doors slamming shut.

you have not agreed to this,  
the way your body has betrayed you,  
scooped you from the safe cradle of a little girl  
& left you defenseless here, constantly reminded  
the rules have changed & no one has explained to you  
how to navigate this place.

if the girls in your class are willing to bow down  
& readily trade themselves away for approval  
you will be lonely  
in your stubborn refusal to bend.

before the small thatch of pubic hair  
started to brush against the front of your flowered panties,  
the world seemed vast  
& you exulted in the sensation of your muscles  
flexing & moving inside of it.  
as your body remodeled itself you panicked  
at the sudden narrowness that surrounded you  
penned in by sweaty-palmed boys  
who felt entitled to your body smug in their newfound sense

of power.

in the cafeteria, groups of girls drew together, discovered  
how intoxicating it feels to be a bully  
how fear secured loyalty better than friendship.  
the boys learned to get off  
on turning them against each other.

you watched this world speed up around you  
& prayed to be invisible.  
back at home, you stripped off your clothes  
& stole one of your mother's pink Daisy razors,  
hoping each swipe of the blade would leave your skin  
the way it was before & give you room to move again.

weeks later, when your period started,  
your mother looked at you differently from across the dinner table  
& your father pulled away from hugging you  
before you were comforted.

that night, you stuffed the corner of the pillow into your mouth  
so your little sister on the bottom bunk  
wouldn't wake up & climb the ladder to ask, *What's wrong?*  
because there was no way to tell her,  
a flat-chested, fuzzy-legged nine-year-old  
intent on being your shadow  
that you were jealous of her.