

Zoe Reay-Ellers

Age: 16, Grade: 11

School Name: Interlochen Arts Academy, Interlochen, MI

Educator: Brittany Cavallaro

Category: Poetry

Girls will be Girls

in sixth grade

teacher sends the boys out of the classroom
to go make trouble amongst the crabapple trees
in the field outside and we look at one another in confusion
because what's so special about us usually teacher

keeps the boys in at recess for being too rambunctious
but today we're trapped inside and none of us have been causing trouble except
Cass kissed Julie's crush last week and then Julie pulled Cass's hair
but none of us told because we're not snitches teacher pulls out

a plastic blue and teal tool that she calls a ray sir and shows us how to run
it down your leg always down never up because you'll bleed
and boys don't like scratched up legs knees girls i want a boy
in our class to notice me so i sneak into my mom's room

and grab hers she keeps it in a cup in the bathroom cabinet
and it's almost new because she's a hippie and doesn't believe in ray sirs
because that's *conforming to the pait ree arch ey*
as she likes to declare whenever we walk by a pretty lady

on the street i run my right leg under the sink run the metal across my shin
and bare a small strip of skin smiling i continue
and that night my legs ache but they're smooth and i'm pretty
mom look i'm a dolphin she got rid of her ray sir after that

in seventh grade

i go to a sleepover at my friend sammie's house and everyone
who's anyone is there sally gretta teja zoey i arrive
in beat-up cargo pants and my dad's old letterman jacket they all call
my look vintage cool chic i nod along because these are the cool girls
and i don't want them to know that i'm wearing this

because i forgot to do laundry yesterday all of my jeans were buried
at the bottom of the hamper and i grabbed the jacket without thinking
because i forgot it wasn't just going to be me and sammie i step inside
and they return to the living room with me in tow where there's a cheese pizza

and salad i put two pieces of pizza on a paper plate that bends in half
the second that the bottom of the slices hit it and i scramble

to stop them from hitting the floor while the other girls chatter i recover
and go to take a bite when i realize they're all staring at me *what* i ask

you're eating like a quarter of the pizza greta says eyes wide
aren't you afraid that'll make you fat i usually scarf down five
or six slices whenever someone brings in pizza
so i look at sammie and she shrugs sipping at water we usually drink coke

in eighth grade

i'm at the mall with my friends getting dresses
for our moving-up ceremony in a month sarah knows a good store
and we decide to make a day out of it getting pretzels
and trying on too high heels we me sarah alyssa sammie

get matching dresses in different colors but now we have another hour
and a half to kill before sarah's dad comes
to pick us up alyssa's sister has a job at the Sephora
a few stores away so we wander over she's working

right now bored and owes alyssa a favor she gives each of us a makeover
and shows us how to match powders and foundation with our skin
tone paints streaks of blue above my eyes and green above sammie's then turns
my chair to face the mirror *wow i never knew you were pretty before*
sarah calls out wasn't i pretty before

in ninth grade

alyssa comes to school in a shirt that's no more than a thin strip
of fabric and shorts that ride low on her hips
and high on her legs i realize that i hadn't noticed how small
her waist was how big her chest was before now

and apparently the boys didn't either they cat-call her in the hallway as she walks
to french class and she smiles i wonder how it must feel
to be that pretty i go home that night and stand in front of the mirror feel terror
clutch at my chest as my gaze registers that i am broad
and tall and flat all at once i wish to be a shapeshifter

in tenth grade

i buy a razor and begin shaving my legs arms plucking my eyebrows
i cover up tender skin with layers of foundation blush contour i slip on clothes
a size too small expose my stomach concave from the hour i run
each morning i am perfect i'm perfect i'mperfect imperfect