A Mother on the Eve of Her Child's 15th Birthday

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.46428/ejail.48.05
Available at: https://scholarworks.uno.edu/ellipsis/vol48/iss1/5

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A Mother on the Eve of Her Child’s 15th Birthday

Nikki Ummel

In the rain, in the car,
    I wait outside
        your best friend’s house.
    You come out, beaming.

I cannot hear
    what you call back to her,
        over your shoulder,
    as you trudge toward me
but your face shines.

You climb in without a word.
I do not turn the radio on.
    We sit in thick silence, inch into traffic
as rain smears the windshield.

I want to reach across the console and
    press you to my chest, like before.

I want to tell you how I dreamed of you—

    How I pulled you from the reeds,
        how I dreamed this for days
before the doctors called me in,
    emergency c-section.
    How I cupped you with one hand,
touch filtered through holes in plexiglass.

Now you press your forehead
    against the glass of my Honda CRV,
create as much space between us
    as if you could part the sea.
Leave me.
As I turn into our driveway,
your headphones roar.
I swallow my words; they sink,
layer my belly in stone.

But you do not know.
You open your door and go.