

## FOR JENNIFER AT THIRTEEN

Firstborn girls do not mirror their mothers,  
they grow into them—the fit,  
like an old pair of jeans  
whose knees hold the bending.  
I hear you at the piano I hoped to play  
fingers discovering the difference  
between Mozart and Haydn,  
the ballet I gave up at fourteen  
becoming the vehicle  
of your long-limbed grace.

Part-way to dying  
you grow into me, as the polliwog  
into the amphibious frog;  
like a shadow, you stalk me,  
enlarging my grotesqueries:  
my conscience  
and my need to believe.

Yet there are things that neither genealogy  
Nor love can bequeath.  
When I tell you of Montgomery and Selma,  
With whose memory do you imagine  
Those brave black bodies  
Or that hope?  
When I recall how fright and exhilaration  
Rampaged through a hot East Harlem night,  
What experience do you bring, reared  
In the cool green suburbs of New York?

Preoccupied with public occasions,  
I have not talked  
of how the water tasted  
from my grandmother's rain barrel,  
nor of how we followed the iceman  
down the alley, begging his charity  
for shivering icicles to lick.