

Nikki Ummel

Eleven

She carries the bag like a crucifix.
Like she can use it to fend off
vampires, thirsty for the blood that now
runs between her legs. She is excited.
Feels the thrill of secrets. Her
pads a badge of honor she conceals
with a small purse mama bought,
on sale, at the corner store
on the way to school.

Mama, rooted in the school parking lot,
tries to cover concern for her
young daughter's sudden bloom: fear
runs through her veins— *so young*. She bites
her nails and fingers her rosary. *Hail Mary,*
full of grace, is the fruit of my womb
blessed too?

Daughter, hall pass palmed
like a sword, points it at
questioning teachers, hawk-eyed
Coach Kenyon, wet mouth Ms. T.
The girl carries within her
prayers of gratitude: she's barely bleeding today, but
it feels good
to pretend.