

Ann Townsend

While I Bathed

When you opened the door and the flash
clicked off, I held a book
to my belly, and the apricot smell

of the suds rose over my legs.
I looked surprised; the water made me shine
for the contrast of shadow and light,

for reflection. Inside the desk drawer,
which opens with a sound
like the taking of breath,

a jumble of pictures: the little niece,
the calm father, someone's view
of a mountain top, and me, the naked one.

Sometimes I go there just to find it,
to notice the round plasticity of limbs
underwater, hands rigid around a book,

small breasts trapped between my arms.
The boy who filmed me first
thought I was nothing, merely beautiful,

cautious in an empty classroom,
black cloth in backdrop against my skin,
arched flattened breasts, and rolls of film

on the floor. So these pictures,
held too long in the hand, speak without me,
even as I cup the lovely silk around myself

and snap the clasp. The bathtub's faucet
must have dripped into the empty tub
later on, leaving its red mark

on the metal drain.

You must have held me, as you do, that night,
cupping your hands around me as we slept.