

THE ONLY GIRL OUT AT MY HIGH SCHOOL

wore a lot of black. Her pants
were wide and bedazzled

with chains. She had a lip ring.
Wore a rainbow of bracelets

stacked to her elbow. I remember her
walking down the hall with two girls,

and I wondered if one was her love.
I wondered if it was lonely, being a stereo

of pride, bass booming, intimidating
and loud and all of the things girls weren't

supposed to be in that small Arkansas town
where kids debated over religion between classes,

said women were supposed to be silent
and gay people were going to hell.

My parents told me to take a walk,
not a stand, and I mostly listened.

Slow danced at prom
with my own shadow. My face,

a bouquet of scarlet anytime
my name was called in class.

I was a violin with the strings
plucked out, a symphony

of silence, exactly who
I was taught to be.

She was her own marching
band, parading down the halls

and even the religious kids
respected her. Liked her taste

in music. I once sat with her
on an empty stage after play practice

and watched her go through a playlist

on her laptop. I don't remember

the songs, but I remember we laughed.

I remember the way I felt

awkward, but also excited. How I paid
attention. Like I was hearing an overture,

collecting the melodies

so someday

I could sing them.