meet your maker the superintendent jokes
when he introduces coach

as if we need another god

get on in there, girls
coach winks
under fluorescents
we are pool-soaked thighs

he calls us girls
at practice calls us
at home

& so we dive, water safe
water swilling
swan necks tight
asses

legs everywhere girls pull
themselves on deck stroke
surface skintight
Speedo Illusion Splice

I’ll show you a girl who has shaved
coach tells me before my race

I want him
to say ease up
in the first one-hundred
let the girl in Lane Four take it out
power off the wall

but he slinks a hand
over my shoulder
(and I don’t shrug him away
maybe this is what I need
to make the relay team)
murmurs if the water drips
down in one line, she’s still hairy
but if there are beads
she’s shaved
he says look at that one, Jackie
my name a singling out
my name a sin—
points at a girl’s quivering drops

we look her up and down
lines of her frame
might be mine

I want her to explode
off the blocks smooth
new legs like fish slime
at first then like being
swallowed home

we are steely
quads diamond cut
deltoids

fingers tremble clutching
blocks silence before
the beep thrust
all of us
we push away
what we move through

none of what I don’t understand
muscle as anything but
a way to escape coach smirking
we’ll go with the hi-cuts

race day my suit tight clinging
hip bone marking me fit
a girl how to tell the difference
between glint of eyes lingering
too long and a mirage

my body is easy to know
submerged

each breath
my mom cheers Jack
each breath I take
I am safe a boy
Jack, Jack, Jack

* 

I need the trainer
one room away
but coach says lie down
on the diving board

& I do

because in Texas
a coach is a man
is a god is a friend
of the superintendent
is a rule to follow
when you are a girl
& thirteen
because he says *I’ll take care of you*

because no years have passed
yet no mom saying, angry

*did he sit with his crotch on your backside* no god ruling a body
more than bone and skin

because how to say *no* to what isn’t
a threat his hands rub skin
ices me down before

*it is only a massage only*
a coach an athlete
a girl maybe is it okay
I don’t know how to say

he tugs thin strap
of elastic from my back
greedy fingers dig at tender
of my shoulder
nothing more

*Jacqueline Alnes*