Boundary

Lucy E. Allan
There's a joke about boys who get too close to one another. They stray too far into intimacy, cross some line, reveal themselves as something other.

The boundary between boy and boy is a solid thing.
But girls wear their guidelines differently.

Girlhood defines itself by its intimacy.
We stray into each other’s space.

We overlap.
Growing up, I couldn’t trust that intimacy. Not when that girlhood closeness stirred shame and panic in me I was too young to understand.

Seeing no boundaries, I forced boundaries on myself. I drew police tape around me because I knew my actions needed to be policed at all times.

I didn’t understand why yet, but I knew.
I remember the mistake I made.

I remember my friend - blushing, giggling - telling us the story of a boy who tried to kiss her on the cheek.
And then, because she wanted to demonstrate, because I was nearest, because she thought nothing of it,

She leaned in to kiss me as he had kissed her.

And, like an alarm triggered by a trip wire, my instinct kicked in.
I pulled away.

And that's how they knew.

By holding back, I had strayed too far.

My friends had seen me mark a boundary between myself and them, and all of us knew then, without understanding what, that something wasn’t a secret any more.
And no one ever said anything.
No one ever acknowledged what had changed.

But I caught them, every now and again, glancing at me out of the corner of an eye, with something not as cruel as suspicion, but not as kind as concern.

Looking back at me over their shoulders as they began to grow and change and take their places in the world.
leaving me in their wake to scramble after them, 
tripping, 
stumbling, 
scrapping my elbows and knees, 

but never quite falling...
...one way,

or the other.
Lucy E Allan is a Frankenstein's monster apologist with a creative writing Master's. Her published work can be found in Thomond Comics, Riot Grrrl Press and Gothic Funk Press. She can be found on Twitter at @BitchHomunculus