

directions

I have a son and two daughters, until they tell me otherwise.

My children believe that the shower is a magical portal of ideas.

My youngest recently said to me, “Mom, it’s like I don’t have any ideas all day, but when I get in the shower my brain is full of cool stuff. I think it’s the water or something.”

“Could be the water,” I said. “Or it could be that the shower’s the only place you’re not plugged in—so you can hear your own thoughts in there.”

She looked at me and said, “Huh?”

“That thing that happens to you in the shower, babe. It’s called *thinking*. It’s something folks did before Google. Thinking is like . . . it’s like googling your own brain.”

“Oh,” she said. “Cool.”

That same child steals my expensive shampoo once a week, so the other day I stomped to the bathroom she shares with her teenage brother and sister to steal it back. I opened the shower curtain and noticed the twelve empty bottles littering the tub’s

edge. All the bottles on the right side were red, white, and blue. All the bottles on the left side were pink and purple.

I picked up a red bottle from what was clearly my son's side. It was tall, rectangular, bulky. It yelled at me in bold red, white, and blue letters:

**3X BIGGER,
DOESN'T ROB YOU OF YOUR DIGNITY,
ARMOR UP IN MAN SCENT,
DROP-KICK DIRT, THEN SLAM ODOR WITH A FOLDING CHAIR.**

I thought: *What the hell? Is my son taking a shower or preparing for war in here?*

I picked up one of the girls' slim, metallic, pink bottles. Instead of barking marching orders at me, that bottle, in cursive, flowy font, whispered disconnected adjectives: *alluring, radiant, gentle, pure, illuminating, enticing, touchable, light, creamy*. Not a verb to be found. Nothing to do here, just a list of things to be.

I looked around for a moment to ensure that the shower was not, in fact, a magic portal that had somehow transported me back in time. Nope. There I was, in the twenty-first century, when boys are still being taught that real men are big, bold, violent, invulnerable, disgusted by femininity, and responsible for conquering women and the world. When girls are still being taught that real women must be quiet, pretty, small, passive, and desirable so they'll be worthy of being conquered. Here we all are. Our sons and daughters are still being shamed out of their full humanity before they even get dressed in the morning.

Our children are too vast to fit themselves inside these rigid, mass-produced bottles. But they'll lose themselves trying.