

Naked

Marilyn Bushman-Carlton

They'd come from practice at the gym,
their hair steaming,
and in the flirt and banter
would reach inside my girlfriend's car
to ruffle our teased hair.
We'd swat their hands and laugh
(keeping one hand free to tug our skirts in place)
and slump our shoulders
when sweaters stretched too tight across our breasts.
We'd scold occasional swear words
from boys we'd known since grade school,
sat beside through lessons on modesty
in church.

It was spring, dirty streets and nets of leaves
oozing from the thaw.
The talk was cars, and for an hour we traded—
Suzie's Karman Ghia for their polished white sedan.
In the passenger side of the front,
I noticed the glove compartment was locked,
tight as their zippered jeans,
but the key fit, and I read aloud
from the cleanly-typed pages.

At first it seemed funny, a little naughty,
an extension of our taunt and toy.
When I stopped, we all knew it wasn't—
the girls who were not girls at all, but
hyperbolized parts,
their faces detached and unimportant.
The language didn't feel like love.

It was our baptism,
our initiation to the fleshy underbelly of brotherly advice,
chivalry, scrubbed skin,
lettermen's jackets and August kisses,
to the secrets that trapped their tongues,
kept their conversation small.