

Nothing We Needed to Know

Marilyn Bushman-Carlton

And then, to show how it was done,
Mrs. Jackson, the Home Ec. teacher,
bent from the waist, the way you drink from a tap,
and demonstrated how to let the breasts
drop into a brassiere. How each
would fall into its cup—
right and left—
for a perfect fit,
no adjustment needed.
She reached behind her back,
hinging her elbows,
and locked the fastener shut,
slid each arm into its loop of strap,
and straightened: twin bulks
at the front of the room,
she with squat shoes, brown hose,
hair graying and tight,
the dress form, headless and bare.
Tomato aspic firmed in the fridge.
An institution of baked eggs, the finger bowl,
toughest teacher in school,
and mother of two girls we knew,
lit by odd shapes of afternoon light,
a white brassiere on the outside
of her mildew-dark dress,
and no one dared laugh, not then,
nor later, when we sat, our chairs half-circled,
as she read, cover to cover,
voice pasty, lids low,
a church book on chastity
that filled the eighth grade sex education requirement
but kept sex a gray woolly blur.