

WOMEN SHALL TEACH WOMEN

HOLLY BURNSIDE

In the lunchroom, I admired the bravery of your broken arm
the product of a penny-drop from the clothes pole bar,
and you offered your ante through grinning teeth,
gleeful as a snake, "Do you want to see a naked man?"
So we slipped away, our sandals pounding faded linoleum
to the dry abandoned showers behind the gym, where
standing so close your skirt brushed mine in a cotton kiss,
you unrolled your secret like a map to a crumbling city
revealing torsos, limbs, shining teeth, cocks and balls,
men tanned and moustached like TV private I's.
Our fingers gripped the creased and wrinkled pages
and I saw a crime scene, imagined there must be weapons, injury,
property damage implicit in the tangled bodies, the reddened flesh
but you said, "My dad has lots. He throws them in the trash."
My body jerked away from yours, but when summer came
we played for hours in the beaten dirt of your side yard
with dolls the size of living children, and on rainy days
we raced screaming around the pool table in your living room,
while your father crouched in the corner smoking,
Jack the Ripper in tattered blue jeans, the wicked promise
of naked men laying fallow in the kitchen trash bin
until I came home with dirty jokes my mother thought I'd caught
like scabies. Her eyes studied mine like a hunter reading tracks

before she shook her head and said, "No more. No more."
I might have crumbled like salt under her grasping hands
but I'd already learned how to cache the stolen flesh.
I knew she could not keep me pillared there for long.