

The Way In

by Anne Jonas

They touch your hair and it is one of the best sensations you have ever felt. You stand in line, legs aching to sit, trying to lean without being noticed against the cool metal of the lockers. And inevitably someone quietly asks to play with your hair and you say yes, trying not to let your excitement show. And for as long as it lasts it is more or less the most you know about touch between women outside of the family, it is the hint of a gateway to somewhere else, somewhere amazing. Soft fingers gently tug, moving silkily through, braiding and caressing. And for that moment waiting in the girls' line you can forget your usual persona, the cast off child who matches plaid with floral print and can't see the difference, who thinks that lime green slacks match with petal pink shirt because it must make you look like a flower. You are the one who doesn't even brush her hair because you don't see the point. But while your hair is being touched all that is gone. Here difference is a blessing. And for once you, the good girl, are willing to risk the wrath of teachers because there is nothing they can do to you that will be worth stopping the hands from smoothing down a braid, running fingers over your scalp.

Your hair is a hot commodity. Unbraided, straight, available for play, it is one quality that lets you in, for a moment, to a children's world that you are most of the time on the boundary of. Jump rope, hopscotch: you are the odd girl out, wondering what it would be like to let your feet hit the pavement, to let your throat scratch with chanting. But you are the skinny white kid reading in a corner at recess now that games have progressed beyond running around. In the hallway, though, waiting to move between classes, there you might find favor again, or at least your hair will, and you will stay as still as possible to avoid detection. You will be quiet to keep away the teacher's gaze and to avoid anyone's discovering how much you care, how much it means. The brush of fingers through your hair. Later moments of intimacy will recall this first hint of things to come, the excitement and the risk, but never with as much sheer visceral desire. You want it to last forever, but it never does.

You wonder why such a lovely harmless activity is against the rules and hope that next time the other girls will again be willing to take the risk. It's a risk you'll keep taking, consequences be damned, every time, closing your eyes under the light pressure, melting under the touch. Each time your hair stays largely unchanged but you cling to the hint of a loose braid, cautiously touching it with your fingers as proof of a fleeting connection.