

Ranae Beyerlein Michigan

Once I Was...

A girl walking home from school,
Lured into a garage where those boys made her take off her panties
Said they would tell if she didn't,
that she did.
Laughed at her white nakedness and kept her panties.

A young aunt to a mixed-race nephew
Who her mother said was Italian
As if that would suffice
When her friend called him
A bad name
She heard from those white boys in the garage.

A daughter who was afraid her dad would be called up to police
When there were riots in Detroit,
Proud he once drove a burned baby
To the hospital where it died,
His red bubble light flashing
And siren on the whole way.

A girl who asked for new shoes
When her penny loafers had a hole in the sole,
For a new bra when the only one she had

Was held together with three safety pins:

Told to babysit for money

And the children's father wanted kisses from his liquored lips in the car on the ride home,

Whose mother didn't believe that nice man would say anything like that.

Robbed at gunpoint

Believing that they were looking for a new apartment;

They believed she had a venereal disease

When they wanted rape,

Carrying her black and white TV

And a bottle of saved pennies

Out the door.

Now when my earrings are too heavy at night,

I put them in a pink leather pouch

Tucked inside my purse

That always also holds lots of money.