

from Juked #5, Spring 2008

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### IF WE HADN'T BEEN LAUGHING

as we stepped onto the bus, perhaps those boys wouldn't have followed.

If the bus had been a bright shade of blue,  
we might not have been the last ones to board.  
If we had walked faster, and hadn't looked back  
on the way to the bus stop  
those boys might not have seen us, yet  
if not, who would have sat behind us and said,  
*See those girls in the plaid uniforms? Ugly, aren't they?*  
If we had gotten off one stop sooner, with the old  
woman hugging her butcher-paper bundle of fish and chips,  
while the bus rattled on between gum trees;  
if those plaid uniforms had been stained and our hair  
unwashed; if we had been even uglier,  
then perhaps those boys would have changed their minds.

We weren't, and they followed us  
down the lavender-scented street, and  
if we hadn't turned to face them,  
we might have ended up like that girl in the newspaper.  
If we hadn't finally sloughed off the illusion  
that they just wanted a quick snog, or a number to call,  
if she hadn't been the one whose fortune we had borrowed  
without knowing it, it might have been us  
curled up behind a row of bins  
as if we were sick and asleep.