

Karen Head

Bad Girls

1979

Two of the town's three steel mills were closed
before we arrived, fresh from Europe,
the new post sergeant major and his family.

The Saint Louis Army Depot is actually in Illinois.
Mississippi-downstream from the Alton refineries—
a place people try to leave.

Prather Junior High backed up to the highway
faced a dilapidated rooming house
at the end of a closed-off street.

Most students came early for free breakfast
stayed more for the free lunch than for learning
never seemed anxious to get home.

No wonder the Depot kids seemed rich.
We wore a few of the season's fashions
bought from a mall thirty miles away.

Gwen's father was a lieutenant-colonel
monied even by military standards.
She was impeccable in French braids and Izod.

A target really, with pink and green satin ribbons.
Sandy, wearing St. Vincent DePaul jeans
couldn't help but hate delicate Gwen.

I was the new girl when I met them both.
The air between them already soured
by nothing either could understand.

I admired Sandy's strength,
coveted Gwen's grace,
did not know which one I wanted more.

When I saw Gwen pushed down
Sandy gripping her braids
to drag her down the hall

I stepped between them.
It must have been the sheer shock of me
That momentarily linked us—

so weary of who we were trying to be.

KAREN HEAD is the Writing Program Coordinator at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Her writing has appeared in a number of journals and anthologies. All Nations Press released her first collection of poetry, *Shadow Boxes*, in 2003.