

The Girl with the Patch

By Karen Kao

1.

A girl has fallen in the schoolyard.
She waits on a bench in front of the school
holding hands with the nurse.

Her father has been notified.
The school sends flowers.
Sister Paul Anthony's third grade class
practices GET WELL SOON in clear script.

The doctor recommends plastic surgery.
For now, she'll have a small scar,
if it bothers her, well,
get her a patch.

The girl stays in at recess
doesn't get to play with scissors
or the bigger boys.
The principal comes in to see her
pats her head
says it looks much better now my dear.

2.

Certain days the girl will place
the patch on her left eye
to go downtown when the bus
runs north and south and the stores
are on the right.
Other days nothing pleases her more
than to slip her bodice to one side and show
the patch that covers a scar but please
don't speak of it.

Today the patch appeared on her forehead
and I heard she swooned six times
in the arms
of full-chested women.

I think she pushes her face between
white breasts
to feel her face cool
then warm.

3.

If it had been me I would have run
screamed
never gone back again
but it was her
eating out late in a diner
and I suppose it was her fault
that he came and asked her name
reached over to touch her
and saw her patch.

He must have smiled and asked to see
sitting in that grimy booth with the lights
from the road passing on and on.
She must have laughed
or turned away
and he must have laughed, too.
They say the two of them laughed all night
and when she left
she left him smiling
his face turned up to the ceiling
a small black patch on the floor.