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## Bolted Back

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## Bolted Back

At the age of four, I stood between a chain  
linked fence and an aluminum shed  
as a neighborhood boy forced my pants down  
to peek between my legs. I did not know  
how to stop him with words and my tiny fists  
did not stand a chance against his body, muscled

from a summer of swimming and baseball. I listened  
to my father's lawn mower chopping  
the smell of cut grass in the far front yard. I held  
my breath hoping he would turn  
the corner of the house. When the lawn mower sputtered  
to a stop, I crawled inside myself and burrowed

a hole from throat to spleen. Sliding  
down the slope of my spine, I made of myself a screw  
to hold my lower back in place.  
At the dinner table that evening, with empty  
throat and churning stomach, I struggled  
to dislodge myself from backbone.

I am a woman now. My mother compliments my posture  
at my every homecoming and men have rubbed  
the curve at the small of my back.  
But all are unaware of the bolt holding me upright,  
pushing words of violation up my vertebrae,  
through my throat, and past my lips.

—Michelle Grindstaff '02