

## THE POP OF A SUBURBAN BALLOON

I am fifteen and walking  
bouncing and carefree on a sunbaked sidewalk  
in post card suburbia where the day smells bright and the world seems small.

He is twenty-five, maybe  
younger, maybe older,  
speeding past me,  
head out the car window, "What's up, baby girl?"

The words are tinged in amusement  
lifted into the air like wayward balloons but  
they fly at me like daggers until I pop  
and stand there,  
dumbstruck, tongue stuck  
in a throat snatched of a snappy remark (something you'd see on TV, maybe)  
until I can't see the dull, dented four-door anymore.

I am fifteen and walking, dragging feet along the sidewalk,  
arms folded over chest, eyes on pavement, jumping at every passing vehicle,  
formulating what I would've said. What I should've said.

My body is sheltered by a shapeless sweater and loose-fitting jeans, no  
skin to see besides numb fingers.  
Poor armor against the next set of bright eyes and sharp teeth.