ELIZABETH PHILIPS

JACKNIFE/2

Each day, I am apprenticed to the boy
I want to be.
He rifles the ball
and I catch it
or I fumble.
His red head ducks and weaves,
thinking, end zone.
I tag him
or I don’t.
He swaggers
no matter what.
With the deftness
of a novice
I’ve learned the language
that drives us
toward that hallowed
and to no mind
imaginary
goal line.
Fuck! is the sound of
the ball,
well-kicked, or a pass,
snagged
out of the achingly fresh
October air.
The boy I want to be
is the one who slams me
into the chain-link fence
(nascent breasts
like crushed buds)
because I won’t
stay on the sidelines,
cheering,
or skip rope and sing
with the other girls
in the lee of the school.