

Flora

by Kristine Shields

Confident child.
I carried the little bud
just below my breastbone
in that unguarded ganglia of nerves.

Then
your filthy hands
below my collarbones
caused such desiccation.
There is no rejuvenation of
dead buds or dead nerves.
Dry leaves stuck in my throat
suffocating poetry, intimacy, and kinship.

And so
I lay my healing hands on
clavicle and symphysis and sacrum
to succor buds in other girls
in vindication and
to supplant the budding orchid that
you stole from me.

*Kristine Shields is a survivor of child sexual abuse. As a result, she is a women's health nurse practitioner with a doctorate in public health, a researcher and writer, and a sexual and reproductive health advocate. Dr Shields is the author of *Pregnancy and the Pharmaceutical Industry* and *The Vulva Owner's Manual on Birth Control*, numerous medical journal articles, and the free monthly newsletter, *Paddendum*. She divides her time between Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and Charleston, South Carolina, in the USA.*