

## Three Poems · *Ellen Wittlinger*

### FLESH

By March I can't wait, pull  
the socks off the baby  
to stare at his fat, unused feet.  
Loving freedom, they kick and twist,  
giving me a taste of spring  
when the children shed their clothes.

The baby, wrapped up all winter,  
will roll on his white tummy,  
feel the sun on his arms  
for the first time. It will be hard for me  
to stop touching all that lovely flesh,  
still mine to kiss and tickle this year  
and maybe next. He will beat my face  
with puffy fingers and I'll pretend  
to eat up his hand, lost  
as I am in the luxury of his skin.

The three-year-old who had no use  
for swimming suits, preferring to slither  
naked on the bottom of her scummy pool,  
has turned four, wants privacy,  
buttons her shirts to the top. This year  
I dare not stare openly  
at her long brown legs, so capable  
of carrying her away. Even she  
puts her face up to the sun and says,  
"Let me take my shoes off forever."

Young bodies stretching in the sun  
change skins more often than snakes.  
Last summer a mole I'd always had  
disappeared from my hand, then showed up  
same place on her,  
as though my own material  
was still becoming her.

They came to me naked:  
it's how I know them.  
I long for the weather  
that lets me see the flesh, carry it  
in my bare arms.

### BEDTIME

In separate rooms we close our books.  
The familiar siren of a teenage couple  
screaming threats from one end  
of the block to the other  
builds to a wordless wail,  
then diminishes. I wait, hoping  
the baby's rage won't follow,  
then close the windows just a bit: I'd even  
rather breathe city air than listen to it.  
As you rattle cubes in your last  
relaxing sip, I switch lights ahead of you,  
close doors according to our intricate design  
to keep the cats away from baby,  
cats and baby equidistant  
from our nuclear dining room bed.