

Tracking

I found it in the path—
her plastic comb
the large, curled handle
made to ride up
out of a back pocket
her back pocket

she would notice
it was missing
as soon as they arrived
at the falls
when she reached back
after the hike after the
wind
ready to straighten
her long, brown hair
and felt only tight denim

What men are best at
Uncle Benny told me once
is always being
one quarter-mile behind
the woman
but I was only twelve
and so, nearly
thirty minutes late
catching up to the girls—
stretched out around
and above the falls
on boulders, sunbathing
suntan lotion
wafting into the tight
canyon walls
one echoing boom box the roar of
white water spilling into the
stream
the mist hovering

and she was face-down
on a flat slab
of granite
a cold Tab popped open
beside a brown arm

and I waited
the comb in my fingers
lifting it to my nose—
herbal conditioner
perfume
and Jenny

the sun stretched up
the walls until
the girls lay
completely in shadow
and then one by one gathered
their magazines and nail polish
novels and empty
pop-cans
towels and bottles
of lotion

she removed her sun-glasses
pulled on her jeans
and shouldered her day pack

I watched them from
the bush
walk right past me

Keep looking for it she
said to a friend
it'll be on the trail
somewhere

and fifteen minutes later
I rose from hiding
wondering what I might
have done
or said
if I were a bit older

Here Jenny—I was
just out walking
and found your comb
I thought... I
thought..

I thought I'd better pick up
the trail again
now nearly
a quarter-mile cold