



Around the Houses

by Saffron Swansborough

Inspired by the vigil for Sabina Nessa and dedicated to my daughters, age 6 and 12

What to teach a little girl about her body
Your body is a fun palace for you to play in
Nose is a doorbell
That makes a funny MWARP sound
Back is a lawn stretching out like a cat
You like cats best, as they are *SO* soft
Hair can be candyfloss when you wake up,
Helter-skelter smooth for school, and *carouselian* at playtime
Eyelids are French shutters
Which you can paint whenever and however you choose
Eyes are on stilts as you call out, "Imagine if..."
Bum is a bouncy pillow for you to land on
You can be swung in the air like a flying elephant
But if something scares or hurts – use your voice
To share how you feel. You can say No.

What to teach a teenage girl about her body
Your body is a temple for you to worship
Legs are pillars with which to stand tall
Eyes are sacred scrolls to be read by scholars
Voice is a dynamic stained glass window, mapping your moods
Lips are prayer mats – you can whisper or shout whichever colour you like.
And change your mind – and through these
You pronounce positive affirmations
A light shines through you and it is immortal
Gold flows from your hips
While your stomach is a flower festival
Each breast is a holy flag proclaiming that you are a proud woman.
Only you can consecrate your body.

What to teach a boy about a girl's body
A girl's body is a lighthouse
You need permission to go near it
Some days, it may emit signals you find confusing
On these days, you will stand well back
Other days, she may let you in, but halfway up the stairs
Ask you to Stop. And you will.
Inside, her mind curves like a conch shell,
Complex. The weatherfront around the lighthouse
Is different in each moment and can be unpredictable.
There is an on-off switch yes, but it's a bit more complicated
Than that. She can be red and white in the same day.
You can protect her if she is in distress.
Only if you honour her will she beam
As clear as unbroken light direct from the Sun.

