

## The Only Kid Who Invites Everyone

Beside the blackboard, gold stars  
curl like drying starfish.

On my folder, cartoon salamanders eat cake:  
friends forever.

Teddy leans in the reading nook,  
matted face pressed to the wall.

The teacher's fan whirrs and whines.  
There is no metal net to shield its blades.

Recess, everyone gets picked for ball  
except Bobbie, a boy whose clothes are always  
new and smell like pickles.  
He doesn't like ball, and brings his own trucks.

Sometimes the toy's acceleration excites us,  
sometimes it sounds angry, like the driver  
veered off road into a boulder pit  
at 90 miles an hour.

Up from her desk the teacher sways—  
how lucky we are, *Bobbie has a surprise.*

When I see his smile, it feels like the first time  
I found a salamander under a rock.

He lifts the drop top desk, removes a column  
of deep purple, blue, and yellow envelops  
and places them, like a deranged Easter bunny,

on every desk.

And nothing happens. We do math.  
The day winds down. Closing bell rings.

Then, one by one, students rise,  
pinching their invitations.

I pick up the eggplant colored envelope—  
in silver my name looks important;

I walk past Bobbie's desk,  
and toss it in with the others.

They are so clean and soft  
in the shiny black trash

but one yellow edge has already begun  
to grow dark with the juice  
of a rotten apple core.

The invitations float on still waves  
above last week's stars,  
each a rocket ship  
of good intention  
aimless  
in a clumsy cosmos  
that knows no reason.

## Goodbye Lullaby

When tiny teeth  
lisp for more too eat,  
and cornhusk men  
hammer down the door,  
and the carnival of life's disappointments  
parades in brazen loop—

When midday heat curls palm fronds  
like a fist around a mother's finger,  
and the daughter's spit-cleaned cheek  
is split like honeydew,  
Even when you stand smack in the center  
of all your hopes come true—

Prepare for the patter  
of acid on tin. Steel your spine  
so it won't get in.

Each of your hands  
is an open fist . . .  
resist, resist, resist.

## Recurring Fever Dream

We are a family going for a walk. Though my father is stronger, my mother pushes the enormous stroller. My brother's inside it, wrapped in yellow-brown sheets like a baklava. He's too small for the carriage, small enough to fit in my 7-year-old hand. I'm rollerblading. The paved path spirals up a steep, narrow hill, made of splintered stone. I am obsessed with the blacktop's flawless surface; with the low, oiled sound of the blades gliding over that perfection. Around us the sky grows yellow-green, as in the Dali painting where a tiger with stilt legs risks a fracture for the taste of pomegranate. Mom said he used a magnifying glass to get the color so blended. The road is more perfect; it was born blended. And I am safe, smooth, almost soundless—when suddenly, up ahead, the road cracks. This is concerning, but what's worse is underneath. Sand. Like the kind in the Candyland hourglass I always wanted to break but never had the guts. The cracks spread. I keep blading. Can't stop. Huge chunks of black road break and tip like rafts on lurching waves of glittery white sand. I leap from chunk to tilting chuck, completely off balance, arching forward and back, arms pin-wheeling, gathering speed. My parents are without personality. They have no response to the horror.

Then, in my bedroom, my mother says: why are you screaming? If she hugs me or kisses my head, I cannot feel it through the fever. A room over, surrounded by the smell of saltines, spilled ginger ale, and stewed tomatoes, my brother sleeps alone.

## Tar Black

A rain so light, to see it  
you have to look  
into the darkest door.

When stepping in a puddle,  
show no fear, so  
spoke the shadow  
of a bowler hat.

My student already described  
the black drops  
of sidewalk gum  
as constellations—  
so I don't

backtalk the junkie  
under the jellyfish  
umbrella  
unaware of  
the fresh star  
glued to her soul.

Needs

During drought,  
the hose feeds  
the snake.

\*

Beyond, peaks of thinning blue.  
A tethered climber stops:  
salami sandwich.

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Under the rusted bridge  
a wren takes her chances  
with the delicate toilet paper.