**Girl Made Me Cry**

Laura Tate

Every day, before the 8:40 bell and pledge to the flag,

third grader Kristin walks in, and on my pencil smudged table,

sets down her Styrofoam breakfast tray. Peanut butter, bagel,

a small, bruised apple. I open her milk carton,

spread peanut butter with a plastic knife, remind her

to say please and thank you.

She is new to our school and full of questions,

but we have work to do:

First, she rereads yesterday’s small book,

then writes on sentence strips with scented markers.

Smell this one, she’ll say. Purple grape.

I am a Reading Specialist. I remind her to eat the bagel,

drink the milk, wipe off her face and hands.

Sometimes she asks me to tie her shoes.

I’ve got twenty minutes to work on oral reading fluency

and automaticity with High Frequency Words,

flash cards I wrote with thick, black letters:

Friends Thought Made Cry

Want Kind Gone Through Help

Old Cat Going Over Day

Let’s Love Water Girl

The ones she doesn’t know we read again,

and celebrate when she knows them well,

then add new words to the stack. On Fridays

she takes word cards home to practice with her daddy.

I keep graphs, show her how the lines are getting higher.

Two years below grade level, but it’s only October.

One day, she tells me she’s moving. Again.

To live with Daddy. All packed. Just her.

I will never come back here she says.

She is an expert on leaving. Some days

I could leave too. Just walk away.

Going. Gone. But I stay.

On her last day in our school, she walks in

with her breakfast tray, says the bus was cold.

It is November and she does not take off her thin jacket.

I let her pick out a book to keep, read aloud

the note I’ve written for her, and when our time is up,

she says walk me to my classroom, so I do.

We walk down the quiet hall, listening

to the sounds of our shoes.

She reaches for my hand,

and, like a teacup falling from the top

of a tall building, my heart

shatters.