

Beatnik Blonde

by Jane Hammons

The other second graders would never see *a poem as lovely as a tree* but we love e. e. because his *balloon Man whistles far and wee*. And his name is small. The other class marches to fife and drum and sometimes dosey-does. We swivel and swirl like things without words when Blair puts a man called Bird on the stereo.

“But when do you do plus and minus?” Mama asks and all the parents ask and then the principal. “And phonics?” Everyone wants to know.

Blair says taste the words with your fingertips.

“She won't last long,” Mama says and all the parents hope.

One day after school Mama gets mad. “If it wasn't for you I could've been.” She starts to cry. “Poetry.” She gets the hiccups like she does. “And jazz.”

Could've been tears her up and I don't understand. Then Blair is gone in her black tights, her blonde ponytail curling like ice cream down her back. She was just a substitute.

I get sad because I want to be *mud-luscious* and listen to bird songs. Mama smiles because now I know that red mixed with green makes brown. D says *duhduhduh*. And everything plus zero stays the same.

