

I am not theirs and they are not mine

by Tara King

i.

My garden, because I paid \$30 for a summer lease. All 9'x21'
growing vigorously.
If all the melon flowers turn into melons...

It is only mine when I am there to defend it.
The air above and around it is not mine.
The garden belongs most to Grace and Hanna.
They come out in their church clothes, prod earthworms, steal
raspberries, scream at parents who have already forgotten them,
trample vines creeping in the path.

My first year I hated how big and unruly the plants got.
But big and unruly means lots of tomatoes.
I gave Grace and Hanna each a beet seed.
Maybe big and unruly is not a bad thing for a girl to be, or a tomato.

ii.

A mosquito red with blood on my arm streaked with black dirt. Foot-
tall grass like the prairie conquers the honeydew. A Siamese cat
startled out of the bushes. The neighbors' roses tug insistently on
my hem. Ground sparrows in a flock eat freshly scattered grass
seed. Our alcoholic neighbor asks over and over again why anyone
waters a garden, nature should be enough.

iii.

I'm trying not to listen
I am just trying to weed my garden.
But they won't shut up:
She found a bird! It's looking for its mom!
A bird! A bird! A bird a bird a bird!

Three children,
One with a brown sparrow cupped in her brown headscarf.

I just want vegetables.
I just want quiet.

I'm jealous.
I want to hold a sparrow.

I did not know then and do not know now
how to brave the wildness of children,
how to teach them imaginary things like:
“respect” or “safety” or “environment”

She pets the sparrow with her forefinger.
I feel its tiny heart beating inside me and I hope it
Beats itself to death soon.

