

Nothing

by Tawnysha Greene

After Christmas, we go to the government office
to get what Momma calls food money,
bills with colored stamps she keeps behind
the plastic flap in her checkbook. She takes a number,
ninety-six, and we wait on hard blue chairs, watch
the television in the corner. It plays *The Neverending
Story*,
a movie we're not allowed to see, but we watch
anyway, the flying luck dragon, the horse that drowns.
We go back after the Fourth of July, but they say we
make
too much, send us to the school down the street for free milk,
cornbread they offer in the summer. On metal
benches in the cafeteria, we eat, watch the other kids
watch us, their clothes dirty, their feet bare.
When summer's over, we help serve dinners in church
after night service and Momma brings her big purse,
sneaks
bread rolls, apples inside. Sometimes, when storms
come through, service is cancelled, the dinner, too,
and Momma gives us big cups of water before bed,
tells us
to drink, to make our stomachs full and on these nights, I dream
about the boy in *The Neverending Story*, the gate of mirrors,
and the Nothing, a dark cloud that floats in the sky, takes away
everything.

