

# Taste of Pennies

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Kindergarten is San Quentin, and it is  
time to establish and demand  
my dominance on the playground.

Velcroed shoe  
is a snug fit—be the  
cheetah.

The other kid: quaking  
molasses. He knows he is  
about to lose the footrace; yet  
another notch on my  
Etch-A-Sketch.

Lined-up, my toes on  
an asphalt crack  
to break his  
mother's back.

Tense and anxious—  
the pigtailed girl squeals, "Go!"  
So I do.

I am the wind, fast and cool; the souls  
of my feet are  
floating. The kid  
is still There? Ha ha ha, well,  
I am Here.

Spilt sandbox  
sand blocks  
my path—no way to  
dodge! One step through it  
and I know I blew it.  
Little boys aren't  
meant to fly.

Chin crash lands  
on a lunch table, and teeth  
slice into tongue—the taste  
of pennies is rich, overwhelming.  
The kid crosses  
the finish line.



I stagger to the teacher who  
watches us with the intensity of  
a blind hawk. She ignores me until  
I tell her what happened. But  
my words are soundless, crimson, wet,  
and they stain the front of my  
Ninja Turtles T-shirt.  
The teacher curses  
and the wind cries.

I don't like the taste  
of pennies; it has cost me everything.  
Now,  
I am second best,  
the same as all the rest.

Six tongue stitches later,  
my cheeks are still moist  
with sadness; not because I  
can only mumble or because  
I can only eat scrambled  
eggs for two weeks.

I lost the race.