

Garbage Pail Kids

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We're the Nasty Nicks and Ray Decays
Up Chuck infantatas spewing, not pretty babies under cabbage leaves.
Weird Wendies and Spacy Stacys, Three Card Montes
Hiding eyeballs instead of peas under a walnut shell
One eye constantly cloaked in darkness
We're born broke and broken, with nobody to show us
How to throw off this fate.

While other kids are chasing brass rings and silver screens
We're learning the fine art of dumpster-diving, how to scrounge for our supper
We're doing hand-clap songs on porch swings
Spitting in cans, trading bootleg cassette tapes, climbing up the back fence
We're drawing hopscotch grids with boosted schoolroom chalk
Live target-practicing air rifles, reading Grandpa's Playboys, riding in the truck bed

We're the playing card all-star traders, slap jack, black jack, daily Russian roulette
Cracker Jack toy surprises, smoking candy cigarettes
We're suckers for bubble gum whistles bumper car stickers scratch-off tickets
popsicle stick jokes matchbook wisdom
bottlecaps boxtops freaky talk show topics beer cans bottle rockets
M-80s expired coupons fifty cents off

We'll make a game of chores just like Mary Poppins
(Except SNAP means something different where we come from)
And here, a job is a job is a job

Jesse liked his comic books but didn't own a pair of jeans
Mismatched garbage bag sweats were what his mama dressed him in
Rhonda grew up in foster homes and cultivated seven baby-daddies before she could drink
Little Audrey came to school smelling like cigarettes and booze
In second grade, Tiffany's mom turned twenty-two
And Kimmie at twelve got her first tattoo:
A rose-wrapped dagger homemade job on her ankle
Ralph, the undiagnosed epileptic, never learned to read
And Dirty Amy, after years of teasing, finally got clean

We don't get braces and ballet lessons
We don't join the Scouts
We're Boys & Girls Club free lunch seekers
There's nobody to cheer for us
We don't play sports because we can't afford the gear
We'll never be President of the United States, we'll never be Bill Gates
We're netless basketball hoops mounted on street lamps
And the only summer camp we know is juvie

Doctors are for blood and fevers only
We set our own bones, snip our own tonsils, pull our own teeth,
We're doing double-dutch in the street,
Nursing our own follicles at the kitchen sink
Covering roots with Kool-Aid peroxide home perm dye jobs

All we know is we got this rattletrap DNA
All we know is we got this sewage in our veins
We can feel the fallout roaring in our guts
From Ramen noodle dollar menu hot-plate gourmets
Cool Ranch Jolly Ranchers shit-on-shingles pork rinds
peanut buster parfaits

We're stealing roadwork cones for our rooms, dreaming of arcades,
Swimming down in quarries, peeking under circus tents
One ounce at a time, we'll learn the metric system, and we know exactly
How many washes this roll of quarters'll get us at the laundromat

We're back of the class, bottom of the barrel, never make the cut
Hiding under blankets backseat smugglers sneaking in the drive-in
Siphoning HBO from the neighbor's cable line
Ruined on sugar meth RC Cola Laffy Taffy Fun Dip Blo Pop highs
We're jail bait homespun grapevine moonshine
A dozen dogs and not a can of Alpo in sight
Cats birthing litters every ten weeks
We're dying fast around here, babe, so hurry up and breed

On Christmas Day,
St. Vincent's filled our stockings with tidings of comfort and chocolate coin joy
But prayer cards ain't cheat sheets, and they ain't fortune cookies either
The rest of the year, green-visored Jesus treats our entreaties
Like any other numbers game, speeding our wishes away from us at NASCAR rpms
And if we get into heaven, it'll only be because we got traded

We dream of shoes that aren't taped together and firsthand
brand name tags peeking out our neckline
Backpacks filled with things to help us make the grade and graduate on time
And then maybe we'll get upgraded from left behind refuse bin child
to honor roll recyclable instead.