

THE SMALL BRIGHT THINGS

Rainbow
Butterfly
Frogs
Spider
Turtle
Whelk
Bird
Bat
Snake
Starfish
Kitty
Coffee

RAINBOW

Who can resist singing
A song of praise?

Just look.
All the bright colors of the world
In my little garden:

The white of the gardenia,
The pink of the chrysanthemum,
The red of the rose,
The maroon of the hibiscus,
The yellow of the sunflower,
The orange of the cosmos,
The lavender of the hydrangea,
The purple of the bougainvillea,
The violet of the morning glory,
The blue of the lantana.

As if the day has laid out
Pieces of the rainbow
At my feet.

BUTTERFLY

The butterfly is dancing
In the morning air,
Beating her spotted wings of gauze,
Flitting from flower to flower,
Taking a sip of nectar
Here and there and there and there.

Can you believe this, she sings.
All the sweetness in the world
And it's free!

FROGS

After the rain
The deep-throated choir
Erupts into song.

The bullfrogs
In the ricefield
Croak *KO-KAK, KO-KAK*.

And the green frogs
In the pond
Answer *ko-kak, ko-kak*.

Their two-part harmony seesaws
Between ricefield and pond,
Between *KO-KAK* and *ko-kak*.

Serenading the moon
And the dreaming child.

SPIDER

Meal time is happy time
Is dress-up time is feast time.
What will it be this time?
Fly *empanada*?
Cricket *afritada*?
Ladybug *enchilada*?

The spider washes her face,
Combs her body hairs,
Dons her gown of silver silk,
Wears her necklace of pearly dew.
She dances her eight-legged waltz
Across her house of sticky web.

She feels a tremor underfoot.
A twitch. A tug. A catch!
With quick dispatch, she rushes
To the scene of entrapment.
Come live with me
And be my lunch,
Says the spider
To the hungry
Chameleon.

Epic ouch!

TURTLE

I don't mind carrying
My shell all day.

It is not a burden.
It is my sanctuary
From heat and cold,
From rain and danger.

Home is where
You hang your hat,
They say. Or where
Your heart is.

Home, for me, is
Where I wake up
Every morning, and
Where I close my eyes
Every night.

WHELK

Low tide washes over the whelk,
A grey-green lump in the sand,
Slimy with moss and algae.

Prized as food delicacy,
Not for its dour plain looks
Which have none of the attractive
Markings and colors
Of its flamboyant seaside cousins,
The cone and the scallop shell.
Still, it's a magnificent specimen,
If you look hard enough.

Inside its dim interior:
The music of the sea,
The art of the cathedral.

BIRD

What's in a bird's nest?

Let me see.

Mostly leaves of grass and brush,
Bits of mud and glitter,
A piece of twine and tatter
Woven into a bowl.

On the floor,
Fluffs and fluffs
Of down and feather.

In the center,
A clutch of three
Speckled eggs.

And overhead,
Darting from branch to branch,
The pesky mother bird
Shooing me away.

BAT

For sheer invention,
Nothing beats the common bat,
The ultimate shape-shifter:

Circus acrobat,
Hanging mummy,
Folded kite,
Velvet sack.
It roosts upside down
From cave wall and ceiling.

Fox-faced catcher of insects,
Hog-nosed eater of fruits,
Mouse-eared licker of blood.
It sleeps by day and hunts by night.

Speed ghost,
Black magician.
It slices through your dream
And leaves a trail of shrieks in the dark.

SNAKE

She pours like black water.

She hisses beware, moves beware.

She coils and uncoils endlessly.

She greases her scales in oil.

She writhes like a length of muscle.

She slides into a dark hole.

She slithers in the tall grass.

She swims in the water like a whip.

She tastes the air with a flickering tongue.

She changes skin from season to season.

She ambushes her prey in the dark.

She strikes heedless like a slingshot.

She keeps poison in her fangs.

She sleeps with eyes wide open.

She frightens brave men on the road.

She regrets her startling beauty.

She misses the Garden of Eden.

STARFISH

Behold the starfish:
This creature of many contradictions.

The starfish, for one, is not a fish.
It is a sea star. But neither is it a star,
Fallen from the sky to the sea.
Like the jellyfish and the sea anemone,
It doesn't have a backbone,
But its skin is bony and calcified.
It lives in shallow pools on rocky shores,
But is found on deep ocean floors as well.
Typically five-pointed like a star,
It can have as many as fifteen or fifty.
Break one arm, and it grows another.
A primitive eye is found, not in its head,
But at the tip of each arm. Imagine.
It has as many eyes as arms.
And if you think the starfish is always brown,
Think again. It is other colors as well:
Yellow, red, green, pink, lavender, blue.
Truly a creature of surprises.

In the clear tidal water,
Watch the groovy starfish insinuate
Its Michael Jackson moonwalk in the sand.

KITTY

*Hey, Kitty, Kitty.
Whose child are you?
Are you the child of four-footed
Long-tailed Bantay?*

He's a dog. Silly.
I'm a household cat,
Daughter of Mummy Meow
And Daddy Meow.

*What kind of food do you eat?
Do you like French fries
And hotdog? Ice cream
And watermelon?*

Hotdog is fine
But I prefer fish and milk,
Kibbles and nibbles, mice
And everything nice.

*What do you do for fun?
Do you watch TV,
Read books and comics,
Play Candy Crush?*

Give me a break.
That's kid stuff. I prefer
Hiding in bushes,
Sharpening my claws,
Sneaking to the park,
Purring in the dark.

And I prefer romping
With my bro Kitty Blue
And my sis Kitty Sue.
For I'm a friendly kitty
Named Kitty How Do You Do.

COFFEE

He loves me
Unconditionally,
My black Dachshund.

He sprawls on the floor,
Head up, facing me.
He keeps watch
As I move the cursor
Across the computer screen.
When I get up for a glass of water,
He follows me to the kitchen.
If he sees a house lizard
Scampering up the wall,
He barks and barks furiously.
So protective and possessive.
You wouldn't think
He's just a small dog
From that deep full sound
Of his body-builder bark.
He's longish like a sausage,
Muscular and small.
Though there is nothing
Small about his big-hearted
Courage and love and loyalty.
Ever ready to take on
Any foe: cockroach, mouse,
Lizard, dry leaf, thief,
The neighbor's Labrador.
When I go back to the computer,
He quietly follows,
Nails clicking on the wooden floor.

Here Coffee, I say. Sit.
Yes, love, he answers.
Loving me unconditionally.