
BENJAMÍN NAKA-HASEBE KINGSLEY

More Precious Than Pizza

It is only twenty-five years ago—you are six and a half and halfway through your very own personal pan pizza—little bodies build into straight lines inside the elementary cafeteria—grease on your small fingers—grease on your T-shirt collar—your small legs wobble in a small chair—and a big big bronze medal dangles by a bright yellow sash around your neck—and that medal is as big as your fist—and that medal is gleaming—today—it says “Book It!”—and you’re worth a million bucks—today—medal day—ceremony day—you’ve read sixteen books just this month—you didn’t cheat—Toby did—Zach might have—Chelsea did—definitely—not you though—you are six and a half and now you’ve had your pizza and you still have the medal for today and tomorrow—there’s nothing better than wearing a medal every day.

Tomorrow you’re in the cafeteria with your medal and your small hands are clean and your legs are wobbling and you are hungry—but still worth close to a million bucks—tomorrow—now tomorrow—you’re in the cafeteria with your medal and your small hands are clean but shaky and you are very hungry—and you realize you aren’t worth quite as much as public school lunch costs—the memory of pizza grease is nowhere—but your shirt collar—so when Toby sits next to you oh you are small—small hands small legs—you are never smaller than now—now today when you hand him your medal—a trade—no take backs—his brown paper bag—for your big big bronze Book It! medal—and when you open the bag—when you open the bag there is a note from a mother—with a heart—and there is a careful sandwich—and a favorite blue spoon—and a name-brand dessert—and you find more love in that brown paper bag—than you ever will in medals.