

Violet

When extreme poverty is too unbearable,
children are turned out of their homes,
except at mealtime and bedtime.
How could they play there?
How could they invite their friends?

Often, they tell us,
“Sometimes a friend invites me to a birthday party,
but I say, ‘No, I can’t go.’ I feel bad,
because I could never invite them to my place the next time--
I’m too ashamed! ”

Girls are the most humiliated.
They hate being kept away from their friends,
especially since they can hardly play outside,
mixed in with the boys who push them around,
often hitting them for fun.
Outside, there’s always mud, or dust, or dirty streets.
And they have to put up with clothes
that are wrinkled, soiled, torn.
How ashamed they feel!

Where will they play, where can they have fun?
In the neighborhood, on the sidewalk,
on construction sites, or vacant lots!
What friends will they make there?
What can they learn?
What new horizons can they discover,
especially when the magic of rubbish dumps charms them?
There’s so much treasure to harvest,
things they can sell to get food, things to wear,
or to bring home,
broken toys, disjointed baby carriages...

Still, the worst is vacation time,
when there’s no one to take care of you,
and you have to stay put.
So many children playing on the cobblestones, or in the dust,
become dehydrated.
Some children are accidentally mutilated for life
by sharp objects, by falls.
Sometimes, accidents cause death.
One Friday afternoon, Violet, a two-and-a-half-year-old toddler,
was playing with her five-year-old brother,
throwing junk into a pit.
Rubbish was burned along the banks of the pit
because of the insects and rats.
Violet slipped,

falling headfirst into the fire.

Her brother went looking for help,
but it was too late.

They could have doused the fire with water,
but there wasn't any water.

It had been cut off when the bill went unpaid.

The police came and said,

“These children should have been put into foster care long ago! ”

There was no money for the burial.

So the parents had to borrow.

“How will we manage tomorrow?” they asked each other.

Tomorrow, other children will play alongside the pit,
passing away the summertime...

