On and On
by Michelle McEwen

Mama found two dryers in the laundromat that go on and on and on. She said don't tell nobody about these dyers but I want to because my friend Joni's mama never be having enough quarters and always gotta dry their clothes on the furniture. But mama says don't tell nobody about these dryers so I don't. She says the women in here don't like these dryers 'cause they in the back of the laundromat where all the flies be. Mama don't mind flies or bees or roaches or rats. She mind ants, though.

And she mind Mary, too. Mary is the woman who mama says bring the flies to the laundromat. I tell mama that Mary is gonna find out soon about the dryers that go on and on 'cause her boy always be hovering. Mama says that's 'cause Mary's boy likes me. "He ain't thinking about these dryers," mama said once. "He's thinking about you." And all I said was "ew!" because Mary's boy is white and he wipes his nose with the back of his hand.

Until Mary and her boy find out about the dryers, it's just me and mama that know about them. That first time we came to this laundromat, I was thinking mama was putting in quarter after quarter but then I heard her say that day, "These dryers here act like they don't wanna shut off!" She opened and shut and opened and shut those dryer doors until she was sure. That's when she found out about the two dryers going on and on. She didn't bother trying the other ones. She kept shoving in clothes and underwear and towels— drying until everything was dry. She stood back away from them with her hands on her hips and said to herself, "Well I'll be, Ruth!" She laughed and laughed and grabbed me by my arm and told me to keep my mouth shut and when we were done with our washing and drying, she told me to leave those dryer doors slightly open and when we came back the next time, don't you know those dryer doors were still slightly open and when mama closed them,

they started with no quarters! Ever since, we've been going right to back of the laundromat and the women be looking at us and warning us about the flies. One woman said that it smelled like piss back there. "Hey," she said, shaking her head, "you shouldn't be taking your child back there!" Mama just stretched her eyes at her the way she do when she thinks folks are in her business.

So me and Mama be in the back of the laundromat with the flies and the dryers that go on and on and if I want something from the vending machines, I have to walk all the way to the front. I get to use the vending machines when I want now since mama be having extra change. Sometimes she says, "Bring me back a honeybun and a Coke."

Sometimes I think somebody be back there with us in the laundromat with the flies and those dryers. Somebody like TeeTee who died a year ago. TeeTee was a friend of mine— smart girl. She'd say hi in one language and bye in another and she'd say help me with her eyes. That's how I knew she was in trouble— the kind of trouble you wouldn't wish on nobody. She drowned, though, and I was sad and glad at the same time 'cause she was finally away from her folks then. Sometimes I think it's her that be back there with us in the laundromat. Sometimes I be thinking it's Grandma Belle who died around the time TeeTee drowned. The world is crazy that way— two people close to me gone around the same time and I'm supposed to go on and on like those dryers and smile still and do my schoolin' still and the dishes. Mama says things like be strong and pray and get some sleep. Last week, while we were folding our warm-warm sheets at the laundromat, I told mama what I thought about TeeTee and Grandma Belle being in the back of the laundromat with us and she said, "There's nothing back here but these flies and my dryers." And when I said how else can you explain *your* dryers and how nobody else knows about them and how else can you explain all these flies, she just said, "Don't be thinking so much baby."