

Lovebrarians -by Laurie Halse Anderson, *SHOUT: a Poetry Memoir*

I hated reading. Loathed the ants  
swarming across the page, lost  
my excitement about school, fought, reduced  
to a puzzle with missing pieces.  
Once branded, the feeling of stupid never fades  
no matter how many medals you win.

But then we rode the bus downtown  
me and Leslie, who majored in music  
and lived in our attic, Mary Poppins  
with a Jersey accent, we rode the bus downtown,  
the coins hot from my hand *plink, plink*  
in the box next to the driver, all the way downtown  
to a Carnegie library built by an immigrant  
so everyone could read, free  
and untrammelled by politicians seeking  
to bind them into ignorance,  
chain them to the wheel.  
Leslie promised she'd read me the books  
so I didn't have to be afraid of mistakes  
and I wrote My Name in big letters  
got my first badge, a library card  
I asked the librarian "Can I take out all the books?"  
and she answered quite seriously  
"Of course, dear, just not at the same time."

And so, with extra Leslie help and a chorus  
of angels disguised as teachers and librarians  
for years unstinting with love and hours  
of practice, those ants finally marched  
in straight lines for me  
shaped words, danced sentences,  
constructed worlds  
for a girl finally learning how to read

I unlocked the treasure chest  
And swallowed the key.