

Vern Rutsala

Cards From My Aunt

They come every year at Christmas,
written in a perfect Palmer
Method. We imagine her
still doing the exercises — rows

and rows of perfect O's
at the kitchen table. They come
every year but tell us too
little — we can't even read

between the lines. Among the usual
greetings there is always a phrase
out of the blue — "Haven't moved
yet" or "Sam is much improved."

Others have told us, "The pollen
count is too high" and "It must
have been the full moon." We get
this piecemeal version of her life

once a year, a story all foreshadowing
or denouement, all punchline
without any buildup. In what way
has Sam improved? Was it

pollen or the moon that made
him sick? With lines dropped in
that way there is always
a sense of crisis just over

or about to happen but never
the thing itself, a kind of
off-stage drama we can never
fathom. All we can do

is crown her the heavyweight
 champion of exasperation or queen
 of the non sequitur. The last card
 ended with, "You just can't

stop people from stealing."
 Stealing what, Auntie? And how
 is Sam now? Have you moved yet?
 What is the pollen count on the moon?