

Prayer

It was picture day. Me: a first grader. I was all ready.
Hair combed. Shirt tucked in tight. Tie clipped on.
Mom's orders were clear:

No getting dirty or messing up my hair
No riding my bike. No playing in the sandpile.
No playing outside at all.

Those were all the things, especially being forbidden,
I needed to do that day. I had already learned about
The spirit of the law; how it lets us forget the inconvenient parts
and mostly obey.
So I went to the playhouse, a shed in the backyard,
furnished with a child-sized pantry, table, chair.

It began to rain consequences:
The things you don't plan for, but choose.
Afraid, hair and clothes already soaked in my mind,
I said a prayer.
Not a rain prayer I had heard before, not the asking or
thanking of desert people for moisture.

It was the prayer now most familiar to me:
Let me not bear the bad thing I deserve.

The rain stopped. It stopped abruptly.
The thought "coincidence" might have occurred to an adult,
logical, sterile-minded.
That adult might have offered tepid thanks:
"if You did that for me, I am grateful,"
as a scientific explanation fretted in the mind's back room.

Not me. I knew I had seen the finger of the Lord.
Despite all those farmers' pleas—for me—He stopped that deluge.
I walked across the backyard and inside,
My eyes, like small stones, burned by that revelation.

—Shawn P. Bailey

This poem won third place in BYU Studies 2006 poetry contest.