

POETRY

I Teach Six-Year-Olds about Jesus in Sunday School

Deja Earley

A girl I've never met meets me at the door,
whines at my leg until I hold her. Thin arms,
thin mouth, a sour smell I overlook while fetching
crayons, glue sticks, snacks. She lifts her dress,
exposes the top of her baggy white tights, looks at me.
We both sing: "Faith is knowing the sun will rise . . ."
I sit next to her, tap her hands, whisper no.

Kyle, on the front row, holds a cardboard
box on his lap, a green scrawl on the lid.
It's his turn to toss the bean bag and recite
a miracle, but he stops, looks at me, says,
"This is my box," like I have to meet it
before he can toss. He places it on the chair,
doesn't know the miracle, returns it to his lap.

Michael sucks on his plastic bat, swings it so
I'm showered in spit. "What's the bat's name?"
I ask, taking two fingers to slow it. "Jesus."
When I end the bat business, he howls; and I hold
him like the Pietá, his sweaty back sticking to my arms.
I rock him, pray in his ear until he sleeps,
his tears soaking my blouse, his bat tucked in my bag.