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On a box of rainbow sprinkles

by *James Matthew Wilson*

Last week, with Thomas out in the front yard,
    I pulled a little matchbox pack of sprinkles
From my shirt pocket, shook it three times hard,

So he could hear the countless colors rattle,
    Then took his freshly scooped vanilla cone
To cover all its mound in a bright mantle.

A melt of cream already dribbled down
    My fist, and so I hurried, tapping, tapping
To spread the candy evenly around,

Thinking, I guess, how such a fleeting treat
    Would almost be worse than his getting nothing
If that small radiance vanished in the heat.

But then, my finger slipped on the last pass
    And spilled out with a sound both swift and final
The whole into a clump sunk down in grass.

Thomas took back his cone and licked away.
    I chucked the box, and thought no more of it,
Presuming that, in the long heat of day,

The sugar ants, who spread their granulated
    Fiefdom everywhere under foot, would carry
The sweet pile off till their dark young were sated.

But just this afternoon, when I came out
    To mow the lawn, which with the August sun

And rain grows thick in weaves of verdant sprout,

I happened to look down and see, among
    The plump and arching seed heads, a little patch
Of untouched brightness where it had been flung

By my mischance. Amid the flush and fruitful
    Season, it seemed, not even ants, for all their
Reputed diligence, come for their scoopful.

Nothing now has to be snatched up in greed,
    The world being prodigal with dropping sweetness,
Forgetting even memory of need.

And we are foolish, laying ourselves so bare
    Before its generosity, but do so
Anyway, being the motley fools we are.

James Matthew Wilson's most recent book of poems is *The Strangeness of the Good* (Angelico).

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