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Making Hay

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Making Hay

by Mike Vanden Bosch

Between opening and closing grace,
my father used to wedge praise into tabletalk:

“Pass the potatoes, Mark.

I like the way you mowed the alfalfa—
no rooster tails fanning the breeze at the corners.”

Or, “Pass the butter, please.

I saw you out the window this morning—like Samson
heaving bales up the mow with a pitchfork—
I can’t believe how strong you’ve gotten.”

Such praise, half-deserved but never half-hearted,
struck and lit like lightning,
lightening my day, though often striking me dumb.

Today I’d crawl through muck to hear such tabletalk—
praise coming and going between stretches of grace
yawning across great gaps I meant to fill:

At the banquet table Father saying, “Mark, my son”—
and smiling—“you mow the new land like a barber.”

And I, no longer dumb:

“Your self-sharpening sickle cuts like a razor”—
salting his world with praise as he has salted mine.