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Crossed Sticks

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Crossed Sticks

Mike Vanden Bosch

*The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry?
All flesh is grass. Isa. 40:6a*

“Never look a gift horse in the mouth,” my father always said, pointlessly, it seemed to me—boy to whom no one would think of giving a horse. But when he gave me a bony pig whose body was crying, I did not eye the pig’s mouth nor his runny rear or snout, nor scrutinize the fleshless skeleton stretching the taut skin outward. He was alive, so

I christened him *Pal*, thought *thank you* even though I daily threw bones this bare on the dead pig pile for the rendering man to reap. I got a bitten baby bottle, set the pig in the sun, and with what love a mercenary heart could muster, nursed some flesh on him whose siblings had too often nosed him from life’s nipples.

Who was I to intercede to keep this frail pig’s bones sheathed in flesh? Not enough, as four weeks showed his grass shriveled. When he was dead, I committed his squeal to dust with a memorial—crossed sticks for mere months in the sun. While a solitary sister looked on, I stared glassy-eyed at one gift stretch in the flesh vanished like blanched blades of grass in a gust.