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Feeling the Subtext

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Feeling the Subtext

Mike Vanden Bosch

As the preacher mumbled and moaned of Joseph's
merciless brothers, I slumped out of my mother's reach
half asleep between a real brother and a spiritual
sister who, to stop the devil, preserve family honor,
and stick my mind on the preaching, tried saving me
from sleep with sly acupuncture, slowly stabbing
her two-inch hatpin into my thigh to pry open
my eyes and help me hear the sermon on Joseph's
bloody coat.

I, to prove I was a man immune to pain, gave no
hint her pin had reached the bone but sculptured
my boy's face to look lamb-like before slaughter
and mask my screaming silent prayer for mercy:

“Lord, bless me like Joseph, sunk in cistern,
carted off by Ishmaelites to Egypt,
even sold to Pharaoh a world away
from this pew.”

(This poem has been bought by *The Banner*,
to be published at some future date.)