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Living Words

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The Living Words

by Mike Vanden Bosch

When a child, pulling a three-wheeled dog on an oak floor,
I heard an older brother say to my mother
while she stood ironing white for church,
“Shut up or I’ll put a bullet through your head.”
He talked to her as he once had
to a rat that bit his finger.

I half-expected my wheeled dog to bite my brother
and lightning to divide him
as it had our apple tree a week before.

But he disappeared into the fall,
leaving the words hanging
with the white for church.

The words shadowed me later
when a tear rolled down mother’s cheek
at hearing Dad read at family devotions:

*O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom!
Would God I had died for thee.*

They clouded the church one Sunday when mother sang:

*Time like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away,*

and again when she sang:

*No earthly father loves like Thee
No mother, half so mild,
Bears and forbears as Thou hast done
With me, Thy sinful child.*

Her soprano voice did not hold
a high note again until Easter.