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The Smithfield Boys

by Dennis Ross

“Could you take the four boys
this weekend? Bob and I
are having problems,
they’ve nowhere to go,” she said.
They all came, quiet, thin,
ages four to eleven with teddy bears,
toy trucks, and sleeping bags,
bedded down on the floor
of the farm-house. The farm-wife,
small and thin, had four boys of her own,
cattle and hogs to feed, full-time job
at the grain processing plant,
husband in the hospital.
Make do. All eight boys helped.
“When is Momma coming back?”
they asked a week and then a month
and another month later.
Hard to answer. Do what you can.

Four months later, Momma returned,
tan, saying it had all been too much,
she had needed to get away
for a small vacation.
The farm-wife hadn’t had a day off
in nine years, said nothing,
had tears in her eyes as the boys
gathered their belongings and left.
She saw new sadness, wariness in their eyes.

They had grown accustomed to real love.
Poor little Smithfield boys.

