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Stillbirth

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STILLBIRTH

Peter B. Hyland

Daddy broke to his knees,
Then made an unchildlike cry, right there
In the red dirt.

Pressing his mouth to the warm foal's,
He forced his human breath,
The animal head wet and dumb,

My brother and I watching
As he made a fist to summon
Back the rush of blood,

Beating the chest as if the dead horse
Were one of his own,
Its birthcoat shimmering as he tried.

Weary with digging, Daddy told me
To pour the lime, the brute foal a few feet
Away in the restless sun.

A white cloud in the hollow ground
Rose up; the wind
Ran through the chicken wire.

In the dark I lay on the grave's belly,
The cold earth beneath my palms.
I watched the far house, the small square of light.

The brown coat my brother wore
Was in the pasture.
The gate shook against its metal latch.

Fenced in the next field,
The black mane flared, month on month,
Until the mound turned flat.