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Dead Horse Mary Koncel

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Mary A. Koncel

DEAD HORSE

The slow pitch of the shovel. And dirt—black, warm and weary from its own weight—piled in full, heaping mounds. As if the ache in our arms was still and final.

We are digging a hole. Who would have thought? When a horse dies, legs stiffen and eyes stare at vigilant angels and clouds pushed against a faint but stubborn horizon. This horse is dead. A kind, old, patient mare.

We raise our shovels and dig the hole. It will take the horse and all her bones. It will smother, then soothe her with its black warmth, keep her back straight, her head from raising up, fill her eyes until they close. Big, ponderous eyes, like the stretch of untouched meadow, a flock of hungry swallows, circling.

Sometimes the hole is too deep. Sometimes it takes too much of what needs to be remembered—a flush of mane, long easy strides on muddy mornings, the press of small body against large. We stop, turn aside, trying to hold back, hold back all that needs to stay.