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Halves of One Abstraction

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Halves of One Abstraction

In my dream I look at the covers
of some books by South African writers.
Among them is a novel I have never read
about father-son rivalry and war.
On the jacket, silhouettes of two men
face directly away from each other
and form halves of one abstraction.
In one of those curious turns that occur
so often in a dream I become a character
in the book, and am taken to a field
by a man who pretends to be my father.
He is a weak man, unfair and wrong,
but I do not know if he is weak
and therefore not my father, or simply
another man who shares my father's gift,
or even if I've made the whole thing up:
my father, his weakness, the rivalry.
I only know it is right for me
to endure this punishment in a meadow
full of grass, a light wind blowing,
the sky gray and troubled overhead.
So I turn my back upon him slowly
and a young woman speaks in my ear,
guiding my attention to a small farm
at the edge of the grassland on a hill.
A cloud shifts, and winter sun spills
over brown stone walls and red tiles.
My father pokes one finger into my back,
pressing just above the lumbar.
This causes me no particular pain,
only a vague discomfort, like a wound
that needs one stitch, and I set out
for that house on the distant hill,
though I know there's no one home.