Halves of One Abstraction

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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.