

“How to Bury a Horse”

*JL Sultana, eighteen-year-old Arabian mare*

Tied to a post in a pasture  
all night and day,  
you never knew love before us.  
The hair never grew back  
across your nose  
where the halter used to pull.  
My daughter found you at night  
out behind the grain bin.  
I found her  
barefoot, curled up against your back  
on the cold ground.  
She blamed herself, refused to leave,  
begged to cover you with a blanket.  
Two hours later I convinced her  
we'd come back in the morning.

Burial day is a chilly October morning  
a light rain falls  
on my head, your hooves.  
She picks the corner where she last saw you  
in the back triangle of the pasture.  
The man unloads a backhoe, drives it slowly  
around your too still body,  
bringing down the yellow bucket  
over and over,  
six feet deep and eight feet wide.  
Your legs have stiffened overnight,  
But your long black tail  
still fans your red bay coat.

Chains are wrapped around  
your legs, then looped  
over the backhoe's bucket.  
The machine lifts you in slow motion,  
forcing me to look away.  
He drives to your grave,  
delicately eases you down,  
then jumps in to loosen the chains.  
He looks to my daughter,  
Saying there was blood  
coming from your left eye—  
*must have been a stroke.*