

Shetland

Shorty, lone ornament of the south pasture;  
brawny, bristle-maned chestnut stuffed with clover.

A savage saddled: ornery, headstrong, mean.  
But once, in a snit, I banged through the screen

and found him idle by the barbwire fence  
just staring—calm, inert—toward the house

and got a wild hair, thought, *I'll stroke his muzzle.*  
Sidling up, age nine, my palm met his skull—

an anvil, a feldpiece shrink-wrapped in hide—  
and the news traveled up my arm. This cloud

of sweat and flies and moist, long-riddled breathing,  
this piss-hot leathery stink, had *being.*

He was a beast, all right, but so was I.  
At last we two were meeting eye to eye

and my brain forged for us an island north,  
hardships braved, friendships kept, galloping forth.

We stood long in Texas while the June sun  
slowly moved, mid-morning; a calf went on

bawling for its mother. I remember  
hearing my grandmother's radio stir,

crackle, and settle on the local weather  
as we were disappearing into the heather.

*Nick Norwood*