

Flush

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My father didn't throw the hammer at me,
just toward me. I told myself it didn't hurt
anything but the grass. But when I hear the word
that caused it all, I feel that hammer hit me.

We were re-siding the north face of the house
and he'd asked if the new board was flush.
I was thirteen. To me, "flush" was what faces did,
or toilets. I was afraid to seem stupid

so I nodded yes. After he'd nailed it to the wall
he saw the board came up two inches short.
Red-faced, he glared, his eyes tempered steel.

The hammer was heavy and hard. It would have hurt.
It lay there on the lawn, the rust on its claws
like dried blood. I knew, despite his face,
he hadn't tried to hit me. He hadn't come close.

Still, when he picked it up, I couldn't help but flinch.

Father, I'd like things between us to be flush.
Help me hammer these words into place.