Little Barrel Poems

Aaron Anstett*
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1

Veins raised on his stretched neck,
a horse leans down and knocks his snout
against a rain barrel’s boards
until water runs out. By dusk
his owners come in from the fields
and beat him, then set about patching
the hole with shingle scraps, edges ragged
as coastlines on a map. The horse’s lips
are pulled back, his teeth clamped
steady on the handle of the oil lamp.

2

Board by board, I undo a barrel,
stove through each stave until
it’s splinters, kindling,
scrapwood and chips
I unloose with the hammer.
The shape the barrel held
is still there, but barely.
It’s an idea. It’s air.
Here, on the ground, are three tin rings
with nails pointing in.