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Tamara Pace Thomson

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## **THE SON OF A COAL MINER REMEMBERS HIS CHILDHOOD**

by **Tamara Pace Thomson**

Sometimes I heard voices in the trees and in the light.

My sisters and I sat obedient on the roof of our car  
while Father informed us of his plan:  
“I am sorry children. I have to kill your mother.”  
Staring at the sun, or at Father’s black gun, I envied eternity.

In groves of aspen I heard voices in the clattering leaves, like light.

Birds broke their necks flying into our windows, they would  
seizure until still.  
I couldn’t believe the minutia of their suffering, the blow and  
rupture of organs  
or splintering of flight’s hollow bones.  
A baby bat on the path once trembled in morning sun.

Cottonwoods rushed like river water in evening light.

To stave off rot, Father would immediately  
chill slaughtered meat.  
Music and muslin triggered memories that might be delusion or  
dreams.  
I dreamed of my mother drowned in a pool.

Creek water wrinkled shadow and radiance—blending locust  
leaves with liquid light.

If naughty at school, I found a willow switch to carry  
home for Father to whip me.  
My mother rarely lifted her eyes those contracted afternoons.  
I kept my own eyes open wide.

Through the window, summer nights, I heard poplars gorge on  
moonlight.

From the hood of our car, between my two older sisters, I stared  
at Father's black gun—  
we never saw our mother again. She drove north to Oregon  
that day.  
Still, I remember voices in the trees, in the light.  
Sometimes I heard voices in the trees and in the light.