

After Ellis Island

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My daddy was a miner and his light went out. He married a blind woman so it didn't make much difference. He slept between the swings of his pickax. My daddy was tough and when the canary died he ate it. Of course my mother cooked it first. She made stew. That was all she knew how to cook. She had burns on her hands and the pot turned blue from Sterno. She swept the floor with the clippings from his beard. I was an only child. I made up games and dreamed my daddy was God and the broken pieces of rock were people. He never stopped. We were famous. They groveled at our feet. My daddy bore billions from the sparks of his ax. Then he spit. My mother fished the dark streams and trapped. We never went hungry. At night I would hear them, something like a roll and a hum and I would fall asleep. That's how I knew it was night. The rocks were silent like my mother was blind. My daddy told me strange stories about sunlight and rain. My mother sang. The rhythm of the ax was in us until it caved in. It was like the whole earth gone deaf and dumb. My daddy and my mother were crushed and I cursed the stones and followed the cold and the flame until I reached the inside of his stories. Like I said I was an only child and I was never as close to him as dead, and when I wanted to visit my mother all I did was close my eyes.