

Pile of Lost Things

When the other miner dropped the metal slab my grandpa lost
His first finger. While his buddy threw up he blew coal dust
Off the bloody slice and bagged it in ice for the road. His cloth
-wrapped stump gripped the wheel while his good hand called
My grandma, who scolded him for taking the drive
Alone (he always laughed at that part). They couldn't save the finger.

He talks about everything save for this: the one finger
Of memory his stories leave in the coal. His youngest son, lost—
Buried—in black soil. I know that my dad and Steven went for a drive.
I know my dad, seventeen, forgot how easily they could be dust
And he sped into an ice patch. The doctors said Steven was dead. They called
My grandpa in to see what the telephone pole had eaten, his marbled cloth
Relic of a son. He didn't believe them. He lifted the cloth
To find Steven, pulsing. He gripped that limp finger
With the gritty four he had left and called
His Lazarus forth on tottering walker-heavy feet. This memory is then lost—
I heard it from my mom who heard it once from my dad, who turned it to dust
For all I know. I sift the soil to find my grandpa's drive
To lift the sheet, to grip the wheel. On the drive

Belt of the stamping machine he lost his second finger, amidst cloth
And rust. He thought he could see through the dust
Thought he could reach the row's one crooked piece, thought his finger
Was quick enough to adjust. In the end he lost
To the machine, to pinky mincemeat. I wonder what he called
Out for while passing me these memories—or who he called
Forth. I wonder if recalling his absent fingers was really a drive
Through the piles of all he had lost.
When he plucks his old knuckle from coal is he lifting the cloth
From his boy's eyes, again and again? Does he speak about each finger
To tell how Steven returned to the dust,
How his son ate his shotgun's nozzle even though dust
Had begun to pile on that walker? Even still he called
The morning new. His yellowing finger
On the ground didn't drive
Him away from the mines. His boy under cloth,
Then seeping through the carpet, didn't drag me into his pile of lost
Things. I remember the worn stub of his finger, its dust
Lost on my cheek. Good night, he called—
I drive through the memory—he tucked me into linen cloth.