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The Polygamist's Daughter

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The Polygamist's Daughter

Three women give birth to me
and I acquire mothers for every holiday.
Some drift in with the paychecks
on Friday nights, hair blown over their eyes,
laughing, leaning on my father's arm
like golden epaulets.
Others come in dark skirts and dusty shoes;
tired by the long walk from the Butte road,
they ask for a drink of water and never leave.
From these, my father takes books with black covers
to turn beyond the west fence,
late at night when the children can't tell
the rising flames from those who watch.

On Sunday nights, my father reads to us.
He begins, *this is a true story*,
and then a look like the sky before snowfall
spreads over his face, trembling
on his mouth, emptiness that fills itself.
The stories are about his mother:
he calls her Ruth, Esther, Rebecca;
he remembers her in a blue dress,
walking ahead of him one summer evening
when she seemed so like a still pool,
so like an ending he was about to reach.
And some days, everywhere he looks, she is there,
walking away, carrying a child,
just ahead of him, a blue dream in the twilight.

An August evening hoards its coolness
in birds, in the tops of trees.
I lie awake in the bed my father made for me,
I look out from the bed of my father's bones
and watch the moon, liquid on my traveling dress.
Tomorrow I am leaving here forever;
tonight the mothers drift into the room,
pressing me close. In the dark,
they are all the same woman,
each whispering from far beneath
her veil of night-colored hair,
telling me of the great, loveless world,
that I will move through it
repeating a name that is not my own,
telling my strange story over and over,
in different voices, with new endings.