

The Postmistress

by Rhonda Pettit

In 1981, Nellie Woolum, a retired postmistress in Harlan County, Kentucky, was killed when a coal refuse pond above her house collapsed; it was owned by Eastover Mining.

I knew it sat high on the ridge above me,
a purse without fare for the journey,
a black eye that never looked down
and yet was weeping.

I knew that they called it a pond
but the algae was gob, the plankton was clay,
and the crawfish and peepers were bony coal.
I knew the water was rock.

I knew how to speak, deliver the story
to bottom lines, bottom lands,
upper hands, bottom lies.
I, a crank without grease.

They told me the wall would hold up
hold up hold up
 hold up
all that was useless to them. Near Christmas,

I listened to the rain one night,
let it rock me to sleep, remember being
carried away, hitting a wall, splashing over it.
I sing now. Who listens?