



I Can Explain

Here in the foothills, every story begins
because somebody opens her mouth.
My great aunt turned ninety this month.
She can still recite all the names,
82 dead, Poston Mine Number 6, Millfield.
My cousin weeps first-hand experience
regarding Freedom Industries'
gross negligence along the Elk River.

It is no revelation that a lot of you
blame us for our twang and Billy Ray Cyrus,
for coal's carbon footprint
and *Make America Great Again*.

There's a kid with a mullet who lives
near me whose pickup truck wields
a giant Trump flag, so large
he almost ran off the road,
the flap obstructing his windshield.
I saw him erecting it in the Piggly Wiggly
parking lot like he was doing the most
patriotic thing ever.

Listen, he's a good kid—volunteers
at the dog shelter, first one out
to shovel on snow days.
So much of this willfulness is dependent
on generations having been born here,
knowing for a fact that poverty
is not a moral failing or the result
of not working hard enough.

His great, great, great grandfather
died at Poston Mine Number 6,
having volunteered an extra shift;
his granddad, in Vietnam.
His father works two jobs and serves
as Deacon at the First Baptist Church.

I don't know about you, but far beyond
the sermon, it's the music that pulls me in.
Those gospel sagas steeped in survival
and hallelujah, God's hands all over you.
I'll fly away, Oh glory, I'll fly away!

To touch another with what has touched
ourselves—isn't that the reason
humans developed language,
to build community, words drawn
from gesture and song, tales shared
in caves or on some lonesome prairie
under a gleaming night sky—overtures
brimming with light and air.

I can't help but think a lot of you
have never learned to relish your breath
or paused considerably to contemplate stars.
Do unto others, we say—
but you don't want to hear that story.