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Makayla

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Makayla

By Shawn Fawson

*After the photo by Katie Falkenberg, "The Human Toll:
Mountaintop Removal Mining," West Virginia, 2012*

A five-year-old girl has been drawn a bath
and asked to sit, fixed and wary,
having just stepped in a tub
filled with red-brown water and coal sludge.

Flat suds: a mountain-top blown to pieces
and going up in blasts outside.
Grey smoke scribbles its dust
over roofs, swings, cans, dolls,
and whatever else a house still holds.

Someone's washed her hair,
but she's hardly a little girl,
looking down as if the truth
might reveal itself in stages:
this is still her home, her house
found only by tearing up the map,
her town without paved streets,
well with no clean water trickling
through stone. Here, the seepage
of metallic runoff fills a tub
where a child bathes,
hunched down and scared;
her small hands, clasped together,
claim the one thing she knows.