

FOR THE ONE WHO DID NOT STOP

Julie Dunlop

on the road to Big Stone Gap
as the long line of cars
made their way, slowly
like a dirge
from the funeral home
to the memorial gardens,
which is another way to say cemetery,
which is another way to say
my grandmother's body was in the hearse
you zipped by in your SUV
so fast you likely missed
the hearse's white curtains, its old-fashioned design

I'm sure you were on your way
to your wife who was about to give birth
or perhaps you were racing to work
afraid to get to your strip-mining bulldozer late

Or maybe it was just the sight
of all those headlights
snaking through the mist

The ghosts of past and future losses
chasing you, pressing you to speed

It is possible you are from another country
some place in the world
where death does not mean slow down
where grieving is best ignored

"People are funny," my grandmother would say,
which meant inexplicable, inexcusable,
forgivable all at once

Powell River was churning that day,
filled with new rain

The people who had stopped
along the side of the road
windows down, could hear it

as my grandmother, and her mother, and hers
heard it, a wordless music
outliving us all