

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

Number Seven

by Richard Lewis

It was the last day before half term and Morgan wished he could stay home and start the holiday early. Nevertheless he skipped along the rain-washed morning to Pantglass School, unaware that high above on the mountain slope, the monster was stirring. The community had been living with the threat that had grown to over a hundred feet high for some years. Its brooding presence loomed precariously, swollen like a cancerous growth.

Morgan's teacher Nance was devoted to the children in her class but she was tired and looking forward to a week off work to spend time with her fiancé Tom. As she took registration and collected the dinner money, she thought, how little changed in the village. The river of things just seemed to go on much the same.

Up on the mountain, work on slag heap number seven had stopped due to the persistent rain but the monstrous pile was flexing its muscles. Silt and its watery sister combined to form a slurry, releasing energy like the effort of a thousand toiling miners. The weight shifted and gravity complied, sending a twenty-foot wall of waste sliding down the slope toward the school.

The children gasped on hearing the roar, like an aircraft descending on the village. Nance darted to the window and screamed at the children, "get under your desks!"

With her sole intention to protect the children, she bent over Morgan and three others as the deluge crashed through the window and caved in much of the wall. A sickening racket of breaking glass, splintering wood and crumbling stonework filled the classroom.

Then all was silent, the silt and mud having settled over and around fragile forms, holding fast the living and the dead.

Morgan and his three classmates being sheltered by Nance were dug out alive but one hundred and forty others were not so lucky. When they finally released Nance from her tomb, she was still clutching a one-pound note collected for dinner money.

Concerns had been raised to the National Coal Board about the slag heaps but ignored. Slag heap number seven, the waste product of unnumbered hours of toil from sweat-stained bodies, had been biding its time. The relentless rain and unseen mountain springs had destabilised the spoil. Half a generation were swept away that day, tearing the heart out of the community of Aberfan.