Ace Boggess

Feature

Hard Time at Huttonsville

Convicts on fire, convicts lined up:
execution by slow torture, cons
not ready to face mortality
before they test themselves with freedom:
on the news, at least thirty inmates
tested positive for the virus,
which means more, which means
cruel & unusual, which means
Help me, O Lord, forgive my sins—
a time for entreaties like the foxhole.
I never went to Huttonsville
during my confinement, its reputation
hardcore, woesome, humbling, but know
sickness spreads through a slammer
how a drop of dye in a vase
will redden or purple leaves
of a flower imprisoned in its water.

The virus is not righteous
in its selection process—
a scolding judge who would sentence
a man to death for misdemeanors
if the law allowed it &
good citizens did nothing,
which is what they always do
until their names appear on the docket,
their empty prayers answered
with emptiness, silence, or a cough.

One Hundred Thousand

The exact number (generalization
for an existential logic problem),
according to Pirandello, of people
who would know a different version
of me, & by extension, one another.

Again, per Pirandello, each
has reached a *No One* phase.
Who were they when the *One*
applied? Now dead, now dead.
& the news goes on, & the number

rises to something less symmetrical.
Who were they that I did not
meet them & craft their crooked noses
in my thoughts, find them other
than they thought themselves?

Could do that from here, I guess.
This one lived by his ring finger.
That one couldn't dance to save her life.
Stories upon stories. Fantasies.
Philosophies of nothing & the moon

Down for the Count

Riots in Minneapolis.
Riots in Atlanta.
Riots in Los Angeles.

Virus lurks still
inside the skin of many.

Killer cops deserve
to see the other side
of a cell like choosing art
looking only at the back.

Virus lurks still
inside the skin of many.

I'm stuck inside my head,
chronicler of moments,

meanings. Last night,
I watched the news.
This morning: shopping.

Fear is the heavyweight
champion of the world.

Virus lurks still
inside fragile bones
of my glass jaw.

2020

You've been a curmudgeon shouting from his doorway
for us to get off his property
while we're nearly halfway up the drive.

Almost promised us World War III at first,
missiles flying to & from Iran.

Then, the virus. Days hiding in our homes
like tourists in our own existences,
with even the young having mid-life crises.

The President suggested injecting
UV light & industrial cleaners, &
that was worth a laugh until it wasn't.

Now: cities aflame by night,
sacked by the righteous sharing their rage.

I, from my mountain, watch the world burn,
unable to offer a healing flower
or assurances we won't drink this vintage

again in 2021, or whatever other years remain
in our depressed, unholy, post-traumatic lives.

Invite Me Out into Shadow

where pleasures of a fractured city
leave business cards:
choose this, take that, want it, want.
I do want like a child
in aisles of the superstore
pointing, *Please, please!*
but stay home as if toys are knives.
night's allure demands too much.
night unfriended me long ago
when I stopped believing in it,
worshipping on my knees, crawling.
days I beg for night to love me.
it never calls, texts, sends a secret code.
I've collected its advertisements
in a drawer full of longing.
sometimes I pick up the phone &
start to dial, then hang up,
certain all the numbers have been changed.

Ace Boggess is author of five books of poetry—*Misadventure*, *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So*, *Ultra Deep Field, The Prisoners*, and *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled*—and the novels *States of Mercy* and *A Song Without a Melody*. His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review, Notre Dame Review, Mid-American Review, Rattle, River Styx*, and many other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His sixth collection, *Escape Envy*, is forthcoming from Brick Road Poetry Press in 2021.