

Ace Boggess

The Dead and the Living

She texts that her pop's brutal cop dog
killed the stray pup they've taken in
despite a fence between the two &
all the good will of isolated worlds.

Not a dog person, I process this
like a school shooting or tsunami,
a horrible otherness elsewhere
which has nothing to do with me

except in need for empathy I lack,
money I lack, or ability to do one thing
about it, which I lack most of all,
not the hero of any story

that begins or ends with fire,
blood, grief, guilt, remorse.
I choose the option I have:
I call to comfort, & by the time

she answers, the pup's alive again,
hand of some dog-god having touched it.
How's that possible? I say.
Did you bury it in a Pet Sematary?

She doesn't laugh but gets the joke &
will laugh later once things have
settled down, begun to make more sense.
For now, the big dog's outside barking,

its booms over the phone
sounding like a column of howitzers,
which means trouble, which means
the pup's still out there scrapping.

You better go check on that, I say.
She says she will, but her voice
assures me she's a refugee
from a war she knows will never end.



A Junkie in Rehab

said he envied me for the stupidest thing I ever did.
He said he stabbed himself in the gut
in front of his kid, then went to the E.R. for pills,
because he was too chickenshit to rob a pharmacy.

I countered with fear of self-harm as why I chose the other,
a brief existence as a criminal that ended in a blood-
soaked floor, my head squeezed under a deputy's boot
as though he were snuffing a cigarette.

Convinced myself I needed to do it, risk of injury
or death by someone else less worrisome
than knifing my stomach or slamming a door on my hand.
Strange how two men swimming in the same sewer

notice dissimilar things: for him, the stench;
for me, the rats. *At least you don't have kids*,
he said. He had me there. *At least that*, I agreed, &
wondered if it would've made a difference.



Gratitude List #24

Forgive me when I praise my wealth
of second chances.

Fell into a manhole once.
I was young & in college, buzzed on booze.
Someone left the disc askew.
Only my left went down.

The dashboard in my black Ford Tempo
set itself on fire
due to a faulty, recalled part, &
I, driving through Morgantown,
lost good sense & pulled onto the lot
of the nearest Exxon station,
got out, then went back
for the journal in which I
had written half of a novel.

How often I almost burned myself up,
dosing on methadone, trying to quit
the drugs I loved. My hand
went lazy with a lit cigarette,
slacking against my chest—
all those T-shirts with burn holes—
the first touch of flame to skin
waking me like a loud alarm
set precisely for 2 a.m.

Praise most the times I should've died
in dope lust from overdose
or a pistol clicking behind my head
in shadows of a stranger's house.
I've twice had knives held to my throat.
A cop could've shot me when he had the chance.

Praise these words, too,
which save me again:
antivenin against the snakes
that bite at dawn &
won't let up until the night has fallen.

