

My generation is not lost but we are losing

In the good economy, I boarded puddle jumpers
for rural campuses, shook the hands of faculty

whose pinched mouths showed they were tired.
Dutifully, they moved me from building to building

so I could lecture their pretend students, so many
parking lots to cross, taped-off areas blocking

off landmines where other candidates had exploded.
I was a champion, the fattest and most entitled cow,

and I interviewed in person for two years. Once the bad
economy began, I learned to flatten myself

on a screen, so determined I was to survive. I bared
polished teeth and told the faculty in assertive yet

modulated tones that I could teach anything. I made
my promises to muted laughter, to faces hidden

on Zoom, while in the cities, orderlies bagged bodies
and nurses protested for masks, footage we all

watched late into the night. I couldn't sleep, either.
I began sending emails to people I knew, friends

that I imagined were better connected. They began:
I'm reaching out to see? or Do you know

someone who might need? but no one had time
to answer. No one could turn off the news.

Some watched the news for years straight.
Some became the news, swallowing whole

its desolation in cyclical packages of footage,
learning to frame the fracture in their own lives

as reportage. I posted volumes of stupid shit.
Agents of the state murdered George Floyd,

and I resented what I had, my disinfected
echo chamber, this performance layered

over the dead. There's a record of what I did,
days timestamped by email. How I tried.

I built pedagogy workshops as my students
gave up entirely on school. I drove to the border

of my dry county and bought a handle of vodka,
drank to blur my vision. I wanted to be as useless

as a governor. I threw my expensive
pens, my interview suit, into the open sewer

of a nearby lake. *I have alienated everyone*, I told
my family. *Imagine*, I whispered into the voicemail

of my Congressperson, *wanting to fit somewhere*.
I hadn't found my purpose. Or was it lost?

In the bathroom mirror, I made outsized vows
to become necessary. I swore, again, to be good.