

My generation is not lost but we are losing

In the good economy, I boarded puddle jumpers for job interviews at 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, their yellow-taped 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 to fit on a screen, so determined I was to survive. I bared my 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. In the cities, hospital workers bagged the dead and nurses protested for masks, on camera, 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 "I'm wondering if you know someone who might need," but no one had time to answer me. A police officer knelt on the neck of George Floyd, crushing his pharynx, as police had done all along to black people, but here it was on video. Everyone I knew had long, self-righteous opinions about the protesters, about the use of the word "riot" when applied to people gathered in the open. On long email chains and on social media, educators created workshops to help themselves teach during a crisis, as their students gave up entirely on school. I, too, said "fuck it." I drove to the border of my dry county and bought large quantities of vodka, drank enough of it to blur my vision. 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 told my Congressman, *wanting to fit somewhere*. Like so many others, I had not been given what I was promised. *Have you ever felt like that?* I said to no one. Looking in the bathroom mirror, I spoke my outsized vows. I swore that I once had a purpose.