



Ace Boggess

### The Chaplain at Night

Hardest hearted stone men, dark-armored in mail of blue tattoos,  
their muscles swollen clouds of burning rain, eyes fierce &  
glassy as gems for a granite demon—how they weep

when the chaplain comes at night. Whenever the chaplain comes at night,  
the sight sounds a banshee's shriek, maracas from a rattler's tail,  
what refrain some unseen pistol sings like a squeal of brakes on the highway.

Everyone longs to turn away, instead looks on with awe that fear assigns  
as if fixed to the sofa & forced to endure a month of 9/11  
or war coverage on the TV news that never changes.

All want & and don't want data, information, facts: Whose

lot was drawn, whose name highlighted in the book of suffering?  
Someone's sainted mother, faithful wife or infant child

just fell beneath the wheel of ambivalent fate, body crushed like bones  
of an enemy. Someone's tether to a happy life, a free world snapped.  
Though the chaplain speaks words of faith & hope, those words

reek from a freshly dug grave, wet earth, pungent roots of grass &  
onions, dead smells the dead smell: by being there  
he breaks a man—being there, how easily it happens.

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Ace Boggess has published poems in *Harvard Review*, *River Styx*, *RATTLE*, and elsewhere. His books include *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled* and, as editor, *Wild Sweet Notes II*, an anthology of work by poets living in West Virginia.