

M * A * S * H * Nurse * * * * *

& {and}

Bad (!!!!) Idea

By

Ken

Purscell

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Ken Purscell has got to have one of the most unique minds I have ever encountered. His theme in 'M*A*S*H nurse' is the MASH theme song and that particular female actor in the title sequence that was never actually in the show...How do you people come up with this stuff? And what's more, Purscell is each rib-tickling amusing, poignant and sympathetic in his treatment of this woman who was either scrubbed from the show or merely hired to do the opening. From the audition to the cuts, takes and edits, and on and on—but no credit: "For just a few frames she goes all out / To reach a certain painful destination" ...If I ever put my tongue this far in my cheek, I'd be frightened I might swallow it. Don't miss it. Again he batters and buttresses us comparing a virus to a 'Bad Idea' I got to start you off, shouldn't be quoting so many lines at once, but I can't resist: "A virus is only an idea, / a pattern, a sequence, / one protein tied to another, / instructions in how to make / other copies of itself / from whatever stuff is at hand." Absolutely fabulous, stay well! Ken Purscell. (Spacing is poet's own.) HS*

M*A*S*H Nurse

The plaintive music falls
Across its fourth and still counting decade
And still she runs towards us
And yet it's not to us she runs.

For just a few frames she goes all out
To reach a certain painful destination
To carry out uncertain painful duties
For those arriving in their pain
Borne on hovering birds and
Seeking repair.

Left (in her eyes) and behind the others
She grabs her hat
And hopes not to lose it
Or her cool.

Yet outside the frame, we know
One sits and watches,
Calls out,
And the runners halt
And gasp for breath
As the director calls them back to their mark
To do it one more time,
This time for real.

It's not for real.
This is the take we've seen
For episode after episode,
Decade after decade,
Police action after incursion after mission after sortie.
These few seconds are the ones that stay.

And somewhere someone with a razor blade and tape
Cut and spliced her running
With that of other nameless souls.
A few faces we will recognize.
Hers, and the others, we will not know.
Names appear, the music swells,
And those names go on to fame and to the grave.
But her name isn't there.
She just keeps running
Wearing a uniform already out of date
The day she wore it
To portray a not quite war
While her classmates fought (and ran)
In another not quite war.

She runs as if she hopes
The horror she portrays may someday end.
She runs as if she knows
She stands for all those other nameless souls
Who
eventually

will run to aid in Iraq, Afghanistan,
And countless other stans
Where running could do some good

The music falls.
Her hat does not.
Trapped in time
She is running still.

Bad Idea

A virus is only an idea,
a pattern, a sequence,
one protein tied to another,
instructions in how to make
other copies of itself
from whatever stuff is at hand.

The idea may travel very far.
But the stuff, the proteins--
they come from us. Hijacked
cells repeat the deadly orders
from outside, but the stuff itself
is us. The chains
conveying the idea, the shell
holding it together, even
the spiky crown
that stabs its way past our defenses:

all these once were breathing
and pulsing within us,
for us.

Our food, our drink,
our precious essence
are all transformed
from life to death
not by a thing, but by a wave
of corruption to a notion
of total authority that brooks
no overseeing antibody.

It calls resistance futile. In secret
it lulls and bullies until
we come to think that only
by repeating these commands
--and no others--will we be great.
The notion says that breathing
and pulsing are a swamp, a mess.
Destroy them, convert them,
and you shall be free.

Alas! No wonder
distance only slows the spread.
How can we be distant
from ourselves? No wonder
masks may not be good enough.

What fools us are the masks
we always wear around each other.
We are not attacked so much
as betrayed by our own material,
taken in
by a bad idea.

The hope, the trick,
is that eventually
we can find the way
to recognize the signs of harm
separate the idea from our selves,
and learn again to breathe.

THE POET SPEAKS:

Poetry is seeing things
in a new light.
“M*A*S*H Nurse” began
when a friend pointed out
that the sitcom’s title sequence
stayed mostly the same
for every season.
Dozens performed
(mostly running)
yet only a few were named,
recognizable.

Yet it occurred to us
that, given the show's ubiquity
(I watched a season in Sweden!)
and it's strength
in syndication and streaming,
each participant had by now
amassed as much screen time
as some major movie stars.

They are uncredited people,
portraying people
providing uncredited help
to uncredited men and women
wounded in unspeakable ways.

Ironies abound.

"Bad Idea" was written
after a trip to the post office
the day the pandemic arrived
at our little town
in the mountains of Virginia.

The assisted living was quarantined.

Someone in the post office
said, "We're importing disease
from foreigners."

On the walk home, I got to thinking,
and I realized that,
yes, the RNA sequence might be foreign,
but the proteins of the virus
(indeed, of all human-borne viruses)
are made up of proteins
already present within us.

It is, in a real sense,
a homegrown disease.

And then the bad ideas of politics
hijacked and took over.

Thus the poem emerged, in just one day.

This was April of 2020.

The politics have only gotten worse.

The poem seems almost tame now.

And, after George Floyd was killed

only a couple months later,

the plea to let us breathe

seems only more poignant.

Poetry helps me see

things in a new light.

AUTHOR BIO: Kenneth Purscell is a retired pastor, adjunct professor, retail cashier, and customer service agent. He and his wife Koni used to live in southwest Virginia, but have moved to the south suburbs of Chicago. This is his first publication. But his greatest accomplishment in life is that he once made Victor Borge laugh.

