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Two Poems

by George Bishop

Jail Time

Letters were handwritten,
in pencil, recorded
on lined paper, usually
yellow—kind of a sick act
of innocence. There's trying
to hide the explanations
in punctuation, hoping
the pause can pronounce
your deep sigh and rapid heart-
beat. There's the blank space
between paragraphs you count
on your mother, wife or daughter
to fill in with a plan, a parole.

Really. Who in the hell am I
talking to? Here, we don't even
take our own confessions
seriously. Only at lock down
do I think about what I said,
remember how I couldn't
seal the envelope. By bed
the jailor's eyes are full
of erasures, chewing like
roaches in a box of old
books. The ink of answers
takes time to dry. There's more
jails than this to go
through, some solitary
each word must escape.

Centennial

Riding a bus through the country's
version of downtown, speed bumps
where speed has always been locked
in a clock, I scan the rows of second,
sometimes third floor windows
that look out from the old hotels
along this sketch of Main. Usually,
I'm looking for a curtain that's barely
separated, maybe some part of a woman's
face, the inside of her eyes deep
in the sidewalk, dark hair hanging
like a haunted forest. Then, I wonder
if anyone's studying the rows of tinted
windows I'm behind, the bus waiting
for a light to change. Inside, I'm going

from door to door, different kinds
of loneliness tapping the English oak
just below each peephole. Who is it?—
I make myself hear as we pull away.
The next stop is mine where Dot's Diner
waits—a thick cup of coffee and something
sticky. I'm hoping for my booth to be empty,
the one with an old photo of Main. There's
a woman leaning out one of the windows
I just passed, a parade below her, a band
playing in a pavilion, instruments to their
lips. They've been taking my requests
for years now. Nothing to march to.
Just a couple songs about going back,
all the vacancies of a different key
in my hand, something beginning
to turn.

George Bishop's latest work appears in *New Plains Review & Border Crossing*. New work will be included in *Melusine* and *Nagautuck River Review*. Bishop is the author of four chapbooks, most recently *Old Machinery* from Aldrich Publishing. He attended Rutgers University and now lives and writes in Kissimmee, Florida.

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