

## d r i f t i n g

maybe i am drift i n g  
with the waves on a boat,  
aged wooden brown, bobbing  
up and down .  
i make no effort  
to partake  
in my journey's direction,  
stretched out on my back star i ng  
up at the blue painting  
with white brush  
strokes, strain i n g for  
an answer i cannot hear —  
one that i'm not sure  
i'll comp re hend  
even if heard,  
bobbing up and  
down, lying with the waves.  
i wonder if it matters much, my  
bobbing with the waves, if  
it will take me  
to a dark place i did not  
intend to go,  
or if  
it will take me  
back to where  
the waves were made .  
because in the end ,  
after the waves find the sandy shore  
bobbing up and down ,  
don't they return  
to where they came from —  
where blue  
meetsblue?

## Brigit Pegeen Kelly

The Celtic goddess of poetry  
other poets adored.  
A goddess who  
never mentioned  
she was a goddess.  
Long flowing brown hair  
and such a soft smile.  
The patroness saint of farm animals and  
lost college students.

We were always scheming rendezvous that never happened. To a Sacramento monastery. To the beach by her pilot brother's—with sandcastle contests and races on manmade contraptions that traveled over the sand. She offered to carry me over her shoulder if my wheelchair couldn't maneuver the beach. I wanted to see the beach she mentioned in class, the one by where she grew up and planned on living at if she was ever homeless; but I wasn't sure if this beach was that beach. The thought of grains of sand stuck on my body sends shivers down my spine, but I was going to suck it up to see her. I should've tried harder, I should've said screw sleeping three hours a day for a week to try out for law review and my first legal internship in Berkeley on MLK Jr. Drive without air conditioning but with an office cat I fed Greenies to and an attorney who let our homeless clients walk her pure golden lab and went to the beach with Brigit, even though she was a 5 hour drive away from me and I didn't have a car that year. I should've rented a car. I didn't even get on law review. To the Springfield cemetery that creeps me out. All cemeteries creep me out, but I didn't tell her, saying I would go with her. She always loved cemeteries. Perhaps it's a Catholic thing. I remember reading her poem about boys smashing cemetery gravestones. I can't remember the name of that poem or if the image of overdue library books in her truck's dashboard window was in it or something she mentioned in class.

Although I got to read her most famous poem in a lot of my English classes like a popular song I like replaying on the radio, she never assigned her poems to her students, much to our dismay. She hated reading her own poetry, which must have been hard with her people's pub poetry readings; although she had no problem reading my poems out loud in class for me with her 90 MPH reading speed. I secretly read all of her books during my semester with her; I didn't realize that I could get so many goose bumps from a collection of poetry. When I borrowed "Listen," a word she opened a poem with to open my poem, she seemed annoyed, saying that I didn't know what I was doing. In Celtic Folklore, poets were revered as royalty, as gods, because otherwise, their satire against you could curse you. She wouldn't have cursed anyone, but she was definitely born in the wrong time for a poet.

She asked us in class who wanted to be rock stars. Almost everyone raised their hands. I didn't, even though I kind of wanted to. I guess she didn't realize that she was a rock star, or at least I thought she was. I also didn't exactly tell the truth when she asked who actually went to a coffee shop to write our observations, like she had instructed us to do. I did go watch people standing in line, purchasing their caffeinated cups, and shaking the edges of pink paper packets before ripping off the corners to pour the white grains into their steaming cups at the Union for at least a half hour. But when all the other students said that they did not go, I remembered that I technically went home to write the poem, instead of writing it at the Union. Perhaps it is fitting that Brigit called me a baby all semester long, as the youngest student in her class. She always brought candy for us, which I just took to my dorm to eat, as not to awkwardly ask for help. I later joked with her that the candy multiplied like fish. She always enjoyed my odd sense of humor.

I wore a ruffled white and blue short sleeved shirt in the style of Nance from Oliver Twist to office hours and she asked me why I was wearing that, because it was low cut and people could probably see a lot since I was always sitting down in my wheelchair. My mom had bought me that shirt, like she does all my clothes. I don't know how I responded to Brigit's shirt question.

She told me I should read Christy Brown's poetry. I had heard of this Irish writer who had the same disability as I have and of his left foot, but I didn't know he also wrote poetry. I always want to call him Charlie Brown.

## Brigit Pegeen Kelly

When she said that he died young, I must have made a look. She told me not to worry, it was because he was an alcoholic, not his cerebral palsy. I wrote a poem for class after watching *Il Postino*, saying if it was based on actual events, that Pablo Neruda was a jerk. She lent me his 100 love sonnets, saying that I should read him before making such statements. I must have devoured that pink polka dotted book, like I do with most books with my death grip; I even broke the binding of my high school copy of *Wuthering Heights*. But Neruda's book didn't change my mind. I thought love sonnets, really? And I wondered, didn't Charlie Brown have anything more important to write about than being so sexually deprived? Typical Anglo Saxon male writer trying to get into our undergarments... but I guess it was more complicated for him physically and socially, despite his rock star poet status. After four years of English and Creative Writing classes, reading the great poets convincing women to sleep with them and my classmates' poems on their sexual explorations, I gathered that almost everything is about sex and that when my dad asks who could possibly love me, what he is really asking is who would want to have sex with me. I later longed to experience physical love too and questioned if I could even write poetry without these experiences, but realize that there is so much more to life than that. They recently discovered that Brown was abused by his wife. How do you discover that decades after someone's death? If I told my mom, she would scoff, saying at least his wife stayed with him.

Brigit said that her parents never had a TV when she was growing up and she asked me if I can visualize the imagery from poems. She seemed envious when I said that I could, having been raised in front of a TV. I found it curious that she could envy anything about me.

When I asked her how to keep myself motivated to write, she asked why I write. I said that I enjoyed writing. She replied that that was good; I'd stop doing something when it's no longer fun. Brigit added that the life of a writer is a lonely one, but it was something that I could do from home. Perhaps she knew something I didn't back then. It might have been during the same office hours visit where she assigned me homework during the summer break, although neither of us had classes. Six narrative memory pieces, not poetry, saying that I had a strong grasp on dialogue and encouraging me to get over my super short Emily Dickenson length lines. She said that I don't know what I am doing with my writing, but that that was ok—my memory would guide me—and recommended writing a memoir. I wondered who on earth would read a memoir of no one famous, but complied anyway. At the end of summer, I sent her my six pieces. When I went to talk to her about them, I vaguely recall her liking them. But she also said that my grammar was wacked, a fact that I had known for some time. I smiled, replying that that's why I write poetry; it masks it well. I don't think I ever told her that I especially enjoy writing because it is something private I keep from my family with my parents, who don't understand English well, and my sister, who doesn't even like fiction. She probably wouldn't have understood this sentiment with her writer husband and her father, who I believe was a literature professor.

I didn't take any classes with her my junior year, because I planned to take her again my senior year and I thought I should take classes with the other poetry faculty, even though I wanted to drop them and take Brigit's class. When I went to see her my junior year about doing my senior independent study with her, I was wearing a three fourth lavender shirt. She commented how nice that color looked on me and I liked that shirt so much more after that. It turned out that the spring of my sophomore year was the only time I had class with Brigit, which is ironic because she tried talking me out of taking her class, saying that I was too young and questioning if I would take it seriously. Sophomore year was when I started talking less. Before college, I always had an assistant around to interpret my speech. I talked non-stop in my freshman classes, hoping to boost my participation grade; even though I went to classes by myself then—the other students usually understood me if the professor couldn't. But by sophomore year, before my spring semester with Brigit, I realized that if I waited long enough, another student would eventually raise the points I wanted to; and that professors seem to accept my participating by harassing them by e-mail and during office hours instead of talking in class... either that, or they just didn't care if I participated. What I never told her was that the year before, when I won a freshman poetry contest, the English Department Dean raved about her as a great young poet and I was determined to take her class. I was surprised that she wasn't as young as the Dean or her department picture alleged.

## Brigit Pegeen Kelly

Brigit also unsuccessfully tried talking me out of law school, encouraging me to get a MFA. I would have been flattered if she didn't do the same to all her pre-law students. I probably would have gotten a MFA instead of a law degree if she didn't go on sabbatical my senior year. You see, all the other poetry professors were extraordinarily discouraging of pursuing a writing career, saying they like to eat.

It took me several reads of her poetry to notice a brother who stutters; and violating the rule against confusing the speaker in a poem as the poet, I asked Brigit if her brother stutters. When she confirmed that he does, I wondered if that's why she tried harder to understand my speech impediment, jokingly saying in class that everyone should get high so they could understand my speech better—something that I found had some merit later with my pothead poet friend who understood me better high.

I would be sitting in an English class a year or two after reading Brigit's books, listening to the professor rattling off about another poem or the "city upon a hill" and had aha moments—so that was what Brigit was doing in that poem or that line in that poem. And upon learning that Thoreau was mentored by Emerson over many meals at Emerson's, I imagined that my relationship with Brigit to be similar. Perhaps I daily dreamed that I was her annoying mentee. And perhaps my dreaming made it so. I later wondered what would happen if I showed up at her farm and considered moving back to town just to be near her when I longed to move back to Illinois anyway.

She told me that she was the black sheep among her successful siblings, with her pilot brother and doctor slash attorney sister, and I wondered how a poet who almost won the Pulitzer Prize could think that, simultaneously pretending like I didn't idolize her. I worried that if I told her that she was my favorite poet, it would make things awkward between us. I didn't get the nerve to tell her until several years later and it didn't make anything awkward.

As we walked back from my graduation ceremony on the uneven sidewalk to my dorm, I asked my dad if I could take the love of my life, my beloved older dog, Happy, to law school with me. My parents told me on the drive home that Happy died. They lied, keeping him alive for the last few months of my senior year, even though they never lied to me before (even about Santa Claus). I wailed on that car ride home. It felt like I was punched from inside the corner of my chest. I cried for a week straight. I couldn't help being angry at God for taking Happy away from me, even though I had multiple dreams of his death even the last time I saw him, which I dismissed, saying maybe he would outlive Angel. Looking into Angel's eyes, I commiserated in her sadness at losing her chew toy. I promised to take better care of her, not harassing her like I did before for being alpha over Happy. I wasn't able to keep my promise the year after graduating from law school, after her skin started falling off her face from a rare liver disease.

I wanted to move back as soon as I moved out to California for law school, the year after I graduated college. I cried in Angel's face as she licked my tears after we finally found an apartment far off campus for me during orientation week because Student Housing told me at the last minute that they only have one accessible unit that was occupied by another student with a disability. It would only be the beginning of how wrong I was to think that I must have a place somewhere, like the different shape blocks that fit into the box with different shape holes... only I didn't realize initially that nothing matches my shape. My sister, dad, and Angel had to go back to Illinois, leaving me and my mom in the nearly empty apartment. I originally thought that I could live by myself in California, having lived in a dorm for students with disabilities before where I managed my personal care assistants, so I thought it would be easy to coordinate my own care. Out of the over hundred responses from the Craigslist ad I posted before moving, only one person actually showed up to interview. Because I couldn't live independently with only one assistant, my mom had to stay and provide nearly all of my care. It was hard on both of us; I didn't have to depend on her since before college and even then, my dad and my sister were around to help... a fact that my mom reminded me every day, saying that if I had only listened to her and went to law school in Chicago like she told me to do, we would not be in this mess... even though she and my dad had moved to Kansas for a pastor position a few years before and I wanted my sister to enjoy her Chicago college years without having to help me. I wish my sister hadn't told my parents that I was accepted into a Chicago law school, a fact that I wasn't going to tell them because I was sick of becoming so

## Brigit Pegeen Kelly

sick in the winters and I was going to the best law school I got into, regardless of the quality of its student disability services.

When I asked my mom for a mirror to put at my law school desk, to check if I had stuff on my face, she scoffed, laughing, “You think you’re a woman too?” Sometimes, we’d fight in the morning and I would go to class without eating breakfast, losing my appetite and not wanting her to feed me. I’d buy a bagel at the coffee cart in front of the law school because I could eat that by myself.

I didn’t tell Brigit how bad it was; that I was like the boy in her poem that wished he was never born after being taunted, but it was worse; I wanted to die. I wasn’t suicidal. I just wanted to die. Law school wasn’t what I had expected. I wanted to drop out after the first week. But I didn’t want people thinking that I dropped out because of my disability. I didn’t want to worry Brigit, so I just told her I hated law school and California. Brigit said that people either love it or they hate it, implying that it was ok if I didn’t like her birth state. She wasn’t above telling me that she told me so; that I wouldn’t like law school. But that it was ok, she said that I could be one of those poets slash lawyers. When I asked how she knew I wouldn’t like it, she said her students go into law for the money. I assured her that I wasn’t in it for the money; I planned to be a poor civil rights attorney. I thought that even though I wouldn’t be rich, at least I would have a job after law school and that kept me going. I never told Brigit that she helped me survive my first year of law school with her replies to my e-mails. She was still on sabbatical that year, staying with her brother who lived 5 hours north of me. We schemed ways to see each other—she didn’t want to hitch a ride with boys down the winding coast like she had to do before and she jokingly considered illegally stowing away in her brother’s plane that regularly flew cargo near my law school. We settled on just sending smoke signals until she got sick with bronchitis that year. Harassing people over e-mail was my favorite pastime. I told Brigit at one point that something must be off because she became faster at replying than I was that year. We’d discuss random things; nothing of great significance. One time, she advised me to not live life accumulating so much stuff; something I’d remember moving back to Illinois having to ship countless boxes of my accumulated stuff after originally moving to California with just a church van full of stuff: my wheelchair, some clothes, my college TV, my laptop bag with Happy’s collar and Brigit’s first book, but no mattress.

During my first year in California, I swear I saw doppelgangers of people I knew in Illinois. Brigit’s doppelganger with long flowing brown hair rode the bus I took from the campus library bus stop pass the small central park with the biweekly farmers’ markets; pass the *Chocolat* desert shop; pass the apartment off the train tracks I looked at; pass the triangle house—a house that was not a pyramid, but one of those three dimensional triangle shaped blocks we fit into the triangle hole in the box with different shape holes; pass the fancy Nugget grocery store with 47 different energy drinks and vitamin waters, and an assortment of health foods and green household products; all the way at the end of the line, where my apartment always baking in the sun stood facing a vast dust farm with the 100 year old tree that fell the fall I started classes. It was at this bus stop that I overcame my dislike of cats. I was waiting for the bus one morning when a teenage looking kitten came and gently jumped on my lap tray, letting me pet her for a good amount of time, immediately before she jumped off and scurried down into a sewer drain. I looked for her when I waited for my morning bus, but never saw her again.

Brigit and I usually met in e-mails or in the few letters I sent her when I remembered that she didn’t have internet on the farm, after she gave me the address, saying that she would read all of the poems that I send her; that is, besides when I went to see her in her corner office on the third floor of the English Building. I don’t know why her office looked so much bigger as a sophomore, coming to discuss my poems and life in general. She worried when I said during finals week, that I was so stressed I was going to die; I had to explain that it was just a Korean<sup>1</sup> expression, like I’m so hungry I could die. She didn’t report me to Student Health. Her corner office looked like a regular sized office when I visited campus 12 years later. Her office still had countless bookshelves neatly overstuffed with books, a fabric sofa for students waiting to talk to her to sit on, a

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<sup>1</sup> Korea used to be spelled with a “C” before Japan changed it under its occupation, so Korea would come after Japan in the English alphabet.

## Brigit Pegeen Kelly

circular window overlooking Wright Street, and her sitting behind all of her desks with her outdated computer off to the side. She stepped across her desk fort to hug me for the first time. We were both surprised to finally get to see each other; I thought it might not actually happen, what with all our failed rendezvous. She hugged me again on my way out, remarking how womanly I looked now, which I think was a compliment. When she apologized later in an e-mail about not having more time for me that day, I replied that it was great just seeing her, and I got two hugs at that. I was frankly surprised that she stopped her meeting with her grad student when I popped in. Brigit was embarrassed that she was dirty that day, just coming from her farm, and apologized for smelling. But she didn't smell or look dirty to me. I was like, are you kidding me, but kept my comments to myself, like I usually do. I remember being so excited when she told me to come in after I knocked on her office door. I actually did wonder if I smelled from my three hour car trip to the English Building that morning.

When I heard she had passed, I had just printed a letter asking if she still wanted to try visiting my Chicago. I knew of a barn for her animals to stay at (I assumed it was her farm animals and not just her dog when she said she would need to bring her animals with her because otherwise, she probably would've just said her dog), but that I was still figuring out how to get her animals here from her Central Illinois farm since she probably couldn't bring them with her on the train—something she jokingly told me before. I asked if her brother could fly them here in cargo, hoping it would make her smile, like how I could never stop smiling whenever I'd get a reply from her. I didn't mail this last letter. I regret that she gave me more than I could ever give back to her. I don't know how Wiki knew she passed before I did. 65 seems so young, even though I have friends less than half that age passing away from genetic disabilities. Perhaps it doesn't matter how old the people you lose are, you always want more time with them. I woke up to spurts of sobs, realizing she was really gone. But I found comfort in believing that I'd see her again one day; it's ok if you disagree with this.

I dreamt that I met her in her office. It was one of those quick dreams you dream, right before waking up, so we didn't talk much, at least from what I can remember. It was a few days after I found out. I've been having this heaviness in the bottom of my gut from not having corresponded with her in several months and from not knowing she was so ill. I mean, I know that everybody is dying, at least in theory; I just thought I'd have more time with her. I probably dreamt this because I've been staring at the picture of when I surprised her in her office. Her grad student took this picture of us together on my phone; we were sitting in front of her fabric sofa and one of her bookshelves neatly overstuffed with books and a picture of the virgin Mary (at least I think it's the virgin Mary) resting on top, next to a glass green incent holder; she was sitting in a chair next to me with her arm around my shoulder; we're both smiling—me with my huge, loud grin, and her with her gentle, soft smile. She liked that I had printed and mailed that picture for her, saying that she hadn't had her picture taken in a while and that she looked peaceful.

In my Korean culture, dreams have meanings, although I am not apt enough to interpret them. I got a sense she was telling me not to feel bad, that I could give back to others, the way she gave to me. So even in her death, she was encouraging and comforting me, like how she told me that I was in the right place, at the right time, in the midst of my brain turning into mush with 16 hour days rewriting cover letters over and over and over again after law school, despite my feeling that I just wasted years of my life and should've gotten a MFA instead, like she advised me to do back when I was a sophomore. And now, I'm the one talking pre-law students out of going to law school.

My mom would say that a dream with the deceased is a bad dream. But I'd ask Brigit to haunt me, like how Heathcliff asked Catherine, except I don't want my obsession to be so obvious and it might be somewhat creepy—to be haunted, that is. My childhood house was hunted, as was the basement of the English Building, but those are tangents for another time.

A few weeks after, I dreamt I found one of her bookshelves out in the midst of the English Building waiting for someone to take care of the remains. I rummaged through it, finding her students' poems and a note she was writing for me on notebook paper that she didn't get around to e-mailing. Of course, I realize how uncharacteristic this is; she would have kept these things on one of her desks and she wouldn't have drafted a

## Brigit Pegeen Kelly

note to me before e-mailing it, at least I don't think... She mentioned in an e-mail how remembering she hadn't e-mailed me back yet would keep her up at night with her list of other things to do. And once, she said that her computer ate the reply she was typing for me, so she was retyping everything. But I never realize how unrealistic my dreams are when I am dreaming and I have no idea if this dream meant anything other than I should finish this poem.

The last time I saw her was the time after my surprise office visit; I had coordinated a well-choreographed schedule of thirty minute visits with friends and former faculty on campus during an October visit. I was running late (a bad habit I picked up in California) in between appointments. On the way to my appointment with her, I fought with my sister, who was already annoyed at me dragging her all over campus to talk to people—her least favorite past time—and she insisted on going back to the inn to check on our mother, who was waiting for us there. Half way to the inn, I said she could just drop me off at the English Building and she could go check on our mom because I wanted to get as much time with Brigit before my next appointment. So, she reluctantly came with, still fuming, but submerged her fumes. It was my first time bringing anyone else with me to talk to Brigit.

Brigit had wanted to talk to me in person about my rejected MFA application. Apparently, her husband, who was also my former poetry professor, thought it was a conflict of interest because I had them both as professors in undergrad. Brigit said that she couldn't convince him otherwise and that my poetry application was one of the better ones. I don't know if she was just saying that to make me feel better. She said she still remembered my poems from class and that that is rare. I was surprised by this, since I have forgotten most of them, including the one about how the University was going to build a new dorm for students with disabilities—I scoffed saying that they might as well build a glass dorm in the middle of the quad to make their tours more convenient and described living in my dorm, wishing that the senior who rolled around jokingly hitting on me would blow up when he came home drunk and smoking cigarettes. My recollection was refreshed writing this. I do remember that Brigit commented that she liked how this poem didn't portray people with disabilities as asexual saints, which she said was common.

Brigit asked me where else I applied, to which I said nowhere, because I just really wanted to work with her. I actually convinced my parents to let me apply to the Illinois' MFA program because Brigit told me she was going to retire soon. You see, my parents really wanted me to finish seminary and stay in California, since I got substantially more personal care services after establishing residency my first year there. And although my parents never expected me to go to college, my mom always wanted me to be a pastor, or a pastor's wife. Perhaps this is why I always thought that I would be homeless when I grew up. Brigit suggested that I apply to Austin, where she sometimes guest taught, saying it takes students many years of applying to several schools before being accepted. It seemed like she was in Austin every time I visited campus previously, or so I thought. I sighed, saying that it took me 9 years to finally move back to my promised land, that I didn't want to go to Texas, and that perhaps it wasn't meant to be since I was just accepted into a legal incubator program in Chicago with an elevator that wasn't really wheelchair accessible and got to return from my California desert wanderings.

She remarked at how experimental my poems were in my application and that my writing was refreshing because it was from real life. She expressed her own frustration, feeling stuck with expectations of academic writing. I think I knew what she meant by experimental and academic, but I should have asked her to clarify. Perhaps it was the hands off style of teaching shared by all of my poetry professors I've had, but she would give one word comments to the poems I mailed her. Beautiful. Ambitious. Does ambitious mean pretentious?—I never thought to ask her to elaborate. I should've asked her if she ever walked away feeling defeated from wrestling words; I should've talked to her more about writing; I'm not sure why we didn't. Perhaps I didn't think it was worth wasting our time together—to have her look for the poems I sent her. I did stop by the Union Bookstore that morning to get one of her books for her to sign; they only had her recent book, not my favorite book of hers I had bought online years ago I put in my laptop bag with Happy's collar when I moved to California, but I lost track of that bag with my countless moves. I held the purchased book in my lap while I talked with her, timidly asking her to sign it as our time dwindled down. She was surprised and

## Brigit Pegeen Kelly

seemed to think my asking was an honor. When I saw what she wrote later: “To Esther, with the beautiful name, with the beautiful smile, with the beautiful soul;” I thought that’s it? I wish she used a pen instead of a pencil.

I couldn’t sleep that night thinking about my MFA rejection. I wasn’t sure if she was suggesting that I might be able to work with her in Austin; but I knew with my luck, I’d go there when she didn’t guest teach.

If I had known it would be the last time I would have with her, I should’ve stayed longer and skipped seeing everybody else I was supposed to see that day, including my next appointment, even if I am developing a crush on him although he’s over 70. I should’ve listened to Brigit’s advice more. I should’ve asked her more meaningful questions. I did ask her how she knew she was Roman Catholic; she said she read a book about religions when she was twelve and decided then. I thought to myself, that she *is* a genius. I was 31 and still figuring out if I even had a denominational preference, after almost two years in seminary before dropping out. I still don’t understand denominational differences. I don’t know why we didn’t talk about religion, as the only two people in the entire English Building horribly hostile against Christianity who were out about it—her with her poetry and me with the “Jesus loves you” sign on the back of my wheelchair. I was so confusingly crushed about the reasons why I wasn’t accepted in her MFA, I stopped by the next morning, even though she said she was free in the afternoon. She was with a student and seemed annoyed I came earlier. I said that I couldn’t stay with my family waiting in the car and I just wanted to say bye. She commented about what a great sister I had, translating for my speech impediment the day before, and I hoped my face didn’t give me away. Brigit always did feel bad that she struggled understanding me in person and seemed relieved when I said her husband wasn’t any better at it, like she thought he was (perhaps I was selfish refusing to use a computer to talk for me like Stephen Hawking, forcing people to really listen, learning my language). OK, so I guess, technically that was the last time I saw her. Perhaps I should’ve made my family (my mom, sister, and two small dogs) wait a few more hours that day? It snowed on the way home that Halloween, lightly covering earth’s sins. The second half of that sentence is from Brigit’s poem her husband showed me from their student days. I only read it in his office once, so I am going off memory.

A green bean flew from my mouth, across the table, when I heard she had cancer. Apparently, it was her second time, but I never knew that there was a first time. I had an ominous feeling then. I was visiting campus for a friend’s wedding and sent Brigit a letter asking to see her, perhaps for a meal or beverage since we’ve never broke bread together, with the most recent version of my poetry collection I was working on about a week before. It took me an extra week to actually mail it out because anything beyond my basic needs is considered a frivolous nuisance by my family. I never heard from Brigit, so I just met some friends before the wedding. I guess that I didn’t think of Brigit either while I was admitted to the ER for four days during my second year of law school with “pneumonia symptoms,” hooked up to IVs and a breathing mask, when I literally thought I was dying.

My sister and I got in late on campus the Friday night before. We passed by the hospital on our way to get a late night meal; the same hospital I was on my way to visit a friend with pneumonia at a year before when I heard she passed. I had an eerie feeling passing that hospital, remembering Amber. I actually had been avoiding visiting campus out of fear of missing Amber more. And I hadn’t really been in contact with Brigit since she explained why I didn’t get into the MFA program; the awkwardness of still being confusingly crushed by the rationale delayed sending her anything. It turned out that Brigit had passed away that Friday night I came in for the wedding. Perhaps she was at that hospital when I passed it. I don’t know what’s worse, if she never saw what I last mailed her or if she had read my poems about death and surviving friends. How insensitive can I be? We always had horrible timing.

When my aunt visited us from Korea, she told me that when her mother (my grandmother) passed away, that she felt alone in the world for the first time. Even though she wasn’t always with my grandmother, she had felt safe knowing that my grandmother was around somewhere. I’m still fuming at how my mom’s siblings treated my grandmother, who raised them by herself and with cigarettes in place of a husband, selling her house and



## Brigit Pegeen Kelly

making her wander between her seven children's houses like a vagabond. But what my aunt said about my grandmother was how I felt when I learned of Brigit's passing; truly alone for the first time.

Brigit, only you and I  
know if any of this actually happened  
and how many of my lines  
are actually yours.  
With you gone ahead,  
I guess that leaves only me.

You always told me  
that I had something  
important to say  
and that I had  
a strong voice,  
long before I realized  
I had anything  
to say at all.  
Ok, so, maybe  
I added important and strong.  
You were never  
fond of adjectives—  
with your fondness for  
em dashes.

I wish I could have said  
good-bye to you  
at the funeral  
that I wasn't invited to—  
seeing your unmarked grave.  
I wish I could have pressed  
my fingers prints on your coffin,  
like I did for my friend, John,  
who seemed more Irish than Catholic.  
But there I go again,  
being the narcissistic student,  
only thinking  
about myself.

How do you even write a poem  
for the Celtic goddess of poetry  
other poets adored?  
For the patroness saint of farm animals  
and lost college students?

I wonder if she would've been mortified  
if she knew I wrote all this.  
She would've never approved of  
being called a goddess or a saint.  
She would've never approved of  
these metaphors. But these metaphors  
are fitting; her songs live on,  
in between the realms of

**Brigit Pegeen Kelly**

folklore and spirituality,  
in the thin layer above the underworld  
bleeding into our world.

Who cares if the goddess  
or saint was manmade?  
She was so real to me.