

POETRY

*How Bad?,
Sustained,
In Which I Am Told "Life Isn't a Movie" and Realize It's a Television Show,
and
"Write One That'll Make Me Cry."*

How Bad?

In high school, I met my best-friend's sister, Megan, accidentally.
I had seen her pictures around the house from her childhood to her modeling gigs

in London where she ran into Eisenberg & Cavil
and all her brother could tell her to ask was why Batman vs. Superman was so awful.

It wasn't until one weekend, sifting through the frozen food in their family freezer,
talking to the dog, when we, both thinking we were the only ones downstairs,

came face to face. I screamed; Rollin ran down in a towel and introduced us,
back when our dialogue felt closer to a sitcom where our problems were resolved

within half an hour and harder moments were always bookended with a laugh track.
Right now, Meg is stuck in Nashville where her apartment roof was ripped off

and through the window she saw the tornado in her courtyard. Not far from her,
and thirty minutes from my house, James and Donna Eaton died beside each other

on the mattress they were thrown from. After fifty-eight years of marriage, they
both passed away beside the other and I can't help but wonder what they went

through in those decades. I can't help but wonder what the next fifty-eight years hold;
I think about the fires in Australia, COVID-19, and how Chap asked me

just yesterday If this was how the world would end and I told him not to ask me questions like that again.
Hoarders call forth hoarders as shelves continue to deplete, and after Tom Hanks's announcement

someone tweeted "now we all know someone we love who has it." As I drive past
Pre-Y2K padlocked stoplights, I think about how it's been a week since I wrote the first line of this poem,

and since then the NBA has cancelled its season. Since then, late night shows are now devoid
of studio audiences. The appointed leader of virus prevention at a clinic in Poplar Bluff

just told his wife over the phone: "I'm not going to let you get this and I'm not going to
bring it home." She will be put on a ventilator if she gets one. Their daughter told me

when something like this takes over "we realize how little we have." We realize that most
of our walls are artificial, but we can still walk above active volcanoes. We can still televise it.

And we can scrub our hands every twenty minutes, but even then we can't pretend
to properly predict who might yet be contagious. Still, with whatever comes next,

we will try to prove ourselves to be dominant. Safe. Living life-hacks.
It's the monk eating pine-leaves to stay preserved, the mother with the matchstick between her teeth

while cutting onions to keep herself from crying, or us wondering whether
Eleanor Rigby and Father McKenzie were in the same church the whole time.

Last weekend, a band kept time with a fire alarm, changing musical signatures to the ringing
in the jazz club, reminding us that maybe we can still make music out of chaos.

We can stay on that tightrope at least a little longer. To prepare, in every way we know how, preventing or perpetuating panic. Growing up, mom would call us back inside the house

as dad pointed toward lightening over damaged trees. The same storm we feared was the same storm we couldn't stop watching, so when we were told the weather was meant to get pretty bad,

we had to ask: "how bad?"

Sustained.

Again, morning to evening with wind blowing thoroughly. Considered: Us.

“Backwards red-rum?” asked *Stranger A*.

Truth. Absolute Murder. Order preferred and time propelled

continues it somehow
and somehow it continues propelled

time and preferred order. Murder absolute
truth. A stranger asked, “red-rum backwards?”

Us: Considered. Thoroughly
blowing wind with evening to morning,

again. Sustained.

In Which I Am Told "Life Isn't a Movie" and Realize It's a Television Show

"I wish there was a way to know you're in the good ol' days before you've actually left them." -Andy Bernard

We knew. With dialogue far too rich to not have been given to us, an alphabetically assigned introduction,

and a compelling cast with questionable backstories, we knew. Consider Kuleshov and how he spoke of scenes

in terms of two values: the isolated moment and the way it played into an over-arching lot. We couldn't recreate the meaning if we tried.

Cultivating our own callbacks, we did our best to find consistency, tuning into every episode. Between dying dreams and unexplainable plot twists,

the writing kept us on our toes. Watching our own lives unfold, we spoke of these years together in terms of television;

Shawn Spencer said "it's too late to recast. The part is yours," and I felt that. Only after the cameras were rolling

did we know: our semesters were seasons with interwoven story-arcs that we could only hope came full circle.

Right when it seemed scenes were wrapping up the show, they continued to contract an added cast of fan-favorites, each with their own interests

and recognizable knocks. The hand-sketched sign swung open with the door every time a familiar face came through the living room with a quip for one of us to write down

in the tattered, aptly titled College Ruled notebook. For four years we've written them down and for four years we've read them aloud.

The script is finished and the set has started clearing out. When the camera panned away, we promised to appear on each other's shows, some hoping to create their own.

Some will. Some won't. Some will "get on a boat with Levar Burton and never come back."

We know these four years were the springboards for further storylines and spin-offs, but we also know there will only be one Chateau.

“Write One That’ll Make Me Cry.”

This prompting to write on “people I care about” by someone I care about began with a pen, an empty apartment, and Brian Crain’s “Rain” on repeat.

Brian Crane: an artist Liz introduced me to by playing a piece on the piano, commenting before and after her performance that it wasn’t very good. She told me once

that Chap was one of the few that could truly encourage her and that she always knew he meant it. Strength is not synonymous with stubbornness. Strength is having friends to speak

into your life and that make sure you’re listening. Clive Staples said safe investments didn’t exist and to love at all was to be vulnerable; I think he was right.

An old friend waited for marriage to savor two years of intimacy, storytelling, and confiding in someone he thought he could trust. She traded it for sex.

Consider: Seth Alexander, before he could grow a beard, held by the neck somewhere between the playing cards and the candy, simultaneously

holding onto the breath he has left, still scanning the aisles he was being held above, in case a classmate comes into the store and sees him. At the same time,

an eleven month old South Korean tries a little harder for attention in Seoul, pulling the right ear of his roommate that’s trying to sleep.

Bak-Jeong-Su is unaware of the time, the abnormality of his cleft lip, or the three siblings in Adams, Tennessee that can’t wait to meet him.

Consider: filling a kitchen at two in the morning with confessions, recollections, and fears, forgetting for a second that anyone has class in the morning. Consider: actually being seen.