

Joe

Brian Satrom

I came for the quiet, the conversation.

All evening you've returned to the story of a man you loved
who didn't love you, or who loved you
but couldn't stop loving others. This archeology,

sorting of shards, searching for a whole.

It seems late in the year for crickets. There's an ongoing

murmur from the freeway, cars on I-90 headed for Beloit,
Rockford, Chicago,

you after work counting cards out loud, fifteen two,

fifteen four, a pair for six,

moving a peg around a cribbage board, me with my cards,

fifteen two, fifteen four, the kitchen door

open a crack to let out the cigarette smoke, the air cold,
the moon just above the horizon, huge,

weighed down like a loaded barge, night with its chaos
of barking dogs, your voice

a thread holding things together, a virus in your blood

trying to undo you

like fingers working away at a knot. Joe,

don't judge yourself. This afternoon

I walked down State Street with shoppers and students,
their shadows touching, a man

with an overcoat, gray beard, and earrings, playing harmonica
on a park bench, singing the blues, teenagers

on corners in baggy jeans, cigarettes between thumb
and forefinger, giving each other
bored, knowing looks, a preacher, bible in one hand,

pointing with his other, store windows

with their oversized photos of fashion models, images
of happiness like bright, fluttering kites.