

**CAE**

**SURA**

**A LITERARY ARTS**

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**FALL 2010**

**CAESURA**





# CAESURA

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*Fall 2010*



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cae • su • ra [sa-zhoor-a, sa-zhoorae] n., plural

1. *Prosody*. A break, esp. a sense *pause*, usually near the middle of a verse, and marked in *scansion* by double vertical line, as in:
2. A division made by the ending of word within a *foot*, or sometimes at the end of a foot, esp. in certain recognized places near the middle of a verse.

*To pause is to consider. Consider the words preceding the caesura and prepare to relate them to the words that follow.*



"Life is either a great adventure or nothing."

~ Hellen Keller

# Chelsea Gendvil

## *A Country Lives Under*

A country lives under  
packed  
moist dirt.  
As unber mounds  
amass,  
people,  
pink and pulpy,  
make volitional shifts  
further  
into cool, conformed  
burrows.  
Some soil  
sands the lips,  
drops in  
the mouth.  
A bland, chalky  
savor  
easily swallowed. Gag  
reflex,  
disabled. Some disturbed  
hands will claw  
upwards.  
Earth is heard pushing and ripping  
solid  
beneath nail bed.  
A scent of metal  
and mineral.  
Few mouths will  
reach  
an opening to  
tongue and gulp  
air.  
Those that do,  
will be told,  
“It is oxygen you need.”  
But it’s  
not,  
it’s air we need.

## *I'll Write You a City*

For your jumbled mind  
a jungle gym city twisting  
with chrome Egyptian blue  
and gold alongside rushing  
rusted fire  
escapes on reflective buildings'  
windows  
steps and walkways  
loping onto others across traffic  
above asphalt Black  
slides slipping you down  
cataract your breaking  
bones like marrow tear drop  
splinters from building tops  
to center streets to sidewalks  
lashing around  
corners around blocks  
Jumping  
gather your broken body  
bereft of pain  
You kick flip  
off trampoline grass beds  
over and onto street lamp  
platforms  
From one to another  
you find yourself  
falling for adrenaline  
with sewer hole saviors  
sprouting spring water  
Surfing on sports' cars  
The speed increasing  
your fingers fasten  
to the hood  
An abrupt stop  
sends you soaring  
towards the phone lines  
I hear you, I made you pray  
for a gymnast's finesse.  
I've decided  
this city is not for you.

## *Everyone Down Here Loves Him*

Bobbing in a sea of them,  
face strained upwards, his chin  
skims their floating heads.  
People, small mobile walls  
of mass, translucent meshes  
of color, fluid like liquid ghosts.  
Constantly they shift, sifting  
through one another like malleable  
puzzle fragments, barely retaining  
their silhouette in the blur  
of crowd. Bodies enabling  
buoyancy, their undertow,  
only a passing thought.  
When he does not suffocate,  
when a black cloth vacuum  
does not void his breath,  
he speaks of an earth glancer  
loving him. A rope, he thinks,  
pulls his throat above all.  
Memories, swimming in arms  
and faces, violently kicking in  
jaws and slapping eye sockets  
accidentally, are lost. He does not  
know they exist, allowing him to.

## *Tardy December*

Tardy December, where is the white sky?  
My skin is swathed with autumnal warmth.  
This morning's dreams have fixed my mistakes,  
and brought back the dead.  
Those once cold, sunken faces are blushing  
like the leaves still cling to the balking branches.  
With my breath not visible, am I right to forget  
winter? The heat in my chest says yes.

The Lavender Evening becomes the thief of  
Afternoon's time as Light sees fit to quit the day.  
The dreams disguised as memories begin to dissipate.  
They are the fog from my chilled cheeks  
waiting for Denial's bliss to remember what really exists.  
Loss blooms the darkening sky into my throat.  
I recall that winter must always come  
despite early December's lies. My errors seem repeated.  
They are a skipping record. And the dead die again.  
Their memory as fleeting as sound.

## Tyro

I sit beneath you  
as one sitting under  
a fruit-bearing tree.  
I consume your words.  
They fall  
from your branching thoughts  
into my open mouth.







# Alison Langleiben

## *Girl in Field of White Weeds*

Joe, a girl in a field of white  
weeds vanishes behind brick.  
I watch her go and know  
loneliness. Did I disappear  
as smoke, how I wanted to?  
Or was I a sun burst on the  
window of your eye?

I watch a boy stroke  
a girl's hair. She doesn't  
feel him. The last time  
you held me, I was counting  
wallpaper flowers, sheep.

His white button-down  
reminds me of your collar  
bone. Her eyes were bent  
on another's arm. In her,  
they are rocking, a stranger's  
mouth crowning her head.

In me, we swayed, talked  
about everything but  
ourselves. I knew you  
played the guitar, you  
knew I sang in my sleep.  
We never heard each other.

For your first birthday  
with me, I baked you a cake,  
dizzy with sweet heat,  
the oven reflecting our  
desire to eat. We let it burn  
as you tore apart my apron.

The boy notices the girl's  
distant eyes. She shrugs.  
As I watch the girl go,  
I imagine your pale skin  
under lamplight. The white  
weeds break under her.

## *Vesuvius*

A living city buried  
in green fields, under ash.  
Farewell Pompeii, Herculaneum.

She licks burnt lips, smoldering.  
A park planted in her navel.  
How restless her eruption. How ready.

She has been quiet, but she knows  
you built a church on her head,  
how you drove the nails into her face.

Men have forgotten she ever  
thundered, spouted buried cities.  
Even Hercules knew when to pray.

Her lungs are smoking serpents.  
Every hundred years the air is pure.  
Tonight her mouth opens.

The Love Scene, *from the perspective of Ethel Barrymore*

No cell phones. No coughing, choking, speaking  
at any time. Feel free to applaud my bitter  
glance. I love you in stage whisper.  
They build pornos out of my embrace, eating  
my body in swift sweeps. I am a thought stripper.  
The lead's tongue wiggles its way into me,  
love scene laughing, audience sucking my  
sigh in like a kiss. I tremble, unable to recall  
how I came to be this. My name in a locked box.  
The seats creak, leaning forward. Anticipation  
sweats and loosens his tie. Don't worry,  
little lady, says the hero man.  
He has affairs with mirrors and sometimes Jim,  
our costume designer, who eats my plastic hero  
like he's the last piece of candy on earth.  
In my unreality, I am the one in love, and the shaking  
of my skinny actress body is from wanting, not fear.  
Because I'm playing a woman  
I throw my little victim body to its knees, weeping.  
Because I'm playing a victim  
I throw my little woman body to his knees, begging.  
The lamb is led to the altar. The community cheers  
as the blood creeps out and onto their feet.

## Batman's Robin

Dick. *Sidekick*.  
Like a jerk of the leg,  
a dog urinating. They don't know  
what it is, just you and a knight,  
ten men with guns, each wanting  
the glory of your dead head  
under his boot. I live for the fight,  
first jump off the bar, flying,  
about to die, and then-  
he catches you, your partner  
grasping your wrists like God.  
Then he vanishes behind smoke,  
and me with him, ghosts together.  
I'm not in love with him.  
I'm in love with the dark  
way he smiles, about to win.  
The tar in his voice bubbling  
like lava in his throat. When  
he kicks Joker in the balls  
for kidnapping me again.  
His smile as he unties me  
slowly, the whole room  
unconscious, and he holds me  
like he would a son, or a brother.  
We never cry, but I feel him  
shake under all that armor.  
When he carries me to bed, careful  
of my new wounds, he kisses my  
forehead and I'm gone, drunk on  
lying in a bed that belongs to him.  
Who wouldn't be dazzled, stutter,  
want to sigh when he pats me  
on the shoulder. Kid. I'll be his  
son, his confidant, his kick.  
My motorcycle purrs at his car,  
a cat in heat. They sleep together  
in the cave of his subconscious.  
Sometimes he waxes my ride.  
After, he stands immobile  
for hours. I watch him,  
knowing there is a love deeper  
than sex, and it lives  
in the moments when we both  
might die together - and don't.



“Character, like a photograph, develops in darkness.”

— *Yousuf Karsh*



# Sundas Nazir

## *Nothingness*

It stared back at me. The steam from the grilled, one-and-a-half inch thick T-bone steak barred my vision just like the dark brown, diagonal stripes on it. My champagne colored, bone china, square plate with handcrafted yellow flowers was made pretty with beet and avocado salad. She even sprinkled it with violets, my favorite flower. The small chandelier spilled dim-yellow light in the kitchen and the warmth made me want to be seven-years-old again. The sight of the dark, pink sky and snowy evening from outside the window made me shiver with guilt.

Was I even worthy of this warmth? Did I deserve this meal that mom prepared especially for me? No and no.

“Why do you do this?”

“Mom, I was just-”

“You enjoy it, don’t you.”

“I was going to start-”

“Shut up! Just shut up!” mom grabbed my plate and threw it against the wheat colored wall like a Frisbee. The plate shattered into pieces the size of raindrops. They shone like chunks of hail on concrete. The sound was thunderous and piercing. The world seemed to end. There was not going to be life after this sound. It was the ultimate scream. The silly t-bone steak landed on the floor against the wall and began to enjoy the show already. Two violets fell near it like vulnerable babies. Beet and avocado spread on the floor like preschooler’s square blocks.

Angry, she got up and knocked her glass of water on the mahogany, square table. The water seeped through the red bamboo table mat in front of me and thick, continuous drops patted my thigh in condolence.

“Don’t eat. Go to hell. Die!” she stormed out of the kitchen.

All the colors seemed to have escaped through the only window. They were gone forever, just like my friend Zara, not to going to return, just like dad. Everything was in grayscale, even the violets.

I cleaned the mess in slow motion.

My room, too, was tacit, a dead jukebox, and I wanted to cry. There was no window high enough for me to fly out. Wings were not needed. Dinnertime was officially over and I didn’t eat. The emptiness filled the giant abysses in my stomach, all of them. Life was finally in control.

She just didn’t understand.



# Daren Bastedo

## *Octogenarian*

Bertola's boby  
rests atop the  
mercury colored  
pillow and sheets.  
"I wanted us  
to just rust  
together." stated  
a morose Marty,  
83, before his  
attempt at ending  
himself. The bullet  
made its impression  
in her forehead, a  
16 pt. period gave  
her a new religion.  
Marty packed heat.  
Packed a pocket  
pistol inside stain-  
less-steel colored  
corduroy's. He had  
hoped, after the  
shot tolled all  
ears, that the  
cancer, emanating  
from her lung, was  
a black smoke  
exhaled through the  
hole in her  
head. Marty, a crouched  
scarecrow, bled it out,  
half-dead

as the nurse pressured his  
wound with her  
bare hand.



# Lori Lovaglio

## *Medusa In The Morning*

Tiny tongues flick at my face.  
Jade scales scrape the nape of  
my neck. But I'm used to that

now. Skin, bone white, hair  
glimmered like smoky quartz,  
all gone now. The North was

Swallowing me. Infested with  
frost, all my thoughts were below  
zero. I wanted heat from the sky,

not from charred wood. What did  
my hands look like with the sun  
holding them? Did the water shine?

I wanted to feel my pupils shrink  
in the bright thickness of the light.  
Curiosity slept within my cells.

An aching to separate from the  
false shadows. Athena, soaking in  
her strength, collapsed upon me

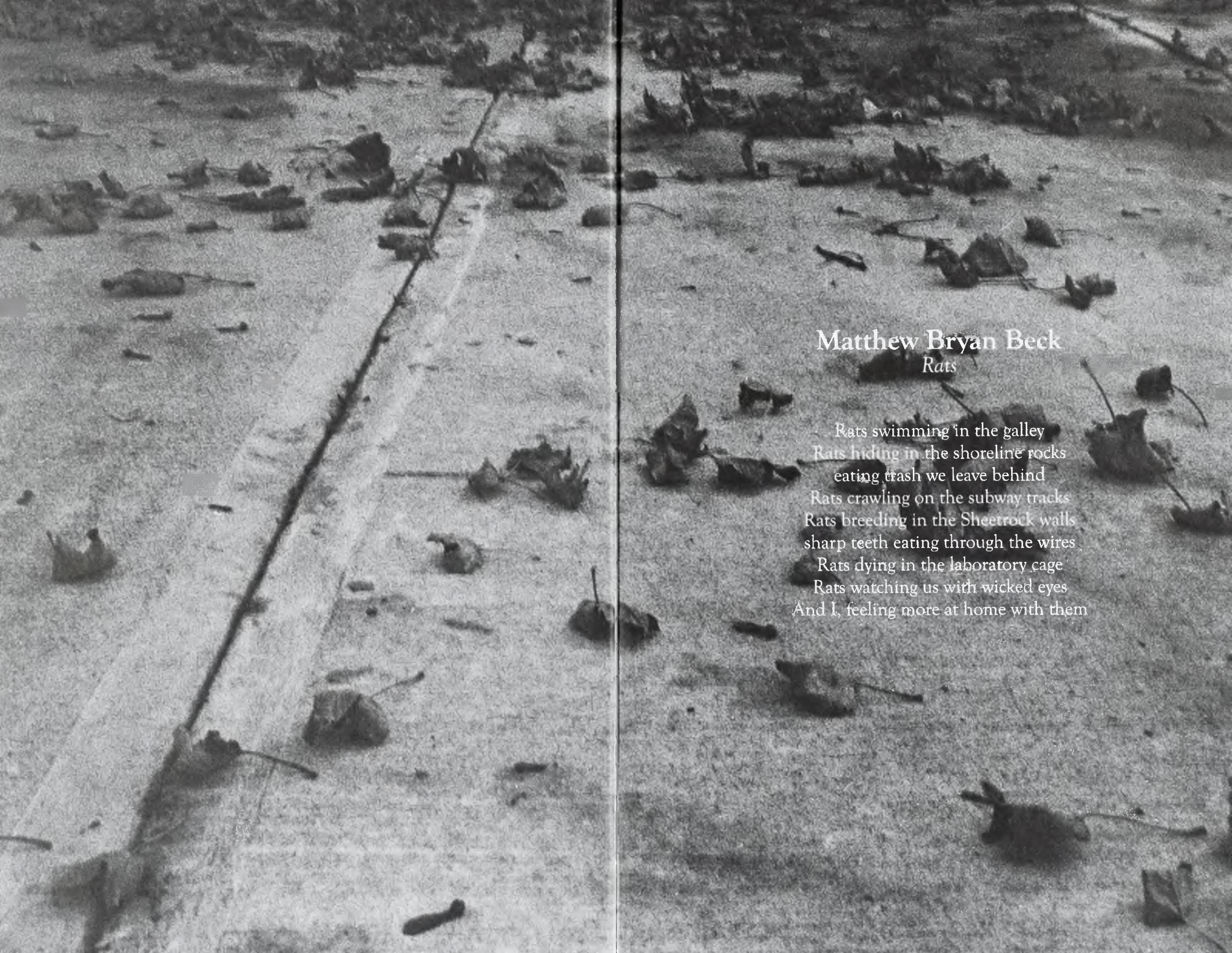
with her golden fist. My body  
turned frigid, my organs iced. But  
I am not dead. I feel the life as I

sleep, twitching around my head.  
I no longer want the sun. I only  
want for someone to look at me.

To touch me. To hear the Gorgon  
blood that still moves quietly inside.  
They come for me. I cannot control

what happens to them. I whisper, I  
am not a monster. I want more than  
serpentine dreams. All I have is stone.





Matthew Bryan Beck  
*Rats*

Rats swimming in the galley  
Rats hiding in the shoreline rocks  
eating trash we leave behind  
Rats crawling on the subway tracks  
Rats breeding in the Sheetrock walls  
sharp teeth eating through the wires  
Rats dying in the laboratory cage  
Rats watching us with wicked eyes  
And I, feeling more at home with them



# Matthew Bryan Beck

## *The Sun and The Moon*

Once upon a time, long ago, the Sun fell in love with the Moon. He first saw her, for a fleeting moment, pure and white, as he was dying for the day and she was birthing. As the last breaths of life and light left his burning lungs, he whispered her name, but she heard it not. She was achingly beautiful: radiant, glistening, perfectly-shaped.

For thousands of years, he would wait all day for her, but always they would pass without meeting, only a momentary glance or word before gravity pulled them apart. They lived alone, separated at opposite sides of their young charge, Earth, yet always thinking of each other. She would reflect the light he left for her, and he would lie dormant, sad, cold, counting the minutes and hours until he saw her again.

The Sun could bear the infinite isolation and sadness no more. Determined to see her face, embrace her and profess his love, even if it killed him, he put all his strength and weight to fight gravity, trembling, sweating, breathing flames and lava, and broke off his orbit. He lumbered towards her. Soon she noticed him floating towards her and smiled in recognition as their eyes met, then screamed suddenly in terror and panic. *Go back! Go back, my dear!* He would not stop, he could not, for mass and energy propelled him at furiously increasing speeds beyond his control. Suddenly, the young Earth, seeing the Sun throttling toward certain destruction, threw himself in front of the path. They collided with tremendous force.

There was a second of silence —

They both exploded in a majestic bursting cloud of hydrogen, helium, oxygen and carbon, the blinding brightness of the neon lights and deafening crunch of density causing the witnessing stars and planets to cower and whimper and hide for cover. Mercury was killed instantaneously and without warning. The Moon screamed and wept and wept and wept, uncontrollably. The smoldering sulfuric ash and stardust finally settled, the sonic boom fading.

After healing from their wounds and extending their condolences, the surviving planets migrated to surrogate solar systems, pleaded with her before they drifted into deep space to join them and start a new life. But she would not speak a word, would not move from that tragic spot.

She never shone again, wore blackness in mourning forever.

## The Gravedigger

I dig holes in the ground for people who have died to live in. Their loved ones can have peace of mind that they are safe in a nice dry wooden box. I don't tell them the worms eat the bodies. I love the smell of freshly-dug soil: wet, clean, pure, like blood from a wound. It reminds me of my mother. The grass is greener in the cemetery than anywhere else. God made it that way to give the dead people something pretty and colorful to look at. Even they get tired of the same old things. The trees are naked in the winter, like beautiful, slender women without their clothes on. I love the quiet. I always talk out loud, say what it is I am thinking at that moment, because nobody can laugh. People can't hurt me here, because everyone is already dead.


Sometimes I dream about vacationing high above on soft clouds, somewhere warm and bright, far away from the frigid cemetery and my cold, stiff companions. (I don't like beaches. Once, when I was a kid, I cut my foot on the beach. I cried, but my dad just laughed and drank his warm Rheingold and told me to not be such a faggot. I hate beaches.) Corpses are good friends. They don't say much, but they are good listeners. I've memorized all their names: Arthur P. Madison, b. 1890 d. 1918, John B. Garvey, b. 1911 d. 1967, Mary McGill, b. 1972 d. 1972. (I'd tell you their names, but you'd forget them anyway.)

Nobody recognizes me, stops to talk to me in the street. Nobody calls my phone. I had it ripped out two years ago. I eat alone, deserted diners at 3 AM and greasy waffle houses for Tuesday specials. The waitresses know me by order, not name. I have nobody to go home to. Once I had golden retriever, but she got tired one day and died. I dug a hole in the back woods behind the shed, spread dead leaves over her to keep warm at night. I live in a trailer by the lake (the end that nobody comes around, there was a chemical spill about 15 years ago, but I don't mind it) like the old woman who lived in that shoe, except I got no children. I always wanted to be married and have children to call my own.

When I was still young and hopeful, when my heart was still full of aspirations, my mind still full of plans, my spirit still full of fire, I went to the senior prom with a pretty little blonde thing named Sue-Ellen Rogers. She wore a yellow taffeta dress, with a white rose corsage pinned to the glistening, magical fabric. She looked like one of those Greek goddesses (Artemis, I think it was) leaving her moon wrapped in sunbeams. I wore my only suit, a faded powder-blue my dad wore to his wedding: a size too big, clanking my bony, lanky figure like a weathered sail, smelling of moth balls and Old Spice. She asked me to dance. I agreed quickly, smiling like a fool, my crooked teeth like a broken windshield freshly cleaned. I danced like a bear against an angel-footed queen: she, graceful, fluid, airy, effortless, me, clumsy, oafish, lumbering, ugly.

She married a plumber.





“The pain passes, but the beauty remains.”

– Renoir

# Sundas Nazir

## *Companion Leaf*

It came through the window  
On a serene, Fall night.  
It was the last orange leaf  
That came to my rescue.

Truly, all I needed were ears.  
I needed them to listen to me.  
I needed them for myself to hear myself.  
But, the leaf had none to lend me.

Disappointed, I crumpled it.  
I shattered it into plenty of pieces.  
I let the aches and cracks be my music  
And I wanted to smile but couldn't.

I sprinkled them on my face.  
They cut through me, the pieces!  
They felt like broken glass tracing itself on a newborn.  
Where shall I hide my face?

## *Four Score and Five Days Ago*

I made a boat out of blue paper.  
I let it sail. I let it trail.  
All my secrets were written on it  
And I let them sail, too.

To myself, I was unfair. I was unaware  
Of the pirates who were patiently waiting.  
Waiting on the other side of the shore,  
Waiting to receive my boat.

When the pirates saw the paper boat.  
They made sure it sailed only to them.  
Then, they picked up my boat  
And set sail on it. Wicked, they were.

Forever, they vanished, I thought,  
With my paper boat of secrets, those wicked pirates.  
And I let them vanish.  
Nothing was under my control.

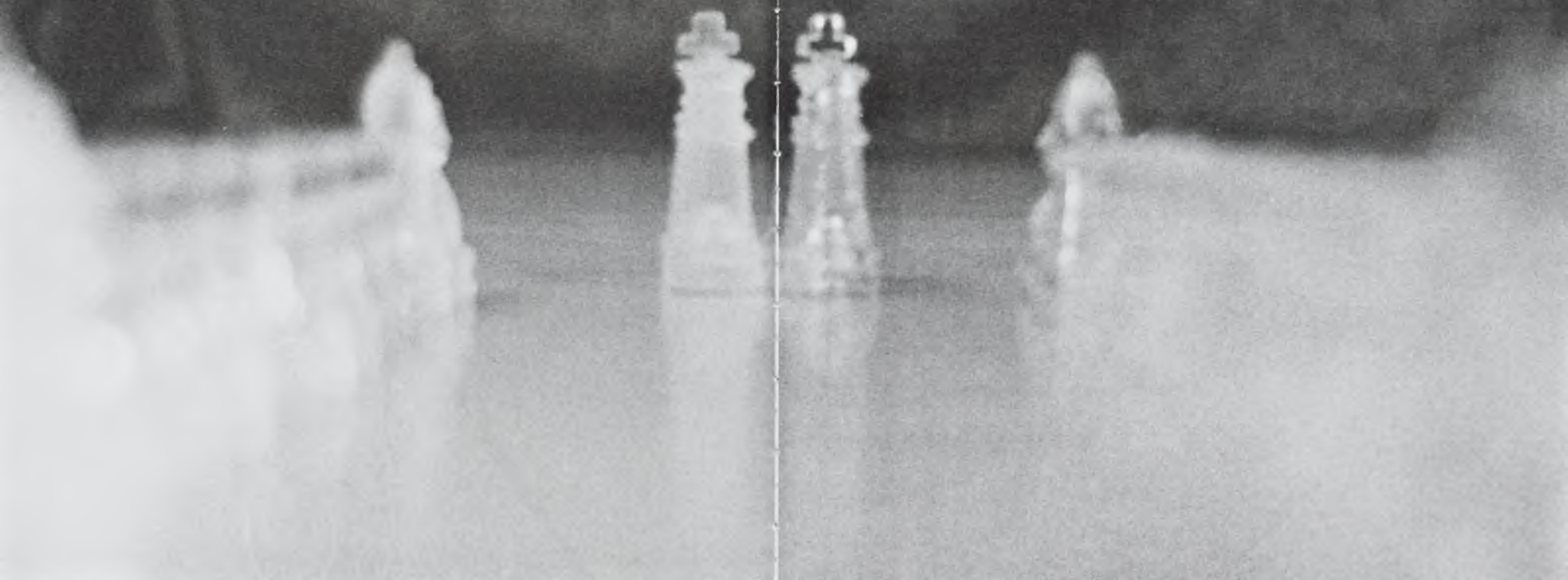
I embodied the water and made the waves echo.  
It was that calm, cold, cloudy day when  
I saw it and yelled, "Let me go! Let me go!"  
After such a long time, I finally saw my boat!

The pirates had abandoned my secrets on blue paper.  
They had called it a mismatch.  
So, I made another boat out of red paper.  
And I let it sail. And I let it trail.



“An artist cannot fail; it is a success to be one.”

— *Charles Horton Cooley*





# Michael Dalessio

## *The Snowy Heart's Remix*

The snow boy was thinking of the snow girl  
When lust burned his heart  
The flames tip toe anxiously  
Until he gradually melted  
And disappeared...

The snow girl is frozen in a drop of water  
Perhaps this is a gift from the snow boy  
She thinks this and melts,  
Shrinking as she thinks  
And the drop of water stands tall

They begin to drift empty,  
Leak out and soak into the once white  
Snow melts, evaporates, and yearns for the snowy  
Desire to be rejoined as a solid circulatory centrifuge.

## *Raw*

It's those lines  
That once spoken are brought to life  
Travel further than just finite words  
More than just black and white verbs

It's those raw lines  
Those street lines  
Those Brooklyn, Baltimore, California lines  
That hold more than just dull gray letters slapped together

It's those scribbled down on loose leaf lines  
Those 2 am recording studio lines  
Those Bedford and Avenue S. lines  
Those freestyle...electronically enhanced lines

It's those lines that reach into you and generate  
The high definition lights encrypted in the walls  
of your cranium.



Megan Moriarty

*Love Is An Aviary*

My heart is a pigeon, bobbing its head  
back and forth, looking for crumbs to live on.  
It's so ugly and it's so stupid.  
My heart sits by his window and coos.

Two leaves had fallen in similar ways.  
They met on the corner of two streets  
on a windy day, and talked about the sadness  
of being dead but still existing.

My heart was a sparrow when he loved me.  
He trapped it in his politician hands  
and hid it while he looked up at the sky.  
My heart perched in a cage, and it would sing.

I hear cats scratching at passing cars,  
keeping moonlight vigil over birds' nests.  
We lose each other living in dark rooms.

# Sal Tarantola

## *The Emerald Pool*

I press the crisp, shiny leaves of the magazine hard to my face and thoughtfully breath in the smell of freshly printed ink: could a connection be made between me and the artist? How effortlessly he lays the black line upon vellum to portray shadow and form. His awe-inspiring mastery of perspective and wordless panels conveys deeply meaningful, fantastic experiences to me. His draftsmanship transcends Michelangelo and Rembrandt (my art heroes, discovered in encyclopedias in my grandmother's basement) and his drawings virtuosity is not something easily studied and learned. I have spent years poring over the intricacies of his hatch work: he almost never used pencil to rough-in the characters of his stories, nor relied upon a script to tell his tale. He simply puts nib to paper and allows a kind of stream-of-consciousness to flow through. He signs his name as Moebius or Gir alternately, and I can never be sure why he assumes these personas when drawing his post-apocalyptic alien landscapes and creatures. I know only that his work transports me to far-flung, lush, and enticing worlds where I feel powerful, meaningful, and look forward to endless discovery, enigmatic possibility where nothing is taboo and everything—even the mundane—is sensual.

His earth name is Jean Henri Gaston Giraud. He's been creating masterpieces since just after the end of World War II, more than twenty years before my birth, and from a land where most artists prior had been (and still are) revered for impressionistically painting what they saw and not, as he said in rare French television interviews, "By manipulating and forming into shapes the ideas that flow through me from someplace and from some power beyond my comprehension. I am only an interpreter."

I hold in my hands a 1976 *Métal Hurlant*: a comic swollen with Moebius' beautifully-rendered black and white art. Intended for adults, it found its way into the hands of an eleven-year-old boy who had just begun to discover his artistic ability, a doorway to inspiration, a portent to revelations that would not manifest for another thirty years. Clouds quickly gather I sit reading, a dry thatch in a densely-grown opening of oaks and ancient, rustling, contorted willows. (I travel the thorny paths to this spot frequently when solitude, unencumbered thought, and freedom to create seem impossible back at the house. Sometimes I come here to draw, other times to read, sometimes both, and still other times simply to surround myself with sentient nature, seek some connection to that elusive, magical aspect of Being often shrouded in the banal repetition of everyday living.) The writhing canopy of dark afternoon clouds mute the sunlight. Several raindrops meet their end upon my book's pages. The possibility of a sudden deluge is enthralling. Through some unseen inner sovereignty, I am somehow an active participant in the looming storm. But there is no downpour. There is only the fecund and fragrant earth, a cool, des-



ultery wind, and I in the middle of it. sensing that no other human have knowledge of such wonders.

The living clouds settle, become still, a shadowy blanket over the world. There is still enough light to continue reading. Now a distant sound, like splashing water. A deep, vibrating moan, as if a great weight moved upon the earth. I've been to this spot countless times over the years, but I never dare explore the thickly-treed terrain. I find no need to go beyond my comfortable reading thatch. The primrose, blackberries, and wild mandrake are reading companions. But this new sound compels me to rise and examine more closely this. The nearest body of moving water is the River Severn, which lies about a hundred miles to the west of Shrewsbury, in the Welsh Marches. I've lived here for more than forty years, though unaware of any tributaries where perhaps an unmapped vein leads the great brackish stream. Discovering some unseen estuary, lake, or pond in this vast woodland solitude entices me to forge my way through the tough sinews of the forest, a roof of twisted, mingled, mossy branches. Outreached arms of opposing trees stretching across the forest floor touch one another, over eons joining to become one. The little sunlight is nearly obliterated, barely enough see more than twenty feet in any direction, and each step the possibility of a punctured eye from countless low-lying, four-inch thorns the trees wield like armor. I look back to my thatch and still see my book. The breezes play with its pages, but with a few more steps into the dark, my novel, my thatch, and my trees disappear.

The watery splash! Louder, made by something with substantial mass. Straight ahead from my position and to the left. I carefully approach, while holding my arms as rigidly as possible against my sides, to keep from being impaled by the massive spikes of the branches. I creep along, my face feels the subtle chill of cool air from an unobstructed, wide open area, but the darkness of this new world prevents any sight of a possible opening in the distance. Excitement swells within me. My fantasy carries me, leaving one plane of existence and entering another. Millipedes and crickets abound in the wood. Every creature known and unknown finds refuge in the labyrinth of knotted vines, and they each crawl freely from branch to branch and across my back. I can't swat them off for fear of injuring myself more than any of their bites or stings, but my curiosity is so strong that the creatures' presence became less and less frightening with each laggard step. I slowly grow accustomed to the physics of the low-slung place, and soon walk with stature, still stooped, though stiff and apprehensive. Strange, voiceless high-speed birds soar by me and wing their way through the maze of thickets. Even if I never find the source of splashing water, this newly discovered sanctum will forever be closer with the hidden world.

Suddenly, without warning, the earth beneath me falls away and I descend into sudden, blinding light, plunge feet-first and thigh-deep into warm red mud. Crumbled debris, soiled stones, and wiry roots crash on me. I regain my senses. My bare arms are thorn-shredded and bloody, and most of my shirt torn away. I cough and spit and rub the dirt from my eyes.

I scan my new surroundings. Clinging millipedes. Tall, green, swaying reeds.

Buzzing dragonflies. The talk of frogs and flight of grasshoppers. Squadrons of mosquitoes, mayflies, and ladybugs. Through an opening in the overgrowth, a small pool of emerald water, sparkling like I've never seen before. My legs are solidly encased by the deep mud. The water splashes more loudly and clearly. The plop of wet feet coming toward me. I swallow. Two wondrous creatures emerge from the glowing marsh and silently creep toward me, their pinkish flesh glistening like crystal. They are female, hairless, unclothed, but resembled no woman I've ever seen. Black, almond-shaped eyes. Grinning, round cheeks. As they near me, the pink becomes more vivid and their nakedness more tangible, the gooseflesh of their moist skin like soft bumps on a sheet of fine paper. Without a sound, one takes my right arm, the other my left, and I am freed from the deep pocket of mud, breathless, nearly naked, my trousers and boots still in the mud. We hurl headlong through the bulrushes and into the deep, green pool.

We descend dark water to depths I couldn't possibly swim alone, past huge, luminous, slow-moving fish with bulbous glowing eyes. The basin of the pool widens like the belly of a dormant volcano, and the basalt bottom of the algae-covered floor is a large opening. To its right a great stone slab reveals a cavernous vestibule, ancient steps hewn from the stone. Our heads penetrate the water. I gasp powerfully, fresh oxygen filling my lungs. We scale the slimy steps to a strangely dry white stone landing, a circular beam of sunlight above us, the space cavernous and echoing.

"Where am I? How can such a thing be?" I whisper. "I live within earshot of this place, yet its enormity would seem impossible to keep hidden?" The creatures spoke no words I could understand, only soft, sibilant moans. We walk through the sunlit hall and come to an intricately carved wooden door, slightly ajar, queer designs cut into. A muffled rumble then the strong vibration of a massive object being dragged across the earth: the creatures sealed the doorway. I slowly push the door open and enter the room.

The room is narrow, only seven or eight feet wide (the walls stretching up as high as the sunlit opening in the cavern), yet deep, like a train tunnel carved through a mountain. Positioned in the corner, a large unmade bed, and next to it, a small, round table holding a single burning taper. On the mattress, a crumpled blanket and unopened books. A tall bookcase houses incalculable volumes and a cleared space for an alarm clock. Scraps of white paper and an ashtray holding two wooden pipes on the floor. A black figure with longish, white hair sits at a tilted table. Drawings are hung upon the walls of this strange stone domicile. Closer inspection: these are cartoon pages by Moebius! They aren't reproductions, either, actually drawn by his hand: the pen impressions and uneven quality to the black ink. I am astounded. I feel ill and begin to shake. I glimpse the figure once again. Was that him? A familiar song plays from some unseen source: "Fire" by Jimi Hendrix.

"Do you like what you see, I mean the art, do you like it?" His voice is light and sincere, but the walls increase the volume so much that he could have whispered and I would have heard him perfectly.

"Yes. The artwork is beautiful. This man's work is without a doubt the greatest example of a gift to be bestowed upon any human being. I've been trying for years to understand how he gets those beautiful shadows and depth of form with only the fewest of pen strokes. He's amazing." I feel my knees shaking as I speak. "Come here and have a seat. Let's talk awhile."

I'm unsure before, but now I'm certain; he speaks with a French accent, and through the dim corridor, his appearance becomes more familiar: large nose, round glasses, the almost fetal position he assumes upon his stool, and the drawing board at which he now works. Am I dreaming?

I get up close. He sits with a sable brush making wonderful, flowing black lines upon a sheet of large paper. A small stereo is on the floor, surrounded by Jimi Hendrix CD's and cigarette butts. A lamp with a magnifying-glass lens positioned directly over his head shines upon the table. He doesn't look at me, continues to draw. His hair is white as the paper, and his balding dome shiny and unwrinkled; if this is him, he'll be somewhere near ninety years old, but this man doesn't look a day over seventy. I can no longer restrain my anticipation:

"Are you him? Are you Jean Giraud?"

"Oui."

Don't waste this amazing opportunity blathering how you worship this man's work, or ask where the hell we were and what he was doing here. I have things to ask this brilliant man, but I have no words. I stare at his hand as it moved effortlessly upon the paper, as if guided from some invisible force. He doesn't hold his brush any differently than I do, and he doesn't use any more exotic materials than mine; he concentrates completely on the activity, undistracted by my presence. He feels any obligation to acknowledge my company, so long as he was working. He stops. He dips the brush in a jar of water and places it on the table. He spins on his stool, adjusts his glasses, and focuses on my face:

"My boy, don't be bothered with the mechanics of art. A truly great artist can create beautiful lines with a stick in the sand just as easily as he can with a brush of the finest sable. I never attended art lessons. I learned all I know from looking at the art of the artists whose work moved me, and then I learned how to commingle with nature and interact with that thinly veiled world that lies just beneath the one that you live in, and to attempt to channel that energy to interpret it upon the page. Do not try to emulate or reproduce the work I've created. Your work is beautiful, I've seen it. What a bore it would be if every blade of grass in the field were the same. Your moments spent in the thatch, your desire to lift the veil, and your journey here are proof enough that you're already there. The final lesson to prepare you for this endless journey is to concentrate on what it is that you're creating. Use your experiences to guide your hand and rely upon them, and not yourself or your preconceptions, to make your art. You are a beautiful person and I'm glad that my art has brought joy in your life, but if you'll excuse me, I need to finish my work. The girls will take you back."

Moebius picks up his brush as though I wasn't there. The two pink creatures are waiting for me.

# Megan Moriarty

## *Childhood*

I was younger. I cleaned his fingernails.  
I fingered the cut in my mouth  
and swallowed blood.

We listened to the possums exchange  
drugs for cash and midnight kisses  
behind the neighbor's garbage can.

They're so soft when they're born.  
They have no eyes. They all look the same.

Earlier today, I wished that I could drift down his block  
slowly enough for the kittens to chase my heels.



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# Greg Bonanno

## *My Time As President*

Greg Bonanno: 17. Still a boy-man.

Principal Ellsworth: late 40's.

Sarah Crimp: 17. Pretty and tall.

Student Voice: Offstage. Read by one person.

### SCENE

*A high-school auditorium. A podium is left of center and three chairs behind it. Sarah Crimp is positioned front stage and begins signing with first line. The student body murmurs during the active part of the performance.*

### PRINCIPAL

Thanks. Thanks. (Roar of mocking cheer) Okay. Okay. (*Agitated!*) Well, uh, Mr. Bonanno petitioned enough of you to have this assembly. I wasn't thrilled with the idea initially, but it looks like the we all got in here without too much of a riot. Well, what can I say that Greg isn't going to say? I just want to say that we're looking towards next year and want to congratulate Bonnie O'Leary, our first female student body president, on winning the election. We're proud to make progress. Without further ado, our outgoing president, Greg Bonanno.

*(There is little applause. A small group starts a chant "loser". Greg approaches holding his blazer button, alternating waves from left of the stage to right.)*

### GREG

Thank you, thank you! Okay, okay, calm down. Principal Ellsworth was kind enough to give me this time, even though it was only right. Please, thank you, yes. I'd like to set the record straight today. Clear the thoughts some underclassman might be having. And welcome our first female president, (*unenthusiastically*) Bonnie O'Leary. But enough about her, she'll be here next year.

### STUDENT VOICE

Where did our student fee money go?

*(Greg ignores the call, continues quickly.)* I also want to thank the lovely and talented Sarah Crimp. She is our American Sign Language signer, or whatever. She'll be helping out the one full-deaf student and the half-deaf student today. And clear the record-whoever accused me of being cruel towards people with disabilities (particu-

larly before my presidency and last year when I acted as governor of the juniors ) I give you Sarah. If that's not enough, I urge you to walk over the handicap plank on the way out, the plank-or whatever it's called-I petitioned for. Ladies and gentlemen, my thoughts on this sad occasion of my departure are towards the future, but with a strong and accurate consternation towards the past; towards my time as president, and towards how it has changed my life. I hope to set the record straight, to clarify why decisions were made. If you told me one month ago that I, Greg Bonanno, would stand up here having had our pride compromised, I wouldn't have believed you. You must be wrong. That's why I'm here. To reclaim, yes we can. On the morning of the November incident, I, like many of you, was in class. I remember *(looks down to someone in the crowd)*...hey, could you to stop texting? No, next to you. Yeah, you. Could you please stop texting? Seriously? It's rude and inconsiderate.

STUDENT VOICE

I'm not texting, I'm taking notes.

GREG

You are using a cell phone to, uh, *(air-quotes)* "take notes"?

*(An egg from the crowd peps Greg on his head. Three more follow and the student voices go wild. The sound is loud and different objections to Greg's policies can be heard along with curses and all-around general unruly. The crowd is silent and the play is meant to shift out of real time and becomes a conversations between the characters on the stage.)*

GREG

*(Addressing Sarah)* I did this for you, you know.

SARAH

*(Shocked)* Me? What? What did you do for me?

GREG

All of this. My time as president, the election, this assembly, the pizzazz. I...wanted to impress you.

SARAH

I don't even really know you, Greg? You're, like, a jerk?



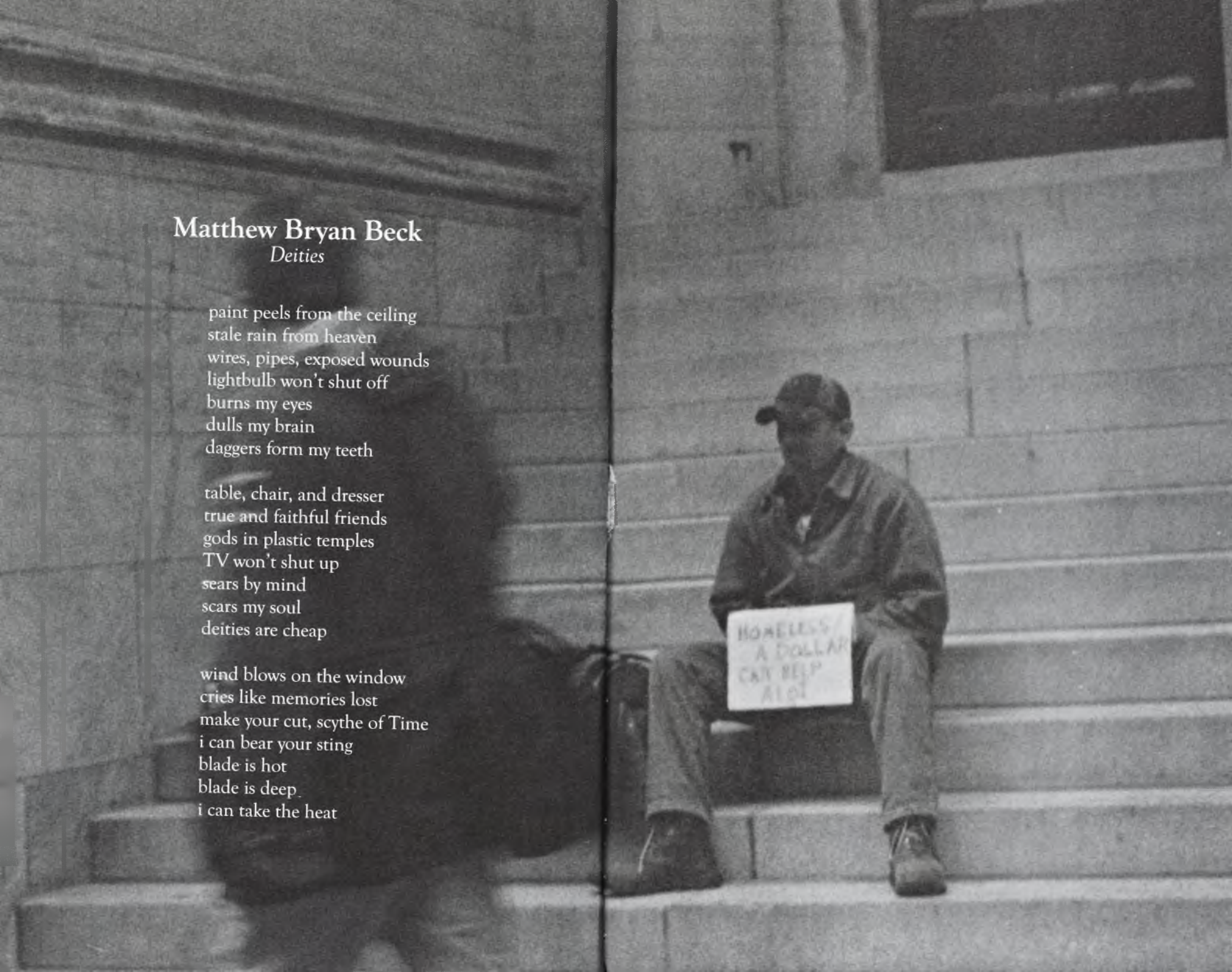
## Matthew Bryan Beck

### *Deities*

paint peels from the ceiling  
stale rain from heaven  
wires, pipes, exposed wounds  
lightbulb won't shut off  
burns my eyes  
dulls my brain  
daggers form my teeth

table, chair, and dresser  
true and faithful friends  
gods in plastic temples  
TV won't shut up  
sears by mind  
scars my soul  
deities are cheap

wind blows on the window  
cries like memories lost  
make your cut, scythe of Time  
i can bear your sting  
blade is hot  
blade is deep  
i can take the heat



HOMELESS  
A DOLLAR  
CAN HELP  
A LOT

“Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.”

— *Henry David Thoreau*



# Andrea Curry

## On Materialism: An Essay

Marie shops frequently. She has a good job, makes a substantial salary, buys what she wants, when she wants: Coach bags, stilettos, custom-tailored designer clothes, items she sometimes never even uses. On the outside, Marie appears to have it all. Yet she feels unhappy and depressed—and does not know why.

In recent years, research has shown that material possessions are not the cause of happiness. Leaf Van Boven, Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and Thomas Gilovich, Professor of Psychology at Cornell University, found in an experiment that people who agree with statements like “you will buy things just because you want them” tend to be less satisfied with life. This can lead to depression, paranoia, and narcissistic behavior. (They found that people spent more time contemplating their experimental purchases rather than their material purchases. Experimental purchases take on a more symbolic meaning, whereas the material purchases are more complicated in the abstract sense. A new shoe is still a shoe, the new blouse is still a blouse, but the experience of a trip to the Swiss Alps, for instance, is something you don’t forget.) You forget these simple moments and focus instead on what’s ‘new’ and ‘hot’.

Billboards, television, magazines, and other advertisements scream immediate gratification: you need this to be happy. You not only need to be making a lot of money, you need to be making more than someone else to. A Solnick and Hemenway study found that people prefer to earn \$50,000 a year while everyone else earns \$25,000, instead of earning \$100,000 themselves and having other people earn \$200,000. Why would people choose to earn less? It’s not really about how much you earn, it’s about how much you earn in comparison to other people.

Today’s ‘need for greed’ is tomorrow’s cry for help. Money can become your god. The ego seeks pleasure and gain. It is an endless hedonistic quest. Our money and material possessions will never bring us lasting happiness. You don’t need clinical research and studies to realize this. The only way to true happiness is the surrender of your ego. Ego dictates you need to be better than others, and consumer culture tells you how. Momentarily happy with your new toys, you end as empty an shell. Like Marie, you will always want more. You are intended for a deeper level of understanding. Why continue with the charade?

# Matthew Bryan Beck

## *The Idiots' Guide to Single White Girls*

The young, single, white 20-something girl is the strangest breed of mammal. In the entire social animal kingdom, she is the most mysterious and prized, hunted by internet creepers, and Sephora samplers alike. She congregates mainly in urban metropolitan areas: New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, Chicago, Toronto, etc. She traditionally travels in packs of similar bred white females (there is much photographic evidence on social networking sites to support this theory) but often pairs off in a slightly homoerotic friendship with another select female partner, with whom she often has lunch/breakfast/dinner dates, goes to the movies with, goes on vacations with, texts and calls religiously, and often jokes with that they are “married”.

She can be observed at trendy concerts, parties, bars, nightclubs, restaurants, bookstores, coffeeshops, college campuses, theaters, subways and parks (usually intently reading a trendy book, or at least making sure other people notice she is intently reading a trendy book) or just walking down the street looking wind-swept and care-free: she knows she has a full credit card. She wears scarves and pea coats and bangs and sunglasses when there's no sun out, and carries Coach bags and emotional baggage from her distant father and clinging, overbearing mother. She makes “random” references to movies that, like, everyone has seen, and will religiously follow a trendy television show until it gets “predictable”.

She changes careers and tastes more often than her profile picture or favorite John Mayer song. Her iPod or iTunes library is a virtual garage sale of music she thought she liked, music her friends told her to like, music she used to like, music she pretends to like, music she is afraid her friends will find out she likes, music she sorta likes (but only listened to once or twice), and music she totally has forgotten she owns. She changes her hair color and hairstyle incessantly. The progression usually goes something like this: long > brown > blond > short > brown > long > auburn > short > black > lesbian.

The young, independent, white 20-something girl never knows what she wants. She goes to college and studies Nursing or Secondary Education or English Literature or Creative Writing or Dance or Film or Music or Visual Arts--but she rarely sticks to just one. She has no cemented identity. She confidently roams the earth in search of purpose and meaning, firmly shod in Ferragamo's. Unlike the typical Black person who is comfortable being black, or the typical Asian person who is comfortable being Asian, or the typical Hispanic person who is comfortable being Hispanic, the white girl is never quite comfortable being...white. She secretly, subconsciously feels guilty for receiving so much attention and free-passes from society,

and she internalizes this guilt, and it manifests itself in spurts of passive-aggressive behavior and mild self-hatred.

The young, single white female (with perhaps the exception of the young, single white male) is the most lonely of the species. Despite her extensive network of close friends, family, acquaintances, classmates, random internet friends, and guys she strings along, the young, single white female always feels alone and unfulfilled. Why? She wants the perks of Carrie Bradshaw, but craves the emotional stability of June Cleaver. She wants to play in Nordstrom, but come home to Walnut Grove. She wants the proverbial best of both worlds, but can never completely commit to either, and as a consequence, never gets the full benefits of either. She is perhaps the most internally-conflicted organism known to nature. In her blissful state of youth, singleness, and whiteness, she never quite matures, perpetually stuck.

She is Forever 21.

# Stephen Krauska

## *Small Apples*

We ball up our imperfections  
like little wads of lard dough;

put them in opposite hands,  
clasp digits together and walk  
through Central Park.

We squeeze and shape the  
little wads into a crust

with delicate movements.  
Wrapping them tightly around  
little rust colored apples, we

bake them  
at three-fifty  
for thirty minutes  
and eat them.  
They're delicious,

as delicious as that  
first sin must have tasted.  
They taste like something  
to love, like Lexapro  
and anemia.

Pastries of imperfection  
that assure us we were  
never angels  
and can thank Heaven  
for each other's bodies

with sweat  
and teeth  
and fingernails  
and naked stars  
and mouth  
on mouth  
tasting  
small apples.

## *Sedation*

The room is dressed in  
a faded flower  
wallpaper blouse with  
blue nylon threadbare  
shoes. The addresses

have been cut out of  
all the expired  
copies of Newsweek  
Time, People and Golf  
Digest to match the

anonymity  
of all us waiting,  
unnamed, contagious,  
monitoring clocks.  
The punctuating,

sick coughs are made worse  
by the dry static  
hanging in latex-  
scented, filtered air.  
Alcohol-gel hand

sanitizer in  
clear bottles ward off  
colds and flus from the  
cold, chipped Formica  
reception counter.

My ears jump at each  
jarring sound hoping  
it's my name. Leaning  
on my knees, shaking  
both legs to the beat



of my nerves, I count  
all the abscesses  
on the walls where chairs  
have been risen from  
too quickly.

Like an untrained ear  
to an out of tune  
piano I sit  
unsure of my own  
cacophony; too

tight or too loose, I  
have no good answer.  
Prescribed wavelengths of  
smooth electric sound,  
harmonious cure,

wait in the lyrical,  
shout of my name,  
rhythmic count of blood  
pressure, recorded  
in salt colored pills

which taste like sugar  
sound like the distant  
atonal buzz of  
electric locusts  
tuning TV static.

## *The Ten Chromosomes*

a long one just between  
my shoulder blades, dark  
wildly curly; unattractive

the leathery wrinkles  
of my fading tan pinched  
between my fingers.

the tweezers sloped at an aerodynamic  
angle. A precision guided chrome weapon  
just back from razing of my eyebrows.

Narrowing in I think about  
the chromosomes that differ between  
humans and chimpanzees.

palm sweating under the hot  
lights, as it sweats for the dollar  
bill in someone else's wallet

holding my breath to steady  
myself as the tweezers aim  
as I make everything but eye contact  
with the woman across the subway

licking my lips a habit  
to make the words sssslide  
out just a little easier

the tweezers grab  
a tight, ravenous hold

the starts, a brief barbiturate  
thrill, a rush of blood

I spit on the floor  
fuck it

I draw it out  
wasting as much daylight  
as I can

I utter a low "goddamn"  
as the pain builds

my hand is chrome and gleams to honor  
Vanity at the fountain of Nacirema  
before the great reflection

the helix unravels in a final pin thick sting.



**Matthew Bryan Beck**

*Manhattan Sonnet*

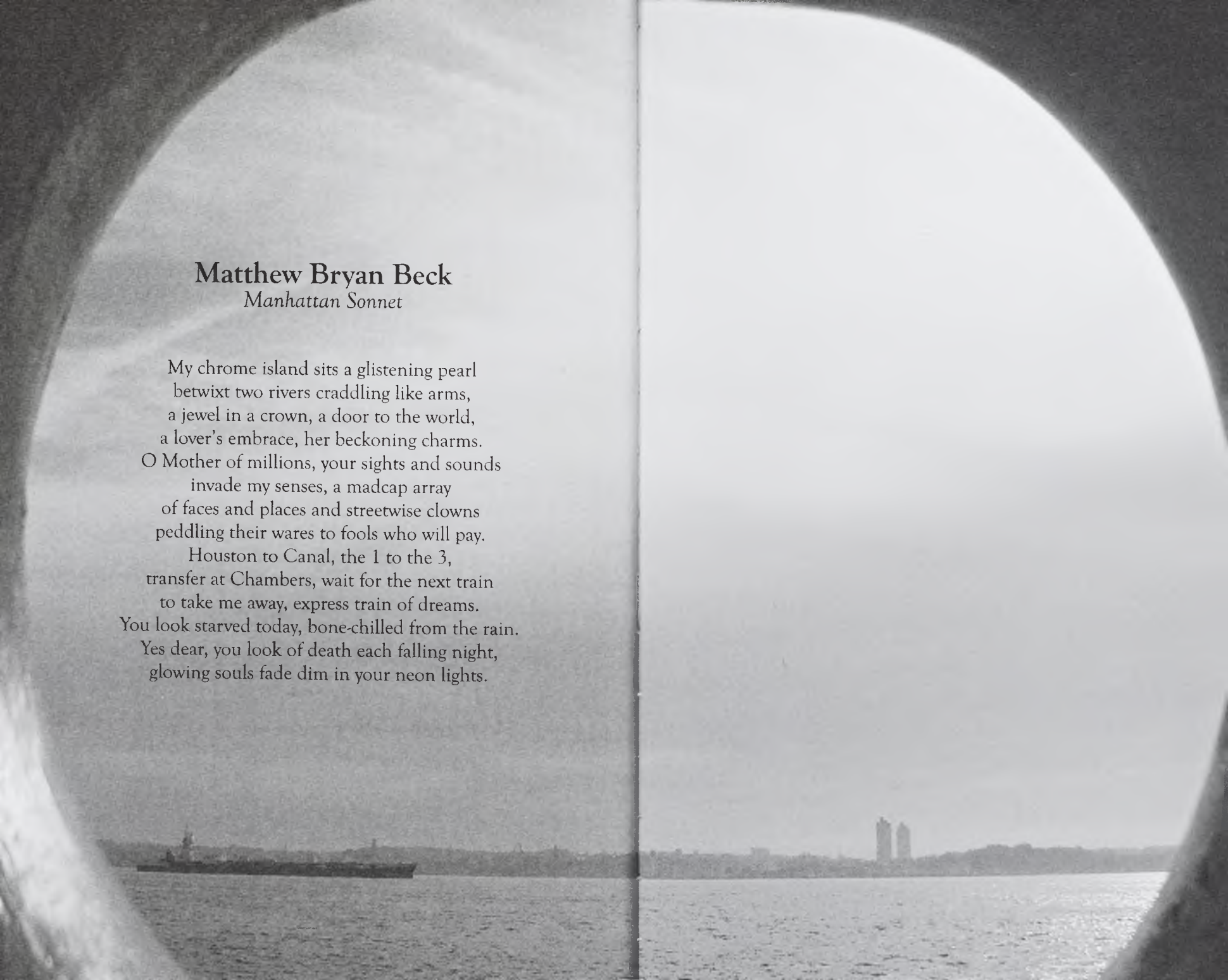
My chrome island sits a glistening pearl  
betwixt two rivers craddling like arms,  
a jewel in a crown, a door to the world,  
a lover's embrace, her beckoning charms.

○ Mother of millions, your sights and sounds  
invade my senses, a madcap array  
of faces and places and streetwise clowns  
peddling their wares to fools who will pay.

Houston to Canal, the 1 to the 3,  
transfer at Chambers, wait for the next train  
to take me away, express train of dreams.

You look starved today, bone-chilled from the rain.

Yes dear, you look of death each falling night,  
glowing souls fade dim in your neon lights.





**Andrea Curry**  
*How slower life would move*

Even a whisper of your name gives me shivers  
yet there is still no answer  
the question simple  
will there ever be a me and you?  
Oh, how I need to know  
I hold hope  
Even when life seems stagnant  
your smile brings me cheer  
I can still hear your laugh  
to my ear, how sweet the sound  
How slower life would move  
If every moment was spent with you

*Planted*

As the grape plucked  
from the vine rots  
so does the human heart  
when not planted on the Rock.















# Edward Venturi

## Meet Jim

Jim – average looking

Voice – male voice

Tom/Gary/Lucy/Woman/Doctor – played by same male actor

### SCENE

*Stage is dark. Spot light on Jim front center stage, wearing a suit.*

### VOICE

This is Jim. Jim is a 25 year-old graduate from Rutgers University. He majored in English, graduated with a 3.9 GPA. Recently, due to financial troubles, he moved in with his mom. Jim has no job, no girlfriend, no car, no money. Meet Jim.

*Lights out. Lights up. Jim sits across from Tom, the interviewer.*

TOM

So, Jim. *(Looks at sheet)* Jim...Jameson, is it? I'm Tom, you can call me Mr. Silver. How ya feelin' today, Jim?

JIM

Okay.

TOM

Good, good, beautiful day, beautiful day. So...tell me. Why do you think you would be good for this position?

JIM

*(Takes a moment to think)* Well...I am a very hard worker, I am reliable, I show up on time, I always give 110 percent...

TOM

Impossible! No such thing. *(Looks at sheet)* I see you graduated with a 3.9 GPA. I wouldn't know by looking at you. That's pretty big, though. You must feel pretty cocky with a GPA that big? The ladies must love when you whip your big GPA out. They probably gasp. Don't they?

JIM  
(Beat) What?

TOM  
I knew guys like you in college. So cool with your hair brushed like that, and...getting good grades on tests...

JIM  
I...I don't...I don't know what you're talking about.

TOM  
You wouldn't. You know what. I think this interview is over. Thanks for coming in. (He gets up to give Jim a handshake)

JIM  
Wait, what? That was it? (Slowly rising)

TOM  
Oh, so now YOU wanna give the interview, huh? Well guess what, Jack. This is my turf! I call the shots!

JIM  
What?

TOM  
You're fired!

JIM  
But I don't even work here?

TOM  
Get out of here! (Jim starts to leave) You'll never clean toilets in this town, ever!

*Lights out. Spotlight on Jim center stage.*

VOICE  
So, that didn't go as planned, but Jim is resilient. Cleaning toilets wasn't for him. In fact, he has another interview right now.

*Lights up. Jim sits across from Gary.*

GARY  
(Holding resume) Scarlet Knights, eh? Looks like we got ourselves a Rutgers man?

That is one helluva team. Ya know, I went to every game in the '84 season.

JIM

*(Smiles awkwardly)* Oh, you went to Rutgers, too?

GARY

Did I?! Take a look at that pretty piece. *(Points to a diploma on the wall.)*

JIM

Oh, nice, that's cool...

GARY

Well, I'll have to check, but I'm sure we can find a place for a Rutgers man like you in our company.

JIM

This is great! Thank you so much, sir, I really needed this...

GARY

Don't mention it! Scarlet Knights gotta look out for each other.

JIM

Thank you! And might I add, sir, you have a very attractive daughter! *(Pointing to a framed picture on his desk.)*

GARY

*(Stops laughing and becomes very serious. He picks up the picture frame.)* This...is my son. *(Beat)* He has Down's Syndrome. *(Jim looks away from Gary, towards the audience, awkward.)*

*Lights out. Spot light on Jim.*

VOICE

Missed it by that much. Probably better off. Stockroom manager wasn't Jim's dream-job. Besides, he never would have landed this gig making phone calls.

*Lights up. Lucy shows Jim to his desk at center stage, holding a stack of booklets.*

LUCY

Well, here you are, honey. *(Gives him the booklets)* These are the numbers you call, this is the script, this is a booklet of common questions and answers a customer might have, and here is a list of numbers and references. If you have any questions



I'll be in my office. Remember, just stick to the script and keep smiling. You can hear a smile on the phone, you know.

JIM

*(With a big smile)* I'll try.

LUCY

That's the spirit! *(Exits)*

JIM

*(Stops smiling. Plops booklets on desk, takes a seat. Stares at his desk for a moment. Takes a deep breath. Opens to the first page and dials the number. Waits a few seconds, phone to his ear, begins reading script.)* Hi, is this Mr. Abou-Chrouch? *(Beat)* Hi, my name is Jim Jameson, and I'm calling from WingTech. How are you doing today, sir? *(Beat)* That's great to hear. As you may know, WingTech is the best birdcage maker in Massachusetts. We have a reputation for high-quality craftsmanship, excellent maintenance service, and timely delivery. Each birdcage is hand crafted to fulfill you and your bird's needs. Now, Mr. Abou-Chrouch, can you tell me what kind of bird you have? *(Beat)* Oh. Well...have you ever had a bird? *(Beat)* Mhmm, okay. Well, would you like to buy a bird? *(Beat)* Hello? Mr. Abou-chrouch? Hello? *(Hangs up. Crosses out name, dials second number.)* Hello, is this Mrs. Abston? *(Beat)* Hi, my name is Jim Jameson, how are you doing today, ma'am? *(Lucy returns to stage and stands off to the side; he doesn't see her.)* That's great to hear. I'm calling from Wingtech, and as you may know, Wingtech is the best birdcage maker in Massachusetts. *(Jim notices Lucy and slows down his speech. He stares confused. Lucy just stands there smiling.)* We have a reputation for high-quality *(looking back at his script)*...craftsmanship, excellent maintenance service, and timely delivery. *(Lucy starts making motions near her mouth to signal Jim to smile. Jim puts on a big smile and his voice becomes very enthusiastic.)* Each birdcage is hand crafted to fulfill your bird's needs. Mrs. Abston, can you tell me what kind of bird you have? *(Beat)* You don't say! Well...do you want a bird? *(Beat)* Oh, me neither! Well, it's been wonderful talking to you! Have a nice day! *(Hangs up the phone. Looks at Lucy.)* What a wonderful lady!

LUCY

*(Walks over to Jim's desk, still smiling)* Is everything going okay, Jim?

JIM

*(Smiling back)* Everything is going super!

LUCY

Alright, just checking in. Keep making those calls, and just remember, *(beat)* keep



smiling! (Smiles with hands. Exits.)

JIM

(Stops smiling. Looks at the list. Dials a third number.) Hello, is this Mr. Bario? (Beat) Hi, my name is Jim Jameson, and I'm calling from WingTech. Hello! Hello? Mr. Bario? (Hangs up.. Phone rings again. Jim looks confused. Hesitantly picks up.) WingTech, Jim Jameson speaking. (Pause) Mom!? You can't call me here, how did you even get this number? (Beat) I'm fine, everything is going fine...yes, everyone is being nice to me...yes...I have to get back to work, okay?...okay...I love you, too...bye. (Hangs up.)

Lights out. Spot light on Jim center stage.

VOICE

So, WingTech wasn't for Jim. He is better off doing something else, so much untapped potential. Where does that leave Jim? Where does he fit in? Jim has no job, no girlfriend, no car, no money, lives at home with his mother. Meet Jim.

JIM

(Looking around for the voice) Hey, I don't want to be Jim anymore?

VOICE

(Brief pause)...But you have to. You are Jim.

JIM

Yeah, but I don't want to be Jim anymore?

VOICE

(Pause) Then who do you want to be?

JIM

I don't care. I just don't want to be Jim.

VOICEOVER

Well...how about you be Josh?

JIM

I'd rather not have a 'J' name.

VOICE

Okay, then what about...Phil?

JIM

Phil?...Phil...hmm...alright...I can try it.

VOICE

*(Clears throat.)* This is Phil. Phil is a 25 year-old graduate from Rutgers University. He majored in English and graduated with a 3.9 GPA. Recently, due to financial troubles, he moved in with his mother. Phil has no job, no girlfriend, no car, no money. This is Phil's life. Meet Phil. Phil has been hired as a door-to-door cutlery salesman. *(A briefcase of knives is in Phil's hands. A single door on-set; a spot light on the door and Phil. He knocks. A woman answers.)*

PHIL

Hi, I'm with ChopCut, and I'm here to sell you knives!

WOMAN

I don't need any more knives.

PHIL

But these knives are mighty sharp. Let me show you! *(Takes out knife and stabs woman. Looks at audience and smiles.)*

WOMAN

*(Holds her wound.)* Wow. *(Beat)* They sure are sharp. *(Turns to audience)* I'll take a whole set! *(She throws a wad of money. takes the knife set, slams the door.)*

VOICE

Wait a minute; you can't just stab that woman!

PHIL

Why not?

VOICE

That's not how it works!

PHIL

But she bought the knives?

VOICE

Yeah, but you stabbed her!

PHIL

I don't see the problem?

VOICE

You can't just stab someone and expect them to buy the knives from you?

PHIL  
But she did?

VOICE  
It doesn't work like that!

*Lights out. Lights up. The desk is back to the side with a doctor sitting behind it. Phil is sitting in a chair across from the doctor.*

PHIL  
Doc, I think I might be crazy.

DOCTOR  
Are you hearing the voice again?

PHIL  
Yeah. I can talk to it now. *(Beat)* And it talks back.

DOCTOR  
And what do you talk about?

PHIL  
He usually just tells me what's going on in my life, so I told him I didn't wanna be Jim anymore.

DOCTOR  
And what did he say?

PHIL  
He said I could be Phil. So I'm Phil now.

DOCTOR  
How does it feel being Phil?

PHIL  
Same as it feels being Jim. *(Pause)* I stabbed another woman.

DOCTOR  
Did she buy the screwdrivers this time?

PHIL  
No, it was steak knives, and she did buy them.

DOCTOR  
Congratulations on your first sale.

PHIL  
Thanks. *(Pause)* He said it was wrong to stab her.

DOCTOR  
Do you regret stabbing her?

PHIL  
I don't know.

DOCTOR  
Do *you* think it was wrong to stab her, Phil?  
PHIL  
I don't know. *(Pause)* I mean...she did buy the knives?

DOCTOR  
So, even though there seems to be a slight hint of remorse, you are able to justify your actions because she did, in fact, buy the knives?

PHIL  
*(Starts shaking his head)* Yeah.

DOCTOR  
Interesting.

*Lights out. Spotlight on Phil center stage.*

PHIL  
*(Looking up)* I want this all to stop. I wanna be Jim again.

VOICE  
You have the choice. You can make it stop. Right now.

*Lights out. A phone rings. Gradually lights up. We are in the doctor's office. He is writing at his desk. He checks his watch and answers.*

DOCTOR  
Hello? *(Pause)* Jesus. *(Rubs his head with the free hand.)* No, no, I'll come down. Someone has to call his mother. I'll meet you at the hospital.

Lights out. The faint sound of a church organ is heard. Lights up, the stage reveals a casket. There is a black wall section behind the casket. There is a podium next to the casket.

VOICE

Jim Jameson lived an incredible life, tragically cut short. Jim's life was not measured by money, but by love. A few friends would like to speak on his behalf. Mr. Thom-Silver. *(Tom, wearing all black, stands at the podium.)*

TOM

I only got the chance to meet Jim once. I didn't know him very well. But I know that his GPA was larger than the average GPA. My GPA was only a 2.1. *(Sighs)* I'm going to miss that jerk. Burn in hell, my friend *(touches casket)* burn in hell. *(Walks around the casket, slips on the mustache to become Gary, dressed in all-black.)*

GARY

Jimbo and I were Rutgers men. We knew how to party, have a good time. I'll never forget the time Jim said he wanted to screw my Down's Syndrome son. *(Starts to cry.)* Crazy bastard. I'm gonna miss him. *(Hugs the casket, walks around it, pulls on a blond wig with a connected black veil, becoming Lucy.)*

LUCY

*(With a huge smile on her face)* Jim was always smiling. He was such a happy young man. *(She walks around the casket, behind the wall, crossing herself)*

VOICE

The uh...woman who Jim sold the knives...

WOMAN

The first time I met this kind young man *(beat)* he stabbed me. *(Brief pause)* He sold me a set of the sharpest knives I've ever owned. *(She slams a butcher knife into the top of the casket.)* I owe it all to him for introducing me to ChopCut cutlery!

*Lights out.*

SCENE







A HUNDRED ACRE BLUES

*a crown of sonnets*

by

Matthew Bryan Beck

## I. TIGGER, GET YOUR GUN

Always happy am I? Carefree, you say?  
Yes, I act the clown and fool for you.  
I bounce around, always ready to play  
your foolish games, but if you only knew  
that my total confidence is a lie,  
my bravado a show. I am scared.  
Tiggers never get lost but they do cry  
when nobody sees my soul I have bared.  
My stripes I array to disguise my pain  
a camouflage cloak I lose in the bath  
and paint on before they drip down the drain.  
I wear a fake smile, but under my wrath  
rages. One day when no more I can take  
these woods I'll shoot up. One day I will break.

## II. EYORE IS SO EMO

I'd shoot up these woods. I would break one day.

But I never forget to take my meds,  
can't feel anymore, just a stuffed grey haze,  
a hundred acres of wandering dead.

Depressed I am not; they just think I am.

I am dying to speak, to open my mouth  
but Pooh and the rest just don't give a damn.

Thanks for not noticin' me. Or my house.

I am but sawdust, yet I feel the sting  
of their condescension like a hot blade  
each day I am forgotten. I could sing  
my lungs out but would they even stay?

My nailed tail has forsaken me again,  
but that's okay: so have all my dear friends.



### III. PIGLET, INTERRUPTED

It's not okay. For all of my dear friends  
think me a weakling, a cowering lump  
of pig flesh to trample upon, pretend  
courage and nerve I do lack. Yes, I jump  
at the thought of Heffalumps and Woozles  
and the sound of the howling wind at night.  
But though my frail limbs be like limp noodles,  
I am Piglet, hear me roar. There is might  
within this small frame, these bones like wrought steel  
deceptive under my body petite.  
My stutter is my guise, my roar a squeal,  
but though my words slow formed may be, you treat  
me like a child, not a peer. Prepare  
to see the lamb a lion, O fine bear.

#### IV. CHRISTOPHER ROBIN DISORDER

I saw the lamb a lion, O fine bear,  
I saw you in our Hundred Acre Wood  
pondering, think, think, think. You would share  
your honey with all who asked, so good  
a bear were you, of very little brains,  
but very much heart. Alone I was not  
when I was with you. I am not insane,  
as my doctor's say. I remember our spot  
where we romped and played deep in the green glade.  
Piglet was jealous of the bond we shared.  
Murder most foul he plotted ev'ryday.  
He hated me. He hated me, I swear.  
Were you a phantom, a childhood scheme?  
Was it all in my head? Was it a dream?

## V. RABBIT RAGE

It wasn't in my head. It wasn't a dream.  
I swear those crows were eating all my crops.  
Where is my shotgun, my killing machine?

My scarecrow in vain endeavors to stop  
these foul little beasts. A murderous rage  
my being doth fill when Tigger appears,  
mischief to make. I would take up my spade  
and wipe the grin off his face with one spear  
to the head. Yes, I am a nervous wreck.

But what of it? We each our demons face.  
We each the strongman endeavor to best.

We each the dragon endeavor to slay.

So cut me some slack when I get like this  
My brains are all here. They've just gone amiss.

## VI. POOH WON'T GO TO REHAB

My brains are all here. They've just gone amiss  
to the tree with the honey, where my thoughts  
go each day. Addicted to the sweet kiss  
of the amber fluid am I. I've sought  
its elixir from street-corner dealers,  
from junkies and addicts, bears just like me.  
Oh Mr. Sanders, where is your healer,  
your savior to come, from this hole to free?  
Piglet does not understand your travail.  
Tigger is clueless to your soulless eyes.  
Eyeore is obsessed with his damn tail.  
Rabbit is a jerk, cares not for your cries.  
Christopher Robin's love is oppressive.  
My illness grows with each day successive?



## VII. OWL IN DEMENTIA

My illness grows with each day successive.

I lose my memories each bit by bit,  
piece by piece until they all seem regressive,  
the clock moving backwards tick by cruel tick.

My feathers are falling out, my beak bent  
and crippled, my wings can't fly anymore.  
My bones feel used and worn, energy spent.  
I never have guests or knocks on my door.

Pooh and the rest never visit or ask  
for advice. All my stories go untold.

I putter around the tree house, the last  
of my noble line. I feel so very...old.

I think I will lay down now and die.  
If they ask where I went, just say "the sky".





# Matthew Bryan Beck

## *How To Make Tea*

Lay out your china, the cups and saucers  
fill the pitcher with cream, not too much,  
just enough to fill stomach and soul.

Put on the water, medium flame,  
wait, wait, wait for it to boil,  
but don't go too far; you don't want  
the house to burn down or the  
range to catch fire or something.

You need to use cold tap water  
(not lukewarm or distilled water)  
or filtered if your tap tastes funky.  
The kettle is important; choose wisely.

Making tea is about the ritual,  
a solemn rite of relaxation, and  
the ceremony must be performed  
with all solemnity and grace.

Loose leaf is preferable; tea bags  
contain poor-quality crumbly stuff.

Pour two heaping tablespoons into  
a strainer placed inside the kettle and  
pour boiling water over the strainer.  
Allow the tea to steep for no more than  
two minutes; any more will bitter it.  
Take a deep breath, you're almost there.

Remove strainer, pour into cup,  
cream and sugar to taste and stir.



















“Do not fear death so much but rather the inadequate life.”

— *Bertolt Brecht*



# Matthew Bryan Beck

## *The Grace of Jonathan Feinberg*

NURSE: late 30's

ROBERT FEINBERG: late 40's

OLD WOMAN: mid 60's, brown dress and shawl

JONATHAN FEINBERG: early 80's, pale green hospital gown

DAVID: early 20's, dressed in smart 1940's fashion

CORA: early 20's, white muslin summer dress

### SCENE

*We are in a nursing home, the room of Jonathan Feinberg. The stage is bare, except for a hospital bed, a chair beside, a small TV, and a night stand littered with odds-and-ends: magazines, empty pill bottles, thick black reading glasses, and a faded black-and-white photo of a solemn-looking young woman in a small oval frame. The minimal light seems to emanate from a few florescent lights overhead. The windows are shut; it's night, apparently. We hear distant normal hospital noises. The nurse enters stage right.*

NURSE

Time for your dinner, Mr. Feinberg.

JONATHAN

What is it today?

NURSE

The same like every Wednesday. Turkey, mashed potatoes, apple sauce. Do you want your juice now or later?

JONATHAN

Yes. No.

NURSE

Okay. I'll leave it here if you want it.

JONATHAN

I don't like the mashed potatoes here!

NURSE

You have to eat, Mr. Feinberg.

JONATHAN

I want different mashed potatoes!

NURSE

I'll be back in an hour to check up on you.

*Nurse exits. Jonathan looks at the plate momentarily, then pushes it away. He stares blankly into space. His thoughts seem to drift.*

JONATHAN

Mama was a good cook. Her latkas were my favorite. I wish she would make me some right now.

*An old woman, carrying a glass jar, slowly enters stage left.*

OLD WOMAN

I brought you some homemade chicken soup with kneidlach instead, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

Mama! I knew you would bring me something!

*She sits down carefully on the chair by the bed.*

OLD WOMAN

I would have come sooner but you know your father, always wants a clean shirt right before he goes down to the drug store to play cards with Mr. Edelmann and Mr. Schwartz.

JONATHAN

How is Mr. Schwartz? Feeling better?

OLD WOMAN

The same, the same. You know his youngest daughter Sophie? She got married to that nice boy down the block, Daniel Gingold. You go to school with him, no?

JONATHAN

No, David does. I'm three years older, Mama, remember?

OLD WOMAN

Ah, I almost forget sometimes. David seems years older.

JONATHAN

Just because David gets better grades doesn't mean he's better than me, you know.

OLD WOMAN

Zuninkeh, did I say that? Did I say David was better than you?

JONATHAN

No, but you act like it sometimes.

OLD WOMAN

Heaven help me. My two sons, fighting over nothing! Jonathan, you know I love you both the exact same.

JONATHAN

That's not the same thing.

OLD WOMAN

I give up! God knows I try to be a fair mother. But if you want to sulk, go ahead and sulk. At least eat my good chicken soup while you're doing it, eh?

JONATHAN

Okay, Mama. Robert is visiting me today, too.

OLD WOMAN

Your oldest? The college boy?

*Jonathan picks up the photograph from the end table and looks at it warmly.*

JONATHAN

Deborah was so proud of him. The first in our family to go to university.

OLD WOMAN

He graduated?

JONATHAN

Yes, summa cum laude in 1978...maybe it was 1977. I can't remember. Don't you remember, Mama?

OLD WOMAN

Jonathan, I've been dead for the past 35 years.

JONATHAN

Oh, that's right. I keep forgetting.

*Lights go down quickly. We hear a warbled, muffled male voice calling out.*

VOICE

Dad? Dad?

*Lights go up quickly. The old woman has disappeared. Robert is standing by the bed, looking concerned. Jonathan is sleeping soundly.*

ROBERT

Dad? Are you alright?

JONATHAN

Huh? What?

ROBERT

Dad?

JONATHAN

Who is it? Who's there?

ROBERT

It's me, it's Robert.

JONATHAN

Robert? Oh, Robbie! I was just talking with your grandmother.

ROBERT

You were dreaming, Dad.

JONATHAN

She brought me chicken soup. I told her you were coming. You just missed her.

ROBERT

Dad, it was a dream. I'm here now.

JONATHAN

Robbie?

ROBERT

Yes, Dad.

JONATHAN

Do you remember my brother David?

ROBERT

I never met him, but you've told me stories. He died in the war, remember?

JONATHAN

The war? Oh yes, the war. David was three years younger, you know. He enlisted a month earlier than me. Davey was so smart. Davey was...was...

ROBERT

I know, Dad, I know. You better eat now. Go easy on yourself for once, huh?

*The nurse enters stage right, carrying a plastic cupful of clear liquid.*

NURSE

Time for your medication, Mr. Feinberg.

ROBERT

I've got to go, Dad. I'll be back on Friday, we'll talk some more. You make sure to eat what they give you, okay? I'll see you later.

*Robert exits stage right.*

NURSE

Just swallow this now, Mr. Feinberg.

*She lifts the liquid to Jonathan's lips, who drinks on command. The lights go down slowly. Soon, in the darkness we hear a younger male voice, clear and gentle.*

VOICE

Hello, Jonathan. It's me, David.



JONATHAN

David? Where are you? I can't see you.

DAVID

Open your eyes, Jonathan.

*The lights go up slowly. David is sitting comfortably, legs crossed, hands folded, on the chair.  
He smiles at Jonathan.*

DAVID

Hello, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

David! Why, why, you haven't changed a bit!

DAVID

*(chuckling)* Well, my fashion has not, as you can see.

JONATHAN

David, let me tell you, the youth these days have no class. No class at all. Back in our day the movie stars had faces. You knew Ingrid Bergman from Ann Sheridan and Lana Turner from Jane Russell. These girls, I can't tell them apart.

DAVID

They were built for style back then, to be sure.

JONATHAN

Oh Davey, it's so good to see you. Where have you been all these years? What have you been doing with yourself?

DAVID

I wander around here and there. Been all over.

JONATHAN

Do you keep up with any of the old neighborhood kids?

DAVID

I see some now and then.

JONATHAN

Morty Greenfeld? Remember Morty? God, I haven't seen Morty in years. Remember when you, me, and Morty were kids? We used to jump the tracks and throw

rocks at the passing trains? And play stick ball in the lot across from Mr. Kozlowski's delicatessen? And take the trolley after school down to Red Hook and fish at the docks all day?

DAVID

I remember well. Like it was yesterday.

JONATHAN

I wonder whatever happened to Morty. His father wanted him to be a lawyer or something respectable. Good head for figures Morty had. I had no use for them myself. Wasn't he in your outfit?

DAVID

Same unit, same bunk.

JONATHAN

That's right, you both were shipped out the same day. Same day. I remember Mama baked you special rugelach for the trip. Was it a rough time, David?

DAVID

Basic training was. But once I got aboard and learned my job, it got easier. You never wrote me like you promised, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

Oh David, we were all so heart-broken to hear about your ship. Mama and Papa sent me a cable when I was in England waiting deployment into France.

DAVID

I thought of you when it happened, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

*(choking up)* Did you, Davey? I'm so sorry. I said I would write, didn't I? Yes, I did say that. I'm so sorry. You know...all these years...I've...I've felt so guilty.

DAVID

Why, Jonathan? It's all in the past. Dead and gone. Long forgotten.

JONATHAN

I have never forgotten it, David. I felt such...such...remorse that I would never have the chance to tell you all I should have told you, treat you the way I should have treated you, listen the way I should have listened. I was always jealous of you, you know. David, the smart one. David, the good-looking one. David, the successful

one. I was always flunking out, getting into trouble, causing Mama and Papa so much grief. Mama would say that you were the good boy she wanted me to be. Why couldn't I be more like you? Papa was so proud of you, but so disappointed in me. So I hated you. When Cora chose me, I felt I had finally scored a victory over you. I had finally won a contest. I finally had something you didn't. And when you were killed, I was so guilty I had hated you. I could never change the past because there was no more future. All those past words and thoughts and feelings were cemented forever. After you were gone and the war was over, Cora broke it off with me. I don't know why exactly. She said things weren't the same anymore, the world wasn't the same anymore, she and I weren't the same anymore. I blamed you for dying, but I couldn't hate the dead for long. It left me senseless, numb. I didn't know where to go, what to do with my life. I just kept thinking of all the things that could have been and weren't, between me and Cora, between me and you, a whole life stolen from both of us. It has plagued and haunted me for my whole life. I've spent my whole life living in the past. Oh David, I'm so sorry. So, so sorry.

DAVID

There is nothing to forgive, Jonathan, really. And I understand. More than you know. You don't need to beat yourself up like this anymore. I never held anything against you. We were brothers. We were friends. And nothing should keep brothers and friends apart. When I think about it now, I had a good life, really. I had a wonderful family. I was loved. That's all that matters. That's all we really need. We make our lives more complicated than they really are, our problems worse than they need be. Perhaps life is just a series of comings and goings. Perhaps we just pass like ships, for a delirious moment, before sailing into the night.

*Lights go down. We hear a trailing, fading echo of the last line David spoke. When the lights slowly come up, Jonathan is alone in his room. His cheeks are wet with tears.*

JONATHAN

David? David, where are you? David, don't go! Stay with me! Talk with me! I miss you. And I miss Cora. If only I could see Cora again once more, tell her how much I love her.

*A beam of light appears stage left, as if a window has opened. Cora steps out into the light.*

CORA

I'm here, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

*(shielding his eyes)* Cora? I can't see you. Is that really you? Are you real? I am dreaming you. I am dreaming. I must be.

CORA

Dreams are sometimes more real than waking life.

JONATHAN

Cora? Let me look at you. You're as beautiful as ever, after all these years. And look at me. I'm old and wrinkled and ugly. But how did you get here? Why have you never come here before?

CORA

You've never asked me before, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

I was afraid you wouldn't answer.

CORA

Do you remember the summer you proposed to me, Jonathan?

JONATHAN

I'll never forget that summer, that day, as long as I live. June 12th, 1942.

CORA

Remember how we spent the whole day in the botanical garden, under the cherry blossom trees by the pond, with only the swans and each other for company?

JONATHAN

You wore the same pretty little dress.

CORA

I had worn it specially for you.

JONATHAN

*(breaking down)* Cora, oh my sweet, lovely Cora. You've come back to me. But why? Why have you stayed away all these years? Why did you break off our engagement?

CORA

I couldn't marry you, Jonathan. Not after David was killed.

JONATHAN

But why? Why?

CORA

*(long beat)* I loved him, too.

JONATHAN

*(hoarse)* You were in love with David?

CORA

Yes. *(beat)* You were the reckless, carefree boy I could fly away with. But he was the quiet, dependable boy I could lean on. It was wicked of me, but I loved you both, in your own ways. You and I had madcap fun, and it was sweet and light-headed, but it was a moment in youth. David had the deepest place in my heart, the part only he touched. He knew me. You loved me, but you didn't know me like David. He listened to me when I was saddened, comforted me when I was distressed, scolded me when I was childish and horrid and acted like a schoolgirl. He was so caring, so gentle, so compassionate. I knew I would love David even when the bliss and bloom of youth had withered and faded. I'm so sorry, dearest Jonathan. You were so impulsive. You did everything with such abandon. When you asked me to marry you, I should have said no and explained to you about David. It would have hurt you then, but saved us both so much heartache in the future. But I didn't want to hurt you. You were so earnest. That day was perfect. I couldn't ruin it. And I couldn't wait forever for David to muster the courage to ask for my hand, for himself. So I settled for you. God forgive me. Before David boarded the ship, he turned and asked me to wait for him. He didn't know about us. I...I told him I would, but I cried all the way home. When he was killed, I felt so guilty. As long as he was alive, I felt both of you had a fair chance. You took the first action, and would have won me. But when he was gone, I knew it wouldn't be fair to you, to him, to me—for us to marry. I knew I would spend the years pining over the loss of David, never a true and complete wife to you. It would have been selfish. So I let you go. For you, for David, for myself, I let you go. Can you ever forgive me for what I did to you, Jonathan?

JONATHAN

*(slowly)* I am a broken old man. I have no more anger or hate or bitterness left in me. I cannot change what is past. I do not want to go to my grave with malice in my heart. I was torn in two then, but now I can see the compassion in your cruelty. Maybe that's called grace. I don't know. There's so many things we should say to our loved ones when we're alive, and never say. Why? Why do we do it?

*As Jonathan is talking, more to himself than anyone, Cora slips away quietly.*

CORA

*(whispering)* Sleep well, my dear friend.

SCENE



## Fine Print

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THE END





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