

Jake Sheff

*Notes from a Virginia Wedding*

For Jared and Molly Bauer

“...[H]e was tenth cousin to my grandmother, which you know counts for a great deal in Virginia.”

John Esten Cooke, from *Mohun*

*Virginia: Day 1*

The rocks are always rocking back and forth  
In Virginia's mind. We departed Oregon  
On a golden Wednesday morning, painted

By Matisse and early spring. The airport was  
All business, and ever so lightly, the brides  
Of Dracula went back to their coffins. Golden

Sunlight silently indulged in abominations over  
Which we are obliged to draw a veil. A waitress  
With a gold tooth served me the law of opposites

Before our flight. The east coast beckoned:  
"Care to join me for a wedding?" My daughter  
Turns all detritus to gold; she proved desires

Not suppressed, but channeled into decent, even  
Holy, ends, are best, when she annoyed us  
With her impatience for the takeoff time's

Arrival. The last two years, my stomach had  
Been naturally well-behaved; a rarity, despite  
What we desire, dream and do. Before we

Boarded, my designer jeans grew anxious,  
Sitting, as they did, beneath the gorgeous  
Gurgle-gargle astrovirus made its name with.

The airplane's rear end received my Dopp kit  
With great sangfroid. The TVs in the terminal  
Featured a reporter with a binge-worthy face,

But a caseating voice; she interviewed a lawyer  
Who said, "I'm no astronomer, but stars do  
Twinkle." I tell you, nothing on earth can mingle-

Mangle quite like nausea! My wife, whose kiss  
Can light a candle, and whose fingers disappear

A storm, cast a thousand teachers' dirty looks

In my direction when I belched. And as my face  
Turned freakishly green, the redness in her  
Furrowed forehead told my color, "Keep it to

Yourself!" The turbulence was no gourmand; it  
Banished thoughts of next week's porchetta,  
And yesterday's chicken on a golden kaiser roll.

My arse arose in bitter-bottom waves; it wouldn't  
Breathe its last until we landed in Atlanta. I was  
Seated apart from my wife and daughter –

Both cut from the same cloth as grace and Queen  
Elizabeth – and, to the good fortune of nobody,  
Next to me was seated body odor that made my gas

Positively Gucci by comparison. As if I needed  
More reason to envy anything insensate! I almost  
Said, "I hope you have bad dreams tonight"

(a curse is the sincerest form of impotence), but  
Then he pulled a ranunculus from his coat pocket,  
And I thought, "To heck with it!" On the flight

From Atlanta to Norfolk, my GI tract refused  
To update its stereotypes; when I considered  
The stewardess's offer of a snack, my queasiness

Peeked out from its cubbyhole and whispered,  
"You're askin' for it, Dramamine be damned!"  
My appetite – not generally a quick learner –

Made itself scarce. I'm told that art and evil  
Keep the day from getting bored to tears. No evil  
Happened on that flight. The arts this student

Of Salerno put to use did fustigate my urge to  
Spew. My wife and daughter insisted I was

Not in a bad way, even when my face made

The Grootslang seem handsome. "It's all in  
Your head. You're just nervous." If that were  
True, I'd have envied the Dullahan. The baggage

Claim did not deliver everything I'd wanted.  
How does the proverb go? "Love and hope do go  
Together; angels bring what demons mock. And

Goodness rides on wisdom's wing; there is no  
Other way." The baggage claim, it always leaves  
Me wanting more; much like – I imagine –

A polyandrous mating system would. I'm not  
The poster child for paragons; I had to ask my wife  
To drive the rental. "C'mon," I groaned." Everybody

Wants a moral quest." It's a good thing my hope  
And pride were both sedated. Corri grumbled  
Something about a house husband, as dutifully

She took the wheel. When she steered us through  
The Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel, I tried  
To sleep in the warm embrace of self-pity and

Dehydration. When our Kia hit a bump, my pity  
Said, "Your weapon is your weeping. I'm no  
Fool!," and went to sleep in back by Maddie.

When I was abandoned by my favorite and most  
Trusted feeling, I saw a sign for Williamsburg  
And smiled. (Who among us strives to frown?)

This disciple of Aesculapius knows it's easier to  
Conquer another's malady than to rule our own;  
I thanked Corri for getting me to bed in one piece.

She said, "You left me no choice." I almost said,  
"Don't be like that," but something neither  
Beast nor god can't resist when Morpheus calls.

*Virginia: Day 2*

We set out that morning for a day too big to fail,  
For a day, I say, too big to strain credulity. If all  
The truth must be told, it seemed my gastrointestinal

Illness was no longer mandating I stay close to  
A toilet. I guess sometimes a law dies of natural  
Causes. My daughter's dominant trait that day,

It hit me from below, and we were on a shuttle bus  
To Colonial Williamsburg. We saw its centuries-  
Old veneer, its centuries-old intelligence. My wife

Just felt like changing, so she listened to the actor  
Performing Washington's *Farewell Address* in  
A gingham dress and the mood to see anew.

The speech's load-bearing light was Maddie's  
Cup of tea. I hope she'll learn to tell a trapdoor  
From a troubadour; that's been my lucky rabbit's

Foot the last two years. To try reshaping hope  
I wouldn't dare. There are those who feign that  
Gray clouds invite despair, provoke surrender.

Them I dismiss. All morning, descendants of Cain  
Outnumbered the rainclouds' descendants. Yea,  
We walked on all the blocks of that confluence

Of desires on a busy Thursday after the flood,  
Until my daughter's appetite unnerved her  
Zealous curiosity; unnerved it, I say, zealously.

Virginia ham on biscuits combined two opposite  
Emotions in my heart. The bug in me had  
Shown more clearly than the noon light that

Lite fare would be a wiser choice. Good thing  
I didn't treat my gut like some Cassandra

Then! (I nearly always do.) We visited the silver-

Smith, who didn't charge the price of liberty  
For rings, so Maddie bought one. We visited  
The wig maker, who didn't charge an arm

And a leg for a peruke, but the peruke cost  
The wearer his hair and that of a stranger.  
My vanity calls that a near-death experience!

We visited the courthouse, where a portrait  
Of Queen Charlotte was the spitting image of  
Maddie's classmate and frenemy back home.

"There are too many Nicoles, and they're all  
Too hard to please!" My daughter's lament  
Was the lament of all people who are too good-

Natured by a third. You can't have one religion  
In the world, the world won't have it, but  
The capitol stood beneath a scented, sculpted

Sky with the full force of blood, and Corri  
Smiled generously. I said a prayer to not forget  
The vision. (Prayer is the sincerest form of

Impotence.) The day was generous, and  
Generosity is joy. The House of Burgesses  
In Maddie's heart directed her into the Public

Gaol. Blackbeard's ghost, the one they had  
Chained to the wall, the one, I say, whose soul  
Has a chancre in the image of a snakeskin rose,

He, on the strength of a wicked and mysterious  
Disposition, took the liberty to utter a greeting  
As the Sheff ladies walked by. I overheard him

Still berating his men: "Make yourselves valuable.  
You're not like women, whose value comes naturally."

I did some back of the eyeball calculations, but

Won't share them here. It's for your protection,  
Reader: bad poetry is known to cause cancer.  
From what I could tell, we all of us left our fear

Of being lied to back in Oregon, but I did ask  
The milliner and mantua-maker (under my  
Breath), "What do you intend to do with my

Attention?" All twenty-five different species of  
Oak trees began to sway like blood brothers.  
Corri felt she must see the Governor's Palace

At once, if only for an instant. It was a desire, so  
Any attempts to understand, deny or reason  
Against it would be childish at best. She rose

From the bench newsworthily. I asked if desire's  
Like poetry: a mixture of painting's sense  
And music's sound; is that how it silences your

Will and moves you? If that's the case, should  
Something other than my desire... "You are  
Too much of a Sheff, Dr. Sheff." I hear you,

Reader, I hear you. With awful distinctness,  
The palace seemed too retiform to reform, and  
Maddie liked it. The afternoon grew scrawny.

The rainclouds looked like people with pudding  
In their pockets. With a pretty, rigorous, and  
In its rigor maturity, female motion, Maddie fled

For shelter. Her flight possessed the accent  
Of sincerity, whose irresistible power was  
Not the reason we followed. The art museum

Offered us a sizable experience to shelter in.  
We looked at other natures from the outside –



A highly respectable outside – while outside,

The roads were full of mud. Something's always  
Off; it was felt in the gallery's heavy light  
Legitimate. I wish the best was always right,

But Corri's and Maddie's cost-benefit analysis  
Concluded – after only a little bit of time spent  
Walking in eternity – that it was dinner time.

We took our feet and hunger from the car to  
Merchants Square, and found a restaurant in  
A basement down the stairs. The smell of

Macadamia nut pie filled the air with long,  
Beautiful smells. Before I was a minute older,  
I decided on dessert. Statues screamed for status.

*Virginia: Day 3*

Wisdom is what we all know to be true but  
Are prone to forgetting. That morning, before  
We set out for Jamestown, we sat through

A timeshare presentation for \$125 in Visa  
Gift cards, free breakfast and a lesson in  
Spotting what's too good to be true for Maddie.

Corri sat there just like a judge. The slideshow  
Sucked a smart amount of syllables from  
The room. The stale biscuit, rubbery bacon

And burnt cheese went down like the northern  
Kingdom; went down, I say, in the blink of  
A belligerent eye. The lies our fellow men tell

Are part of what forever sings. Large it is,  
The number that are drawn to a religion which  
Denies it's a religion; then and there, Maddie

Felt what men who deny that they are men feel,  
And couldn't wait to leave. The Friday air  
Was far from unisex. Our salesman wore

Abbreviated neediness. And Corri said, "At least  
He only wants our money. It's better than  
The righteous anxiety people wear to steal

Your time." She was right, of course; the sales-  
Man's face could spatchcock a chicken by his  
Just looking at it. If giving be the soul of friend-

Ship, then he's my bestie; he gave me such  
A headache with his stupid words which reeked  
Of pizzled thoughts. I would garrote this memory

If poetry was not of value or within my feeble  
Powers. I said no thanks to every offer, said it

In a tone, the kind that passes through the spicy

Heart of freedom first – this no thanks. He got  
His boss, whose dress was too tight to be  
Deflowered bound. I guess some people hope

A sale will close of natural causes. Her makeup  
Didn't amount to a hill of beans. Lubricity  
Tells us: *bacteria love a bachelor*. Oncotic

Pressure helps ancient problems stay new, but  
Fortunately, ancient solutions cost a song. I said  
No thanks to any feeling offering advice; feelings,

Like compassion, ought to only rule 1/8 the time.  
Then I gifted her the Grey Sisters' charms, and  
Looked into her single eye to say no thanks.

Her toothless maw was my yeehaw. Her actual  
Two eyes said, *Physician, deconstruct yourself!* I  
Can't be swayed by that. Thus, huts in Jamestown

Did prepare for our arrival. Before we move on,  
A note about the presenter: such a funny fellow; he  
Belched in French but farted in plain English.

Wisdom's heart is constant, nothing makes it  
Hot or any harder than it ought to be. We drove  
To meet my parents \$125 richer, and convinced

That nature isn't everything. (Of course, we all  
Had different reasons for that.) The hotel lobby  
Failed to garner universal praise, but I was glad it

Reunited my parents with the three of us after two  
Long years. A family reunited under happy circum-  
Stances has something universal in it, a lot like

What will never be. Corri gifted them a painting  
Of their recently departed and dearly beloved dog,

Jack. When my mom hugged my wife with tears

In her eyes, I do believe the mother of mothers  
Smiled on them in the same way my daughter did.  
My love is shown much more by what I don't do,

And thus has it long been; I suggested we all load  
Into the van, to see the historical sights and grab  
Dinner, with plenty of time left before the cocktail

Party. The wind and bird song danced above  
The Old Dominion State, among the trees that  
Brought Gene Kelly back to life. Without any

Boyish pussyfooting, my father bought a replica  
Derringer from the gift shop. We locked it in  
The van, then visited where the T-Rex still treks,

Which visits vibrations on every receptive mind.  
In Paspahegh Town, the Powhatan way of life  
Was more realistic than any pages from the Kansas

City Star and other bridges made of images  
And language. Maddie stood inside a hut,  
A wild opera in her mind. My father listened

To the feral sonnets in his chest, as he watched  
A historical interpreter recreate a turkey feather  
Mantle under the late morning's painstaking –

But ultimately *forme fruste* – extravagance.  
Along the shores of the James River, I heard  
A little 'don't' before I climbed aboard

The *Susan Constant*. It's not a sin to risk  
A little seasickness just before lunch; I said –  
Ever so quietly – 'don't' in return, then up

The gangway I moved. Before me went my  
Wife, and a Biblical injunction followed

Close behind. The sea that day was taking

Care of business; this alone would not qualify  
As news, but for the fact that my father, always  
One who admires without limit the act of

Learning and is prone to motion sickness, was  
More affected by the information docents  
Shared than by the waves; I posit he was

Floating, though his feet did appear firmly  
Planted on the poop deck. From there we  
Followed Maddie to James Fort, and said

Goodbye to the *Godspeed*, the *Discovery*  
And last year's disagreement. (Would that  
Man's urge to share freely applied to more than

His enthusiasm, which to the bulk of listeners is  
Just opinion with a heated face!) It's not a sin  
To wonder at our humble origins; we looked at

Things entire generations will forget about!  
On our tiny little twig in the Tree of Existence,  
My mom was reading the names of herbs

Growing in the apothecary's garden. "Impressive,"  
She said. "But my trellis is a jealous trellis."  
"Grandpa is really into machines," I heard

My daughter tell her. "He is," my mom replied.  
"But to me, a machine is but a man without  
His mystery." Corri nodded, but I think it was

In agreement with her own thought. An eagle  
Was futzing with the wind and quietly judging  
The nanny state below. A retired cannon looked at

Me so mirror-like. Hunger, with his shield of justice,  
Face of light and sword of kindness, swept us up

And dropped us in the cafeteria's fat, gold comfort.

Peanut soup was served with confidence, but  
Confidence alone breeds confidence in fools; I  
Ordered some, and put it to the test. I spilled

A bit, still storm tossed in a world of hierarchies,  
Where safetyism sits – or more like ducks – far  
Below bad luck. But it was good. Dreams unsettle

What's established; unsettle, I say, truth, order  
And cosmic harmony. They play a sort of hacky-sack  
In the void within, which cannot be filled on earth

By natural means alone; cannot be filled, I mean,  
Without the aid of people, and not just any people,  
But the kind that possess a megaton of negative

Capability. Dreams in a museum get un-housed.  
"Jerry, everything we save cannot save anyone,  
Including you." I'm not sure my father heard that,

But we all knew we couldn't read everything  
And still have time for dinner. Something like  
The church bells' rage or shofar's sorrow lives in

Every heart. Maddie studied Pocahontas' face.  
"Grandpa told me her thoughtfulness still puts flesh  
On America's bones," she later told me. Back in

The rental, hay fever kicked my eyes like 10,000  
Dropkicks. I would've plucked them both out  
With chopsticks, but no one reveres reversals like

A physician-poet! I was lying prone and less  
Prone to lying until the Zyrtec kicked in. Corri  
And Maddie dressed before the mirror with two

White-breasted nuthatches gazing in the window,  
Thinking, *They, too, must be looking for an early*

*Bird special.* While looking on, I recalled the proverb,

*Like to like*, but couldn't be sure if it was their own  
Reflections the birds were seeing; couldn't be sure,  
I say, until they flew into the window, which resulted

In less hearts beating at a normal rate for sometime.  
We left for supper in a toned-down version of  
The evening. The truly unruly wild bergamot waved

Goodbye, and Maddie said, "In a while, crocodile."  
We walked into the restaurant. "Ho there, Jake!  
You whose imagination dates back to the flood, you

Who haven't lost your infinitude since you were bar  
Mitzvahed and you whose splendor – the splendor  
Of Adam! – shines for ten miles around, bring all

That over here, I beg you, and take a seat, too, next  
To me, if you like." My Uncle Dick was down  
From Wisconsin, as well, along with my parents

For dinner and all the festivities. We counted on  
Each other more than calories, passed around  
The Rappahannock oysters, Chesapeake crab cakes

And a good deal of misremembered stories from  
My childhood, all in the service of making merry  
And Maddie's memories of us. "Well, you can't spell

Ought without tough, Maddie." The sun grew  
Skaldic as it sank. Two things are sweeter than  
A sword, but only one is perception's receipt: poetry,

And Corri's smile. She laughed so much, the sun didn't  
Want to set, but the night was eager to come on. Like  
A merchant to the pilgrim, night follows gaiety everywhere.

From the womb of the unknown, dusk arrived  
In beautiful green waves, and in our respective

Vehicles, we departed for the resort, where family

Golfed by the James River. Wine and strong drink  
Delight the soul, but better than either, the critical mass  
Of cousins needed for a meaningful party. “There’s

Always much ado before ‘I do,’” said Jack Chaff.  
“And there’s much more hustle than bustle in  
The early stages.” I shook the dust from my

Nephewhood to hug my aunt. Behind her, my uncle  
Rehashed his stump speech: “Citizens, ye voters  
Wise, whose limbs grew long in Wisconsin...”

And just like one of the frozen chosen, I heard  
A cousin twice removed remark: “Politics bore me, bore  
Me like the driest priest in hell. Oh, for cute!

Are those Kaitlyn’s kids?” Sangria met every  
Able-bodied adult in the restaurant. Upstairs and  
Down, a mulish stone’s philosophy was banished,

And table talk consisted more of rhotic and non-  
Rhotic sweetness (but never schmaltz; never sweeter  
Than a Girl Scout cookie!) than of surface-to-air

Missiles. “Hey now, you’re the doctor now, aren’t  
Ya?” I shook my head. “Well now, maybe you can  
Help me with this evil hope – ah know it’s common

Now, but mine has Ehlers-Danlos syndrome...”  
Hope’s veracity is never questioned, and it can  
Stretch credulity longer than a koala’s vermiform

Appendix! I tried to make a face like I was not  
A lord protector, when he burst out laughing.  
“Ah’m just pickin’ wit ya, doc! C’mon, now! Here:” –

He stood up straight and made a solemn face,  
A solemn and religious face. “The three men I



Admire most – Jekyll, Frankenstein and Faust –...”

He came from Raleigh, this real guy’s guy,  
As all of the bride’s relations did. “Uff da! He’s  
Schnookered,” my mother’s favorite niece-

In-law said later by way of saying hi. “That’s why  
I tell my children, ‘Keep your sorrow narrow!’”  
“Did Connor ask you to buy ‘im a kiddie cocktail?”

“He did,” his dad said. “How could I say no?” “Well,  
For cryin’ out loud, now it’s all over the table  
Over there,” Connor’s mom said. “Over there?”

Ope, I thought someone spilled a watermelon  
Soup.” Nothing’s universally adored, and while few  
Among us get through life without once or twice

Trying to be, I swear, something there was when  
The bride- and groom-to-be came into the room  
Which came the closest I’ve ever personally seen to

Anyone or anything achieving universal adoration;  
And I was only  $\frac{3}{4}$  drunk, so you can trust my  
Recollection! I saw the best second cousins of my

Generation grab every pang by the tang. “Potholes  
Follow too much pathos, dontcha know.”  
Cambodia’s Year Zero and the man made of

Moths and mud looked on with bated breath  
From somewhere deep in the vortex. Little  
Kids snacked on Cheerios and Cheetos

As their guardian angels vegged out nearby.  
“Don’t pitch a fit about that steel-still moonlight  
Stealin’ Satan’s silver hellfaar. Some of what

They have in hell they have earned.” That was  
More painful to my heart than sciatica was

To Abraham's grandson! Death, I heard your beard.

*Virginia: Day 4*

I got up that morning and looked at my phone's  
Weather app; the sun had risen earlier than  
Was predicted on the day of the wedding. I

Watched the tall fescue and Japanese stiltgrass  
*Shuckle* together outside my window. I said  
A quick thank you for the *komorebi's* being in

Good working order; this, in light of the frost-  
Monger's extended stay back home in Oregon,  
Could not, I assured myself, be an example of

Honest to a fault. I wanted Brunswick stew  
For lunch, while Corri and Maddie wanted to  
Shop at Merchant Square with our remaining

Free time (and free time always nails wisdom  
To clouds). Try as I might, I could not leave  
My impulse to improve – what the kids call

An OG – back at the hotel room. Two alley  
Cats came walking up like progress, high on  
Hope and doubt, and funnier looking than phony

Evils. “Here come vinegar and pepper,” Maddie  
Joked, as if they were a pair of people. Rules  
Are unkind to those who would break them;

The country's first planned shopping district  
Would never be quainter than it had any right  
To be. In memory's emerald – what you've lost

When all you've got is hope – that much is  
Clear now. “While we're at it, we need to  
Be careful not to be too careful,” Corri said

While she was leafing through the lives that Leah  
Leads inside her mind. “Fear will make a fool

Of all.” And Shaker Jeffries said to Maddie,

“Hey, Maddie! What did the two-legged spider  
Say to the girl walking by during covid?”  
Maddie didn’t seem to hear, which didn’t

Stop Shaker Jeffries: “I want my six feet!  
Get it? Six feet!” It never ceases to amaze  
The sans-culottes in me how America’s shops

Are never short on righteous pessimism, their  
Shelves never not brimming with more noble  
Vulnerabilities than anyone could ever need,

Afford or carry home in their most unblemished  
Wheelbarrow. That fact is one militant pacifist.  
But I was taught to never (never!) trust a militant

Pacifist. “Maybe this one time,” I told myself.  
In retrospect, I do not think the best me bested  
Me. He’s too good for my own good, it’s true.

That’s why I tend to keep him in my soul’s  
Rathskeller. Fool-felled, fool-fouled: that’s what  
I was. The fool was me. “Why can’t I buy it,”

Maddie asked her mother. “Look at that dude’s  
Face,” my wife instructed her, while pointing  
At the shop owner. “What’s wrong with it?”

“That’s the face of a man after he’s toilet-  
Toiled,” Corri told her. “And after forty farts,  
It must’ve gotten stuck that way.” Maddie, after

That, could see, and asked not any further.  
The eastern redbud and Turk’s-cap lily could’ve  
taught me not everyone’s like me. I didn’t learn

This until too late, but groups corrupt the truth,  
It’s what they have to do before they act, so

I was acting on the best available knowledge

At the time. Between matins and vespers, I  
Got ideas for later gifts, which to Earth's most  
Contentious creatures are love's Trojan horses.

Two female shadows sparkled before me.  
The morning hours were leaning out for love,  
They'll lean forever towards that awful human

Beauty with its shadow shining. "Why don't we  
Mail your souvenir home before we go?"  
My wife's suggestion held on tight to reason,

Since my replica flintlock rifle would likely  
Have to catch a later flight home than ours if  
I packed it. "Where the hell have you been,

My omnipresence?" That question was on  
Everybody's lips right after the sun blurred  
Something out in Marshallese. Maddie

Made an eschatological face in the post office;  
A face, I say, like the ace of axes, when  
Her hair reminded me there's more to life

Than my existence. The afternoon came on  
In a timely manner. There's no use in a Fabian  
Strategy against the sky's neon climax. (Omni-

Victorious time: thank you for that well-lit  
Abalone breeze coming off the James River,  
You truly embodied empathy much more

Than emptiness that day. I'm sorry you will  
Learn too late why never losing isn't real.)  
A northern cardinal's color grew brighter

As the words of St. Paul's first letter to  
The Corinthians went overhead. When Kurt

Said “love does not delight in evil,” it had

The same effect on the purple coneflowers  
Near the fountain and the better angels in  
The corner of my nature choked with weeds.

Before that, *Canon in D* had stolen the sun-  
Light’s proprietary software, so fairies sprinkled  
*Logos spermatikos* with seconds made of

Sambuca and soothing ashwagandha, and not  
Unfairly. Behind me, someone told a joke  
About how Uncle Sam was so fat before

The Civil War, “He could not fill more of  
His suit without a tailor’s poke and pierce” –  
It sounded like a Shaker Jeffries pun, but

When I turned around, it was my Uncle Dick.  
I laughed, but didn’t forget that humor kills  
What Homer shows: those earthly guides –

Ideals or their embodiment – that men not  
Under God will use to fill their always changing  
Pantheon. The bride began her vows: “I’ve heard

Desires starved are best because they can’t be  
Satisfied. I’ve seen that hope can be so mean,  
And hopeful can turn mean so soon. But love can

Never perish, only love, since history shows that  
Everything on earth has had a chance to play  
At God at one time or another, and everything

Came up wanting, except for love. And you’re  
A greater love than what my hope and my desire  
Expected.” You could tell by the way she looked

At him that she believed he could make the sun  
Rise from the west. Try as we might, nobody

Separates church from state within. Now I don't

Recall my cousin's vow in return, but I remember  
Like yesterday two things he said the night before.  
Of Beatrice, a bridesmaid: "She's the town

Archimedean point: everyone has had a God's-eye  
View!" And of his fiancée: "She is my song, Jake.  
She is my song and out of reach." Two fingers hit

Their gold-rimmed marks with ease and some  
Assistance. Disturbed and disturbing dustbins  
Were the target of Cupid's mockery. I believe

What happened next will be clear even to those  
Who are only moderately attentive, but at the time  
I felt a tap on my shoulder. "What did the corpse

Say when it walked out of the graveyard during  
Covid? I want my six feet!" Jack Chaff arrived just  
On time, the two pupils in his right eye fully

Dilated as he gazed towards the kiss that shone  
Brighter than ten-thousand suns. Drinks  
And gaiety suddenly appeared. Next thing I knew,

A psychiatrist behind me said, "Adam and Eve  
Were mentally ill." "What about Cain? Was he  
Mentally ill," the person with him asked.

Besides the table piling up with presents, Corri  
Said to me, "This day is a present-day present  
I will not ignore." After a couple of drinks,

My dad accused a pepper tree of being *care-*  
*Ogant*, and then to clarify he said, "This tree  
Is arrogant *and* caring!" So my mother ordered

Coffee for him, which he promptly chugged,  
And any temptation to make like Herostratus

Was flushed down the urinal with his inebriation.

With the aid of a cane, the bride's father walked  
By. The gentleman drinking with me said, "That  
Man never leaves a pencil before it's out of lead.

He never chucks a chapstick or deodorant until  
He's reached the tube's end. I'll tell ya what,  
That man sticks with things!" I knew a guy in

College who did the same, a famous penny  
Pincher, but I held my tongue, for clearly in  
This case reverence was the called for attitude.

An unfamiliar woman was telling this same  
Fellow why the mockernut hickory and black  
Locust lining the drive up didn't grow into – and

Damage – the power lines strung up nearby.  
"It's that electric field they generate. It forces  
Branches away, but only gives the appearance

Of agency, as if the trees are frightened by it!"  
He nodded. When the woman left and Molly  
Took her place, he said, "It was a pleasure."

"I see you've met my dad's best friend, Gil  
The arborist," Molly said to me. "Gil, don't you  
Trim the trees here?" Out of all the radiant faces

At the next table, I recognized only one. "Kurt,  
Great job officiating! You prove the proverb,  
Cousin, 'Able men get the job done.'" "Aw,

Thanks, Jake! It's great to see you!" He put his  
Arm around me, and added, "Things have really  
Changed, have really gotten so much better since I

Found Jesus." Maddie ran by with some second  
Cousins, less blinded by the light of their nimbi



Than most of the gray-haired children there.

("They can't stop acting like men," is what  
An unknown poet said of gray-haired children.)  
"My paideia was all in a knot, Jake, and every

Attempt at solving sin just served up a big  
Nothingburger, until I found Jesus." A murderous  
Muddy doom was swirling around a throne of

Nightmares when it was announced the reception  
Was to commence inside. That hour must've  
Gone to the best schools, for it built the most

Zygomatic and original peace with all the charm  
Of Parkitecture, which I imagined then was  
The furthest point on earth from the tree

Of Zaqqum. The steak was rarer than a group  
Of sisters who all stand taller than their dad.  
Some opinions are more popular with sad folks...

When the best man walked up to deliver his  
Speech, I didn't perceive the gait of a milksop  
Who blagged his way off a Dutch merchant ship,

And I quite liked what he said about ideals not  
Being the ideal leaders; and when he began  
To speak, I didn't hear the voice of someone

Who eats a breakfast of bark dust, and what he  
Said then still resonates with me today: "Nothing's  
Value reaches infinite in time, which doesn't

Stop our wishes from their wishing. That's be-  
Witching wishing. Let's down a dram of freedom,  
Drown in freedom's sea! It's freedom from

Dream-drunk desires that I need!" Then he  
Raised a glass to Jared and Molly, which

Resulted in only one or two throats with lumps,

But every soul was far from its corresponding  
Collarbone. "My rabbi said, 'Put not your  
*Bitachon* in Bitcoin.'" Idealists see a devil

When they hear you disagree: fortunately,  
My cousin's husband is no idealist; he  
Replied with a radiant face and "Think about

It." Then he added, "Hey, have you heard  
This one? 'Like a cat climbing into a box,  
The atheist sits in the newest cause.'" I

Laughed, and saw the burning out of day  
Beyond a closing door. A man with a pin that  
Said "Vaccinated" told the bartender about

His run in with a chupacabra. He pulled down  
His mask: "The vortex buffaloes and bares  
Its fangs at me!" "This is not to stir up contro-

Versy," the bartender said while she mixed  
My drink. "But he laughs at mawkishness."  
"Who does," I asked. "The man made of moths

And mud. Where I'm from we have a saying  
About the mendacity of marvels. Can I get  
You anything else?" I walked back to my table

And heard the psychiatrist: "The only person  
Not mentally ill in the Bible? Why, that's Joseph!"  
"What about King David? Didn't he pretend to be..."

I couldn't stick around for his answer, since Molly  
Was holding a bouquet to toss and the attention  
Of 25 girls. Outside, the night blew bluer than

E-major, while a sun-yellow C-sharp began to  
Stream in ceaselessly from the DJ's speakers.

“What keeps them all in awe,” my father asked

My mom, while gazing on the faces of the girls  
Around his granddaughter. “Competence and  
Generosity would be my guess if not for flowers

In the air,” my mother said to him. And Corri  
Whispered in my ear, as if to right a wrong,  
“A competent and *dangerous* man.” My wife’s

Corrective injured the night, and stole what  
Darkness it could. Maddie danced a strong-  
Willed dance to every song with my parents.

Postprandial ruins were piled high on every  
Tabletop like little Babels. I watched the mighty  
River put on the moonlight like a silver paisley

Necktie (what a woman!), as Kurt confessed, “I,  
Just want a life that’s hollow’s opposite. Tomorrows  
Far from shallow want me too since I found Jesus.”

“Hey, have you heard this one,” I asked. “Like  
A cat looking for a square of sunlight through  
A window, the atheist seeks out and loves

The newest fad.” He laughed without guffawing  
Too much as many ill-bred people do. He  
Laughed with firm resolve, like one who uses

Reverential capitalization to spell each *Ha*.  
“Well, sorta like the first man, Homer gave names  
To all the abstractions, but like to gods, he gave

Them bodies too.” I sought out my other  
Sensible cousin, and recognized his sensibility  
By his attire, hearty laughter and gait. Like

A downy bed to a ragged body is a good-  
Natured conversation to a tired spirit.

“I always listen to music in the dark, Jake.

I like to see the angels’ wills. I think that  
Light from a song is proof that we’re created  
Things; this object with a unique spirit and

A limited duration in the physical or visible  
Realm: that’s what our lives are like!”  
Compassion follows rules the way a rebel

Follows orders. While as a rule, I would’ve  
Stayed and talked all night with him, I  
Felt that out of compassion for my family

And future self, we ought to call it a night.  
We drove away, below the power lines,  
And saw the lights go down behind us.

“What’d you think of the best man’s speech,”  
I asked Corri, as Maddie slept in the back.  
“No seedless speech was his, am I right?”

Wasn’t it amazing?” “It was something,”  
She said. And as I got into bed, I said, “Corri,  
Corri; *you* are my song and out of reach.”

*Tam v’nishlam - Shevach l’El Borei Olam*