

Jefferson Navicky

El Beardo

In the depths of normal sits a clown.

He walks down the Avenue of Other People.

A cat wants food, so he feeds it.

The clown sits at a bar and listens to a singer, who isn't very good but needs a lot of encouragement. His sister-in-law is the waitress.

The clown watches her smile. She requests sad songs from the singer, and then says, Don't blame him if I cry.

The clown feels a coming on of clown. He says, Do you mind if I dance?

Dance? the waitress asks.

Yes. On stage.

Business in the bar has been epically slow. The new owner, the mother of a friend of the waitress, sits at the end of the bar, tucked into that spot where the bar meets the wall. What is the name of that spot? It should have a name. The owner has big hair.

What's your name, the waitress asks like somebody has put a squash on her brain. She looks sidelong and quick at the owner in the wedge of the bar.

My name is El Beardo.

But you don't have a beard, the waitress says.

Exactly.

The owner shrugs, as if to say, Could business get any worse?

The clown stands on the small stage. He asks the singer to play that sad song again.

Which one?

The one I like.

The singer nods and begins to play. The clown begins to dance. As he dances, a slow shaky crunk, a strangely rhythmic jerk, he shakes out of his shirt sleeve a small dude clown who's wearing the same blue and black striped shirt as he is. Each time the sad song rolls around to the chorus, and this happens a lot as it's quite a repetitive song, the clown shakes another small clown dude from his sleeve until there's a minor dance troop of clowns on the stage all dancing their slow, jerky crunk.

How beautiful, the waitress says and claps her hands together like a

little girl at the fair.

The small dudes continue their dance and they are happy little fellas, but the clown artfully steps to the background, pauses, then vanishes off the side of the stage.

The owner can't help but smile at the small dudes.

Aren't they wonderful, the waitress shouts to the owner.

The owner nods. But will they pay, she shouts in return.

As the clown leaves the bar amidst the height of the festivities, he leans over to the owner.

Keep my babies, he says.

The clown continues down the Avenue of Other People. It is now early evening. The evening light makes everything beautiful. He meets a neighborhood beagle named Jimmy. The dog wants rubs, so the clown pets him, goo-goos to him, shakes the scruff of his neck. He slaps the dog's flank as Jimmy runs off towards the bar.

Jimmy is too human of a name for a dog, the clown thinks. Too human.

He looks back toward the bar. The owner stands in the doorway, watching him.

The clown turns away.