



boneyard

Stephen Beachy

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In this unusual “collaborative novel,” Jake Yoder, a precocious boy caught between Amish culture and the modern world, sits in his middle-school classroom writing stories at the behest of a stern but charismatic teacher. Jake’s stories feature children who are crushed, imprisoned, and distorted, and yet somehow flailing around with a kind of bedazzled awe, trying to find a way out. His characters wander through Amish farms, one-room schoolhouses, South American plains, mental institutions, exotic cities, and prisons; his sentences seem constructed to the beat of an obsessive internal rhythm, and his prose is often haunting and beautiful. The strange logic and disturbing shifts in Jake’s tales reveal a young boy processing intense emotional experiences in the wake of his mother’s suicide and his own proximity to the schoolroom shootings at Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, in 2006. Jake imagines fantastic journeys, magical transformations, and rock stardom as alternatives, it seems, to his own grim reality and the limitations of his life among the Amish. Novelist Stephen Beachy frames Jake’s work with commentary from both himself and editor Judith Owsley Brown, in which they offer their very different views on Amish culture, literary context, the use of psychoactive medications for children, Stephen’s own mental health, and the reality of Jake Yoder’s unverified existence.

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