MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 11 ISSUE 4: KID
THE VALLEY REVIEW

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review was founded by Elizabeth MacDuffie and Alexandra Wagman. We are a non-academic affiliated magazine committed to recognizing and featuring the work of the artists, writers, and musicians living in western Massachusetts and beyond.

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guest salutations

Kid meat is the meat of young goats. Its flavor is reminiscent of lamb meat, and the quality exceeds that of adult goat meat which tastes more tough when cooked. Tens of thousands of billy goats (males) are slaughtered each year in dairy farms shortly after their birth as they are determined profitless. In this issue we denounce the senseless killing of newborn goats, and advocate instead that these goats be raised and later incorporated into a Sunday Night Mediterranean ragu or perhaps pan simmered with onion and tomato.

-Cori Cannavino

i'm mad about a lot of things prayer

Jennifer Juneau

dear lord i'm mad because the cable's out & i can't log onto the internet
i'm mad because i can't fit into last year's jeans
i'm mad because my iphone keeps cutting off stacey
i'm mad because i can't get it right on e houston street
i'm mad because x blew me off regarding my coffee message
and i'm mad about x
so i tormented the magic 8 ball
until it said AS I SEE IT
YES

i'm mad about a lot of things
like half-formed rock bands
and how many idiots it took to fill the white house

i'm mad that someone said
do something constructive with your life
fuck you i am
i wrote about my painkiller addiction in the evergreen review
as i walked through the valley of the shadow of death

i'm mad because america's pharmacies are strict
how much can one's back really ache?
how many times can one lie about tooth pain?

i'm mad because ellen got mad at me in paris baguette
because i didn't talk slowly
everyone heard
i couldn't shut up about my new found love for metaphysical poetry
and for myself
and for the stream of consciousness

dear lord i'm mad
please pray for us sinners

from now until the hour of our death
i'll be plagued by first world problems
i'm mad about how spoiled i've become
in the land of the free

in the home of the brave
i'm mad because i'm never wrong
when nothing's good enough
that must good enough
amen

on essex street

Jennifer Juneau

I walk past *wholesome foods* and i'm thinking there's nothing wholesome about this place
it's just how I like it
the old linoleum floors reek of my youth in all its filth & beauty
& it's 100 degrees out
Next door a crowded bar with its door wide open
and its ceiling fan spinning like a record on a turntable
lures me in
The stale scent of barley & hops is worn into its wood
One bottle of cold miller later
i'm back on the spit-filled & cracked concrete
The air is not ablaze with colors, no shooting stars, no quixotic lens i walk through
just achromatic, bare naked humidity, this summer's day with no breeze
and i got this, i got this fusion of the senses
Don't fall in love, i tell myself
This feeling has no name only a consequence
If i could toss all those wasted lovers of the past away
the ones that failed
and the ones that didn't
i'd exchange every fraction of bliss that had fallen and risen
for this one
I've seen him up there
belting out one love song after the next
with that body language
and that voice
evenly measured like drops of honey
Here's the thing:
i don't know how to play this
Here's another thing:
yes i do

Or, the thing is
there's no time to play this
whether you know how to or not
I'm dizzy with all this drizzle waiting to erupt
like the atmosphere stricken with the wrong weather
I don't want to fall
and i don't want to fall
but falling keeps forcing its way through
I'm spent on the energy
it takes to want someone
this bad
Then this:
proximity
How close you come after the sound of the last guitar string strummed falls dead
The silence is strung-out in echoes
and the notes fall away as they settle in thin air
and the end of motion leaves this vision in stillness
leaving this pursuit to be sealed in another chapter
of wanting

Natasha Hanna

it's *nothing*

Donald Unger

I. **The Grinding**

My wife grinds my teeth.

I doubt she sees it that way.

I suspect that the dental hygienist would understand what I mean immediately—although whether or not she would admit to this is a different question.

I would have interjected something of a potential landmine into my grunting "yes" or "no," while she chirped away about her children, and I would mostly expect a pause and then a deft pivot.

But she would get it.

I know she would.

Of course I haven't told my wife that she's grinding my teeth.

That would be almost as much of an inappropriately personal observation, interjected into a professional relationship, a violation of boundaries.

It's not *quite* that we don't talk.

We're functional.

And, of late—our son gone now—there's less… *functioning* to attend to.

All the brisk energy and the needs and the deadlines and the requirements.

That's gone.

And I should insert here—*what* exactly?

That he went to college?

That he died?

That he's simply grown and gone?

The armed forces?

An overseas corporate posting?

Am I sure he really is—or was*—my son?*

Well.

He's gone.

And, with his departure, some crucial glue of purpose and goal and connection—or an essential channel, some frequency range—went as well.

I was stunned by this, frankly.

There was the initial trauma of separation, the quieter house, the shifting of roles.

But there was no fade after that, no resurgence or rebalancing or. . . there was *nothing*.

A *nothing* so palpable and powerful that it felt like a living, breathing, growing thing, a force that could not be opposed, resisted, or turned back, an implacable fact.

I was stunned by that too.

II. **The Beauty**

My wife is a beautiful woman.

Men—and not a few women—*stop-dead-in-the-supermarket-parking-lot-and-stare* beautiful. Horns honk. Not at *her* but at the statues she leaves in her wake. Grocery carts clatter into car doors as attention is diverted and hands go slack. I sometimes hear little moaning sounds of longing and appreciation.

She knows this.

She acknowledges it not at all.

And to speak to her directly—certainly this goes back at least as far as high school—is hard enough for people with whom she has specific business. That anyone would actually harass her is beyond the realm of possibility. It's clear—I have not the slightest doubt that people *know*—that earning her displeasure could easily lead to being turned to stone.

It's not that she was ever cold.

Not the way I see it.

Out and around when we were younger, socializing when we became parents, the family meals and group vacations, the cocktails with colleagues, she did all of those things with what appeared to be genuine warmth and sincerity. Well calibrated: engaged but not pushy, polite but not distant, interested but not intrusive.

Three or four weeks after the arrival of the *nothing*, I reached across the kitchen table to take her hand, toward the end of dinner. She permitted this, let me hold and stroke it, looked across

at me with an expression neither happy nor sad; she might have been sitting on our patio, looking at a bird that had suddenly alit on her arm.

I traced her long slim fingers.

I wanted to kiss her palm.

I didn't know what to ask—or *how.*

She was docile but not inert.

She waited.

Finally, shaking my head, confusion rippling across my face, I *looked* a question.

And she said simply, "I'm done."

We sat across from each other still.

I searched her face for a more clear or comprehensive answer.

I continued to stroke her hand.

I don't know how to describe her tone or her demeanor.

She wasn't angry or resentful or depressed; she wasn't elated or confused or thoughtful. Her cadences were closer to the polite, low-key cordial response that you might give when a bus boy cocks his head to the side to ask if you're finished with the particular course you've been eating.

She gently pulled back her hand, stood up, cocked her head at me in that exact fashion, took my plate when I blinked, and began to clear the dinner dishes.

I sat there until she finished but she said nothing more, then went upstairs—where, after an interval of time I couldn't judge, I heard her run a bath.

III. **The Problem**

Is the important cliché here *I thought I knew her?*

Is that what I'm supposed to say, think, feel, suspect?

Or *us*?

Is *us* what I'm supposed to be confused about, disturbed by?

But the feeling was more *finally!* which is not to say relief exactly.

But the problem wasn't that I didn't understand; the problem was that I *did*.

It was as though one of the actors in a two-person play had calmly announced the end of the run.

But I had no feeling that this meant we were going to leave the theatre.

We *couldn't.*

Because—ask me, ask her, never talked about it but, life—it's all a theatre without boundary.

There *is* no escape.

There is only a hollow *denouement* without explanation or resolution.

And so she grinds my teeth.

IV. **The Zoo or the Circus?**

We live together as in a zoo.

As we always have.

She the sleek lioness and I… well, that I don't know; I've never really known.

The zoo has always seemed the more appropriate metaphor—quiet, of the modern safari-type, where the animals have room to roam. But I'm pretty sure I'm actually in the circus: a sad clown, a lithe high-wire acrobat, one of those Russian guys in the 7th generation of a family that can juggle fourteen cigar boxes—an impressive feat if a narrow niche.

We were never *Beauty and the Beast*, but—from the time we started dating—amid the clatter of shopping carts released to crash into car doors, I've always heard, amid the moans of appreciation and longing, *Why him?*

Which has never troubled or puzzled me at all.

The same goes for my role in the circus.

A job's a job.

We need sad clowns, high wire acts, cigar-box-jugglers—or we wouldn't call them into existence and then maintain them.

None of those roles is meaningfully more silly or pointless than the work that pays my salary.

And, "Why *not* me?"

I know she's always appreciated my clear-eyed indifference.