

# MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 14 ISSUE 2  
THE VALLEY REVIEW

PASSIONFRUIT



# 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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Front: "Onion" by Carol Kohn

Printing: Paradise Copies, Northampton, MA

Typeface: Gill Sans, Libel Suit (Ray Larabie)

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Vol. 14 Issue 2, September 2020, first printing. ISSN 2372-0999 (print) ISSN 2372-1200 (online)

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- 4** Guest Salutation: Kaliis Smith
- 5** The Meaty Record Review by Jeremy Dubs
- 6** Nighttime in the Swamp & Home Burial  
*Jacob Chapman*
- 7** First Grade Book Report  
*Jacob Chapman*
- 7** Run Clear Notrace Rot=  
*Seth Cable*
- 8** Ticking the N400  
*Seth Cable*
- 9** For Cause  
*Seth Cable*
- 10** Making Love to an Angel  
*Gregory Stephens*
- 14** A Chain of Proteins & Virus  
*Jane Yolen*
- 15** Plowing Under & This Mask  
*Jane Yolen*
- 16** Before Dinner  
*RC deWinter*
- 17** The Making of Stars  
*RC deWinter*
- 18** Knowledge  
*Kirby Michael Wright*
- 19** I'd Quit if I Weren't So Hooked  
*Gerald Yelle*
- 20** The Map  
*Gerald Yelle*
- 21** Cardiff Giant with Dresden Blue Eyes  
*Gerald Yelle*
- 22** Fortunato  
*Richard Wayne Horton*
- 23** Patriate  
*Richard Wayne Horton*
- 24** Alcatraz  
*Janne Karlsson*
- 25** Dreams & In the Dark Room  
*Ed Meek*
- 26** Cultivation  
*Elizabeth Galoozis*
- 27** All-Inclusive  
*Cherie Stoll*
- 28** I've Loved You Forever  
*madame Hair*
- 29** Mourning the Living  
*Bailey Powell Aldrich*
- 38** Double, Double Toil and Trouble  
*Jane Blanchard*
- 39** The Relativity of Loss & Swept Away  
*Mark Hammerschick*
- 40** Grandfather Clock  
*A. Jay Dubberly*
- 42** For Sale  
*A. Jay Dubberly*
- 43** The Roof of the Drugstore  
*A. Jay Dubberly*
- 44** On The Road, 1972.  
*David Anthony Sam*
- 46** Natural Supernaturalism & Angle Street  
*David Anthony Sam*
- 47** Dotard  
*Chris Murphy*
- 48** Poetic Justice  
*Robert Peate*
- 55** Stimulus Check  
*Anthony Chesterfield*
- 56** Dongtek  
*Joy Saha*
- 57** Beach Bodies  
*Molly Dunn*
- 65** Spring's Here  
*Nelson Lowhim*
- 66** It's More than a Sidewalk  
*Carol Bartold*
- 73** Monsieur  
*Seth Simon*
- 74** Portraits  
*Seth Simon*
- 75** Neither Here nor There: A Recipe for How Not to Be  
*Martina Newhook*
- 79** On Fruit  
*Vanessa Bernice De La Cruz*
- 82** Warrior  
*Van Lanigh*
- 83** A Day in the Life  
*Karen Burnette Garner*
- 85** My Baked Potato  
*Frank Zahn*
- 86** Not for Women Only  
*Frank Zahn*
- 87** The Meaty Interview: Gayle Brandeis
- 89** A Sarcophagus of Resin  
*Linda Kraus*
- 90** Living Under a Bridge  
*Linda Kraus*
- 91** Searching for Heathcliff  
*Linda Kraus*
- 92** Appetites  
*Hillary Wheelan Remley*
- 95** City Nights  
*Erica Frederick*
- 96** Threads of Color  
*Susan Dashiell*
- 100** In the Making  
*Kasey Rae*
- 101** In *Waiting for Godot* Nothing Happens  
*Susan Dashiell*
- 102** Drawing on the Other Side: The Tinkering  
*William Fillmore*
- 103** This One's for the Bookworms  
*Jerome Berglund*
- 109** Foolish Drawing  
*Kiyomitsu Saito*
- 110** Dating Silky Maxwell  
*T.J. Butler*
- 124** Stars  
*Counsel Langley*
- 125** Going Underground  
*Jim Ross*
- 137** Covid Street, Easthampton  
*Ben Gagnon*
- 138** Contributors' Notes



## guest salutation: kaliis smith

All nations are built upon pain. This becomes especially important when we recognize that all trauma is also multi-generational. Your pain will be etched into the genetic code of your grandchildren, and then millennia later, a descendant completely unaware of your part in their story looks up at sounds of trouble because you once did, searching for hazards in the sky.

These days the hazards are mostly terrestrial, though still unavoidable. We are taught maneuvers as children, ways to navigate the climate. A weather pattern built for some, but not all. You are taught the signs. A course to sail your ship safely home.

But there are always troubles in these waters. Some you see coming, some you couldn't possibly. And still your friends insist that the waters are calm. That there's no need to panic, but they've never read the sky like you do, and you've seen for yourself how still the waves lie for them. How in the wake of their vessels the waters remain disturbed and toss your boat among them. How even upon the deck of your thrashing vessel they insist upon the placidity of the waters you ride on.

It's unsettling.

We are at the crux of attempting to undo a nigh 155+ years of gaslighting. For the waves have never truly been calm, however easy it was for others to crest them. And we are not making these waters perilous ourselves, though we remember and sing the names of those lost to the seas. It is disturbing that only now when shown the barest glimpse of the breadth of corpses we have lined our stories with do folks start to pay attention. When our pain is specifically and explicitly on display.

All nations are built on pain and the United States are no different. We are unique in how we have evolved that pain however, and the traumas inflicted on the nation's black population has always been on display. At one point it was an actual pastime for us, postcards and all. Witnessing black pain is as American as apple pie (although apple pie has its roots in France, so go fig on that one). And through that lens, however unwittingly, Black pain has been held up as example so that other marginalized communities might distance themselves from it.

This could be you.

You don't want that, right?

Side with us.

Imitate us or this is what you'll get.

This metaphor has been stretched so thin it might show you another injustice.

We can't forget that there's trauma in the retelling as well. For those who have witnessed and cannot forget. For those who have lived through tempests and tumult, calloused hands from

grasping wheel and rope when the waters begged to add them to their number. Those who tried to tell the stories the sky laid bare for them to others so they might sail easier. Those stories that are etched in our very DNA.

All nations are built on pain. Some are lucky enough to have folk who are able to work through that pain to produce beauty. The world spins around them refashioning itself into something more becoming of all of us. Words, inks, movement, voice, sound, textiles, tactiles, science. Tinged in the oceans we crossed and containing multitudes. Reminding us all that it is not always pain, however we ache from our ordeals. That we are stronger together. We endeavor to do and be even more.

All nations are seeking evolution. And we are no different.



## the meaty record review by Jeremy Dubs

Snakefinger: *Greener Postures*

I am Snakefinger, way out, ahead of time, here with an announcement that I'm quite ecstatic about. I come from an island that exists on my 1980 record *Greener Postures* where I currently cohabitate with co-producers/co-writers The Residents, my close companions both during life and after. My physical form known as Philip Charles Lithman left your Earth over 30 years ago. This is where I've been staying ever since my heart attacked. Here I remain alive in a tropical limbo. My island's exotic snake-charming sounds have lured the occasional lucky lurking visitor who stays for the full 38-minute tour guided by yours truly, before returning to their destined place in time and space. You might want to get up. There is a Golden Goat waiting outside your door with a cordial invitation to Snakefinger's *Greener Postures*. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of my island's enchanted creation is coming up soon. The LP itself is the map that leads you. To hear is to transport here. When peculiarly harmonized guitars wobble - when succulent rhythms and subliminal communicate inhabit and perplex your senses, you'll know you've come to the right place. Upon arrival, you may wonder where I am. Look around. I am the Man in the Dark Sedan. I've come to take your hand. I was sent here to be sincere. Truthful and steadfast. You can follow me. I guarantee to take you far away through a confusing, enthralling "Dali nightmare" and back, to love's unknown places. There's just one rule: Don't lie. Across the forest and beyond the wall, meet our island's Residents: The beautiful floating encompassing mist known as Jungle Princess, the subterranean Picture Makers who project a friendly image but really wish to threaten the little children of the sea ("polliwogs and golden fish are we"). You may wonder why I asked you here. Good listener, you are the way out, my release from this captivity. I used to be a hidden mystery, but now thanks to you, it's flashed across the page. Tell the others: Here at Snakefinger's *Greener Postures*, you can feed on my energy and lifeblood at no cost while taking a much-needed vacation. Come one, come all. Come none, no fun. Just hit the play button, set your old pal Snakefinger free, and receive a cosmic thanks from me.



## nighttime in the swamp

Jacob Chapman

For some time,  
I wore a vial around my neck  
that held a small amount  
of my grandmother's ashes.  
One of my friends said why why why  
do you do things like that?  
My grandmother, who had no use  
for rituals of any kind,  
would not be pleased.  
I wanted her with me, I guess,  
for a night like this.  
Toward the end of my nightly walk  
through the swamp,  
I came upon a field,  
and someone had placed a door  
in the middle of the field.  
Nothing else, just a door.  
There was a full moon,  
and I said grandma,  
what do you make of this?  
I could almost hear you say child,  
how on earth did you turn out  
so strange? Do what you have to do.  
I sprinkled your ashes  
in a circle around the door,  
then I walked home  
through the swamp  
and its familiar sounds.  
Grandma, how did you always know  
how to give me enough space  
but not too much?



## home burial

Jacob Chapman

I was asked to say a few words  
at a funeral, the funeral  
of my neighbor's stuffed animal,  
a squirrel named Charlie.  
Charlie died trying to jump from one branch  
to another. The branch broke,  
and he fell to his death.  
It was the third funeral  
at their house that month.  
Charlie's owner, Brian, was going through  
what his parents called a phase, a death phase.  
His parents were going along with it,  
and so was I. At the funeral,  
the other stuffies were lined up  
wearing black clothes, which were mostly  
black paper napkins with holes  
cut out for their heads.  
Brian looked at me and nodded.  
I said Charlie lived a good life, a full life.  
He played in the trees and gathered nuts.  
He loved others and he was loved.  
We will miss him.  
Brian nodded at his parents,  
and they said a few words I don't remember.  
Then Brian carried Charlie  
to the basement, where he buried him  
under a blanket, next to his friends.  
They each had a straw near their head  
that poked out the side of the blanket  
just in case they weren't really dead.  
It turns out they weren't.  
They were all in a coma, one big coma,  
and they recovered on the same day.  
We had a little celebration,  
and I asked Brian's dad what's next?  
as he cracked open a beer.  
Man, I have no fucking idea, he said.  
We got him through this one,  
now we'll try to get him through the next one,  
whatever that is.



# first grade book report

Jacob Chapman

As you know my name is Travis Hall this is my book report on the book The First Thanksgiving by Jane Smith it was an interesting book I learned that the pilgrims and the native Americans didn't really get along that well they fought and one time the pilgrims cut off someone's head and put it on a pike for everyone to see I thought whoa that's a lot for a kid's book my dad says it's all a bunch of liberal bullshit now we can't celebrate Thanksgiving what the hell but I wouldn't want my head on a pike so I don't know I do like turkey and cranberry sauce I really like cranberry sauce and chocolate pie my grandmother makes really good chocolate pie that is the end of my book report on the book The First Thanksgiving



# run clear no trace rot-

Seth Cable

*Penelope opens her eyes.*

- > You are in a room.
- > USE SWORD
- > Use on what?
- > USE SWORD ON DOOR
- > There is no door.
- > USE LAUGHTER
- > Laughter is effective. The room dissolves.
- > MOVE LEGS
- > Which legs do you wish to move?
- > MOVE FUNCTIONING LEGS
- > You step forward onto a landing. There are stairs leading up and down.
- > DOUBT STAIRS
- > Doubting the stairs is effective. They flatten and coalesce into a bridge.
- > BURN BRIDGE
- > Burn bridge with what?
- > USE TRUTH
- > Truth is effective. The bridge has been burned, and you can progress no further.



# tickling the n400

Seth Cable

*The following items were presented (with fillers) in a balanced randomized two-alternative forced choice five point Likert scale off-line judgment task.*

- It's raining cats and diapers.
- I take my coffee bland.
- Mary put the flowers in a vasectomy.
- Are you awake? Before we take this any further, there's something you need to understate.
- Every dog loves to chase cads.
- In the wetlands behind my parents' house is a place I haven't ever told anyone aboard.
- Sounds like Bill dialed the wrong numbness!
- I think for a time, to be honest, I had forgotten about that place. But lately it has been resurfacing in my though.
- Pancakes taste better with syringe.
- It's important that we go there. Maybe then I can leave it benign.
- This plan is almost perfect; there's only one probable.
- When I show you what's there, I won't blame you if you want to leaven.
- The puppet show really entertained the chilblains.
- I think I owe it to you, though, before this progresses any furtive.
- The pressure in his eyeballs is making him go blintz.
- I am not my past. I am not what I've done. All we can do is look towards the futile.
- In the state of Georgia, there are elementary schools built on top of former slave markers.
- Will you do this? I won't ever ask anything like this agave.
- Mary cut deeply into David's thighs, sighing at how much he blessed.
- Dogs in power, children in cages, and the slaves of Christ hope for a virus to bring them to heaving.
- There will be no guilt, if all of us are to balm.
- Ashes to agate, dust to dulcet.
- Ashes to apples, dust to ducks.



# for cause

Seth Cable

Really great to meet you, Mercy.

Thrilled to hear that you're joining us, Mercy.

*Let us know if you have any questions, Mercy.*

You're absolutely right, Mercy.

Thank you so much for handling that, Mercy.

You're so much better than they were, Mercy.

Are you sure you can take this on, Mercy?

*Let us know if you have any concerns, Mercy.*

How are you doing, Mercy?

You can come to us about anything, Mercy.

Are you feeling okay, Mercy?

They haven't received it yet, Mercy.

*Let us know if you have any problems, Mercy.*

I'm afraid I didn't understand that, Mercy.

There's been a complaint, Mercy.

We just want to do whatever we can to help you, Mercy.

Was that supposed to be a joke, Mercy?

*Let us know if you have any resentments, Mercy.*

I cannot stop myself from inhaling your breath, Mercy.

I noticed you through a

keyhole in a room we

just installed, Mercy. If my

guess is correct, you're an

asymptomatic vector, Mercy.

Quo usque tandem abutere,

Mercy?

My body comes in portions, just like yours, Mercy.

King of cats, queen of trash, it's all a hoax like Sandy Hook, Mercy.

I'm turning this in to you, Mercy.

I'm turning into you, Mercy.

I'm into you, Mercy.

I'm you, Mercy.

I'm Mercy.

Mercy.



# making love to an angel

Gregory Stephens



1

Day after day, a silent old man on a hill with a puzzled expression is sitting perfectly still. Marta, a feisty senior with tinted golden hair, wheels Gabriel out to the patio to look across the Caribbean.

10

Gabriel's hand cannot hold a pen to write, but he has other ways of conveying thoughts to his wife. He still responds to Marta's touch.

Marta is the Creator God of this world, and Gabriel is her angel. She controls every facet of his existence. There is nothing he does, sees, hears, or tastes that is not predetermined by his wife. He is an empty shell that she can fill with whatever content she desires.

2

After Gabriel was diagnosed with progressive supranuclear palsy, he felt trapped by silence. Gabe projects his thoughts through his eyes, or his bestial groaning:

*What an irony to be wheeled to worship services by my wife, as if I were a teenager forced by parents to go to church. Once a man and twice a child.*

*"When you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go."*

*I am a captive audience, but if I tune in to what Marta chooses to share, some of it speaks to me. What a thing to hear her read this, as if it had been voiced by my own mute tongue.*

What does Marta see when she looks at Gabriel now, in his invalid state? What did she see before the concrete was poured, which froze time?

Marta loved Gabriel because he was not a typical Puerto Rican. He was not a drinker, yet also not a teetotaler. His moderation stood out in a country where drinking was a national religion.

*“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* That verse spoke volumes. Marta’s materialistic husband had wanted his treasure on earth. Marta grew to believe that Gabriel was her treasure. That is where she put her emotional resources.

When his health deteriorated, Marta developed a regard for Gabriel that evolved beyond merely “making do with the residue.” Marta began crafting Gabe into a different kind of “new man.” This must be a part of the Creator’s master plan, she reasoned.

Gabriel was Marta’s personal angel, her constant reminder of God’s grace. Having survived cancer twice, Marta saw Gabriel as a sign that she had survived for a reason, that there was some divine logic for why he had been left behind in this state.

We become known for our reaction to suffering and tragedy. Gabriel’s diminished presence inspired Marta to write a new script for him, to continue their relationship by other means. This was not merely saintly behavior: Marta had discovered how to make love to an angel.

Marta has certain rituals that Gabriel has come to recognize. When she takes him out on the balcony for a shave, he knows how this will turn out. He has no say in the matter whatsoever. He is a mute witness.

While sitting on the balcony, naked to the waist, he can look down over the bird cage their apartments occupied by Andrés, the Humanities lecturer. Andrés can hear each of Gabriel’s piercing groans, which elicit a sort of call-and-response from the aged Sun Parakeet.

To the left of Marta’s balcony are several neighbors. They are at the bottom of the Caiseas spur, which is shaped like an amphitheater. The balcony sounds reach throughout this neighborhood, as if from a stage.

The shaving is a clue. Gabriel has come to realize what is in store, because Marta’s mood will be different when she has something up her sleeve. Her tone of voice changes, depending on what she has in mind.

On this evening she has slipped Gabriel some Cialis with his dinner. She does not, would not announce this. But still, the ritual quality is established.

She reads him erotic poetry. This evening, it is taken from the *Song of Songs*. She holds her red Bible in her right hand. It falls open to a favorite passage, which Marta has underlined. Sitting beside Gabriel, she holds his right hand with her left hand, her ring finger still bearing the wedding ring from half a century earlier.

*For strong as death is love... Many waters cannot  
put out love  
nor rivers sweep it away.*

Gabriel has been gazing towards the sea, but slowly turns his head and eyes towards his wife, who fingers the pages:

*Come my lover,  
Let us go out to the field... if the blossoms have opened,  
There I will give my loving to you.*

Marta's right forefinger slips the pages back again:

*Arise, O north, and come, O south  
blow on my garden, let its perfumes flow,  
Let my lover come to his garden,  
and eat its luscious fruit.*

12

Gabriel's inscrutable face directs a gaze midway between the sea breeze and his wife's words. Marta sees in his fluttering eyes deep reservoirs of emotion. She strokes his hand, then turns the wheelchair, and pushes him back into their bedroom. As if parking a car, she swerves him around until the wheels are parallel with the bed. From behind, she rubs his bald head, tanned but surprisingly without blemish.

She steps in front of him, kissing his forehead that she holds in her hands. One hand moves down and gives the barest whisper of a caress to the front of his Fruit of the Loom shorts.

Continuing to kiss his forehead, her hand slowly increases its pressure.

"¿Me quieres?" she asks. "¿Tienes ganas?" She wants to know if he still wants her. She tells him as if in an exercise video, to rise up. Gabe is beginning to moan more intensely, which she takes as a yes.

Marta removes the object of her desire, then slowly climbs atop his wheelchair. She continues kissing Gabriel's bald head as she positions herself. "Ya," she says as his moans transition into heavier breathing.

With practiced skill, she lifts her slip, and lowers herself onto Gabriel's lap. Penetration is slow and uncertain at first. Marta has to *bregar*, to struggle with intense dedication in the face of a difficulty—Gabriel's immobility, her dryness.