

# MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 15 ISSUE 1  
THE VALLEY REVIEW

CHUCK



# 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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## salutations from the editor

Sometimes the stars just align. I never would have known, that day when I received a MySpace message asking me to “meat for tea,” that I would latch onto these, perhaps ill-chosen, words, and make them the name of a short-lived band. I never would have guessed that a year or so later, I’d be sitting in the adjunct faculty office at Holyoke Community College, grading papers, and have my colleague, Alexandra Wagman, say “Hey, we should start a literary zine.” And I realized I had the perfect name. And so we began. This conversation happened in December 2005. The first issue was released February 2006.

Now, Meat for Tea is 15 years old and still physically in print. In the beginning the publication was a zine and now it’s outgrown that descriptor but still stays true to the original DIY vision. I’m overcome with gratitude that Meat for Tea has brought me close to heroes of mine and my husband’s. We’ve had two covers by John Lurie, writing from luminaries like Jane Yolen, Marge Piercy, and Anne Serling, and we’ve fostered friendships with rock stars, Jeff and Jane Hudson, David Yow, and Roger Clark Miller, all because of a little publication that began on a whim that Alex and I decided to seriously pursue.

Welcome to the “Chuck” issue of Meat for Tea.  
besos y abrazos,  
Meaty Gonzales (You knew it was me all along, didn’t you?)

## sleepless

Tanni Haas

He finds himself retreating to the bedroom several hours before he starts to get tired. The narrow space with its black-out curtains and heavy comforter helps slow down his racing mind. Or at least somewhat.

He can't stop thinking about whether his son is asleep. He's still a toddler so he should be sleeping peacefully and without a care in the world. But he used to wake up in the middle of the night and just lie there and stare frightened into the darkness with his pacifier nowhere to be found. It can be lonely at night and very scary, with monsters lurking in every shadow. He'd go and check up on him if he could but he can't. Since the divorce, he's only seen him for a couple of hours every other weekend. Hopefully one day.



## like father, like son?

Tanni Haas

As he's driving up the country road to his son's first sleep-away camp, he can't help but think back on his own experiences, on how weak and fearful he felt in the presence of all those self-confident campers, on how he spent most of his time trying to make himself as invisible as possible, wishing only for camp to be over so that he could get back to the safety of his usual, solitary existence.

It's summer and the sun is shining down from a clear sky on a world full of new beginnings. When they arrive at the camp, he cautiously unlocks the backdoor so that his son can jump out and into the light.



## the moment

Tanni Haas

The moment he realizes he doesn't know where his son is is the moment he ceases to exist as a person and becomes reduced to two eyes and a body that frantically search the crowds of toddlers at the local playground. Even when his son eventually pokes his head out from behind a tree as though they've been playing a game of hide-and-seek the whole time does he not fully regain himself. It feels as though he'll always be a little different, a little less, than he used to be.



# visible

Jan Shoemaker

During the week that Notre Dame burned and the Mueller report was released, in a less remarked upon but still, I think, remarkable incident, I was called, “Mrs. Larry Shoemaker.” Warming myself by the fire in a cafe, innocently scrolling through emails, I was unprepared for the slight. I’d say it was a slap, but the hand passed right through me, for I had been erased.

The note addressing Larry Shoemaker and some nameless accessory came from the lawyer who was preparing our trust. Staring at my phone, I wondered when western civilization had started disappearing women again. Did it recommence with the advent of that neo-girdle called *Spanx*—an appalling product name, now that I thought about it, that didn’t need much unpacking. Vaguely, I wondered if I still had property rights.

At the tables in my vicinity, familiar people were carrying on with their old and new enthusiasms. The half-dozen stiffening septuagenarians who meet weekly to keep their French supple were pouring over a common script, letter-pressing Rs, tongue to palate, and rolling out soft vowels like pastry dough. To my left, a middle-aged couple, touching shoulders, bent over *The New York Times* while their third party, belly-heavy and losing his hair, kept up a refrain about redactions and full-disclosure. I nodded my assent to him, then wondered if I’d really caught his eye, having just been deleted myself.

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It was true that recently I’d been making breezy, upbeat remarks about erasure—I called it “invisibility”—most publicly at a book launch for my new poetry collection. “Remember when, as a child, you used to deliberate between the advantages of two great superpowers, being able to fly or becoming invisible? Both so enthralling and full of possibilities?” I’d asked my small audience—loyal friends and students who turn out for these things. “Well, I may never fly of my own volition but, as is reliably the case with women over sixty, I *have* become invisible.” Then I told a short, true story, outfitted to entertain, about the advantages of moving through life unnoticed, ending with, “and I carried my big red Solo cup of chardonnay right past the ‘No Alcohol on the Beach!’ sign and soaked my feet in the lake.” The crowd tittered, as I’d hoped they would. There *are* practical advantages to ducking below the world’s radar, but then I recalled that my husband had carried his wine to the lake too, and he was still *Larry* Shoemaker. Social convention had not redacted his name as it had mine—in the 21st century, for fuck’s sake.

Pouring the last of the tea from the press pot into my cup, I thumbed a reply into my phone. “Dear T\_\_\_\_\_, ‘Mrs. Larry Shoemaker’? Really? What a quaint and dismissive anachronism; I thought it had been euthanized decades ago. I’m honestly shocked.” Then I hit *send* and made my way to the barista, managing at least enough visibility to come away with a refill of hot water and a blueberry scone.

I sometimes have the sense to be interested in what I’m overlooking, what I don’t see. A couple of Christmases ago, thoughtful, name-retaining Larry gave me a digital microscope and I couldn’t stop pushing things into its saucer of light and ogling their images which were magnified on a screen. I slid stones and seed pods and thistles and nests under that small, bright eye at the end

of a swan's neck which bent over a plastic plate with a clip for holding the item of interest in place. Worlds opened before my astonished eyes. Mosses turned to forests, fungi to canyons of spires, the scales of pine cones to battered canoes. I eased back the covers of old leather books, slid them beneath the small, bright lens and what once had been smooth and uniform planes were sliced with rivers and plateaus; the threads of their bindings scattered to the prisms of peacocks' tails. I'd been fumbling blindly through a landscape of textures and hues to which I'd been oblivious.

Morocco recently taught me a few things about invisibility when my daughter Maddie and I spent a few days in Fez. We never did learn to negotiate the shadowy passages of that crowded, ancient medina with the vaguest idea of where we'd spill out into a square. Some of its stone lanes are so narrow we had to walk single-file and you never knew when a turn would lead you to an abrupt face-to-face with a goat's head stuck on a pike announcing another butcher's stall in the souk. We were grateful for our good day-guide, Muhammad, who kept track of us for a few hours each afternoon and steered us to a handful of sites on our itinerary, among them the tannery dye vats featured in every guide book about the old, walled city.

Leather is everywhere in Moroccan souks: in bags and belts and ottoman pouffes and most noticeably in babouches—brightly-colored, pointy-toed slippers that line the walls of countless small shops. And the animal hides that make up these goods pass through the fabled Fez tanneries. The dye vats and the hidden men who work in them to produce the bright wares strung up in markets can be seen from wooden balconies that overlook them.

Through a door in a dim lane of the medina, beneath an overhead lattice that scattered the light, Muhammad led Maddie and me into a leather-goods shop, festooned with the ubiquitous slippers and bags, where we followed him through a series of rooms, climbing half a dozen steps here and half a dozen steps there. Finally, he led us outside, onto a few planks of a third-story porch that overlooked the tannery and pressed a mint leaf into each of our hands. "To hold like this," he said, delicately lifting a leaf to his nose to filter the assault of air that reeked suddenly of a thousand outhouses.

Below us a honeycomb of stone vessels, each deep enough to hold a man to the hips and twice as wide, were filled to the brim—some with dyes and others with a sharp stew of animal urine and feces that softened the tough sheets of cow and camel and goat hides. Balancing on the rims, men moved, as they had moved for centuries, among the vats or stood thigh-deep in their putrid soup, kneading the hides with their feet and hands. Voyeurs, we gaped from the lip of some ring of an *inferno* into which humans are tossed to toil in shit. We lifted our mint leaves like porcelain cups.

After a few minutes, Maddie and I retreated into the shop and retraced our route through the jungle of handbags, deflecting sales pitches with apologetic "*la shukran*"s (no thanks) and "*vegetariens*"—as if that were a regrettable condition we were forced to endure—refrains that could only have sounded senseless and effete.

Though they're not all quite so literal, the world is full of shit jobs performed by invisible people that those of us living scaffolded lives seldom glimpse. Coal mining comes to mind. When I was teaching high school English, which involves mountains of papers that you literally grade everywhere—on vacation, during concert intermissions, in surgical waiting rooms and sports arenas—I kept a couple of pictures torn from *National Geographic* magazine taped inside a closet door in my classroom. They were for the bad days, the buried-and-I-can't-get-out days. One photograph showed a thin man inching toward an enormous beehive on a tree limb that sprawled several stories above ground. "Honey-gatherer," the caption read. In the other picture a woman in a lab coat pressed her nose into the armpit of a shirtless, middle-aged man: "Deodorant tester." On days when the academic earth's plates collided and thrust up new alpine peaks on my desk, I would open that cabinet door and gaze at those pictures, then—with a fresh dose of perspective—go back to my desk and pick up a pen.

I know as little about the invisible person who tested my deodorant as I do about the men in the tannery vats; presumably, in a narrow field of choices, some choice was made; none of them, to my knowledge, were actually enslaved, as the truly invisible are. Visibility, it turns out, varies by degree. And it's not, of course, determined by your corporeality but by how much interest the world takes in you and by how comfortable or uneasy you make people feel.

It was a few days after leaving Fez, when Maddie and I were spectacle-browsing in the big, dusty square called Jemaa el-Fna in Marrakech, that I first noticed the advantage of *female geriatric invisibility*. It's a dynamic that relies on a lack of interest so profound in the predatory male for a post-menopausal female who is not his mama or auntie, that he is unable to register her presence. Doubtless a chemical as well as a social phenomenon, like dirty dancing in high school gyms, it hails from the pole opposite arousal and adds a great deal of agreeability to the daily life of aging women. But not to their daughters.

Strolling through the square, Maddie moved without being accosted as long as the light lasted. In the warm but not hot April sun, we loitered among the notoriously surly snake-charmers—bored as assembly-line workers by the repetitions of serpent-handling—and water-sellers draped in brass cups, and lantern-venders overseeing their glass-and-tin wares spread out on the ground. As the sun set, the scene began changing. The snake-men packed up their asps; the lantern-men lit up their wicks. Tent canopies were unfurled, grills fired up, and picnic tables conjured out of the dry air were laid out in lines in a flash-restauranting routine that predated the stampede of American food trucks by centuries. Story-tellers and magicians materialized and bejeweled men dancing in satin pantaloons and gauzy veils, as every street that met the square discharged its throng. Women in western sundresses and women in head-to-toe hijab, men in tight American jeans and men in *djellabas*—traditional, Berber robes with pointed hoods—crowded the square. We had stepped into a tale from the *Arabian Nights*—tweaked by the times—and I gave myself up to its enchantments. Until Maddie leaned in and asked, "Can we go back to our room? I can't take anymore groping."

*The groping—right.* From the free-pass of invisibility, I'd nearly forgotten the intrusions young women encounter in the world. As the crowd pressed us toward a small band of Berber drummers, the grabbing hands on subways came back to me, the calls from construction sites, the whole, male world that once wanted to know, it seemed, if I didn't *want some of this?*

“Of course,” I said, recalled to the realm of fertile women—a place improved, I’d thought, over several decades, but suddenly so very still the same. Withdrawing with Maddie to the courtyard of the *riad* where we were staying, I felt a spasm of gratitude for the years between us that set me outside the world’s glance—which I recognized immediately as an absurd and demeaning gratitude and an inadequate response to the paradoxical problem of invisibility and visibility for women. Because visibility alone has never guaranteed value.

My friend Beckie likes to tell a story about visibility and value from her years as a biology student at Cornell in the 1950s. Sitting near the front of the lecture hall, the only other woman enrolled in the class was knitting as she listened to the professor hold forth. Noticing her—a woman whose very presence violated the sciences—the estimable Doctor of Philosophy addressed her directly. “Knitting,” he paused in his remarks to observe, “is just another form of masturbating.” Looking up, she replied without losing a stitch, “Professor, when I knit, I knit and when I masturbate, I masturbate.” I love this woman for her refusal to be devalued and excommunicated, for maintaining her composure, for defending her visible right to be.

Women *and* men with an eye out for justice keep fighting and, as my own years of witness and work accumulate, I see how very much those of us doing so will have to, as Martin Luther King Jr. instructed, as every folk singer and tee shirt printer in the upstart sixties repeated, *keep on keeping on*. Not enough has been gained and nothing is gained that can’t be lost.

“Fifty-three percent,” I intoned—again—to my friend Janet who was sitting with me in a small pub. We were waiting for drinks at a *Planned Parenthood* fundraiser, stacking little foil squares of condoms that had been dropped on our table like salt and pepper packets. “Fifty-three percent of American white women voted for a man who bragged he could ‘grab them by the pussy.’”

“You can’t let that go, can you?”

“I will never let that go.” Now the Republican Party was gunning for women’s reproductive healthcare, which was why we’d accepted the invitation to sip wine and write checks that night.

There is a postcard I keep propped on a bookshelf in my study showing a woman—easily in her seventies—holding a sign that reads: “I Can’t Believe I Still Have to Protest This Fucking Shit!” But the truth is, we do. This week, in 2019, Alabama arrested a woman because her fetus died of a gunshot wound she sustained in a fight she started. She wasn’t invisible. Alabama saw her and Alabama *sent her to jail*. She was lucky; outraged people around the country saw her too and got her out. But, I wondered, in the emboldened conservatism of these times, how many flesh and blood women would not be seen?

Because I am invisible now, I keep props at the ready; they’re like the bandages H.G. Wells’s Invisible Man used to wrap himself in when he needed to be seen. Gathering lint and dog hair in the back of my car, homemade signs duct-taped to dowels and dented by bags of groceries read “DEMOCRACY versus trump!” and “Women’s Rights are Human Rights!” Somewhere there’s a pussy-hat back there too. You never know when you might need to jump out in a median or swing by a university or detour by a capitol lawn to join a protest in progress.

The fire at Notre Dame and the Mueller Report both left us in the dark. The Cathedral's spire illuminated against the night sky was, for many people, both a monument to truth and the visible face of France. From the American Midwest, I wept as it burned; people wept all over the world. Robert Mueller's report—as censored with inky black bars as any old war letter sent home from the front—seemed to promise but failed to illuminate the shadowy machinations of the Trump cartel. Like lots of disappointed people, I've hitched my wagon to the glimmer of ongoing investigations in the hope they'll turn up actionable evidence of what is obvious and noisome malfeasance. In the meantime—visibly, doggedly, hopefully—I keep on. I keep on keeping on.

\*



this is our home  
Christopher Lyles

## civility

Jane Yolen

An old-fashioned word,  
hardly in use today  
as the dinosaurs slog  
through the remains  
of our constitution.

It is the toilet wipe  
of choice, that old paper,  
its script posing  
no problems  
to the old white bums  
of the senate.

Then throw it on history's pyre,  
along with the other old-fashions,  
like lady's first, love your neighbor,  
marriage commitment,  
and thou shalt not lie.



## life as an old combine

Jane Yolen

So here I am, eighty-two,  
sometimes stuck in the muddy fields,  
rusting to eternity.  
Other times, my wheels roll  
onto the hardpack of life  
where I feel the wind of my own passing.

This old combine has had many uses,  
daughter, wife, mother, writer,  
the chucker of grandchildren's chins.  
But being left in the field while others  
pass by on their way to harvest  
is not for me.

I'll oil my parts, push the starter,  
turn the engine key.  
This old gal's gonna roll again  
lift those bales, spritz out mud,  
let the lumpy tires find their footing  
on the crush of acres.

Use me or lose me, I say.



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## still singing that body electric

Jane Yolen

Sometimes the body becomes unplugged,  
low voltage, then a massive jolt.

I never know at this age what to expect,  
my circuit breakers revolt, are thrown,  
though how far, how wide  
is unpredictable.

I guess I should keep  
an extra power source handy,  
or a handyman near,  
but having been widowed  
nearly ten years, I make do  
with battery packs.

The thing about keeping current  
when one is so last century  
is when to know which switch  
is which, and which  
should simply be thrown  
away.

I would go solar if I could.  
if it weren't so expensive  
to start up; if it weren't my winter,  
the sun now so low,  
clearly going nova  
in my once infinite sky.



## precious life

Jane Yolen

*"Just wish I could do more  
with this precious life."*

—Constance Currie

My mother died at fifty-nine,  
my husband at sixty-eight,  
not given but taken away.

Yet every day in my own time  
I wonder what more  
I can do in this life\_

What is precious should not be kept  
in baskets, banks, or vaults,  
but thrown into the wind.

To seed in other soils,  
for grandchildren,  
neighbors, strangers to find.

