MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 17 ISSUE 3
THE VALLEY REVIEW

CASSEROLE

ISSN 2372-0999 $12.00

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.

Staff: Editor-in-Chief: Elizabeth MacDuffie
Layout: Mark Alan Miller
Impresario: Elizabeth MacDuffie

Cover Art:
Front: "Playing with Geese" by Sarah Hussein
Back: "Mid-summer/self" by Susan Sensemann

Printing: Paradise Copies, Northampton, MA Typeface: Gill Sans, Libel Suit (Ray Larabie)

Contributors: Elizabeth Appelquist, Jerome Berglund, Shirley J. Brewer, Elliot Cardinaux, Jacob Chapman, Linda Chown, Charles Coe, Joseph Corrado, Victoria Costello, Elena Cvjetkovik, RC deWinter, Mel Edden, Marc Eichen, Eavonka Ettinger, Jeffrey M. Feingold, Scott Ferry, Diane Funston, Sarah Das Gupta, GJ Gillespie, Diane Griffin, Joe Hilliard, Richard Wayne Horton, JL Huffman, Sarah Hussein, Cherryl Jensen, Kim Keough, Barbara Kessel, Zosia Kochanski, Linda Kraus, Vitek Kruta, Kimberly Kuchar, Jax Kusleika, Nadja Maril, Jason Mazzotta, Judith Mikesch McKenzie, Phillip E. Repko, Susan Sensemann, Judith Sharlin, Andrew Shelffo, Ellis Shuman, Mistinguette Smith, Jennifer MacBain-Stevens, Peter Tacy, Claudia Tong, Grant Vecera, Reed Venrick, Gerald Yelle, Jane Yolen, Frank Zahn

Special thanks: Big Red Frame, Gateway City Arts, Splendor Solis Books, Hammer & Horn/Michael Goldman, Tijon, Turn It Up! Luthiers Coop, Viva Tubes, Broadside Books, Oh My, Pie in the Sky Berry Farm, Jeffrey Feingold/Tax Point Advisors, Valley Arts Newsletter, Tzivia Gover/Dreaming on the Page, Abandoned Building Brewery, Corsello Butcheria, Dishonest Gabe, Downtown Sounds, Waugh Insurance, Paradise Copies - and all of our sponsors. Our sponsors deserve great thanks - please visit them and let them you know you appreciate their support of the arts! "Where's Saoirse?"

The Meat For Teacast: anchor.fm/meatforteacast - and everywhere you get your favorite podcasts!
For T-Shirts, Mugs, Totes and more, visit meat-for-tea.creator-spring.com
To help support Meat For Tea: The Valley Review and the Meat For Teacast, please consider joining our Patreon. patreon.com/meatfortea

Advertising in Meat For Tea is inexpensive and easy. By advertising in Meat For Tea you are helping to keep print media alive! Visit meatfortea.com for more information.

To submit to Meat For Tea, please go to: meatforteathevalleyreview.submittable.com/submit.
Please send all other editorial correspondences to meatfortea@gmail.com.

Vol. 17 Issue 3, September 2023, first printing. ISSN 2372-0999 (print) ISSN 2372-1200 (online)

For more information or to purchase current and back issues, PDFs and subscriptions, please visit meatfortea.com.

Guest Salutations

The theme of this issue, casserole, spawns a catalogue of images in my mind:
Comfort. Variety. Creativity. Convenience. Surprise. Leftovers.

In a way, it's a metaphor for life. When someone serves us a casserole we're confronted with an amalgam of ingredients that may or may not be to our taste.

If you love it all, you dig in and enjoy, savoring the the range of flavors colors and textures.

But sometimes a casserole contains things we don't like, or are to which we are allergic, or for whatever reason don't want to eat.

And sometimes it's obvious this dish was put together out of necessity, because there was no other option available for this meal.

So either we dig in and enjoy or we pick around and find the bits we want.

And isn't that like life? So often we don't get to pick and choose the people and events and objects that become part of our meal, so to speak.

And isn't that akin to the creative arts and everything we create from the stuff of ourselves, our lives the world – whether it's poetry, a short story, an essay, a piece of art and on through the myriad varieties of creative self-expression with its illimitable range of themes, words, textures, colors and emotions?

Sometimes we create for the sheer love of creating. Sometimes because there's something we need to say or show. And sometimes we're just just having fun, being creative, trying new combinations of form and words, texture and color in ways we haven't until just this moment.

As Albert Einstein said, "Creativity is #intelligence having fun." And even if the piece you're working on isn't fun, it's still the wonder of something being created in the words or form or colors in which you want to say it – things that need to be said. So go ahead, enjoy this casserole and savor the variety of the human experience.

RC deWinter

a pound of flesh

Linda Kraus

My goddaughter's breasts were truly gargantuan—
they covered nearly all of Lake Michigan.

Were they sensuous, silky soft, easily aroused?
Were they the delicate pink of a Rubens painting

with sun-kissed aureoles around the nipples,
suggesting unbridled, ecstatic passion for her lovers?

When interested men slyly offered, "Howdy do,
so very pleased to make your acquaintance,"

they were addressing only her breasts, as they
stood there, so patiently expecting an answer.

She had ceased to exist—all that remained was a pair
of mammary glands capable of speaking for her.

No one saw the shy, tender girl who was hiding
behind a massive chest; no one saw the bitter tears.

The scalpel can be mightier than the pen or sword;
it can change the perception of a woman's body.

A surgeon sculpted her chest into normalcy;
suddenly she was reformed—a sort of epiphany:

a new woman emerged—one with an aggressive
curiosity and a serious scholar's dedication,

one whose voluptuous body no longer defined her,
a woman who finally was taken quite seriously.

red centered spiders

Jennifer MacBain-Stevens

red centered spiders

crawl near me I move

to avoid them. some teeter off the rocks
into the stream below.

the black ants, huge. lumber on.
you tell me to rest
after a head injury

I sit

under dappled forest light

tiny white moths

lay dead
on the ground
how did they fall?

I watch you stare at the dirt, unsure

what action to take
is it moveable or wet or rocky?
You dig in it, lift it, throw it down into slabs.

I don't know who to call to pass the time
I am a visitor in this place

invisible

birds call out over
the tree canopy

so many pebbles and sticks and spiders and ants, the flies, unsure for once

I wear a bug net the wounds on my face still open

you gave me a topical mug wort, a solace, but I forget things…

I forget mittens and hold the cold compress to my skin
it stings: my left cheek and eye

my face could be scarred
the red and brown radiate heat

Instead of teleportation
my chosen super-power would be to stop time
so I can heal and the world stops

just the red centered spiders, small moving eyeballs
watching me from

below crawl back onto the rock

the birds, free above, repeat one question
like me

that night first lifted into the ambulance

how do we not fall?

bye

Jennifer MacBain-Stevens

the chakra flag colors faded / whipping sidewalk ghosts along the flanks of dogs / fingers just bones to be wished upon later / like a black locust cloud he missed the point of her breath / he passed her by with a disguise and a fist / he ate her organs / her whole feed / how could you not know / what is written in rain / falls on forearms / singular city maps / your throat sound / tore flesh apart / apply this ointment / the only softness /

she looks for her pieces / her peace / on long car rides, when she lights a candle, when she wakes suddenly at 3am, applies mug wort / through hallways / torso pulled apart / nothing fits together now / wings stiff / weak numb talons and cold eye sneers flat lined / until she flies away into the sky / that time is coming / no one knows

deep sleep

Ellis Shuman

Pete was having problems sleeping at night. Insomnia ruled as he tossed and turned, his mind rehashing the day's troubles. Endless traffic jams. Pressures in the office. The demands of his boss. The nasty looks and biting comments of his wife. The unpaid bills, the unfiled tax returns, the threats of his mother-in-law to visit.

Night after night, Pete couldn't get the sleep he needed. He rolled back and forth, thrashing out unintentionally at his wife, interrupting her dreams and recoiling from her sharp elbowed jabs in his ribs.

His wife was sympathetic to his predicament, up to a point. "See a doctor," she insisted. "He'll write you a prescription for something."

"I don't want to get addicted to sleeping pills!"

Pete was willing to try anything, except for pills. He went for late night jogs; drank a glass of red wine before bedtime. He avoided his cell phone and instead read until his eyes were blurry. He listened to meditation tracks, to whales, to waves hitting the shore. His mind numbed but nothing worked. He still couldn't sleep.

In the mornings he rolled out of bed red-eyed and struggled to his feet. Splitting headaches and aching muscles followed him to the bathroom. A cold shower did little to cleanse him of the night's struggles. One cup of coffee, and then another one. Nothing could refresh him for the demands of the new day.

"Take care of yourself!" his wife demanded, offering no suggestions what he should try next.

"Maybe we need a new mattress," he suggested.

"We can't afford it!"

"We can't afford my not sleeping at nights," Pete countered. "I can't go on like this."

The next day after work, he parked at the mall and entered a well-lit store he had seen advertised on television. The Sleep Bazaar. He walked around, eying the beds, the pillows, and the comforters. The mattresses lay in formation as far as he could see. Sealy, Ergovea, Magniflex, Naturepedic. Brands he was familiar with and some he had never heard of.

"Can I help you?" It was a sales clerk, the name 'Norman' pinned to his white shirt.

"Yes, I am looking for a mattress. Queen-size."

"What exactly did you have in mind? Soft or firm? Innerspring or memory foam? Latex or hybrid?"

"I don't understand any of that."

"Well, try lying down on this one," Norman said, pointing to a large mattress.

"Should I take my shoes off?"

"Just rest them on this plastic."

Pete eased himself onto the mattress and lay back. Something didn't feel right. It wasn't comfortable. With an effort, he sat up.

"How about this one?" Norman said, pointing to the next mattress in line.

This one was even less comfortable. Pete's back hurt in the supine position.

"Listen, Norman. I just want something that will ensure a good night's sleep. A deep sleep."

"A deep sleep?"

"Yes, do you have anything that will guarantee that?"

"We have just the one."

Norman led him through the labyrinth of mattresses to a curtained off area at the back of the store. He pulled back the curtain to reveal a single rectangular mattress.

"This is our trademarked Deep Sleep model," he said. "It's made for maximum comfort, combining innerspring coils and polyester memory foam with patented air bubble technology. We offer a 30-day money-back guarantee, but I assure you, you won't complain about your deep sleep."

Pete lay down, sinking into the most comfortable mattress he had ever tried. Immediately he felt the pressures lifting. His constant headaches; the traffic jams; his boss's shouting; even his wife's nasty looks—everything vanished at once. He felt totally at ease, relaxed and untroubled.

"I'll take it!" Pete said, unwilling to rise from the mattress. He could stay like this forever, he thought. His eyes drooped; his mind began to shut down.

"Are you sure you don't want to try one of our other models?"

"No, I want this one. What do you call it? Deep Sleep."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I want Deep Sleep. Nothing but deep sleep."

"You just lie there and I'll get my order book." Norman pulled back the curtain and left the compartment.

Pete closed his eyes. He felt as if he had been anesthetized, drugged into unconsciousness. Deep Sleep guaranteed for his deep sleep.

Norman approached his manager's desk at the back of The Sleep Bazaar and picked up his order pad.

"How's it going in there?" the manager asked.

"He's out like a log," Norman replied. "I'm making the order now."

"Good. What time do you think they'll be here?"

"They usually come within an hour."

"Ask for a quick disposal. We have to get his body out right away. You never know when we'll get our next customer."

Norman filled in the order and picked up his phone. Business was good, he thought, smiling to himself. There was never a shortage of customers willing to do anything, anything at all, to get a good night's deep sleep.

moocows: there they are

Linda Chown

> Of the fertile thing that can attain no more.
> Wallace Stevens, "Credences of Summer"

Presented with the physical,
with the body of things hot in August,
specifically, with those moo cows,
udders hanging fat and swollen purple,
heavy with consonants and Christ recumbent,
with this drone of pain like a toll
no one could even ever keep up—
Michael, row the boat ashore hallelujah
here in the din, this heave and throb
of trouble, terrible pulses pitch turgid, turbid.
Suddenly to have become,
like this, an extra, in my life
without the sleeping dogs to let lie
down down in the bleach of it. The die deads
and the fed feed a tangle of temporary temper
meant to turn about, terrible in this turmoil.
I am a pain which takes the gears over whole-
hog wild and I the child I once was
stuck again to fetch seeing on my own,
staring blind through the physical
rapt in a pool of danger and darts.
Ocarinas and concertinas in the air,
their after-tones set to mouth me
into my brain before I come to see
anything to think about to say that
there is this sudden completeness, this beauty
beyond the eerie tumescence of those cattle.