MEAT FOR TEA

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THE VALLEY REVIEW

JERKY

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 Salutation with Charles Rammelkamp

When my friend Elizabeth MacDuffie invited me to write the salutation for the *Jerky* issue of *Meat for Tea*, I wondered, *how does she know about the complicated relationship I've had with jerky all these years*? Beef Jerky – a good source of lean protein, rich in iron, folate, calcium, vitamins A and C. A military combat ration, durable, able to stay fresh without refrigeration, lightweight, easy to store. The survivalists among us will have a huge store of jerky tucked away in their Rocky Mountain caves as they await Armageddon.

And I also think of Lennon's funky instrumental composition from his solo *Walls and Bridges* album, the b-side of the lead single, "Whatever Gets You Through the Night" (*Do it wrong or do it right…*). How many times has beef jerky gotten me through the night? Wait, that sounds like the punchline to a dirty joke.

An adjective as well as a noun – jerky. *Jerky behavior.* A "jerk" is a pejorative – somebody regarded with contempt, someone who is rude or inconsiderate, boorish, stupid. "He's a jerky guy; he behaves jerkily." (Adverb, too!) Donald Trump loves to sling the word around, but when it comes to being a *jerk,* well, he fits the description like nobody else. There ought to be a picture of him beside the definition in Funk & Wagnalls. He uses the word preemptively as a way of shielding himself, rendering the word meaningless. Name-calling without substance, pure playground behavior – classic jerk manners, classic jerk deeds. TACO Trump's buddy Elon Musk, a classic jerk, does the same. Recently, Musk, behaving like the jerk he is, out of nowhere called Senator Mark Kelly, the astronaut, a jerk. *What a jerk!* But I digress.

The slang originated in the United States in the 1930s. A "jerk off" is a variation. In Chicago there's *jagoff*. You find the insult in Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March.,* though he uses it to highlight Augie's approach to life, his free spirit. In *Humboldt's Gift,* on the other hand, Charlie Citrine, the protagonist, uses the word to describe somebody who is disruptive, inconsiderate. The term originated in Pittsburgh, but was in wide use in Chicago, especially in Irish taverns. "Jack off" is common slang for masturbation. And there's your dirty joke punchline. Jack off. Jerk off.

Obviously, also, a jerk is a quick, sharp, sudden movement, hence its application to masturbation. *Janson gave a sudden jerk of his head…Cecilia jerked the car door open, surprised to see her mother sitting there*. You can see how it might be used to describe a dance, too. Indeed, there *is* such a dance, to go along with the Twist, the Watusi, the Frug, the Mashed Potato, the Swim, the Funky Chicken….The L.A. band, the Larks, had a single in 1964 about the dance called "The Jerk." The Motown group the Miracles had a song the same year called "Come on Do the Jerk." Another Motown group, the Contours, released "Can You Jerk Like Me" in 1964. And who can forget the Capitols song, "Cool Jerk"? The song reached number 7 on the "Billboard Hot 100" in 1966.

From a poem I once wrote called "Down for the Count"

The bus's windshield wipers made me
think of a pair of praying mantises,
tall, elegant, Druidical stalks,
their jerky motion a mating ritual,
instinctual dance steps across the slick glass,
never quite connecting, a tease, a challenge.

But back to *beef* jerky in particular. Seems to me that was the only kind available for years, not that I've rigorously investigated this. But now there's chicken, fish, meatless jerky, vegan jerky (eggplant jerky, shiitake mushroom jerky, tempeh jerky, tofu jerky). There are also many flavors, flavors I don't remember as a kid: bar-b-que, teriyaki, cracked pepper, chipotle lime.

So, maybe the short answer to *why me? How did she know?*:

Everybody's got a complicated relationship with jerky!

Thank you, Elizabeth, for letting me get that off my chest!

And remember: *This machine kills jerks!*

Besos and Abrazos,

Charles

the dreams of people in middle age

Joseph Fasano

I'm one of them now—
both the dream, it seems,
and the dreamer—since a friend said
she dreamt, at the end, of "the old days,"

and I was there, and the two of us were dancing—
long before the digital witnesses—
to a music that was fainter than the May rain,
the words she couldn't make out anymore.

We loved, once, and her funeral
was beautiful,
and now that she has given me
this little gift,

what about my own dreams, in this hard world—
the ones that I've neglected now
for ages, since I can't imagine anyone
would care for them—

the ones in which I'm walking through a dark field
calling the names of my old friends
and none of them is left
to give an answer;

or the ones in which I'm in the barn
of childhood
and a red mare is stomping in her harness,
and when I touch her hair

I know that she's my mother,
and the roads are snowed
and she can't go where she's going;
or even the dreams of long ago,

long before the losses that have crushed me—
the deaths, the marriages, the partings—
and I'm lying awake after the rain has gone,
and I see a little light under the door.

to those who call themselves christian but seek to divide and conquer the world

Joseph Fasano

My god you think
that's what love is?
Go
to your little, bitter meetings,
your callous rallies,
your palaces of gold.

You think you can choose who is beautiful?
Your country is open
to the chosen—
while somewhere, in the shadows
of your houses,
the one you believe
you are hearing
is hanging
in a crown of thorns, in agony,
burning the world with mercy,
his arms in an embrace he cannot close.

brown pelican

Nathan Hassall

In May 2022, an unprecedented number of brown Pelicans were found dead or seriously injured in Malibu, California.

Hunger's hammer fractures the ocean's surface,
scoops from its wet cradle a herring's gawping eye.
A few years ago, your ancestors were found,
wings floating on the current. Some say it was red tide—

algae's deadly bloom turning blood against body. Others:
you were poisoned by the two-leggeds that stare
from the shore. Your brother: scarred
by a fishing hook. Sister, wrapped in wire, wings

too bound to lift. I watch as you oar the air, white belly
just above water, four single-filed kin
in your slipstream, eyes swirling. Amidst this loss, I wonder…
Something, always, just below the image: a face

in the wrinkled blue.
The sunset blends scale-pink.
Night's white flower begins
to blossom. What say you, sacred bird

of the Pacific? What may your chick
breaking through her thick egg
teach us about the predictability of change?
Days pass. Feathers slick black, slip-pale

with age. A form you know emerges,
a weathered king:
brown body, yellow head—
sunlight splints his feather like the heart

midway through a shipwreck.

Ion

Xander Berkeley

the meaty interview with Nancy Kricorian

What's your favorite color?
Red

What's your favorite animal?
I love birds, and one of my favorite backyard birds is the Eastern Phoebe, because I like the way it says its name and bobs its tail, making it easily recognizable.

If you could choose to fly or to be invisible, which would it be and why?
I would choose to fly because I love birds. When I was a kid, I had frequent dreams about flying and I loved the sensation of soaring through the air looking down at the landscape below.

Are you happy and, if not, why?
Sometimes I am happy, sometimes I am unhappy. What I strive for is a sense of usefulness. My motto is a line from Grace Paley: "The only recognizable feature of hope is action."

What book/s are you reading at the moment?
I have developed a habit of reading several books at the same time. Currently I am reading my friend Patricia Ononiwu Kaishian's book *Forest Euphoria: The Abounding Queerness of Nature,* Vigdis Hjorth's novel *Is Mother Dead,* and Najwan Darwish's poetry collection *No One Will Know You Tomorrow.*

What are you currently listening to?
I've been listening to my Beirut playlist, which consists of music by Mashrou' Leila, Yasmine Hamdan, Adiss Harmandian, Fairuz, Le Trio Joubran, Harout Pamboukjian, and others.

How old were you when it became clear you were a writer?
I started writing poetry when I was seven years old, but it didn't occur to me that writing could be a profession until I was in college because I had never met a writer until then. I think I didn't feel like a "real writer" until my first novel was published.

If you could invite six people, living or dead, to your ideal dinner party, whom would you invite?
This one is difficult, especially to choose just six. I made a list of all my defunct heroes and realized they would probably not get along at all. It was going to be a very awkward dinner party. Then I made a list of my best friends and thought of the people whose feelings would be hurt because they weren't included. So I guess I would just go for a dinner date with Marcel Proust, because I think he was a great gossip.

Tell us more about The Burning Heart of the Worlld.
My new novel, *The Burning Heart of the World,* is about an Armenian family before, during, and after the Lebanese Civil War. I did a massive amount of research about Beirut so that all the details would be correct: historical facts, descriptions of city streets, the smells, the sounds, the emotions, all of it. It's an immersive experience from the first page, and I've been gratified when readers who lived in Beirut during the Civil War say that I have recreated that world with great accuracy. The final chapter of the book is an Armenian folk tale featuring talking birds, and I meant it to be a gift to the reader that also clears up some small mysteries in the earlier sections of the novel.

sag jinkins pt. 3

Reid Messerschmidt

6. A Proud Man and a Hopeful One.

The following is a speech delivered by Sag Jinkins to a group of 14 Boy Scouts at the Mertice Hambubger Memorial Jamboree in Climax, Georgia on April 13th, 1969 on the occasion of their completing a group charity project that had cleared four acres of various debris and repaired the houses of 16 impoverished families and individuals. The project didn't officially have a name, but Sag thought of it as Operation Gazebo Redemption, or OGR:

"Gentlemen, I stand before you today a proud man and a hopeful one. I look at you and I see everything I've always wanted to be.

I see confidence and drive and brains.

And I see the future. And I see how wonderful that future looks.

I look at you and I see honor and loyalty and all the other traits a scout pledges to have.

Say them with me:

A Scout is Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, and Reverent.

That's right. Well done.

But I see even more than that when I look at you.

I see my boys. My men. And I hope you'll forgive me for feeling possessive. I can't claim responsibility for your goodness. That was there from the start.

I mean "my" in that I belong to you.

Does that make sense?

You're as much a family to me as I've ever known. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

When I first became a Boy Scout – 1951, it would have been – I didn't have much in the way of family, or anyone that acted that way anyhow, and it was the first place I'd ever really felt I belonged.

But I didn't really feel that I belonged to a family in the true sense until I met my wife, and I didn't feel like that family was complete until I became your Scoutmaster.

So, today, after completing such good work with such good men, I just want to say thank you.

Thank you.

You are so terribly important to me and I hope you know that I will be here for you for as long as my heart is beating.

And that's all I have to say."

7. Happy Knobnoster's Indian Motorcycle Daredevil Spectacular!

Happy Knobnoster called Sag into his office at the dealership.

"Sit down, Sag, sit. I've had an idea and I think you're the man for the job."

From the moment he met Happy, Sag only ever wanted to be the man for the job, and to be the man for Happy's job, finally, was almost too much to take. He managed to keep his mouth from grinning, but there wasn't anything he could do about his eyes. He sat, but just barely.

Happy looked at him with a tinge of disgust. He detested enthusiasm.

"You know that Evel Knievel fellow the boys love so much?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Goddammit, Sag, stop calling me sir. I thought we were past that."

"Sorry. I'm just excited to get started on our project."

"You don't even know what it is! But – sorry – I'm glad you're excited. Sag, you're family and I appreciate how far you've come in this business. I probably don't tell you that enough, or ever. So I wanted to tell you before I told everyone else that we're going to start selling motorcycles – Indian Motorcycles."

"Oh, that's great!"

"It is. With that Knievel as popular as he is, motorcycles have never been more in demand and we're going to capitalize on that."

"You, uh, you said I'm your man? What do you need me to do, sir?"

"Goddam …" Happy calmed himself. He was about to ask his son-in-law to do something very stupid. He could at least be nice about it. "Well, Sag, I've got an extra special job for you, my boy."

Sag swooned.

"We're going to promote our new venture with a daredevil show just like Knievel's. I want you to jump over some cars. And some snakes. AND a gator or two."