MEAT FOR TEA

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THE VALLEY REVIEW

FAUX

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Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

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Guest Salutation with Gerald Yelle

Thanks, Elizabeth, for asking me to write the guest salutation for the Faux issue of *Meat for Tea*. It's a problem we never get away from, isn't it, trying to figure out what's true and what's false? A lot of people claim to value integrity: You're who you are at all times to all people and never play it false. If you think that's how you are, how do you know you're not fooling yourself? It seems you have to take it on faith. Easy to do if other people agree with you. But even so . . .

If it's all just a matter of faith, if you never really know for sure what's true and what's false, you're pretty much free to believe whatever you want. You can radicalize yourself, because, who knows? Maybe there really are lizard-like child molesters running fake news and deep-state scams? Because who knows what the real truth is?

Well but that's the serious side of the question. The issue at hand is faux. We use the French word when speaking of less serious subjects. We say our coat is faux fur or we've made a faux pas. No existential crisis, just an embarrassment. Even animals get tricky at times.

I'm a fan of *Nature* on PBS. There was an episode once featuring tricksters in the animal kingdom. One is a funny-looking African antelope called the topi. The topi male makes a certain noise when it senses that lions are too close to the herd. This causes the females to huddle toward any nearby male, and if they happen to be in heat they could mate with a non-alpha male. Having figured this out, non-alpha males sometimes make that grunting noise even when there are no lions in the neighborhood.

If animals do it, does that make it okay? Of course. No reason to be judgmental. Maybe faux is everywhere, but that doesn't mean it's everything. What's not faux is feeling disgusted by people who destroy the lives of others. There's just way too much of that shit. Usually they do it because of some belief or other. So hey, believe what you want, just don't act on it if it means shooting up a pizza parlor. I know people who read *Meat for Tea* don't need to be told, and for the rest of the world it may be too much to ask. But what else can I say?

With that I salute you, *Meat for Tea,* you compassionate purveyor of free-speech fun and games. And thank you Elizabeth and Mark for making it happen and keeping it going.

Love to all,
Gerald

fall

Matt Jasper

Says Christ to lawn chair—
you've been sitting there open to the sky—
holding no one on your lap lapsed
beyond contact with another—

your woven straps mildewed
from being forgotten in rain—
the intersection of each meeting like another
and another unnailed cross

not embossed with INRI or lacquered
and polished for quick sale
in some ramshackle gift shop
set up at the perpetual source of the miracle

of your prelapsarian days—
when you were holding asses by the score as they
implored and pressed into you—
even let down their hair to pull

on rivets, the lattice, the aforementioned straps,
turgid aluminum shuddering breathless
into the ground pressed by all that
shifting weight above.

One day they're splaying you in sunlit
expectation, next they note your sins
and fraying so fold you into
some bin for melting down and re-use.

You may mourn the passage of time, curse
cruel utility, a saveless savior, the treachery of others,
or lay in the wonder beginning again
of what new shapes will take you and you will take.

tortoise post

Matt Jasper

A quick sentence or two on how sentience
arrives as a fading gradient flow-charting down
from mammals and apparently diminishing
(I would say becoming more direct)
on its ride down the phylogenetic tree
from the large soul-havers like whales, humans,
elephants, dogs, tortoises then on to crows
(who are flying souls) and the various spined
and finned things and on to bivalves
and animalcules impossible to see….

And don't get me started on the plants
they attached to polygraphs in 1966
demonstrating both sympathetic
and remembered anxiety or how the time
scale of tree root telemetries becomes
perfectly obvious if one stares long enough.

Then there are harmonies and sympathetic
vibrations and valence electrons swirling
inside vast mostly-empty atoms of everything
we touch and the way a stucco ceiling
will absolutely be moving in a certain direction
if one dares notice.

Looking away from atoms and flecks
of cottage cheese pulsating in a ceiling,
one may consider our friend the sea sponge
that doesn't even have tissues that can feel
the pain that can begin its patterned demands
on a creature to respond. Next up
in the clade would be cnidaria—
who have nerves yet do not have brains.

Where does one allow consciousness
to come into the picture? And where the soul
(that death-dissociated aggregate
of consciousness in constant communication
with every moment...)?

And if it's a gradient or a hierarchy,
are we sure that we are at the top of it
or just compensating with abstraction
for our lack of purely being inside
of life without need for such distant
reflections upon it?

No wonder we get lonely and fly off bridges
to be one with pure quidditas if we forget how
to look up to the sky or down at the moss
beneath our feet. When we are broken down,
animistic consciousness is everywhere
to receive us.

Trees know they are in the company of other trees
and send messages through the mycorrhizal network
we can barely intercept the signals of not for how
faint they are but for how complex.
Trees detect the energies of other trees
and grow beyond simple tropisms into patterns
of crown-shyness and associations.

Water knows it's in an ocean
without having to think about it.
Consciousness is a condition
of everything. Nothing is not alive.
Everything is seen and remembered.
.

sag jinkins pt. 4

Reid Messerschmidt

9. Batton Was Not Deterred.

Someone sat next to him. Sag didn't look up.

"My friend, aren't you Sag Jinkins?" the person asked admiringly.

Sag turned. No one had said anything admiringly to him in a long time. The man next to him looked like a cartoon character, but he had a musk and a smile that instilled confidence.

Sag sensed a new father figure. It was Batton Trowel.

Batton Trowel was a Texas good ol' boy born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska with a deep weird streak that manifested itself privately in simpering, gross, omni-submissive orgies and publicly in his dress and unpleasant vibe. He got everything he set his mind to, he'd say, but it was mostly because folks would do just about anything to be rid of him.

He'd been a car salesman once, like Happy, and quite successful. He abandoned the trade after he accidentally ingested some mescaline and experienced a typically errant vision that pushed him to seek one-ness with the universe.

He began his search with a large order of mescaline and a move to Florida, where he sold "health tinctures" and healing crystals until he was arrested for drug trafficking and served three years in the Florida State Penitentiary, where he watched both of Sags jumps on the World Wide of Sports.

He'd only been out for a month and was still looking for his next gig when he saw a man who looked a lot like a beat to shit version of Sag Jinkins walk into Lumpy's. Ideas swarmed, but he hung outside for a bit to let his man get loose before he shared any of them. He walked around the block a couple of times, kicked trash and talked aloud to himself. When he felt enough time had passed, he walked into the bar and sat down next to Sag. He spoke about how much he admired his courage and how he could see he was a man with uniquely and ideally aligned chakras. Sag didn't understand what he was talking about, but it all sounded nice and he was too low to feel the unpleasantness that radiated from the large man's leathery skin. He was transfixed by the massive turquoise bolo tie around his thick neck.

Batton could see that this wouldn't take much work, so he got right to the point.

"Sir, I would be delighted and honored to be in the Sag Jinkins business. And if you aren't currently employing one, I'd like to submit myself as your humble manager. And even if you are currently employing some duplicitous rogue as your manager, he's quite clearly doing a profoundly and inexcusably lackluster job of attending to your needs. You, sir, are a star, and should be treated as such. You should be eating at the finest restaurants, not slumped at this regrettable bar. You should be showered with sexual gratitude and sundry other adulations! What say you?"

Sag began to weep and embraced the burly man. He ground his puffy face into Batton's garish western shirt.

"Thank you," he sobbed.

Batton put Sag on a strict diet and regimen of prayer, meditation, and crystals, though he kept feeding him booze and low dose mescaline. He put Sag up at a decent hotel and set to work booking shows. They were hard to come by, at first. But Batton was not deterred.

To pique public interest, he decided to stage a series of Guerrilla Jumps inspired by Sag's first entrance on the national stage. There would be no permits and no forewarning, just a little word of mouth and maybe a nudge to the local news.

The first and only Guerilla Jump was attempted in the town square of Durham, North Carolina. Batton flew there and bought Sag a bus ticket. He gave a couple of homeless guys $5 apiece to put on construction vests and slide the ramps from a flatbed truck.

Sag was too drunk to ride on a bus, but he hitched a ride from a sympathetic fan who managed to decipher his mumblings and take him the distance. Sag pulled from a bottle the entire ride, even when the man asked him not to. He was barely conscious for the event. He inched up the makeshift ramp and slowly tipped over its top lip. He broke a few ribs and wasn't so much knocked unconscious as fell asleep. It was a disaster, but it did make the news and successfully raised his dormant public profile.

Out of the hospital, Sag begged Batton to check him into alcohol rehab. His doctor said he'd die otherwise.

Batton was furious. "These gat-damned city doctors have absolutely no idea what in fuck they are talking about. They are just out to make a quick buck. Stick with me, son. I'll work you over with the crystals and the tincture, we'll get you in a sweat lodge, and you'll be feeling better than a lizard in a hen house. Won't even have to quit the sauce. You shouldn't quit the sauce! Lord, no! It's part of what those people love about you, Sagory. It's the HOOK, son. No one'll pay to see a man who isn't a bit reckless, my boy. And you can't let them down now! You're all over the news! A genuine hero! And, frankly, you can't afford to stop. Or to go to rehab. Here, take a drink of this. It's whiskey, but I've mixed in some of the tincture."

The increased exposure earned Sag some small time gigs and a veritable guarantee of State Fair and Monster truck rally shows for the rest of his life, possibly the worst outcome imaginable. Batton was managing his finances, so he never saw any of his meager earnings. He allowed Sag a small stipend and a constant stream of alcohol, drugs, crystals, and the tincture.

In the five months that followed, there were arrests and health scares and injuries and various humiliations, but there were also some jumps. Sag took no pleasure in any of it.

He did the Okfuskee County Fair in Oklahoma and completed a fairly impressive jump with a fairly large crowd, but shit his pants somewhere before landing.

No one noticed, but it didn't feel great.

He was paid $150 to appear at the demolition derby at the Jamestown Speedway in Jamestown, North Dakota. He didn't land his jump and got into an unsuccessful brawl with some locals in the parking lot. They left him moaning and bleeding on the asphalt and Batton didn't notice he was gone for two hours. It took another hour to find him. Crystals were waved and prayers were intoned and he was back on the bus for an 8 hour drive to Golgotha, South Dakota, with a sharp hot crack in one of his vertebrae, undiagnosed and untreated.

Which brings us to where we started, finally.

Sag is about to die.

10. The End of Sag Jinkins.

Sag hobbles back to Batton after his third trip to the fence and back. The forced march has made him feel a bit better, mentally. More awake, anyway. But his body feels like it might collapse into itself and decompose like a squirrel corpse in a time lapse nature video.

He thinks, "I can't do this anymore."

Sag begins to cry. He sobs and chokes and kneels down next to Batton, who is already mid prayer. Batton puts a hand on Sags head and it's cold despite the 110 degree heat index.

"Oh, great creator, giver of life and riches. Bless this old boy before this great jump. May it inspire all those who see it and put them in mind to buy some merch. Amen."

They stand and walk to the small, sparsely populated Grandstand. Batton hands him his helmet and talks. He never stops talking. Sag doesn't listen.

He tries his own prayer.

"God, please forgive me. I don't deserve it, but please forgive me. Give peace and happiness to my family. I don't need any for myself. But please forgive me."

He feels the words echo in his head. They bounce around but don't go anywhere. It makes him furious. Spurned again.

For the last time.

There's a patinaed pay phone attached to the back of the building. Sag asks Batton for a dime, and Batton obliges. He's thinking about other things.

"On in four minutes. Keep it quick."

Sag jogs to the pay phone. He picks up the receiver, inserts his dime, and dials home.

Lynette answers. "Hello?"

Sag doesn't respond. He is crying, quietly, he hopes.

"Sagory, where . . ." Lynette begins to cry too. Their misery harmonizes, hers tired but open, his raspy and stifled. For a minute they just cry.

Lynette thinks about how this is the first time they've done anything together since he started riding the motorcycle, and it brings her back from the reverie.

She sucks the snot into her nose and clears her throat.

"Aaaaaagh! Dammit, Sagory, I'm so sick of crying about you. I'm sick to death of hearing about you and I'm done talking to anyone about you. I had so much hope for you! You were such a GOOD man. And I had so much hope for us! Our life was good! The boys idolized you and had to see their Hero Dad turn into a scary joke. They don't even use your last name anymore."

Sag was silent for a moment. Then he quietly slurs, "That's good, s'no good."

"Sagory, the last name doesn't have anything to do with it. It's not magic, you're not cursed. You're an alcoholic jackass like the rest of your family. You're even worse than them! You made it out and then crawled back in the dang monkey cage. It didn't have to be like this."

There's a long silence.

Sag says, "Tell boys sorry. Tell'm I love'm. Proud of them. And tell Clinton s'got a great right hook."

They both laugh a little.

«A'way . . .ovoo Lynette. S-sorry. Goodbye."

"Sag, wha ..."

He hangs up and limps toward the grandstand.

He's sitting astride his beat up Indian Motorcycle, alone in the hallway to the performer's entrance. Batton is fifty feet in front of him. He monologues to the audience about his tinctures, mostly, and finally introduces Sag with superlative after slippery superlative. "You Don't Mess Around With Jim" plays on the slapdash PA, tinny and jostling to be heard over Batton's bullshit.

Sag puts on his helmet. He hears the final announcement of his name:
"Saaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaag Jiiiiiiiiinkiiiiins!"

He can almost see the Gazebo. He hasn't thought about it in years, but its profile is reflecting off the inside of his tinted plastic face mask, collapsing into rough piles behind the flamboyant cowboy who had hammered the final, unnecessary, and cruel nails into an already air-tight coffin lid.

Sag imagines Batton sweaty and shirtless, smiling, saying, "Ran out of firewood, Sag!"

He revs his motorcycle once and hops off. He lets the bike fall and begins to run. There is panic, like drowning, and then there is rage, like a swarm of bees.

He enters the grandstand at a dead sprint. Batton hears panting and heavy footsteps in the dirt. He begins to turn, but Sag is already there.

Sag puts his shoulders down and drives his helmet into Batton's left kidney. The big man makes a noise like a plunger unclogging a toilet, and stumbles forward a few steps. The big man is out of breath and unable to get it back. He's worried he might have a heart attack.

The audience is awake now. They are standing and shouting, some in fear, some to encourage.

Sag gets behind Batton. He wraps his right arm around Batton's huge neck, grasps his left wrist and squeezes, like he'd learned in the Army.

The crowd becomes frantic as Batton's face goes from pink to red and black, but not frantic enough to help or leave. Sag's strained grunts and Batton's tight wheezing are amplified by the microphone. Jim Croce continues singing.

Sag squeezes as hard as he can. Batton goes limp and the dead weight is too much to hold. Sag lets him fall to the ground, onto the microphone. The sound of his body hitting the dirt rings through the grandstand, and the music is all that is left.

Yeah, you don't tug on Superman's cape
You don't spit into the wind
You don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger
And you don't mess around with Jim

Sag Jinkins has now taken the lives of two men, and he's about to kill the third.

He reaches down and pulls the microphone out from under Batton's stilled chest.

He speaks through his helmet. The slur is gone.

"I'm Sag Jinkins. Gravity don't mean shit to me. I just wanted to build a fucking gazebo."

He drops the microphone to the dirt. The siren peel of feedback fills the auditorium. The crowd cringes.

Sag runs back into the performer's entrance. His bike is on its side, still running. He picks it up, shifts it into neutral, and pushes it in front of the crowd.

He casts his helmet aside. The crowd gasps.

His face.