MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 5 ISSUE 1: Offal
THE VALLEY REVIEW

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

Uno, dos, tres, quatro, cinq... how quickly that rolls off the tongue, and seemingly just as quickly, the neonate magazine, Meat for Tea: The Valley Review, has grown up and is turning five! It seems like only yesterday that "Gristle," the inaugural issue, was launched; and appropriately, this fifth year anniversary issue is themed "Offal," recalling past themes, while boldly looking into the future.

As I sit here, awash in a commingling of emotions, ranging from nostalgia to pride, my taste buds are alive with pleasure. Each bite of beets, goat cheese, walnuts and greens tickles my palate in a different, yet extraordinary way. You see dear readers, I was recently inspired to take my dear friend Emilio out to dinner at one of my favorite Easthampton restaurants, The Apollo Grill. Emilio has been gravely concerned about his brother and I felt a bit of distraction was in order, and really, what could be better distraction than a delicious meal? But I digress, there's a whole new issue of the magazine and a fifth anniversary Cirque to introduce.

"Offal" may well be one of the meatier issues of all. A painting by rising outsider artist, Leigh Cooney, graces the front cover. The Meaty Film Review is back again, and there's an interview with none other than Jad Fair, who also kindly sent scans of his gorgeous paper cut art, which is currently on exhibit in Tokyo. There's even a recipe using offal, that looks so delicious, I may just make it myself, if I ever find time to cook.

Offal is lovely and delicious, but it's no accident that your lovely editors have chosen a homonym of "awful" as the theme for this issue. With the recent events in Wisconsin, the attempted attacks on planned parenthood and women's reproductive freedoms in general, there is much going on that is, quite frankly, awful.

Thankfully, the upcoming Cirque should provide a brief respite from all of this awfulness and promises to be one truly memorable evening. The Cirque is more than a release party for the upcoming issue of the magazine, but also the release party for a new pressing of MYTY KONKEROR's album, "I miss the future." The album is pressed on white vinyl and looks oh so sexy. MYTY KONKEROR will be joined by Constantly Burning Fire, Satan's Answering Machine, and local favorites, Curious Buddies, so this will be a full night of music. Additionally, the Happy Hour Burlesque Troupe will be giving a fairy tale themed show and also be introducing a new side show act, which must be seen to be believed.

I urge everyone to submit their work to this growing publication; it's the cool way to get a free issue, after all, if we publish it. If your work is rejected, revise, rewrite and submit again. Do not grow discouraged. The esteemed writer,Samuel Beckett, had his first novel, Murphy, rejected by over forty publishers before it was finally published, and he went on to win a Nobel Prize.

besos y abrazos,
Meaty

buck moon

Jessamyn Smyth

My temples itch and ache in a pleasant way while he fucks me. I am aware that the sex is technically hot, but distracted by this other sensation, and relieved when he apologizes for having to leave right after. I tell him it's fine, smiling.

Are you okay with this, he wants to know in the largest sense, probing for attachment that isn't there. I don't say anything, just look at him.

I can tell that you are, he says, puzzled. I grin, bite his belly.
Don't mark me, he says.
I didn't bite you hard enough, I answer, laughing, and hand him his pants. I put on my robe, wait impatiently for him to dress, walk him to his car, wave, and keep going out into the field as his taillights recede.

It's midnight, mid July. The moon is full above the field, and the sky has such clarity I can see pocks in the white surface of rock hanging in vault of black. Everything smells wet and dark; my sexed skin, the night greenery, the sighing wind, the loamy earth. I rub my temples. The robe, oversized now, swirls; I grow smaller as I take up more space. Wet silk trails in dewed grass around my legs; legs that feel elongated, fine-boned, arching from tiny, hardening feet. My fingertips make circles at the sides of my forehead and my skin thins, becomes translucent, parts without pain. My skull changes shape. Bone-hard nubs emerge, velvet coated; I coax them out, they rise to my touch, growing out and up from the sides of my face, their surface mossy, reaching. My hands disappear, recede, my shoulders turn downward, I lean toward the grass and standing becomes a four-legged thing; keratin rounds into hooves, spine elongates, robe falls.

Peripheral vision has widened into luminous surround; emptinesses fill, or cease to matter. My dead rise from their graves and run to me. My muscles twitch, and we run through night fields for the sheer pleasure of it, laughing, filled with lust for the impact of earth beneath our strides, for the taste of sweat or cool water from streams reflecting pocked moon surface. Branches thrash our skins, thorns catch and release, blood flies; faster, my muscles shout, faster, and I run, my dead transforming apace with me.

There are hundreds of us now, thousands: a vast herd running with the momentum of memory. When we reach the big maple, her hundreds of years of growth a giant canopy that dapples the light, we use her body to scrape our antlers clean. Hot bursts of breath mingle, damp flanks jostle and heave, black eyes pocked with history throw light: we strip the velvet. Our bones blind the night with their brilliance.

country life

Riley McCormick

1. Chicken Butchering

I learned how to butcher chickens from a seven year old girl in Kentucky. Her name was Emma and she kept her knives sharp. She was also a sweetheart. First Emma demonstrated the efficient twist-and-snap motion that removes both the head and feet. "You just twist it and yank," she said over the sound of the bird's breaking neck bone. Then she showed me how to pull the flesh of the bird's underside taut and make an incision just under the wing bone. Her small hands easily fit inside the bird and pulled out the entrails. "Be very careful not to accidently cut the intestines, 'cause that's where the poop is," she advised. She helped me remove the lungs, which were a real bitch, clinging to the ribcage like barnacles on the side of a ship. "You have to kind of scrape them off, with your fingernails," she said, holding up a glistening orb for me to examine. "Look, Nina!, They're bright red! Because of the oxygen!"

Emma's and her family were champions of offal, so any useable bits were set aside, livers and hearts and such. Everything else was unceremoniously dumped into a two gallon bucket. This bucket of guts, Emma informed me, was for me to feed to the pigs. "You feed this to the pigs?" I asked, unsettled. Not quite cannibalism, but it still seemed strange. "Yeah, of course," she said. "Pigs will eat anything. Besides, we can't compost it. So take it over there, they'll love it!"

The pig pen was located at the other end of the farm's one hundred and fifty acres. The farm was composed of hills and hollows, or in local parlance, "hollers," bisected by numerous creeks. I hefted the heavy bucket of chicken parts through fields and pastures. I had been working on the farm for five months and my arms and shoulders had grown strong from tasks such as this. I had arrived weak and pale and soft.

2. Arrival

It was the summer of my twenty-seventh year. I had decided to uproot myself from a comfortable, if somewhat drug addled, existence up north. Kentucky seemed suitably exotic, and why not work on a farm for the summer? I had known people who had done it. Organic food! Fresh air! Hard work! And so on. I gave my notice at a job I never liked and hopped on a Greyhound bound for Bowling Green. Rachel, half of the married couple that owned the farm, agreed to pick me up at the station. We had communicated via phone and email and she struck me as sane enough.

She came in a battered Ford Ranger with her two children in tow: Daniel, aged ten, quiet and intense, and Emma, my future butchery instructor. Rachel radiated good health and clean living. I learned that the two children had never set foot in a classroom. Rachel and Paul, her husband were believers in 'unschooling.' "Completely different from homeschooling," Rachel informed me. I liked the kids and envied them their childhood: they were bright and barefoot and wild and free.

Upon arrival, the children took me on a tour of the farm. We paused for a moment near some trellised vines. "These are hops", Emma said, plucking off a cone shaped flower and handing it to me. "Don't ever eat one. They're sooo bitter. They're for beer. Daddy loves beer." "I like beer, too," I replied. It's true: I do like beer. "Not as much as my daddy does!" Emma boasted. "When he runs out of beer during the week he gets really angry." "Oh," I answered. The farm was located in a dry country, ninety miles to the county line.

We tracked down Paul in the greenhouse, and he handed me a packet of lettuce seeds and put me to work immediately. Paul was a tense, tense man. The stress emanating off of him was contagious, and I found my jaw clenched, my shoulders hunched. He disappeared for a bit, and when he returned his mood had swung from sullen impatience to flushed exuberance. I learned, much to my apprehension, that most of my time would be spent working with Paul while Rachel 'unschooled' the children.

3. Pigs are not cute

The farm was like a story book, with a cast of animal characters. There was Manley, an ancient tom turkey, the patriarch; Sweet Thing, his "girlfriend;" Addie the cow and her calves Junior and Little Girl; and Helen, the wizened old ewe. The pigs, however, were not included in this whimsical menagerie. The pigs were nameless eating machines.

The pigs looked up as I approached with my bucket. Buckets meant food. Before dumping the unwanted chicken parts over the side of the fence, I spent a moment gazing into the bucket and see if I could read my future in the entrails. My reverie was interrupted by a pig's anguished squeal. She had shocked her snout, a pig's most sensitive part, on a wire of electric fence, in her desperation for food. Pigs are always desperate for food.

"Just dump the bucket! Stop torturing them. It's cruel!" I wondered how long Paul had been there, watching me. He had a way of doing that, appearing out of nowhere. "Dump the bucket and I'll give you a beer. I got your brand."

"The beast?" I asked.

"You know it."

I dumped the bucket over the side and the pigs went wild. A pig rugby match ensued, the, fighting and scrambling for the choice parts, slipping in the mud. Paul took a can of beer out of the pocket of his barn jacket and handed it to me. We sipped our beers and watched the pigs fight and eat. One in particular eyed us, chomping on some intestines that dangled from its mouth. "This s the grossest thing I've ever done," I declared. "Farming's gross. Get used to it, honey." Paul answered, "Besides, it's their last meal. Let them enjoy it. They're going in Wednesday."

"The pigs are going to the butcher already?" I asked.

Ira Joel Haber

"Yup, season's almost over, honey, thank god." This was true: there was a chill in the air and the harvest was winding down. The first frost would come soon.

4. Thoughts on Beer and Botany

The endless cycle of planting followed by weeding followed by harvesting afforded many opportunities for Paul and I to shoot the shit that season. Gradually a rapport developed. He'd share his beers with me and began calling me" honey," usually if I was engaged in something stupid or dangerous. He shared his farming knowledge with me. The importance of saving your own seed. How to cultivate shitake mushrooms (oak logs are the best media, never pine; the resin inhibits the growth of the fungi.) Why Kubota tractors were superior to all others ("It's the engine!".)

At times the conversation would veer towards the more personal. Paul would ask me questions: "Do you have a boyfriend." I didn't. "Are you heterosexual?" Mostly. "What was your last boyfriend like?" Not terribly interesting. He'd go on about his envy of the Mormons and expound on his "second wife" scheme.

"See, this is how it would work. Say, you, or an intern, could live in the cabin, work here, have your own projects, natural dyes or whatever, and keep me company sometimes, and Rachel could do her thing, medicinal herbs, tinctures, teach the kids…I mean, Daniel's ten and he can barely read. And she'd be my wife when I'm not with my second wife. And I'd get the attention and sex I need. It's win-win-win" he'd say, chopping the air with his hand. "I don't get why Rachel won't go for it." At this point, I'd usually ask him some question about plants, steer the conversation into less weird territory.

"Brassica Olearaca," he'd say, holding up a baby kale plant, before putting it in the ground. "Do you realize that Kale, Cabbage, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, and Kohlrabi are all *B. Olearaca.*? They're all the same plant" He placed the plant in the ground, and patted the soil around it as if tenderly tucking a child into bed. "Kale came first. From kale came the cabbage we know, because someone wanted a tight mass of leaves. They wanted a head. Kohlrabi because someone wanted to eat the bulb, so they bred for the bulb, and you get a plant that looks like and alien." We moved down the row, finishing up the Red Russian and moving onto the Lacinato. "Broccoli because someone desired the florets, they wanted to eat tiny bouquets. Last is *B. Olearaca var. Gemmifera,* the Brussels Sprouts. *Gemmifera* means "bears gems" little tiny cabbages growing on stalks. People imposing their will upon plants. Isn't that *weird?*" he said in wonderment, crumpling his beer can.

Paul's drinking was epic. He'd pound beers during the day and always held it together. I never saw him drunk; he never seemed sloppy. He explained his method to me one morning when he taught me to milk Addie, their temperamental Brown Swiss. It was five in the morning, and before beginning the lesson, he cracked open a beer. I didn't say anything. "Want one?" he asked. "Sure,' I said. Paul seemed pleased. "That's what I like about you, Nina. You always say yes," he said.

It's peaceful, underneath a cow, and we achieved a rhythm, milking together, listening to Addie's heavy breathing and the milk squirting into the bucket. He began to hold forth. "That's the other thing about you, Nina. You never judge…see, you have to be really busy. That's the secret to maintaining a nice, steady buzz all day long. There's so much work to do, I go to bed early and exhausted. I couldn't get drunk if I tried." He thought for a moment, and then added, "Plus, it has to be beer. Beer's cheap, and if I drink whiskey during the day I have rage episodes."

So began my love affair with cheap beer, or, as Paul called it, liquid bread. Paul's brand was Budweiser, always Bud. I had no particular allegiance, although Milwaukee's Best Ice was a favorite. Paul and I had frequent beer breaks during the day, usually after some particularly onerous chore, like harvesting lettuce in the cold rain, our fingers frozen. I would never attempt this anywhere else, but oh, what you can get away with in Kentucky!

We kept our beer habit from Rachel. It felt somehow like a betrayal. Rachel didn't share Paul's enthusiasm for beer. She was a believer in raw milk and raw honey, a proponent of organ meats, a friend of fermented foods. She was generous with her time. She taught me how to felt wool, to make cheese. I'd watch her dexterous hands hang cheese curds and marvel. She was strong, too, broad shouldered and strong from years of moving chicken pens around and hauling firewood. She was both to kind and too tough to be messed with.

5. The pleasures of home meat preservation

Earlier that fall Daniel designed and built his own smokehouse out of an abandoned refrigerator. While it's true he couldn't read at grade level, or nowhere near it, he's the only ten year old charcuterie expert I've ever met. He was in charge of the pork preservation process. He had acquired some high quality sea salt, and planned to make his own prosciutto. He held forth on the importance of sea salt, how it would allow him to cure the hams without the use of nitrates. "No spices, either, "he said. "You can only use salt, garlic salt and sugar for prosciutto. Nina, you're gonna help render the lard. Emma, STAY AWAY from my hams. Show Nina how to cut up the lard."

Lard was important. It was a source of fat throughout the winter, helping the family stay away from the supermarket. I began the process by cutting up a slab of back into equal size chunks, removing any remaining pieces of skin or meat. Robin tended to the stockpot on the wood stove while Emma worked on the leaf lard, "the most special lard! From the kidneys!" she said.

I was absorbed in my task of chopping the lard when Paul stumbled into the kitchen. He smelled like a brewery, competing with the aroma of simmering pork fat. He lurched over to his son. Daniel was busy massaging the cure into the bacon and jowls and ignored his father. Paul picked up a jowl and examined in closely and began to chuckle. "Their faces!" he said, dangling the jowl in Daniel's face. "Can you believe it's their *faces*?"

From the stockpot came sudden popping sounds, startling as firecrackers. We all flinched, except Paul. "Cracklings! Oh man, great, cracklings. On Nina, honey, just wait until you try some cracklings, they're amazing." I flinched again. Paul had never called me "honey" in Rachel's presence. He handed me a crackling and I ate it.

Cracklings are bits of pig skin and fat that float to the surface during the lard rendering process, and yes, they're amazing. "That's a good girl" Paul said.

"Yes, the 'second wife' is always the nice one, right, Paul?" Rachel said.

"Imagine these with biscuits." Paul went on, ignoring her. "Or maybe on even on some cupcakes!" He doled out some cracklings to Daniel and Emma. "Or one ice cream!" Emma added. "Yeah, sweetie, great!" Paul said, patting her on the head."

I removed a bit of flesh from my remaining chunk of lard and cut it into four equal pieces and I was done. "Well!" I said, desperate to flee the scene "I guess I better go check the sheep, make sure they have to have enough water." I had to pass Rachel on the way out, her lips pressed tightly together. "Don't think you're the first" she said as I passed her.

After the incident, we continued on as if nothing had happened. I left a week later. I squeezed into the Ranger with Rachel and the kids, and we headed out back to Bowling Green so I could catch a bus headed west. On the way there we passed towns with typical Kentucky names like "Hazard" and "Gravelswitch" and "Defiance." Kentucky's a special state, I thought. In Kentucky, seven year old girls own their own knife sharpeners. You can see a cockfight, if you wanted, and buy cigarettes for cheap. You can let your kids go barefoot and teach themselves and you could create your own weird family structures if you chose to. You can live in a dry county yet drink more then you ever have and probably ever will. It's lawless, I thought. It's lawless and I'm coming back someday.

Ira Joel Haber

the ear

E.S.G. Halm

I must admit that when the package arrived, I hoped it was a delicate pastry from D' Elixir bakery on the east canal. And since it was the size and weight of just one, I hoped it was my favorite: apricot. Knowing that it was from someone with very little money, I was touched that he had paid more in postage then the pastry was worth. He must really care for me I thought. My thoughts where mixing between the sweet smell of apricot, no, tomato, no perhaps meat and the thoughts of him in his ripped and red and blue paint speckled shirt going into the fancy bakery to retrieve me a token of his affection. What a brave soul, what a dear man. I pictured him with a smile and a brave sigh of relief.

When I opened the box, my horror gradually came into focus. The tissue paper had red sauce on it. Cherry favored. And the stickiness of the object made me work to separate the paper from familiar object. "Stupid Man," I thought when I finally realized what it was. It was my lovers' separated and severed ear. Bloody and messy and disturbing. Why? Why? Noooooo. I didn't mean what I said. I felt so guilty. You can't compliment a man without them going crazy. I said I loved his ear. Why did I say that? He said he would give it to me. Why did I laugh? Why would he say that? Maybe in the back of my mind I knew what it was when it came. I deluded myself with sweet thoughts of a life that was not mine to have. Who would do this? Was he O.K? Was he bleeding to death somewhere? Should I go to him? Was he dead? Did he leave me a little part of himself before ending the life of the rest of his body? All the trains had stopped. He did not have a phone. There was nothing I could do. Maybe he wanted it this way. Maybe he was mad at me. But I knew that wasn't it. It was more like a marriage proposal. In some twisted reality of sacrifice and beauty and pain and Vincent.

"Can you hear it?," He shouted.

"What, the birds?," I responded.

"The flowers talking to the birds"

"You're crazy", I said.

He jumped up from the picnic blanket and waved his arms: "Oh but it's you who are not listening, love. They are talking the language of god. That one there, the sunflower, is particularly loud. It speaks in color and form. You hear that yellow. Hear it with your eyes, your ears, your whole body. You see the way despite the heaviness of it's head and the force of gravity it still raises it's face to the sun? And when it calls the birds with it's color and form they can not help but answer. And its friends the lilies over there, god I love this spot, are all singing in chorus. And the field is a giant symphony."

Shit now I remember, that's when I said something stupid, like"I wish I had your ears."