MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 5 ISSUE 2: Tartare
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

Another summer, dear readers, another summer. Whether you're plodding, bounding, or mixing my drink, we have arrived together at yet another summer. And what does this mean for us? And who exactly is the "us" we mean when we say that word? Forgive my meandering musings, but I find myself wondering these days: just when is a mirror a mirror, and how does a series of mirrors create a community?

I, of course, am looking at America - the good old You Ess of Ay, my adopted hearth - as we march past Memorial Day, barrel toward the Fourth of July, and even as we pull up to farmstands to load up on corn and strawberries and Hadley Grass. In short, as we collectively reinvest in an idea of what we are, who we are, how those ideas meld, and what that creates, trundling along toward Labor Day, hot dog in hand.

I invite us to look at the colors. Red, white, and blue. I can't help it: I always think of miniature flags held firmly in fat little hands, waved earnestly at parades and fireworks displays. And I think of flesh. An art student I once knew and loved described her experience of watching the carving up of a cadaver, a lesson she snuck into with her boyfriend, a prospective doctor, when in Rome. She regretted her decision to do as the Romans did as firmly as a fat little hand holds a miniature American flag, staying just this side of vertical while the instructor expertly sliced up the cold donation to science. As she told me yes later, one thing that shocked her was how colorful our insides are. We are not simply red, white, and pink as our cartoons would allow. We are, in fact, red, white, and blue, as well as yellow, green, brown, purple, black, pink, and more. Our raw, fresh insides bloom magnificently, as majestically bizarre as a bouquet arranged by a blind, insane, giddy toddler.

I was discussing this all with my great old friend, Robert, a few weeks before his 70th birthday. He's long philosophized in song about what exactly America is, or who, first fitting in the iconically American footsteps left by our mutual friend, Woody, then arcing out his own equally-American howl over many decades and more reinventions than sweet young Madge. It so happened that we were discussing this over drinks on May 2nd, when the world got a bit of a sleeve tug, courtesy of the home of the brave. We sat stunned, not by the news itself, which felt in many ways quite inevitable, but by the reaction to what had apparently been the greatest sporting event in the history of time. The streets flooded with chanting, a furious, pulsating elation, as did the many sinews and fibers of the media. The fat little hand had grown up, and was now screaming jubilant expletives in lieu of waving a tiny flag, as the world, as my friend and I, watched. It all felt, if you will, quite …. raw.

And so here we are, collectively redefined once again, as we stand (united?) at the door of another wet, hot, red, white, and raw American summer. That of course means, among other things, another issue of our Valley Review. And, like Robert has for so many decades, review we shall, as art holds that mirror up to nature. This issue boasts, amongst its many delectable contributions, short fiction by John Mandel, "The Betty," recently adapted into film, soon to be released. Our cover has been created by Laurie McClave, who's shown at the Pop Gallery, and has been featured in Juxtapoz Magazine.

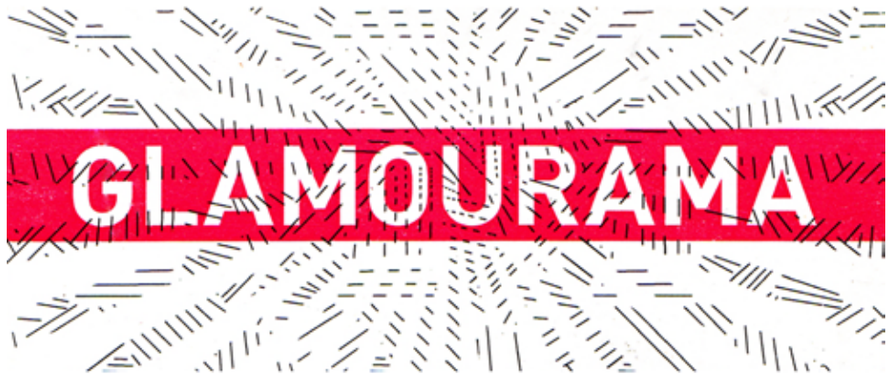
Our Cirque performers include, as always, the ravishing Happy Hour Burlesque Troupe, giving us this time a steampunk-themed show. (Now, don't let the steam cook you too much - we still want you raw for our "Tatare" issue.)

As well, Throwpillow, National Carpet, and The Thousand Pities will infuse the night with their musical stylings. Finally, Ramiro Davaro Comas will be doing live painting, about as raw an experience as painting can be.

I look forward to the summer, friends. We all look forward, don't we? I suppose the difference is what we see in that distance, or perhaps what we want to see. Myself, I'd like to enjoy good food, over good drinks and good conversation, with good companions: a small spot of suspension, relief in and from a world both aflame and awash with raw life.

Until the blazing fall, dear readers….

besos y abrazos,
Meaty



fish in the raw: ceviche

Lindsay Lavalle

My love affair with ceviche began nearly 10 years ago, while sitting at a tiny restaurant on a secluded beach on the western coast of Mexico. As I learned that day, the key to this dish is using the freshest seafood possible. While the ingredients in ceviche aren't ever heated, the lime and lemon juices "cook" the seafood producing the same effect as heat would. As I have traveled through South and Central America in the years that followed I have discovered that every country (and even town) have their own version of ceviche. This recipe is a combination of my favorite parts of the ones I have encountered.

Ceviche is best served on a hot, summer day as an appetizer or light meal. (For added effect, I would also recommend it be enjoyed with an ice cold light, South or Central American beer, such as Corona or Sol.)

Simple Ceviche (makes 4-6 servings)

1 1/2 pounds white fish (red snapper, sea bass, halibut, mahi, mahi), cut into 1/2 inch cubes
1/2 pound sea scallops, cut into 1/2 inch cubes
1/2 pound of 21/25 shrimp
2 cups fresh squeezed lime juice
1/2 cup fresh squeezed lemon juice
1 small jalapeño, seeded and minced- adjust according to taste
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoons salt
4-5 shallots, minced
1 cup tomato, seeded and diced
1/2 cup cucumber, seeded and minced
1/2 cup cilantro, roughly chopped
1 tablespoon fresh oregano, minced
1 avocado, peeled, seeded, cut into 1/4 inch cubes (optional)
salt to taste

Preparation:

- Place the minced red onion in a bowl of water with 2 tablespoons of salt and let sit for 10-15 minutes (this will help take some of the "bite" out of the onions)
-Drain onions
-In a 9x13 inch pan or glass bowl, combine the fish, scallops, shrimp, jalapeño, drained shallots and garlic
-Cover the mixture with lemon and lime juices
-Refrigerate for 4-5 hours, stirring occasionally
-Add cilantro, oregano, cucumbers and tomato
-Refrigerate additional 2 hours (until fish becomes opaque and shrimp are pink), stirring occasionally
-Serve in chilled glasses, garnished with avocado and either Saltine crackers or plantain chips.

conjugation

Myra King

Act of joining together, or the state of being joined

Jem is a poet. "Some people should be edited and written again" is one of her lines. To me Jem has always been my inspiration. Not for writing, but for life.

You know how you see things but don't see them? Like that white painted bench at the cemetery. Your eyes are so filled with the sights of graves, and the sentiment of their words, your mind doesn't have time to reference the mundane. Sometimes you'd swear that something must have been put up overnight. Surely it wasn't there all the time? But then, someone points out the patina of age and you know it has been there probably longer than you have been alive.

"Mert," Jem said to me the other day. Jem calls me Mert, after her favourite tree, the Laurel Myrtle. The Bay Laurel in California and the Myrtle in Oregon is the same tree. Jem's paying job is at the local garden centre. "Mert," she said, "come and see the new plants we got in the other day. Could change your mind about gardening."

I have no time for gardens, not the ones that produce pretty flowers. Anyway, Jem's green thumb only extends as far as the pots full of herbs that grudgingly grow, despite their purported hardiness, on her kitchen window. She is far more the poet, growing her words. And when we are together, when she feels energised by my presence, she writes her best pieces.

I wish I had been there when she first met Stinger, not his real name of course, because then maybe I would have heard his side of the story.

But a week later when I was with Jem, at the café, watching her picking guilt in the form of crumbs from her choc-chip banana muffin, she suddenly hissed through clenched teeth, "Don't look now, but that's Stinger out there." I stared through the café window, trying to ignore two buzzing copulating flies and saw a rather stringy-muscled man with beach blond hair, climbing out of what looked like a golf buggy. He was wearing faded blue knee-cut jeans, no tee-shirt. We live in a coastal town, so this sort of undress is not surprising. What did surprise me though, in view of all Jem's negative comments about him, was the fact that this Stinger guy actually looked quite pleasant.

Jem stiffened in her chair, her knees scraping the table support as she stretched out her legs. She didn't open her mouth, but I knew what she was thinking: *"Oh, God, no! He's coming in."*

As Stinger entered the shop, the now uncoupled flies escaped to the great outdoors to start a family, and a sea breeze, laden with the smell of seaweed and salt, filtered through the aroma of the coffee that was sending out its presence like an invitation.

At the counter, Stinger waved an old lady ahead to be served first, picked up a newspaper and dropped his coins into the honesty box. Engrossed in what he was reading, he didn't even see Jem as he pushed open the door and headed back to his car.

People don't know Jem like I do, but then my existence is because of her, so I owe her that acknowledgement. To know *her*. And no one knows me like she does.

Funny thing the word, 'know'. That hidden letter, 'k', it's there but what does it do? Confuse kids learning to read and write? A silent letter. For what purpose? I am silent too, silent, unless I am talking to Jem. She hears me like no one else can. I have been her companion since teenage-hood and nothing she does can deter me. She has chosen my name well, the Laurel Myrtle has an intoxicating perfume but its roots can be invasive.

I am not always with her. I disappear when she is doing drugs, both illegal and prescription, but I am always *there* for her, and now she accepts me. Accepts my help.

"Anyway," I said, "what's the deal with this Stinger?"

"Can't talk here," she whispered, eyeing off the people in the café. The real-estate honcho, pseudo important in his pinstripe suit. The single mum wiping dribbled ice-cream from her two-year-old still strapped in his pusher. The teenage lovers huddled in the corner sipping with straws from one milkshake, its coldness just beginning to show from the moisture forming droplets on the retro-blue of its holder. And I knew they would all start staring if Jem started talking. People always did.

So soon, there she was sitting on a bench beside the ocean, slanted seagulls with one hopeful eye on her as they dipped past, and people walking by, glancing, then turning their heads as she began to talk.

In the open, people ignore Jem more easily than in a place like a café.

"Well, Mert," Jem said, "Stinger supplies all the herbal medicines, you know, in that new range we have. And homeopathic stuff. Boss said we had to branch out. His idea of extending while still keeping with the garden theme. Still botanic, you know?"

That's the thing with Jem, she sounds like everyone else. But she is a simile, or a word like 'patient', a noun or adjective. Or sometimes both. For there is Latin to Jem. A conjugation.

I am invisible though. I see it in the half turned stares of the passers-by until Jem herself finally sees it and we walk along the beach, to keep three or fours strides ahead of judgement.

Along the esplanade the river meets the sea in a tidal exchange, on the surface all looks calm, but underneath are contrasting currents, powerful, yet invisible. One is trying to escape, but the other converges on it unseen, and turns the fresh water to salt. I have been called a muse. Her doctors have another name.

"Stinger told me, Mert, that I should try some of the herbal remedies… you know, for my…"

Her words stopped, faltered then picked up like a breeze that has renewed its strength. "I mean, I know you're not…"

I realised then that she was talking about me, wanted me to have this benefit. The benefit of the pharmaceuticals. The help of others.

And I saw why she was so scared of this guy, this Stinger. It was for me she feared.

My annihilator, her saviour…perhaps.

metatron
Ivan Lopez

lunch facing outside february 7 2009

David P. Miller

Trust Me bus – Boomerangs van – foccacio grilled cheese sandwich
vanilla café au lait two per cent milk

thin woman yellow highlighter cropped hair
Wellesley
slow Fire Opal – Office for Lease

two women one with light mustache:
how was painting?
& Dudley Sta

the painting will paint itself

Whole Foods bag in shopping cart enters – Purple Cactus – blond
girl with Bears library book – stratus clouds overtaking blue burrito
& wrap bar pickup truck reflections in melted ice puddles Sam Adams
case in a plastic shopping bag
it's a nice dress makes my hips look like

dad and daughter:
got good pressure, look at that
slowly reading, highlighting
my aunt's Christmas presents two months late

slipping a bottle of orange drink into his pocket
some brown rice or some white steamed rice Spanish rice with some little shrimps in them
we deliver for you

i put this in like a strange shutter speed? i'm having such a difficult time with brownies i asked the monk about it she was like – such sensory deprivation, oh those dogs are so cute

ice puddle splash patterns
grilled cheese finished
my other classes – they're all academic – will a 3D sculpture solve the molecule problem? i'm gonna make a potholder that says yes

coffee finished

one-hundred twenty-nine degrees

David P. Miller

in Pakistan.
Radio Sweden's website declares:
the nation
    "enjoys"
record heat
    circa one hundred.
Quaint archaism:
    "enjoy" as "experience"
    "experience" as "endure"
    "endure" as cease to endure.

But this is Fahrenheit, remember.
It's not so bad, really.
One hundred centigrade,
    whooey, now that would be something.
Thus spake the boiling frog:
    Visualize contentment.
    God grant me the strength
    to keep doing what I enjoy,
    the courage
    to smirk at what I disbelieve,
    and the wisdom
    for in case wisdom should ever come in handy some day.

2.
SPF 15 and
every square inch of exposed skin
contracted within the penumbra
of our beach umbrella –
    our parasol – no –
    our contrasol.
And while I hide there
salt-scent warmth moistens my nostrils,
gusts flirt hard with the umbrella.
Breeze refashions the hair beneath my cap
as a mad scientist's coiffure,
buffers the mental image
of me crawling
    across the sand
    past a bleached steer's skull
gasping "water".
Mostly it feels like summer
and all around me

others create their later-years' nostalgia.
I creep out
    from under my rock at last,
roll up jean legs and wade
into the steady caressing high tide.

3.
Roy G. Biv
takes his evening farewell
leaves his surname behind
to settle at treetop level
    beyond the kitchen window.
A Blue band draws Indigo,
Violet, a long curtain toward Black,
and the children end their cookout games
    under the porch light
    two back yards away.
Fifty years from now
I want them to gaze at sunsets
absorbed in these chromatics,
not to fear the sunrise.
I don't want them to write this poem.

teapot square
Jane Wiley

the betty

John Mandel

1.

I had a wife once. We lived together in my cottage at The Betty. She was a good enough wife, attentive and sweet. Whenever I settled into my chaise lounge on the little square of gleaming grass in front of our cottage, I kept sitting up and craning my neck back to see her, my attentive and sweet wife moving among our things, framed by the picture window. This is good, this is good, I'd say to myself while I watched her, a man who has painted this picture must be a very effective and attractive one, this is good, amen. The courtyard is a communal area, but sometimes the thought loomed so large I laughed out loud, and the other residents of the Betty, who always look as if they had died on their own chaise lounges, sat up startled.

One day while I lay there my wife called my name from the doorway of the cottage; I sat up and craned my neck back to see her in my usual way. In an indifferent voice, she told me that she was tired of me, and left, right then, right out the door and down the path to the sidewalk.

It is a terrible thing to be abandoned because someone is tired of you. How do I tell the story without whining and begging understanding for a man so tedious that even his loved ones wander away from him without a good explanation? Nobody has sympathy for the public fool left in this way.

No one at The Betty has ever asked me a thing about it but if they do I've decided to make up a story, and I plan to be very attractive in it, because why would I want to tell them the story in which I'm a little minnow of a man?

2.

I can see directly across the courtyard into the picture window of the German man and his giant wife and their pale, hidden daughter. They're new to The Betty and I haven't met them yet. I'm very aware of them. But I'm much too bashful to introduce myself; I'll fall down and hurt myself on my way over to them, or I'll accidentally spit on them when I speak. Certainly my voice will catch and I'll gag or squeal. To ask me to march across the lawns like The Man Who Gets Things Done and stick my hand out is asking just too much. The small, finite square of grass between us is an infinite emergency to me.

My cottage is identical to theirs, and our stuffed armchairs are so similar that sometimes when the German and I both sit in our picture windows reading I look up over my book and think for an instant that I'm looking at my reflection. The untended grapefruit tree is between us, and from my perspective rotting fruits hang around his image like moldering brains. I'm not much for omens or symbolism, I like hard ground, but this spectacle colors my idea of the man, as if I'm looking at a sinister version of myself. I can't help it, and it makes me suspicious of him. Meeting him is inevitable, though, unless by an accident of good luck we all die of natural causes before the event.

I was told by the unreadable old Slavic man who lives in the cottage to their right that the German is difficult. I'm very uncomfortable around unreadable men, and especially foreign men, because I can never be certain that we're talking about the same thing, but I plan to approach the old man sometime and ask him just what the German did to make him think he's so difficult. As I say I'm not an abstract or poetic kind of thinker, but I can't help the thought that the rotting fruit is a sign, put there by Providence in front the man's image to settle the question about the nature of his personality, and that is very bad news to me, because when there is a man close by who has any kind of questionable reputation, I think about him too much and I feel the need to keep a lookout for him, which is exhausting. For me there seems to be a man like this in every setting, wherever I go. I study them as if I was looking through a telescope at a meteorite and plotting its course right to the center of my forehead.

The unreadable old Slav can always be seen lying on his lounge squarely in front of his door in a proprietary way. Two skinny, lavender-white legs poke out of the old man's enormous camouflage shorts. His conceit is a shiny silver pompadour that he attends to regularly, spraying it, patting it, propping it up.

The old man is inert; if he thinks, or has feelings, nothing of it reaches the surface. I'm jealous of him, too; in relation to him I must seem like a hysterical and public fool.

Once when I was a boy, my father came to my bedroom, took me by the hand and brought me to the big mirror in the living room. He announced that it was time to teach me how to act like a man. His concept, which he said he had learned from *his* father, was that if I look smart and keep my mouth shut, I'll be seen as a self-possessed man, and that will intimidate another man, whose bad luck it will be to pass me in the streets that day; he'll be sure I'm thinking about *him,* and that he doesn't measure up. You'll see his shoulders drop, my father said, this is the kick-me position, this is submission, and you'll be the boss of the moment. Trust me, he said, a man secretly wants to knuckle under to another man's authority; he isn't happy until he finds his place, even if he finds out that his place is to be second-rate, where he belongs, where it's okay to be mediocre, that's how it works. He furrowed his brow and pointed to the furrow. Make your forehead like this, he said. Good, he said, now just shut up.

The old Slav is good at it, his ridiculous spectacle notwithstanding. He seems absolutely impenetrable; he can see what's up while I invent conundrums and the world slips and slides. Or so I think; maybe the man is just an idiot, maybe he isn't thinking about anything at all. But I'm jealous of that, too; how blissful it would be to lie on my chaise lounge with a full stomach and think about nothing, to feel the sun on me until something else happens.

I have an impulse to test the old man, to run across the courtyard and spit at him or pull his hair to see just how self-possessed he really is. Of course I'd never do such a thing, but, oh, god, if only.

3.

The German man's wife is very large, to the point of being a curiosity. When I first saw her I studied her; I sat in the darkened front room of my cottage and looked at her through my picture window the way a man looks at the Statue of Liberty. She made me think of Erda, the Wagnerian earth goddess. Everything about her is abundant and moves autonomously; when she comes through the front door of her cottage it looks like fruits, candies and roasts tumbling out of a cornucopia onto the gleaming grass. She's a good-looking woman, handsome, specifically, anyone would think so, but I hadn't given it much thought until one day when I heard her laugh; its gurgling little sing-song made me suddenly aware that she was, in fact, a

woman, replete with a woman's plums and pearls, and the thought shot a beam right through to my monkey brain, which knows nothing about good sense or propriety. The world was new. The next morning I pushed my armchair further back into the shadows of my front room and waited for her to come out.

Soon after, I started to have sexual fantasies about her. I don't know why; I'm not generally taken to large women. As my fantasies deepened and got more elaborate I tried to add love scenes to the sexual narratives, but it was no use. She's too big; to take the traditional position for kisses I'd have to stand on a stool in order to hover over her and swallow her into my embrace.

Although she's too big for romantic love, and I'm afraid of her husband, I take the risk of watching her whenever I can, lying on my chaise lounge pretending I'm reading or asleep or crossing my little patch of grass to pluck a weed for cover. If I'm wearing my darkest sunglasses I can appear to be looking at something else while I'm really looking at her.

In my fantasies about her I imagine stirring after a dreamless sleep with her, then crawling over the vast landscape of her body, occasionally stopping to shout a Hosanna! for my good luck, making my way through her sweetmeats and nooks, her crannies and confections, over the milky hills and darkling valleys of her Bunyanesque thighs while, as Erda, she sings, *"Stark ruft das Lied! Kraftig reizt der Zauber!" "Strong is your call! Mighty spells have roused me!"*

Foolish, maybe, but in my fantasies I'm God Almighty, and if, in them, I want her to sing an aria while I have her, or if I want to include the husband in them, have him, say, clean my apartment or hold my things while I make his wife yodel, it's my own business, isn't it? Where else in this suffocating shit life can I have things just the way I want them? I'm President of all of my fantasies, and if I assign somebody a role in one, they might be forewarned that in them I'm sovereign, sole author of the story, and they might be asked to do something disagreeable.

But I'm afraid of the woman, because I'm certain that to have anything to do with her threatens to draw me into a confrontation with her husband, who has already aroused suspicion as a man who won't have my safety and well-being in mind. As is my way, the way of anticipating absolute ruin in every endeavor big and small, in every clime and on every land mass and body of water I traverse, in this life and the next, I think the man will somehow find out I have inappropriate thoughts about his wife; he'll go berserk and suddenly run across the little lawns and gardens at me, crushing the flowers, to humiliate me or hurt me grievously. Once on television I saw an interview of a man who, during a beating, had his eye punched out, his spleen ruptured, and his front tooth knocked out; he was so clever with language, so poetic and vivid in his description of the beating that as I watched I grunted and screamed and cried as if it was I being beaten; in all my fantasies of confrontation since then, these three stigmata have become the features of my undoing.

Even the sad, silent daughter looms as a threat; I've conjured a story about her in which she is in denial about an appalling event in the past; it will make itself known in some way, she'll go berserk, kill her parents and come for me next, right down the beaten path through the flower beds that her father made to me. Although she's small and sallow, her rage will make her able to overwhelm me.

This is my way; I'm afraid of them, and by degree everyone and everything in the world. Fear is my general organizing principle, my way.

When I was a little boy my mother and aunts took me to the park in my massive, awned, velveteen and chromed carriage, pulled me gasping and sweating from my silken goosedown blankets and monogrammed embroidered pillows and tried to put me on the tootle train. I had a strong premonition of catastrophe; I clutched my mother's hem with both fists and refused to board. Absolutely the tootle train would derail, throw me and crush me. Vividly I saw my tiny baby feet sticking out from beneath it, the toes perfect, unblemished baby jewels; I experienced a lavish wave of self-pity that was so ecstatic I fell in love with myself right then, deeply.

It was a defining moment; since then I'm certain that anything might rise up out of the ether to hurt me: a careening car, a tumor exploding in my cerebral cortex or eating my lung. A bullet meant for someone else might pass through me on its way. Maybe a dangerous lunatic, born a long time ago and far away, is making his way to *me,* given the random happenstances of a life. Why isn't everybody as nervous as me about what's rushing blindly towards *them?* Even as a small boy at the tootle train I concluded that we're no more than a flap of flesh, a nervous and palsied thing in an inconsolable, anarchic universe, and all we can do is to try to find a safe route through the chaos, through the day. Attendant is the wonderful and heady cocktail of self-love and self-pity. I used to try to discuss this idea with friends, but I learned that if I wanted to have friends at all I'd better keep it to myself.

I cried my eyes out for the rest of that day, during milk time, during nap time, loudly at the swings, which also looked fatally dangerous to me, back and forth to no purpose. I bawled at the water fountain, puled at the ice cream truck and ululated in the port-a-potty, everywhere shaking and weeping, big beamy tears splashing, causing my lips to swell and redden like shiny cherries and my big limpid dark brown eyes and long black lashes to glisten, an enchanting picture to my mother and aunts, even to the other mothers, whose babies had boarded the train stupidly like lambs in an *abattoir;* they gathered around and loomed over me, grabbing and pawing. Poor baby, poor baby, they said, look at that face. I looked through the mist of my tears from one beefy shadow to another, immense, supple, lactating mothers of all of us and even of God, then to each of the other babies, riding the tootle train oblivious and unwitnessed in a circle that went nowhere. So, hmm…I thought, by the beauty and eloquence of my grief I had usurped all the fleshy wonderments, all the fluvial, milky mothers to myself, as far as the eye could see; the other babies will grow hungry and languish as they go around and around slowly to no discernible purpose and wonder dimly, with too few developed synapses to adequately presage the future, what was going to happen to them given the alarming implications of an infinite circle. It seemed to me even then to be a sure recipe for melancholy, which would bloom frighteningly later in their lives. The mothers wiped my nose and stroked my head, cooed and cupped my hot cheeks with their fat palms and tugged on my earlobes and radiated dizzy love at me. I smelled them and leaned into their ministrations like a blade of grass to the sun. I knew then that I had a plan: being inconsolable would be my way of moving through the world powerfully and safely. We're all the way we are because of just exactly what happened to us, in the way that it did, aren't we? Everyone has a plan, don't they? This is mine.

4.
Today the German man suddenly looked up from his reading and caught me looking at his wife. He stood up and stared at me for a long time through his picture window. I panicked; I jumped off the lounge to my feet and looked around frantically as if I had lost something, so it would seem to them that the look was an accident. When he caught me I was having a fantasy of being held in a headlock by her, smothering between bosoms and bellies; guilt and fear caused me to think that the husband had somehow been able to see this image, in perfect detail, as if I had a thought balloon above my head. Now the German will come and attack me in a fit of jealous rage, and at his trial, head down and weeping quietly, he'll describe the humiliation and heartbreak of my crime so poignantly that the jury will find him not guilty, after which all the chaste and virtuous people in the courtroom will turn to me as one, with an indignant eye. I'll stumble around The Betty for the rest of my life, half-blind, without a front tooth or a spleen, anathema to the smug residents, for whom I will be an object lesson in the failure of propriety.

The German came out of his cottage and began to walk toward me, purpose in his stride. It seemed to take him a thousand years to reach me; I thought about suddenly running *toward* him, into his arms, shouting a confession: *"But she doesn't love me!,"* I'd shout, as I ran. *"I'm sure she loves only you!"* I thought about running right out of the courtyard and down the street with only the clothes on my back to another city where I'd make a new life. But I stood, a condemned man paralyzed in the German's thrall, waiting for the blow.

I knew he was smallish, but as he got closer I realized he was a little jewel of a man, tiny and meticulous with a razor-sharp part in his gleaming black hair, small enough to be an oddity among the lawn chairs, which gave him scale. He was well-proportioned and conventionally handsome, a perfect miniature; very delicate, pink translucent skin scrubbed immaculate. He really *is* tiny, I thought, a neat little homunculus. As he approached he held my eyes; I gaped stupidly back at him until I was able to will myself to look away. I fixated on the part in his hair, on its perfection; in my mind I saw his colossal wife fussing with it, being a kind of curator of his part. I stifled the urge to laugh. He put a hand out and I took it. I looked down at his tiny hand swimming in my immense palm, and the impulse to laugh bloomed alarmingly; to keep from exploding in his face I tried to remember painful moments from my past, lost love, a holocaust, the death of a puppy.

"My wife, Ilsa, and I, and our daughter Imke would like to introduce ourselves," he said with a slight German accent, while squeezing my hand so hard little tears came to my eyes.

I looked up and Ilsa and Imke smiled and waved a greeting like synchronized swimmers.

5.
In the warm season, the residents of The Betty lie outside the doorways of their little cottages like potentates of tiny territories on elaborate, throne-like chaise lounges with floral patterns and fringes and cup-holes imbedded in the arms. There seems to be an uneasy détente among the residents; they're polite but suspicious, they rarely speak to each other, acknowledging each other's presence from their little principalities with curt nods and little hand waves. The grass gleams around them.

Ilsa lies on her lounge like a receding landscape of mountain ranges; from my perspective I see her feet first, then knees, then bellies, then breasts topped by nipples, her nose between them, and finally her blue-black bouffant. Dreamily, I imagine an event: I shimmy up her legs, pause for a moment of pious silence at her holy of holies, scrabble up her belly and slide down to the foothills of her breasts. I stop there; I have no interest in the thing that resides in her face. I don't kiss her; my kisses are only for love, and I don't love her. The frail, wan daughter lies next to her on her child-size lounge and burns up in the sun. The tiny husband stays at his perch in the window and comes out occasionally to see if they're comfortable and brings them drinks, which he offers smartly, like a waiter. Since he introduced himself to me I can look in their direction and think about sex with his wife while greeting him with a neighbor's wave and smile. I enjoy even more disgraceful sex fantasies about his wife while I smile at him, not because I'm mean-spirited, but simply to establish and insist that I am the sole author and audience of my thoughts, amen.

But there's been a development; I think Ilsa might be looking at me in her peripheral vision; her eyes seem to lose focus and she holds her head very still, they way I do when I'm angling a look at her. This has caused me to think about how I look, a conundrum because I have grave doubts in that area in general; my ears stick out like cup handles, my nose is too long, and I think the depth of attention I pay to things makes me look a little cross-eyed. Some women have found these to be attractive features, but that is a good example of how utterly confounded I am about how a woman might like me to be. In any event I have no pointers about what kind of man Ilsa might find attractive.

But I've learned from studying my reflection in the German's window that the light of the late afternoon makes me look best; for a little while in this season the arc of the sun brings out a handsome groove in my cheek if I hold my head a certain way. In the magazines at the supermarket, every public man who is regarded as handsome has this feature. Also, when I lie on the chaise lounge I try to compose my body in the languid and graceful position of a thinking man, which I've heard is attractive to a woman; while I think things up, my posture says, other men flee, fight, do the work. On the other hand, not knowing her I can't decide if I should try to look graceful or vulgar; some women like vulgar and difficult men, God bless them.

6.
I returned from a trip out of town to learn that while I was away the German man had died. The daughter is gone. The old Slav crossed the little squares of grass to explain to me that the man had choked on a piece of food, served to him on a paper plate by Ilsa while he lay on his chaise lounge, and was dead in a minute. He delivered his report in a monotone with no expression on his face.

He said the daughter went to live with her real mother. As usual, at the news of a death I felt nothing but the discomfort of being examined for the quality of my response. When I was a boy, and my grandmother died, I spent a whole day in front of the mirror in the bathroom practicing a response to the inevitable conversation regarding her death; using a hand mirror to study my profiles, again and again I hung my head, knitted my brows, mumbled something and shook my head slowly like a bell tolling. That seemed best to me. Now, with the old Slav as my witness, I forced my body to suggest that the German's death was a great loss to us all. But all I could think of was that Ilsa was in her cottage alone, and if God loved me I would make her cry out that very night. It wouldn't be unthinkable that I would look toward their cottage as a gesture to the grieving widow, and I took the opportunity; I saw her large silhouette moving deep inside and tried to fight off images of inappropriate love silhouettes. I bowed my head to cover a dirty

smirk, and excused myself to go inside to ruminate about death and think about the implications of Ilsa alone in her cottage without the German and his daughter as impediments to my desire.

She doesn't come out of her cottage. Her picture window is like a movie screen to me, and from behind my own window, in the darkened room, I watch her simple daily routines. The rotted, brain-like fruits have fallen, and now there are pretty, fragrant blossoms, illuminating her image as the brains once spoiled her husband's. I'm developing rudimentary love feelings for her, and I'm in a torment. I tend to get lovesick, and I knew that soon I would be lost to it.

I can't stop thinking about her; now, without her family in the way, the spectral mothers of the tootle train incident are wound into this colossus of a woman. While all the other babies on the train were abandoned to survive an infinite circle of meaningless events, I stood among their purloined mothers, exultant and smug, denied a lesson of survival; I know now that this is the calculus of my crippling. Now, as I punish myself, all the toughened and savvy babies are somewhere in the city, grown up and sitting with their families, with full stomachs, in front of the television. Their families are beautiful, and they treat each other to smiles and sweets and endearments.

I think about crossing the gardens to make a consolation visit but I know I'll just gape at her, or start to laugh, or try to make love to her, and then I'll try but I won't be able to explain any of it, why love eclipses good sense and propriety.

So I do nothing. I force myself to reckon with the fact that she's so large I won't be able to get my arms all the way around her. I'll feel like a boy when she bends down to me for my kisses. When I lie on my chaise lounge I'll stare at her immense underpants hanging on the clothesline. Maybe she has a mean streak. Maybe she's a drunk, or can't read, or suffers from a mental illness. I don't even know if she speaks English.

At best she looks out with different eyes into a world unrecognizable to me, lurid in its bizarre approximation of mine.

Weeks have gone by. As I move about my day I watch her through her picture window the way I once watched my wife. I realized that I had begun to prepare food to synchronize my meals with her. I can see her television, and I watch it with her. I invent conversations, in which I'm always very clever. I go to bed when she does, and in my reveries about her before I fall sleep, given that I am President and Prime Minister of all my fantasies, she's tiny, and she loves me like crazy, and I overwhelm her completely with my kisses.

Eliza Stassinos

early spring blues

Connolly Ryan

Just another old fashioned sunny day in America,
birds flapping and wrapping tunes around the trees,
veterans wheeling through the crosswalk,
pondering the disappearance of the bees.

Just another old fashioned sunny day in America,
pigs print intriguing patterns in the mud,
farmers jockeying their tractors;
their kids up in the attic smoking bud.

Just another old fashioned sunny day in America,
burning other countries' holy books for kicks.
High-heeled baby girls crawling on the formica
as robins hooked on toxins hop to their next fix.

Just another old fashioned sunny day in America,
the land it teems with harbingers of Spring:
girl-fights on the bike-path going straight to Youtube,
roadkill, miniskirts and teen-age bling.

Just another old fashioned sunny day in America,
the last stubborn snow melts into the ground;
consumers infiltrate the boutiques
as mongrels grow malignant in the pound.

Just another old fashioned sunny day in America,
young parents blithely push around their brood.
Our lakes and eyes resume their pretty sparkle,
our bodies growing vaster from fast food.

Just another old fashioned sunny day in America,
industry is having itself a blast;
nostalgia colors all our daydreams:
even toddlers hanker for the past.

Just another old fashioned sunny day in America,
pornography has morphed into the norm,
compassion sure seems to be getting colder
as this God Blessed planet is getting goddamned warm.

Inklings of the Apocalypse everywhere are looming:
tsunamis and earthquakes turning countries red.
Meantime our priorities are cockeyed:
when will my two mommies be allowed to wed?

parsnip

Carol Brussels