MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 7 ISSUE 1: lardo
THE VALLEY REVIEW
7TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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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To submit to Meat For Tea, please go to: meatforteathevalleyreview.submittable.com/submit.
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salutations from the editor

Greetings readers. I hear you've all been pummelled by Nemo and various other blustery storms, whilst I've been enjoying the gentle Tuscan breezes at my friend, Gordon's, lovely villa. I shall refrain from rubbing this in. I merely state my location because I have been bemused by the nomination for Pope I have recently received. Clearly the nominating, and anonymous, individual has a Rabelaision sense of humor. Fear not, gentle readers. I shall not become Pope.

My little magazine is now turning seven years old, with the release of the "Lardo" issue. Deciding it was time Meat for Tea grew a back bone, I have turned to a perfect bound format. This issue boasts a cover painting by and an exclusive interview with the multi-talented John Lurie. I am so excited to see all the art on exhibit at the next Cirque at Sonelab, and thankful to know Tonya Dixon, Chris Gentes, Leah Moses, Susan Halls, D.H. Yondernod, Raze013, Sam Gas Can, and so many other super talented artists. I also cannot wait to get my groove on to Kollagemontage, Endand, and Home Body, who will be rocking the house. I am also thankful to the ECC for their generous grant which, in part, makes these Cirques possible. See you at the show; I'll be the one with a beard,

besos y abrazos,
Meaty Gonzales

Eleanor Bennett

and still

Michael Alves

And still I shiver
at the passing mention of your name

What time has passed between us
I cannot even say, but I,
    cannot deny,
        This state of passion which you seem to dominate

Within your sight,
    I know no means nor force of will
        could quell my pulse-
        My lips run dry
        my fingers tremble, mind succumbs

        To webs of paths and patterns
        bound in branches of old
        neurons twisted into trees
        of memory-

        Your gentle touch
        Or your soft hair against my chest
        Your enigmatic smile
        Or the confession of your blush

Though, no reverie could mend
a broken trust, a disposition
soured by that acrid powder
you adored
it seems,
much more than me.

Eleanor Bennett

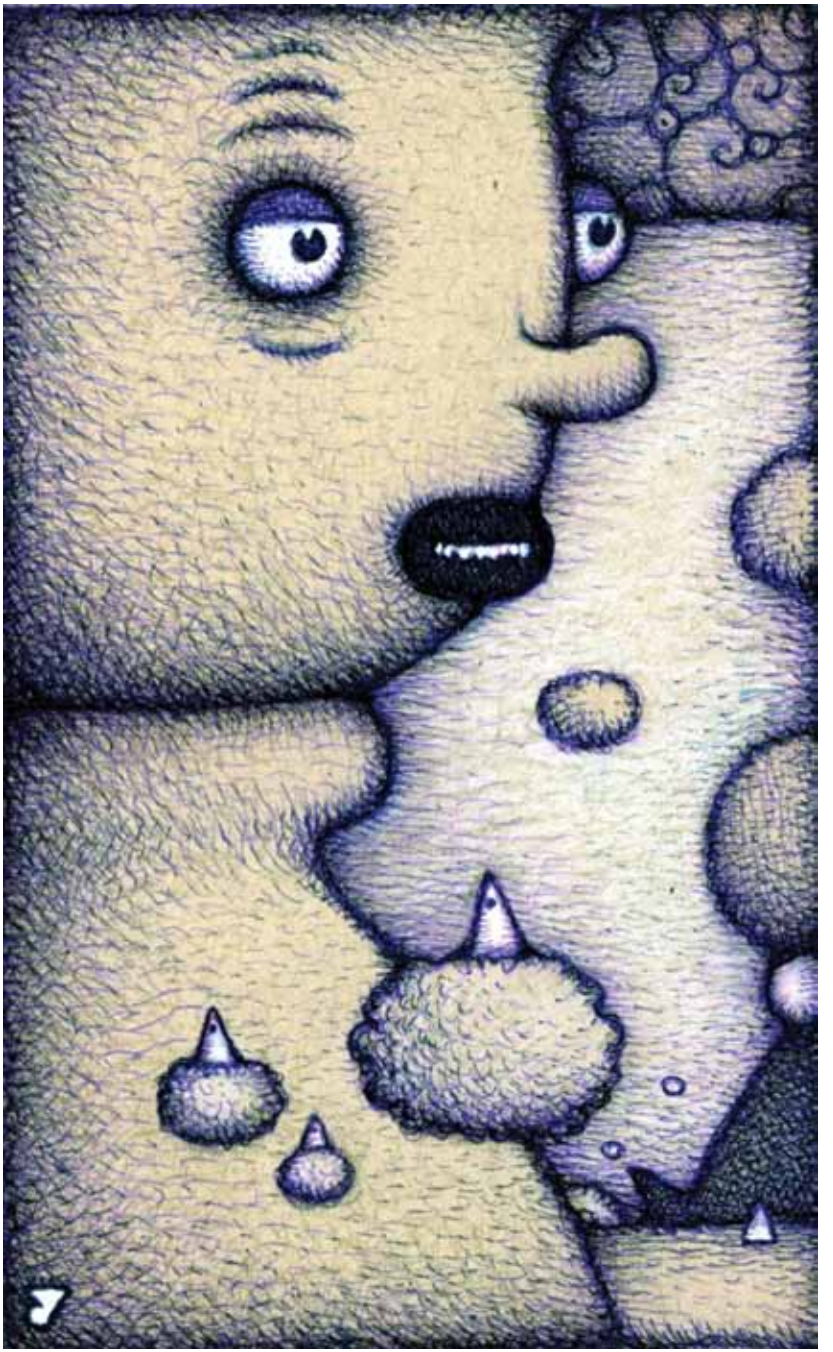
ode to lardo (with apologies to Keats)

Elizabeth MacDuffie

You as yet untasted morsel of lusciousness,
You bastard child of bacon and butter,
The most jaded palate you delight.
Melting umami more eloquent than verse.
What strange alchemy, what mad chef created you?
Was he deity, mortal, or both?
In Tuscany or in Rome?
What man or God was he whom vegans loathe?
What wild passion? What special pigs?
What whiffs and aromas? What glory on the tongue?

Tasted lardo is delicious, but
Lardo untasted is more delectable still.
Not only to the yearning palate, but to the whole being.
Appealing to the tastebuds of no vegetarian.
Fair lardo, upon my plate you
cannot stay.
Your sensuous texture and
Flavor unmatched cannot
remain untouched for long.
Bold lardo, never, never
can you last.
Consuming you is my goal, yet
Do not fret.
You cannot fade, though now
you are gone from my plate,
For long will your memory linger,
and you will be forever yummy.

[This poem was previously published in 30 Poems In November! to benefit literacy at the Center for New Americans.]



freakazoid
D.H. Yondernod

apnea

Meg Pokrass

Anne's husband, Steven, slept with a disgruntled snort. Anne was sure it was sleep apnea, which was dangerous, and that he would be dead soon. He didn't snore like a cozy, lazy bear. He snorted like a raging wart hog, maybe a female hog being raped by a male.

They had been married 12 years. Anne went to a dwindling but regular "ladies luncheon" of old friends for camaraderie... They'd talk openly about their husband's idiosyncrasies while bobbing for worse stories. These women, when together, did not pretend to be glamorous, wore large lumpy gray sweatpants. None of them would be asked to participate in a Spring fashion pose.

During football season, Anne wore her old, denim skirt while singing "The Age of Aquarius" and "White Rabbit" and "All you Need is Love" while Steven roared at the TV screen. "My god what kind of fuckface are you!" he'd scream.

She'd play the ukelele or else she would dance barefoot around the house as if to say "butterflies are free!" This freeing self-expression kept her from smoking. She would sit in her rocking chair, rocking hard, and think about how much she hated alcohol, sports, Republicans, and dentists. She would rock back and forth, closing her eyes and saying to herself that she did not have to be this person she was now. Life had hooks, yes. But there were ways.

Once she tried to care about football and all she could look at were the young men's hulkish shoulders and sweet elephant butts. Their faces were full-fat but not kind.

Anne asked Steven if he would please see a doctor to discuss his sleep apnea. The day she asked she was wearing a diaphanous shirt. She thought if she looked like a commercial for herbal tea, he would calm down and agree to have his condition checked. He was stubborn as usual. Stoic. Said he'd rather somersault off the gorge than visit a doctor and be given an oxygen mask to wear at night.

"So you'd rather ruin your transmission, sell it to a junk shop than have it in for a minor adjustment?" Anne said, thinking that comparing his health to the health of a car may help him to see things from the right angle. She did not want to wake up next to a dead man one morning.

Anonymously she wrote a letter to an advice blog columnist twice asking what to do about things. So far she had not received any answers.

creation story

Ben Bellizzi

Apparently, when once considering our family's future, my parents held a prolonged and perhaps heated debate over whether to have another child or to finally purchase a new rug. To be fair, there were already four children running around the house, all interesting and talented and deserving of their parents' attention and money, and the living room rug, having been peed upon by old canines and young humans, was in dire need of replacement. I heard tale of this dispute many times from my father who, in my mother's absence, would delight in the opportunity to describe how he, despite my mother's lobbying for the rug, prevailed in my favor and was therefore twice responsible for my existence. We were Catholics, after all, and as the family's head Catholic, guilt was the sharpest arrow in his quiver. My mother, upon questioning, did not refute his claim. Once when I had foolishly sought to verify these facts, she had looked at me for several seconds, glanced at the rug, and shook her head ever so slightly.

"Please run and get me some more coffee," she'd said. She took her coffee black. I believe she relished the bitterness.

Knowledge of my humble beginnings, however, failed to swing my devotion to my father's side. Quite the contrary. His ardent campaign watered the seeds of intrigue as to my mother's character and the cool practicality of which she was capable. Reason was nearly always on her side. A fifth child does seem like overkill for any parent not seeking to field a basketball team, and I can envision my mother pointing out what deficiencies, beginning with the shabby rug, could be addressed by capping the number of kids off at four. Now that I understand the process of baby-making, I realize I might have already sprung an unfair surprise on my mother, and in doing so, disadvantaged her argument. Regardless, she obviously capitulated and went through with the pregnancy, though I'm told she had the doctor to put a definitive period behind the number five in the very moments following my birth. My mother was not one to leave a negotiation empty handed.

My position as the fifth and perhaps expendable child came with generous benefits. Expectations were more or less nonexistent and even my most corrupt transgressions were buffered by my four successful predecessors. I also discovered that with each of my siblings' departures for school and the world at large, I gained unparalleled access to my mother just as she was beginning to regain the independence she'd set aside in order to rear her many chickens. With the nest comparatively empty, she started to become a real person. She reconnected with adult friends whose kids weren't necessarily playmates with hers, she took up yoga and dressed accordingly, and she accepted promotions at work that kept her late and necessitated my father's late and painfully slow introduction to the most basic of culinary arts. Just as she was emerging from beneath her parental responsibilities, my father took notice of the sand sinking low in his patriarchal glass. His reaction to this crisis was to focus his accumulated fatherly zeal, originally apportioned for five children, onto the sole individual who remained within his dominion. Again, his campaign backfired. I fled his crosshairs of affection and placed my allegiance in my mother's corner with renewed vigor. Together we made great leaps toward self-determination, all the while agreeing that there would be many things about which we didn't tell Dad.

The apex of this often conspiratorial reinvention arrived on a nondescript weekday afternoon when my mother and I were both home on winter break. I was playing video games in the living room and she walked in wearing one of her "smarter" outfits, a term that denoted shaped jeans, a jacket with a wealth of buttons sprinkled across the front, and some accessory like a leather bag or a colorful scarf that made her look, as she called it, "Not necessarily like a mom." My day hadn't progressed out of pajamas, nor did it betray any hint of doing so, and with the game still going, she said,

"I'm going out to buy a new rug. You can come if you want to."

I set down the controller. We regarded one another. Mom stood cool as a cucumber, as the saying goes, leaving nothing up for discussion. She was off to buy the rug, I could come or I could not. Of course I was under the impression that the rug, like the arrival of additional children, had been permanently removed from the table. Excited and not just a tad scared, I raced off to get dressed, unsure of where one even went to buy new rugs yet certain that I would not miss out on such a wild ride.

As we drove I looked out the window, considering which stores sold rugs and which ones did not. We passed through several towns and each time we left one I thought about the next and what possible destinations they offered. We drove for about an hour, a journey by New England standards, and we didn't speak along the way. My mom seemed to have a certain equilibrium about her that didn't encourage disturbance. I was also aware that I was not an integral contributor to the mission and that my inclusion had been an act of kindness. In fact, she may not have intended to invite me at all, but upon walking through the living room and finding me there, she likely had shrugged and figured why not.

Bypassing all the familiar department stores, my mother parked the car in an alleyway I didn't know existed. She led me to a door beside a large glass window that reflected the anonymous warehouses surrounding what I soon discovered to be a Mecca of floor coverings from around the globe. The store opened up to the size of three or four of these warehouses. Carpets hung on every wall, dangled from the ceiling at various heights, and were laid out on little platforms where patrons could rub their fingers, or cheeks, against the material. They came in every conceivable shape and size, the artistry of each design as impressive as the sheer volume of selection, and each one communicated a sense of royalty regardless of its color. Exotic rugs lusted at me from all directions, and the only place where there were no carpets was the floor, which was a cold and industrial metal. I found this appropriate, for to step foot on any one of these masterpieces seemed like the gravest of insults.

After wandering about for about a few minutes, I found my mother speaking with a salesman in a pinstriped suit. She had already found her rug, and though I stood in such close proximity to her as to garner unmistakable recognition as her son, neither she nor the salesman acknowledged me. At no point did she ask my opinion of the rug.

"Now, as for this particular's piece's protective cushion," the salesman said, "It secures the lifespan and performance of the fibers, and I won't sell the rug without it."

My mother merely nodded, well aware of the qualities and necessity of the protective cushion.

She asked briefly about transportation and care, and without me discovering even how many numbers were included in the price, we headed back home with our new rug.

The weak winter sun dropped below the horizon as we petered through each little town with its strict 25 miles per hour speed limit. We sat quietly listening to the stereo as my mother's fingered drummed gleefully on the steering wheel. Every few minutes I turned to get another look at the burnt red and yellow barely visible in the rug's roll, these triumphant colors that would soon transform our living room, house, and lives in general. The rug was finally coming home. I was sixteen.

I am not exaggerating when I call the rug a transformative addition to our lives. Some of the living room furniture, including the television, was removed to allow the rug to stretch out without impediment. It was understood not to walk upon it, or to eat anywhere within its vicinity, and the time we had previously spent in the living room dwindled as we followed the television into the smaller room next to the bathroom. We were on our way to becoming a family with a separate den and visiting room, though I can't imagine the sort of preposterous visitor that would carry such distinction as to be offered a seat anywhere near the new Persian rug. Years later it was still the new Persian rug, and I'm sure it always will be.

My father never said a word about the rug. He continued to inhabit the house as if it had always been there and the room it occupied was one he'd always avoided. And he continued telling me the story of my birth with the same frequency as before, though he now claimed, and perhaps believed, that my mother had sought a new couch instead of a rug. We still had the same old couch.

As one might expect, things changed more drastically for my parents once the nest was truly empty. Off at college, I got reports that Dad had taken a job on the other side of the state, then in a different state altogether, and the schism that the raising of children delayed set in at last. Though they are both now navigating the waters of independence and uncertainty that I hope to evade in my advancing decades, I can still picture my mother standing back after she'd unrolled her new Persian rug, admiring its majesty amid its blasé middle-class surroundings, basking in her much anticipated ability to make her own decisions.