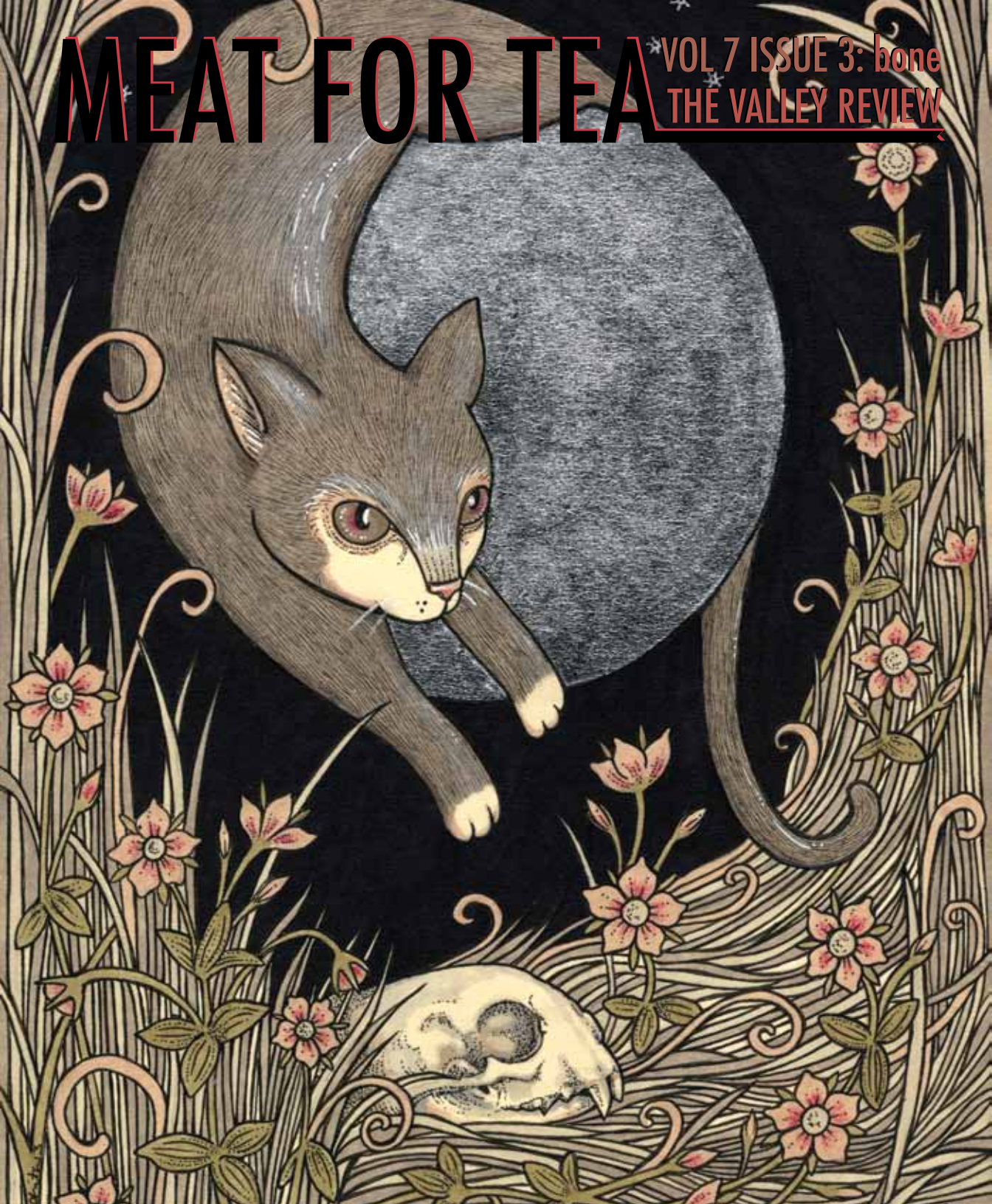
MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 7 ISSUE 3: bone
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.

Staff:
Editor-in-Chief: Meaty Gonzales
Editor: Elizabeth MacDuffie
Layout: Mark Alan Miller
Impresario: Elizabeth MacDuffie

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Contributors:
Jeffrey Alfier, Silvana Alfonso, Angela Bayout, Adam Berlin, Terra Bidlespacher, Meg Brown, Simona Candini, Alana I. Capria, Brian Clifton ,Thomas Cowell, Michael Dickel, James Doering, Jeremy Edwards, Brad Garber, Gil Gildner, Daniel Hales, Will Hall, Jason Harris, Zeke Jarvis, Laura Story Johnson, Bryce Journey, Bruce Kahn, Richard Kostalenetz, Miles Liss, Christopher Locke, Richard Luftig, Elizabeth MacDuffie, Kelsey Jayne Marshall, Colleen Michaels, David P. Miller, Laura Marjorie Miller, Mark Alan Miller, Susie Potter, Jade Ramsay, Sara Rauch, Raymond Rodgers, Mindela Ruby, Gerard Samat, Ingrid Steblea, Yong Takahashi, Jessica Thelen, Sarah Brown Weitzman, Kirby Wright

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Please send all other editorial correspondences to meatfortea@gmail.com

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salutations from the editor

This issue will get under your skin and cut through the fat to get to the very bone. Bones. To get to the bare-boned truth, to reveal the skeletons in your closet, to sip a healing broth, bones evoke many conflicting emotions and memories; ranging from the scary and macabre, to soul baring relief, to comfort. I'm humbled and honored by the responses of so many gifted artists to this theme of bone, but enough about the magazine, you can read this for yourselves.

At this Cirque, marking the end of Summer, I am pleased to introduce the first group art exhibit from the international Bad Apple Artist Collective, with whom I came in contact through the brilliant, subversive art of their ringleader, Heather Rose. Jim Dubois will also have his thought provoking work on exhibit.

Tin Vulva and Endand will rock the house amd a plethora of gifted writers will read their words. This promises to be a memorable evening. I'll see you there. If you have trouble recognizing me, remember I shave off my beard in the Summer.

besos y abrazos
Meaty Gonzales

Greeting me
behind her
open door
was a woman
w e a r i n g
n o t h i n g
except a black
belt in karate.

Richard Kostelanetz

tan pond wolfpit

David P. Miller

Tan Brook runs invisibly from south into the pond, away
from its source in a cemetery spring-fed pool, surfaced only
as off-limits backyard boundaries, its past
as tannery effluvia still in the nose. You've seen
the roadside markers with duck silhouettes, but few persons
know how to sound cross streets and town parks for one

present stretch of culverted creek. Wolfpit Brook, once
a name for the same water, flows northwest toward farmland. Taken away
from ravine traps, wolf heads, ears cut off, brought a purse
of six pounds. Animals and brook both out of evidence. Only
the town history knows wolves "caused havoc among sheep." Brook seen,
maybe, at culvert's mouth where it meets the Mill River, though buried a century past.

The gravestone of Dickinson's lust-captured brother, you once passed
without seeing. He, Susan, Martha, and little Gib, as one
turn their backs on the rest of the buried at Wildwood. Austin's obscene
couplings with the mad astronomer's wife turned them away
from Victorian Amherst. The family's stones, prone on the earth, only
a spring stroll from Mabel Todd's plot, slope toward the woods, impersonate

outcasts. Drainage from soil of town dead runs, impersonal,
downhill beneath ground toward the entrance. Cemetery tourists pass
a close patch of water where dirt roads diverge. Lonely
Tan Brook gathers in a drainpipe at the edge of this pool. Stinks at its one
public viewing place, a pedestrian bridge. Nineteenth-century hides weigh
heavy on the nostrils even this late. But follow it northward, released from a grate, seen

as the broad University Pond. Dammed Tan Brook in the open, scene
of childhood meanders to watch the duck myriads, puzzle over the person
you might become, college student like hippies stretched out on the banks. Await
the sun's warmth of your own days as one of them, afternoons passed
on stone benches or grass. And think of the pond as always there, one
self-subsisting perfection of parabolic fountains, no cause or condition, only

a body of water somehow always replenished. But nothing arises alone. Only
sluice and dam made this site of rope pulls, apple blossoms, seen
on collectors' postcards and Homecoming snapshots. Forgotten, the last one
of the wolves, traps set by colonials, tanned-leather sales figures, the person
whose tannery was built, flourished, and ended. And subterranean, what passed
into the ground as brook water arose. Whose bodies, dissolved, were carried away.

You live daily and only at ground level, like any person
who regards what he's seen outside of the light of what's passed,
till the sight of one roadside sign wakes you to the submerged and away.

wolf skull
Meg Brown

sockdolager

Angela Bayout

"Dispatch number 17213. Where are you calling from?" a feminine-sounding operator asked me on the phone.

"I'm at the overground J train stop at San Jose and Randall Streets in Bernal Heights."

"What is the nature of your call?"

"Well, this might be weird, but there's a bone in the grass near the train stop."

"A bone?"

"Yeah, like a bone on the ground."

"Can you be more detailed?"

"It's on the ground near the pedestrian stairway connecting San Jose to Mission Street. It's maybe about five feet from the steps in the dirt. It looks like a vertebra."

"What is it exactly?"

"A bone. A backbone. It's as big as my fist."

It was gray, the shade of smudged graphite on paper. Aren't bones creamy white? Don't they have tinges of pink and red? It was pocked and porous. There was a nickel-sized canal for the long-gone spinal cord. Shouldn't there have been blood vessels, moisture and muscle?

"Can I have your name and phone number?" she asked.

"Why?"

"If the officers need more details –"

"All right." Considering civic duty, I gave her my number. "Also, there's a paper coffee cup from a Shell station by the bone. Hopefully that helps."

"Okay, thank you. I will send someone out." She hung up.

I stared at this bone, through its pores. It reminded me of a butterfly. I shuddered. I was imposing. I felt like I'd caught a woman with her skirt tucked into her underwear, and I'm wasn't myself but a predator. I was sorry. I was just going to catch the J on my way to work.

The train bore up the tracks, and I trotted to the stop not looking back. Picked a seat by the window and rolled along with other quiet commuters.

I thought about the missing teenage girl from South of the city. Recalled missing person signs I'd noticed.

The J train crept into the metro's dark underground tunnel, and I figured the cops must have made it to the scene by then. They would pick up the bone with their plastic-gloved fingertips and drop it in a plastic bag, label it clearly. They'd take it to the station for testing to study its age, how long it had been out there. Determine if it came from a male or a female, a child or a mother. The FBI's database would be checked. Maybe it would end up a Doe, maybe a family would finally get some answers. That's what happens on the happy episodes of *Unsolved Mysteries*.

I reached work, and typed to my husband over web chat.

"There was a bone near the train stop."

"Did you take a picture of it?"

"No. I called the police."

"What does it looks like?"

"A vertebra."

"Whoa. From an animal?"

"Gosh, I hadn't considered that. But, if it was an animal, it was pretty big. Apple sized. A raccoon is the largest animal I can think of that'd be roaming around our neighborhood. Wouldn't a bone from a raccoon be much smaller? Too small to see or to make me stop?"

"I don't know."

"I hope it's gone when I come home," I typed, thinking that I'll just forget about it by then.

I didn't forget, and I swung by the site. I wondered all day if it was still there.

It was there. The coffee cup from the gas station was not.

vertebra 1
Meg Brown

don't mention it

Thomas Cowell

I went back because my brother said there was work for me. It was a temporary thing, I told myself as I packed my backpack full and dropped the apartment keys off with the manager, shaking her hand and thanking her for the bit of cleaning work she'd given me when the middle-aged maintenance guy was too hung-over to get out of bed. Then I started my piece of shit car, knocked on Karen's door as the engine warmed. But I guess she wasn't home, she might've been at work, I never really learned her schedule. I thought about leaving a note and slipping it under the door but I didn't. I got in the car and headed home.

My brother was part of a construction crew. He put in a good word for me after learning of my troubles finding work after college. The foreman said to him, "Well, where is he? Houses don't build themselves, thank god."

"He'll be here top of the week, ready to go," my brother told him, and there I was.

"You look skinny," my brother said.

I dropped my backpack to the carpet and swept a glance around the apartment. My eyes stopped on the couch.

"Yup," my brother said.

"Thanks," I said.

"Don't mention it. You hungry?"

"Starving."

"Let's go then. There's nothing here."

We went to a bar. I knew the place but had never been inside. It was a workingman's bar. Everyone in the place stunk of dead dreams.

"Pitcher of Pabst," my brother said. The bartender nodded and looked me over but didn't ask for ID.

"And two cheeseburgers," my brother said after the pitcher was on the counter.

"Thanks," I said. My brother knew I had no money.

We took a window seat and waited for the burgers. My brother poured the pitcher into glasses.

"Cheers," he said.

We clinked glasses and drank. I looked out the window at the old familiar streets. They looked the same as I'd left them.

"Bet it feels weird," my brother said.

"Something like that," I said. "How's mom?"

"She's alright. We'll stop by soon."

The house was already built and ready for living. The only thing that needed to be done was the shingling. My brother and his crew had moved on to the construction of another house somewhere across the street from a line of waterfronts, I guess. I only saw him in the mornings before he'd drop me off in his truck and in the afternoons when he'd pick me up. Each morning I'd make a ham sandwich and fill an old juice bottle with tap water. I worked with one other guy on the shingling, some kid probably still in high school who could've been on steroids. We'd exchange maybe five words a day, all work or weather-related.

The summer sun made my face and forearms tan; my skinny muscles strained and swelled from the labor. During my lunch breaks I'd sit under the shade of this willow tree in the gravel driveway and watch old people walk their dogs down the road.

I was sure glad it wasn't my house.

Sunday morning we drove to mom's for brunch. I hadn't seen her in almost a year. It was while we were headed out there that my brother said, "She's started seeing someone again." He was watching the road even though we were going only twenty or so, through a school zone.

I looked at him. "How come no one told me?"

"Well, you know," he began, "I remember how hard it was on you. It was hard on me too, of course. I don't know, I didn't want to bring up the past I guess." My brother shrugged, one hand limp on the wheel at noon.

"It was hardest on mom. The asshole," I said.

"It was hard," my brother said. "That's all. Anyways, she's been seeing this guy for a month or so now. Seems like a nice guy. Name's Frank. He's an electrician. I haven't seen her so happy since—"

I didn't say anything. I stared out the window at the row of houses past the curb, wood-painted houses that somehow brought back my childhood, houses I'd never been inside of, never known the people who lived behind those closed doors. I thought of my dad somewhere in some state with some woman. He could've been dead for all I knew.

"That's good," I finally said to my brother. "How'd they meet?"

"Online," he said.

Mom's house was a one-story, dark with cedar-wood siding; it flanked the ninth hole fairway of the local golf course. My brother parked his truck at the head of the roundabout next to mom's green Jeep Wrangler, a car she looked ridiculous in but wouldn't give up for anything, as the jeep made her think she was in Australia or something, on some endless wild adventure where heartache and loneliness were abstract ideas. In reality she'd never been out of the country, unless you count the one time we'd all gone up to British Columbia for a Thanksgiving. That was ancient history now.

"You look skinny," mom said from the doorway in her pajama robe.

"So do you," I said.

"Hah, not that skinny."

We hugged. She smelled of cigarettes. Nothing new.

"Nice to see you, son."

"You too."

"How's it feel to be back?"

"Like defeat," I said.

She laughed. "You're too skinny for construction. I'm glad you're back, but I wish you hadn't given up that apartment."

"Well," I said.

"You're a city boy at heart," she said. "Doesn't take a detective to see that."

"Lay off him mom," my brother said. "He's doing fine."

"Sure," she said. "We're all doing fine. Come on in. Take your shoes off. Did your brother tell you I've met someone? Good. Come on in and meet Frank."

My brother gave me a look as we went inside.

Following my mom and brother through the house, I glanced through the living room windows and slowed a little—there was a black man sitting there on the back porch. I followed my mom


Boo
Boo