

MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 7 ISSUE 4
THE VALLEY REVIEW

scrapple





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

Cover Art: FRONT: "Delicate Descent" by Dan May
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Contributors:

Jevin Lee Alburquerque, Denis Bell, Kristin Bock, Jihan Bok, Daniel Callahan, Jeanne Chisamore, Diane Cypkin, Matt Dennison, Ryan Dowell, Penelope T. Evans, Moneta Goldsmith, Rollie Grinwis, Bruce Hinrichs, Anthony Hoyle, Clinton Inman, Bryce Journey, Aris Katsilakis, Jim Krosschell, Elizabeth MacDuffie, Kelsey Jayne Marshall, Joan McNerney, Ed Meek, Christopher Mulrooney, Anne Peabody, Tom Poppalardo, Ken Poyner, Charles Rammelkamp, Chelsea Ross, Ashley Shaw, Nicole Shea, Tom Sheehan, Ron Singer, Logan Ryan Smith, Shelby Stephenson, Joshua Michael Stewart, Jeanna Szuch, Gilmore Tamny, Meeah Williams, Gerald Yelle, Erin Wahl

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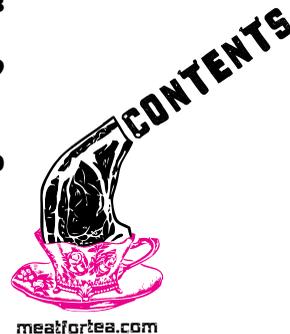
Please send all other editorial correspondences to meatfortea@gmail.com

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salutations from the editor

Recently I was having tea with a dear friend in Tibet and we got to talking about gossip. Certainly, I've had my moments of discovering an unflattering photo of myself, accompanied by an out-of-context quote that makes me sound like a jerk, smeared all over the cover of one tabloid or another. Such is the price of celebrity, it seems. Still, I wonder about the people who read *People*, and I think *Us* should more accurately be titled *Them*. An overriding concern with which celebrity has the best or worst bikini body, who cheated on their spouse, with whom, or who is in rehab, seems mean-spirited and generally pointless.

Equally pointless is gossip behind other people's backs, casting aspersion, pointing fingers, and making judgments. This type of idle talk benefits no one, and damages the ones engaging in it, perhaps more than anyone else. Negativity breeds, after all. My Tibetan friend and I talked about the Buddhist precept for right speech and speculated upon how much more pleasant this world would be if all people followed these simple guidelines: "abstinence from false speech, abstinence from malicious speech, abstinence from harsh speech, and abstinence from idle chatter" (www.tricycle.com/web-exclusive/family-dharma-right-speech-reconsidered). So, in a nutshell, don't lie, don't speak in ways that cause problems, don't be mean, and don't talk smack.

Speaking of right speech, I start to think of its opposite and the stunning example of wrong speech delivered by Rick Santorum. In it he compares himself to the recently deceased Nelson Mandela, (too soon?), and Obamacare to Apartheid. Santorum is a stunning example of what can happen if one speaks without mindfulness. Scary.

On a much more cheerful note, I'm excited to be releasing the "Scrapple" issue of the magazine this Saturday at Le Guerrier Cirque. Ramiro Davaro-Comas will be doing a huge exhibit of his art and Azuza Inkh and Problem with Dragons will bring the rock. A star-studded group of writers, including William Wolack will be reading, too. I'll see you there.

besos y abrazos
Meaty Gonzales

ultimatum

Nicole Shea

We four were sitting on the patio, enjoying the Mexican evening. There were a few lights down by the town and beach, and a fire burned in the dark hills above us. We'd just finished eating a grilled chicken we bought from locals a few houses down. Condiments and sides twisted closed in sandwich baggies. We ate on the patio and drank icy cold cans of Mexican beer.

Dylan started it: What do you think of ultimatums?

Kelli joked: Dude! What I done wrong? Ain't we having fun? I have to stop talking or you'll what? What?

Tina asserted: I love them. Just get to the point. I'm busy. Make things easier for me!

Drew cautioned: Well, not everything is so black and white. There's a lot of grey area and sometimes an ultimatum kinda, ya know, shuts things down.

Kelli: Dylan, why you asking? Can you give us a hypothetical?

Dylan: It came up talking to some colleagues. My friend works with a guy who got an ultimatum from his girl so he proposed to her. My friend thinks it's a totally bogus way to start a marriage and that the guy is doomed.

Drew: If you would have given me an ultimatum, I wouldn't have married you.

Kelli: Sure you would have. Youda bristled, but then settled down and figured what the hell, she here, I'm lazy.

Drew: I love your confidence. But really, ya never know. Sometimes you make the right decision; sometimes you make the wrong one.

Kelli: Thank god you got that one right!

Drew: Right. I've been blessed.

Tina: Ultimatums on big decisions is stupid. Too much drama.

Kelli: It's a fucking ballsy ass move on her part. Cuz yer man gonna walk away or he gonna step up. If he walk away, you look dumb. If he step up, everyone always gonna wonder if he done it because he weak.

Tina: Right. The girl comes out of it looking like a controlling bitch however it turns out.

Dylan: Kelli, is you drunk? What wit da hood talk?

Kelli: Psssh, I likes to be loose, when drunk, in Mexico. Why you hatin'?

Dylan: No hatin', I say we all tries to talk like we somebody else.

Kelli: Sweet! But seriously, if the guy proposed after an ultimatum, I think that's a pretty noble thing. It's so easy to walk away from an ultimatum. Practically everyone will be on your side. Proposing means your girl done served you and you said, I'm not willing to lose this. Maybe he'd been on the fence, waiting for the perfect sign, the perfect time. Ain't no guarantees. He chose standing with her. Fuck y'all. These sound like smart people who deftly navigated a decision you never have a guarantee on. Good for them.

Drew: I suppose, but did the guy stand by her or just give up? How can she know who she's getting?

Dylan: Right. The ultimatum forced a decision. Whether the decision made was a brave one or a fearful one is anyone's guess.

Dylan opened the wine for Tina and Kelli and grabbed beers out of the cooler, tossing a can to Drew.

Drew: Thank you sir. I will accept this beer because you leave me no choice. Beer tossed, is beer drunk.

Tina: It would be rude to refuse. Plus, you gotta help Dylan out or he will be tossed to the couch.

Kelli: I was given an ultimatum once.

Drew: But I thought you wanted to do it!

Kelli: Drew, you know I always wanna do it. Anyway, my first boyfriend and I went through rocky times as all dumb young love does. We were doing some stupid taking-a-break-trying-to-figure-things-out thing. It was all dumbness and bullshit, but what'r ya gonna do? That shit always ugly, sad and dumb.

Tina: True dat. What? I can't be hood?

Dylan: Nope. You definitely can not.

Kelli: So my love says to me, we either get back together right now, or you leave and we never talk again.

Dylan: Shit. That's pretty serious. Obviously you walked away. Did you feel like you were making a smart or a stupid decision?

Kelli: At the time I thought it was totally unfair. I cried a lot. All snotty and but you're my soulmate-y. I wish I had been cooler, but I didn't want that decision forced on me.

Drew: Right. He ultimatumed and you walked away. If he hoped you would choose him, he blew it.

Kelli: Blew it or wisely made us come to terms with what we probably already knew. Maybe it kept things from some long ugly humiliating trying and failing foreverness suck void.

Drew: Yeah, it doesn't seem like it would have worked out, so cutting to the chase was sorta like pulling a band-aid off quickly.

Kelli: Of course I didn't like it at the time, but now I consider it a gift. Right then and there, in that moment, was I going to stand with him or stand alone. You can't know what you don't know. You can't see what you can't see. It was a scary and heartbreaking drive home. Fuck, I didn't even really have a home. I was staying in my parents' basement while they were going through a divorce. I wanted to go someplace and sob my little heart out, get drunk, read old notes, look at pictures of us when we were in love. You know, study my pain. But I wasn't ready to explain shit to my parents.

Drew: What did you do?

Kelli: I stopped crying, drove to my parents' house, dove into the pool, grabbed a beer and lay shivering until the sun warmed my body.

Dylan: Did you feel brave or scared?

Kelli: Scared as shit. But when you're faced with two options, you gotta trust your gut. What else can you do? I guess it felt scary and exciting. Maybe that's what brave feels like. I dunno.

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the cash register tolls for thee

Tom Pappalardo

It was an average night at the dead mall: the elderly were pocketing ceramic bird figurines while children were buying things with handfuls of pennies. Unknown brand names lined the shelves. The blank cassette tapes, hair scrunchies, and Virgin Mary nightlights were selling briskly. I answered customer inquiries such as “How much is this?” and “Is this a dollar?” and “How much would two of these cost?”

This was southern New Hampshire, the early 1990s. I worked at All For a Dollar, one of the more popular dead mall destinations. I pushed buttons on a cash register, I stocked shelves, I vacuumed. It was a low-pressure work environment, and I was one of the better employees. My minimal investment of effort somehow made me an outstanding worker in the eyes of my superiors, and I was promoted to Assistant Manager (I wanted a name tag that said ASS MAN but I was told that this was not going to happen). For a 20-year-old cartoonist looking to avoid responsibility and get a paycheck, this job provided a lovely place to sit.

I was slouched behind the front counter, drawing a comic and listening to the mall’s Tape Loop Of Hits play over and over again. The Tape Loop Of Hits emanated from a speaker somewhere above the bootleg “Co-ed Naked” t-shirt kiosk outside my store’s entrance. You could gauge the length of your shift by how many times you’d heard the instrumental version of The Cranberries’ 1993 hit “Linger.”

An angry-looking mom led her crying little boy into the store by his wrist. They’d been in the store just a few minutes before and I sensed my night was about to get annoying.

She strode up to my register. “What do you have to say?” she demanded.

I froze. Had she witnessed me and my part-timer cutting open glow sticks and splattering the toxic stuff on the ceiling (“It looks like stars!”)? Had she seen me taking Ramen Noodles off the front end cap for my lunch? Could she see I was drawing a comic about annoying All For a Dollar customers? I panicked. The boy looked up at his mother and made a blubbering noise. Ahh, she was talking to him. Good good good.

“I’m sorry,” he sobbed at the floor. I smiled my vacuous retail worker smile, because I didn’t understand or care about what was going on.

“What did you do?” the mother asked in a deeply serious tone.

He held a small toy truck out to me with his free hand. “I took it,” he said to me, bursting into fresh tears.

I held my empty smile. I still didn’t really care. The store bled merchandise every day. Shoplifting was built into the business plan. I looked at the boy and said “Oh yeah?” and then I looked at his mother with my blank, dumb smile. She didn’t smile back.

“And what do you say?” she said to me. To me! What did I do? I was baffled. I looked down at the wet-faced child and reality hit me like a ton of Virgin Mary nightlights: This kid was afraid of me. This wretched woman had recruited me in the effort to discipline her beastly snot-factory. Without my consent, she had appointed me to represent AUTHORITY. I had been shanghaied. My carefree days of youthful irresponsibility came crashing to a halt. With just a few words, she had transformed me into the one thing I most despised: I had become THE MAN.

I held out my hand and accepted the toy that probably had a wholesale price of twelve cents. I dropped my retail smile and spoke to the boy in as serious a voice as I could muster. I said the only thing I could think of. I said, “Stealing is bad.” He cried even more. Gross booger bubble.

“We’re very sorry,” the mother said to me. “...aren’t we?” she scowled at her son. He made a gurgling mucus-y sound of anguish and she led him out of the store. I stood at the counter, dumbfounded, contemplating my new role in the world, the Mantle of Responsibility weighing heavily upon my shoulders. A man approached me from the back of the store. His hand held a spatula; his eyes held a question.

“It’s a dollar,” I said.



2012

Daniel Callahan

We, she and I, bought a dog
and a car and a house
and the drains backed up
and the dog shit in the house.

Do you remember how it
never was fully dark? How
the brightness poured in
until I put up black-out black
curtains to keep out the neighbors’
automatic lights?

It took thousands and a shitty contractor,
but we fenced that yard and lived inside
with 100 years of painted-over history.



the desert night

Daniel Callahan

It’s hard to tell
through twilight and streetlights and
the faint hiss of a dropped call,
if there are fluttering fallen leaves on my windshield
or small yellow butterflies
floating on the dry air.

We’re both smiling, somewhere, and
it’s closer to tomorrow than today.
The moon’s a giant on the horizon and
I’ve got nowhere to be, yet.

The sound is more like laughing
and less the wind gusting
through my open window.





the downfall of a decade
Ryan Dowell

the least cruel method for cooking crabs

Moneta Goldsmith

In order to cook live crabs, here's what you do. Place each crab in a small-to-medium sized bucket. Find two large blocks of ice.

Place the blocks of ice inside the bucket that contains the crabs. Cover the bucket that contains the crabs tucked beneath the blocks of ice, and cover it completely. After a few moments of crab confusion, the crabs will believe it is winter and they will start to fall asleep.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the stove, boil a pot of water. It is important to perform this step with caution and out of earshot of your unsuspecting companions. As a rule, crabs have mercifully poor hearing, especially while hibernating, but they are highly evolved in matters of spirituality—possibly gnomic—even by crustacean standards. It would be wise to whisper a short prayer before lighting the second burner on the oven, just in case.

When the water boils, reach beneath the blocks of melting ice. If necessary, hold a wax candle in your free hand while performing this step. The use of smart-phones and flashlights is not recommended due to a widespread belief that aquatic species, bottom-dwellers especially, are more sensitive to radioactivity than are humans. Anyway, candles are safer. There are always more of them.

When you transport the crabs, one by one, into your pot of boiling water, do so quickly, and without resting too much between crabs. I repeat: for the purposes of this exercise, the window of time between crab convoys *must* be minimal. Under no circumstances should the candle burn to its wick before you are finished with the transport. This is for your sake, but also so that the crabs don't have time to warn their friends, or say goodbye to their relatives, or cry.

It is well known that crabmeat is tenderer if the crab itself suffers in its final hours, but this is a trade off you will have to make for the sake of science.

Rinse out the bucket for signs of bacteria and other crab offerings. Place the lid on top of the boiling water. Try not to turn away when the crabs turn white and slack and then, dinner. You will respect yourself more for this once night falls and you unplug your record player for the evening, the coarse sound of the record still scratching against the record needle, and all the whiskey in the world has not been enough to rinse away the metallic aftertaste of crab and crab tears.

Carry a book to the bed stand. Do not wonder too long whether rooms were designed to be this quiet or crabs were meant to make so much noise under blocks of ice, even for that brief moment, with their little slanted eyes half shut, pretending to be asleep.



it could be my prize but i would rather destroy it

Kelsey Jayne Marshall

I would break his heart for you. My fingers would reach right through his ribcage and find that muscle tucked away in his chest cavity and yank. I would yank and yank until I tugged it through his bones and his heart was dripping in my hand. What a precious little thing, I would coo. Like a little rabbit, nibbling away at my fingers.

I could feed it and keep it in a gilded cage hanging from my ceiling. Friends would exclaim as they walked in the door. *Does it need much care?* No, I imagine I would reply. The previous owner indulged it far too much. I'm trying to teach a lesson of humility. His heart would pump, gluttonous, in its cage on a chain.

But, no. The second I got your heart in my hands, it would be too tempting. Those knotted muscles, so grotesque and disgusting. Your arteries would sputter with fat and your own drippings, gaping stupidly like beached trout. I would let you look at it one last time. And I would break it. Most would overestimate how much effort it would take to feel those muscles gush between my fingers as their fibers unraveled like a skein of yarn. I could crochet myself a new hat with all the strings left dangling from my fingernails.

I would break his heart for you, just to see the look on his face when he realized what I am.



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