MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 9 ISSUE 2: FOND
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 staff

Welcome to this, our Fond issue!

Once the ribs are a deep brown on each side remove them from the pan and set aside. Add your mirepoix. Let the vegetables cook until golden brown, or about seven to ten minutes, and then add two cups of red wine. I prefer a burgundy, but anything with a little fruit and not too much acidity will do. It need not be expensive but try to avoid bargain or discount wine. Add your bouquet garni and reduce the wine by half.

By now you're cooking with fond, so to speak. The dead letters of the recipe have lead you here: simmering wine and bits of brown short rib with an issue of Meat for Tea nearby, open and spine up on the counter, or in your right hand. You scrape the bottom of a thick steel pan with a wooden spoon.

On the next page begins the content proper, but you haven't gotten there yet. The artists featured in this issue have given you something as yet unreceived, so this content is divorced both from its creator and its audience (assuming you haven't read ahead). Still, the works all exist, albeit in the darkness between pages. Does this indicate that art mediates a cruel and awkward economy of dubious meanings or are these features of eventuality and contingency essential to art's power and relevance? While you consider this idea of art in flux:

Add six cups of stock, either rich brown chicken stock or veal stock. Take out the bouquet garni. Notice that the convection of the liquid as it comes up to temperature buoys the fond to the surface where it cools and tumbles again to the bottom.

This weekend at Cirque du Les Fleurs we are excited to be exhibiting work by Luke Cavagnac, Søren Mason Temple, Kimaya Diggs, and Mark Wison. The Claudia Malibu and Mystics Anonymous will provide the soundtrack. One of the secrets to making a great short rib is to season them well with salt and pepper before searing them. I prefer freshly cracked white pepper myself, medium grind, but black pepper or some mixture will also be delicious. If the last Cirque was any indication then a good time will be had by all.

By now, if you haven't, skip ahead and read one of the poems or a short story, or perhaps peer at some of the visual art that appears in this, our Fond issue. Now that piece has reached its audience (you), but you're back here reading the Introduction to this, our Fond issue, and the piece you just read is still there, hidden between pages and again divorced from you. I'm sure that you remember it, though. Revisit paragraph three of the Introduction to this, our Fond issue.

Be sure to scrape the pan well.

-Joseph

skinny girls

Terry Sanville

I live in a third floor walkup, on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown. On foggy mornings, I sit at my window and check out the girls on the sidewalks below – Asians with cropped black hair that looks like a nun's headpiece, white chicks with knapsacks and crinkled hippie curls, and black babes who walk with a certain swagger. They all pass my apartment on their way to the Financial District, the Embarcadero, or to catch a bus down peninsula to some high-tech gig in what's left of *Silicon Valley*.

But it's the skinny Asians that catch my eye. I used to think I ogled them because of the year I worked as a cub reporter in downtown Saigon, where the taxi girls looked half-French and had attitudes to prove it. But I realized that I could trace my…my fascination…my obsession all the way back to Akela and the time we spent together in Sister Agnes Saint Jude's eighth grade class. It's easy for me to blame that girl for everything. But the truth is, I probably would have turned out this way whether I'd known her or not.

Part Chinese, part Hawaiian, Akela transferred to Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School in the autumn of 1958. Her father had taught at the University of Hawaii before moving his wife and only daughter to San Francisco after landing a hush-hush job at the Presidio. At first, I ignored Akela, especially during her first week in school, before she got her proper uniform. She wore classic pigtails that dangled to her waist. Huge flat-lensed glasses made her eyes look tiny and she always seemed to be polishing them with a handkerchief. She sat next to me at the back of Sister Agnes's class, near the steam heat radiators. I figured that coming from Hawaii, she'd need help getting used to the City's damp cold.

By the second week she began asking me questions about homework. I guess she thought I looked dorky enough to be a good student.

"So have you, ya know, made any friends yet?" I asked her at lunch break.

Akela frowned and stared across the schoolyard and the foggy bay toward Alcatraz Prison. "Nah, I'm not really good at that."

"Me neither. You want some of this?" I offered her the candy bar that I had spent my lunch money to buy.

"No thanks. My Mom says I gotta watch what I eat…'cause my face will, ya know, break out."

"Yeah, my older brother's got these big ole zits and…"

I felt my ears grow hot. What was I thinking…talking to some strange girl about pimples. I kissed it off to her being kind of pretty, at least to me. While some girls in our class had grown boobs, Akela hadn't yet. Her school blazer hung straight down her front and slender yellow legs stuck out below her skirt, with feet wrapped in white bobby socks and Buster Brown shoes. The boys ignored her, going instead for the likes of Beverly Quebec with her blouse stretched

tight over amazing tits. Beverly sat near me in class and if I was lucky, I got a peek at her white lace bra between her shirt buttons. Akela would jab me in the ribs and grin when she caught me staring.

On cold mornings Sister Aggie cranked up the heat and I'd fight off sleep through history and civics class. During lunches, I tried to get picked for basketball or baseball games – but I couldn't dribble worth beans and would drop any baseball hit my way. So I'd hang out on the bench under the stairs and watch my classmates hack their way up and down court. Akela would join me, bring her pink doodle-covered binder and go over her notes from the morning classes. Easy to talk with, she thought most of our classmates acted like juvenile delinquents, chattered away about how she hoped it would get better in high school, then college.

Yikes, eighth grade and already thinking about college? We steered clear of boy-girl stuff… mostly because the guys already kidded me about Akela being my steady. Personally, I liked the idea, but had just made the transition between a boyhood distrust of girls and a teenager's lust for them. Girls seemed complex, mysterious, and often acted crazy, one minute giggling and the next minute sobbing. But Akela made it easy and we talked about everything – the friends she'd left behind in Oahu, my failure at any kind of sports, people in our class we wish we were and the ones we detested, cool cars, Elvis Presley, the strange idea behind being a nun. But after a while we didn't need to talk, just sat next to each other and watched the schoolyard erupt around us.

One blustery lunch hour, I slipped back inside the school to grab my jacket from the cloakroom. To save money, the nuns turned off the lights in the hallways between classes and during lunch and recess. Near the dark end of the hall, a short line of boys from my class stood outside the janitor's room.

"What's goin' on?" I asked.

Donny Bruno glared at me. "Shush, keep quiet or Sister Aggie will hear."

The boys jigged nervously, hands stuffed into their salt-and-pepper cords. A giggle sounded from inside the janitor's closet. The door opened and Steve Sutfin slipped out, grinning.

He saw me and glowered. "What are *you* doin' here, nimrod?"

"I don' know. Nobody's told me what's up."

"Stand here and you'll find out."

He shoved me to the front of the line and the rest of the guys grinned and let me cut in front of them. They pushed me forward. I opened the door and stepped into the tiny closet-like room full of mop handles and toilet paper and lit by a dangling light bulb. Beverly Quebec leaned against the wall, her blouse unbuttoned, her skirt pulled down below her panties.

"Who the hell let *you* in?" she demanded.

"I…I…they just told me to…"

"Say, you're the creep that keeps staring at me." She frowned and stepped toward me.

"I…I didn't mean nothin', honest."

"Get lost, cootie boy." She hauled off and smacked me across the face.

I turned and bolted through the door and ran down the hall. My rubber-soled shoes squeaked on the polished Terrazzo, but not loud enough to blot out the snickering from my classmates.

Outside the cold air chilled me and I remembered why I'd gone inside. But I'd be damned if I'd ever show my face in there again. I sat next to Akela on our bench, folded my arms and shivered.

"Weren't you gonna get your jacket?" she asked casually, "and why's your cheek all red?"

"None of your business."

She gave me a smirking smile. "I thought maybe you got snagged by Beverly in the janitor's closet."

"What are you talking about?" I protested.

"Ah, come on. You don't need to pretend. I saw those boys in the hall…it's pretty obvious."

"Well, it sure wasn't to me."

"Why? What did they do to you?"

"They pushed me into the closet…and…and…"

"Did you see anything?"

"Jeez, what kinda question is that?"

"Well, in class you keep staring at Beverly's chest. My guess is that if you got her alone, you'd do more than pass her a note."

I gave Akela a push and she giggled. We sat in silence for a few minutes with our backs against the school building, watching mobs of screaming kids race around the yard. I tried to scrub Beverly's image from my mind, but failed.

"Do all the girls know about…ah…Beverly, I mean, about what she's up to?"

Akela looked at me and rolled her eyes. "I may not be stacked, but I hear stuff. Don't the boys talk about girls all the time?"

"If they do, they shut up when I'm around."

"Ah come on, not even when you're in the John?"

I felt my face burn and knew that no good would come from that conversation, that I was in way over my head, that if I tried to wise crack my way out of it, I'd somehow confirm my status as a first class idiot.

"I didn't see nothin', okay?"

"Hey, you don't have to yell."

"Sorry," I muttered.

"I just don't get it," Akela said and smoothed her skirt over her tiny knees. "What's the big deal about bodies? The ancient Hawaiians, ya know, showed off what they had, were proud, I mean…"

I scowled. "Didn't the priests or nuns ever talk to the girls about, ya know, impure thoughts and deeds?" I had a sudden fear that only boys got the stern lecture and that now I'd have to explain it to Akela.

But she just grinned. "Do you believe everything those old men tell you?"

"Well, yeah…I mean…"

"Do you think it's natural that they don't, ya know, get married?"

I shrugged. Again, another subject I'd never really thought about. But at least the conversation had shifted away from bodies and I breathed easier. Then she unloaded on me.

"Do you wanna see girls, ya know, almost naked?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

"You heard me."

I stared at her unsmiling face. "I…I guess…sure…yeah."

"Come on." She jumped up and stood before me with her hands on her hips. "I've got something to show you."

She took my hand and led me up the metal fire escape stairs that connected to the school's second floor. We stopped at the top landing and looked down onto the roof of the girls' lavatory, a square structure with a parapet wall that bordered it. She pointed at two pup tent-shaped skylights.

"See those windows in the roof?"

"Yeah."

"The far one has a piece of glass broken out of it. It's right above the, ya know, stalls. If you look inside you'll see plenty."

"I don' know," I said. "What if somebody comes…I mean…they could…"

"Nobody's gonna come…and we still got lots of time until class."

"But…but how do I get down?"

Akela pointed to a drainpipe. "You can shinny down there."

"I don' know. Looks kinda tough."

"Ah, come on. If I can do it, so can you."

"You've been down there?" My mouth must have dropped open because she cut loose with a high giggle.

"Sure, the boys' bathroom is right next door…and it's got a broken window too, busted it myself."

I looked at Akela and she stared into my face, laughing. I think I always knew that when it came to smarts and maturity, the girls had us guys beat. But a skinny girl like Akela being downright naughty?

She pushed me toward the railing where the drainpipe dropped to the bathroom roof. I hustled over it and inched my way downward, knowing that the climb back would be difficult. I glanced up at the fire escape landing. Akela had vanished. Oh great, talk me into something stupid then ditch me. I felt like I was back in front of the line of boys, being shoved into the closet with Beverly Quebec. But I had made it to the roof and if I was going to burn in hell for that sin, I might as well enjoy it.

I hustled to the far skylight and circled it, looking for the hole. The upper part of a large pane of thick frosted glass near the ridgeline had broken out. I heard the girls chattering inside. I lay flat against the skylight, my belly pressed to the warm glass, and inched my way upward until I could look inside. Restroom odors wafted up to meet me. Mostly little girls crowded the lavatory, but some seventh or eighth graders combed their hair at the mirrors. I stared directly below at a dark haired girl sitting on the toilet, her panties around her ankles. As I watched, she leaned back, her blouse pulled wide open. Akela smiled up at me and waved. She giggled and slid a hand down her front slowly, past tiny mounded breasts with plum-colored nipples, toward a triangle of black hair.

I stopped breathing. The blood throbbed at my temples. The chatter faded…then a loud crack – like the sound made when taking ice cubes out of a tray – and I fell, fell in a rainstorm of beaded glass. Screams, one of them my own. I twisted my body to avoid hitting Akela and caught a leg on the top of the partition. Then blackness.

Eight pain-filled weeks later, I left the hospital, my left leg pinned at four places, the knee shattered and frozen stiff. I walked like the character Chester in the TV western *Gun Smoke*. Akela's mother had phoned and told my mom that Akela hadn't been hurt but to keep her pervert son away. I finished the term at Golden Gate Junior High and attended public schools thereafter.

At first, after my expulsion, I thought about grabbing a cross-town bus and sneaking onto the schoolyard at lunchtime to be with Akela. But I had new bullies to contend with at Golden Gate, and new girls to lust after. Time passed and I never saw her again.

The bells at Saint Boniface clamor, bring me back to my refuge above Chinatown. The traffic of girls on the sidewalks below has slacked off. But I pour myself another cup of morning coffee and continue my stakeout, waiting for just one of the slender dark-haired beauties to turn, smile up at me and wave. It's probably too late…but this time, I'm ready.

mother

Stefan Lovasik

pin those lips honey
i'll try to explain and kill you

but mother i see the shadow of you
spine of shadows

always looking back to a clean dish
a tv

but mother i hear the rattles
droppings in your head

your hollow head race like dogs on fire
but mother i'm screaming

i hear you
see you

your deafening air of duty and darkness
trying to explain

the methods of being ridiculous
being clean

nice
gone

son

Stefan Lovasik

for Elias

When I first saw you I knew you.
Your face familiar as if I had seen
it decades before –
I saw you as the boy,
as the man.
Your light that you brought into this world,
your light that opened like your hands and took my
face of brutalities and secrets and kissed them to some other place -
so I could get up from the table to find my way and you could
find yours.
This love I never thought capable,
your face within me no matter how old I become
or when I'm among the stars and winds –
I will know your face,
this love and we
will meet
in that light
that hangs
just above
the waters of our birth.