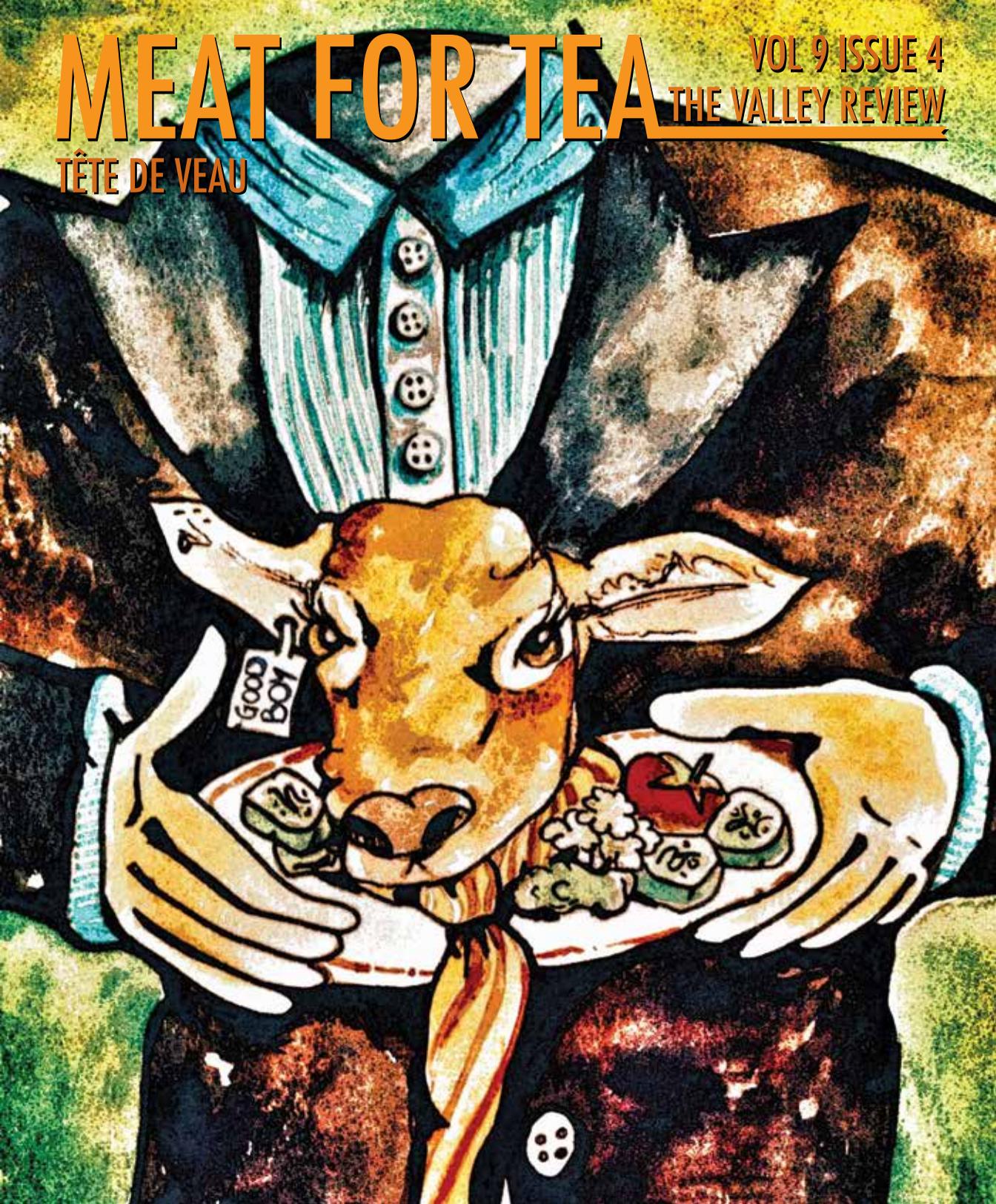


MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 9 ISSUE 4
THE VALLEY REVIEW

TÊTE DE VEAU





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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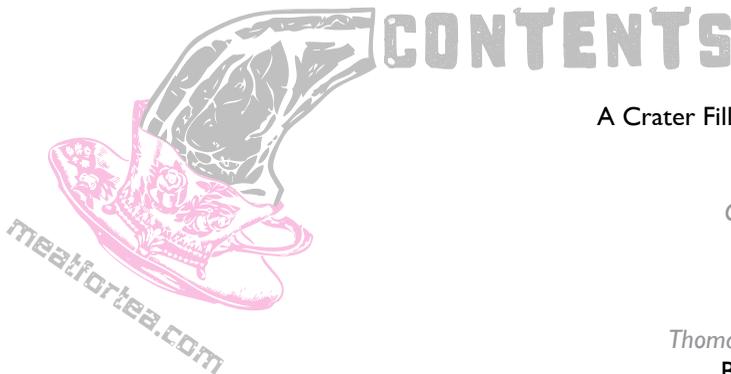
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salutations from the staff

Salutations and Welcome to This, our Tête du Veau Issue!

After many hours of patient simmering, the viscosity is just right, collagen has been stripped and dissolved, and the very cheeks of the baby cow themselves have been rendered slowly into what lies ahead. In a manner of speaking, or from at least one perspective, this is a good use of the calf's head. Anyone who has seen a small cow butchered- from those who have been to an abattoir to those who have merely watched Fassbinder's "In a Year with 13 Moons"- have secretly and shamefully imagined that this animal's head, from which the skin is peeled but otherwise left intact, is simply an indigestible by-product of processing the (relatively useless) male calf's delicious body: the loin, the shanks, the various roasts. We here have put the nose-to-tail ethic to the test and use this heady cut to make a rich filler, binding each piece to the next. With the addition of some parsley, we can even expect an aspic as the remainder it falls below room temperature.

The grip of such a rich sauce is what we are looking for. The theme is merely playful, but the intention is no less sincere, each featured component smothered in This, our Tête du Veau Issue! Jellied, the texts compliment one another. If you listen closely, you can almost hear Volker Spengler shouting the lines from one of *Tasso's* dramatic monologues in the meager white gaps between poems and prose, something about vulnerability in the service of art. Or if you are familiar with the processing of such animals in person then perhaps the sound of the gaps between works reminds you more of humming saws and stainless steel floors. These are the perceptions that bind one thing to the next, much stickier than, say, twig tea.

Twig tea, however, unfolds elegantly as well, it never jellies, and it never goes bad.

-Joseph

the drive-in

Deborah Staunton

I was six when I overheard my father tell my mother that he planned to kill me. It was the middle of the night and I'd awakened from a fitful sleep to the hushed and urgent tones of my parents' voices moving through the darkened house. My father's despondency had permeated our lives, seeping through the walls and into my dreams. That night, as I listened to his frightening words, I thought about the drive-in. It was my only reprieve from the despair that clung to our home like some toxic strain of ivy.

And now, some thirty years later, The paper said the old drive-in would re-open for the summer and I'd left work early for the three-hour drive upstate. It was an unseasonably cool September evening when I handed a twenty to the kid in the booth, took my change, and pulled into the open lot. It had been raining earlier and the ground was still damp. I parked the car and headed toward the playground. Dark clouds filled the evening sky and a group of rowdy teenagers, sprawled on the hood of a car, took a brief break from their roughhousing to leer at me. Large beads of rainwater clung to the deserted playground equipment. I pulled my sweater tightly around my shoulders as an icy wind swept past me and pushed a single swing in a forlorn and awkward movement. The slide, a dark, hulking mass in the center of the playground, stood silently in the rapidly dying light. Brushing the sleeve of my sweater across the swing, I sat and looked at the empty playground, my thoughts wandering back to that long-ago summer . . .

I was dressed in my pajamas, the backseat a jumble of blankets and pillows. Mom packed brown paper grocery bags with sandwiches, apples, and strawberry licorice. We paid the man in the little booth, Daddy drove through the gate, and we embarked on a search for the best speaker in the field of talking boxes. Before he could get it securely fastened to the door, I begged to go to the playground, practically tripping over myself to get out of the car. I could see the other pajama-clad kids and hear their shrieks and peals of laughter from the other side of the grounds.

"Go ahead Beth, take her. I'll meet you there in a minute."

Bursting onto the playground, I could hardly decide where to start. Spying a free swing, I jumped on and sailed upward, the warm summer air pushing my hair out behind me. Pumping my legs, I pushed the swing higher, until the exhilaration of being there joined with the dizzying height of the swing. From the swing I could see the slide in the middle of the park. It must have been a million feet tall, a regal structure with the dying sun glinting off its shiny surface. Scrambling up the steps, I reached the top and my breath caught as I stood there looking out over a perfect world, a ribbon of pink sunlight tying it all together. Perched there, I remained immobile, poised to absorb every minute detail, transfix it in time, and store it away in my mind like an old snapshot. Looking out over the parking lot, I saw my father approach the playground and scan it briefly before spotting us. He came up behind my mom, whispered something in her ear, and she laughed and rolled her eyes.

“Daddy, catch me!”

Sitting with my legs in front of me, I spread my arms out to my sides and flew with a freedom I've never known since. Seconds later I came to an abrupt halt as I met with the firm grasp of my father's strong, safe arms.

The sun was almost completely down as we walked back to the car. I yawned in the warm summer air and was mesmerized as it filled with the intermittent glow of fireflies. As we passed the crowded snack stand, I tugged on my father's sleeve.

“Daddy, I have to feed the squirrels. Can I? Please?”

“Okay,” he said, “but we need to hurry, the movie is about to start.”

Scanning the ground, I quickly spotted a few stray pieces of popcorn, picked them up, and scooted around the snack stand to the large water fountain on the other side. Climbing the steps at its base, I was soon eye-level with the stone squirrels that danced along its edge. There were three of them, a large one followed by his mate and their child. I carefully placed a piece of popcorn in front of each squirrel. “There. Now we can watch the movie.”

We made our way around the small building once again and the pleasant aromas of buttered popcorn, grilled burgers, and cheese pizza followed us back to the car.

Once there, I piled into the back seat and settled in among the bedclothes. Adjusting the dial on the speaker, Dad said, “It's still fuzzy. We can't watch the movie with fuzzy reception.”

Then I heard the sharp crack of a bottle cap.

Mom watched as he lifted the brown glass bottle to his lips and said, “Cliff, is that really necessary?”

“There, that'll do it, clear as a bell,” he said, making one last adjustment to the speaker.

Mom glanced at the bottle again and turned her attention to me.

“How about some licorice?”

I took it and suddenly the car filled with music.

“Get ready, Kiddo, your favorite part is coming,” Dad said with a wink.

As the enormous movie screen burst with pre-show cartoon color, I slowly nibbled the sweet treat, making it last as long as I possibly could and savoring every delicious moment.

My mouth filled with the memory of its fruity sweetness as the temperature dropped and darkness fell heavy on the playground. A penetrating coldness crept into my hands from the swing's heavy chain as I recalled my father's solemn pledge on that late, November night . . .

I woke to the muted sounds of my parents' voices in the kitchen. Making my way to the top of the stairs, I sat with my legs folded under me, straining to hear their words.

"I can't take this anymore, Cliff. You've got to get some help."

"I don't want any help, Beth. I've tried. I just want it to be over. They should have let me jump."

"Do you have any idea what it was like, in front of all those people, to have to calm you down and talk you into the car? What if they hadn't stopped in time? Did you consider, for one moment, what it would have been like for me to have to scrape your body off the tracks? Did you?"

I had crept down the stairs, and stood just around the corner of the kitchen doorway. I could see Mom's profile and Dad's shoes and the sleeve of his overcoat. Mom lifted a cigarette to her lips and lit it. The smoke curled upward toward the heaven my father so desperately wanted to know. I hadn't seen Mom smoke since I was very little.

She took a deep drag and quietly said, "Cliff, how could I explain that to a six year old? How do you tell a child that her father was so terribly unhappy that he jumped off a moving train and is never coming back?"

In the silence of that moment, I asked God to help my Daddy, to change his mind. When he spoke, his voice cracked and each word was forced and heavy.

"I've got that figured out, Beth. I can't leave her, I can't. I'll take her with me. I'll make sure she goes fast, she won't feel anything, she won't know what happened."

Mom closed her eyes and tears formed at their corners. She sat there for a moment, silent and still. When she opened her eyes, her face had somehow changed. With trembling hands, she reached toward the brown, glass ashtray on the table between them.

"Cliff, I can't, I won't let you take my little girl. I'll do whatever it takes to keep her safe."

"Beth, I would never hurt her, you know that. You know how much I love her." He was crying. "That's exactly why I need to take her with me."

Silent tears streamed down my face as I slowly headed back upstairs. At the top of the stairs I turned and went into my parents' bedroom. It was still and silent. Dark shadows sailed across the room as the headlights of passing cars threw silhouettes of oak leaves into odd patterns on the walls. I walked past the bed and into the bathroom. Mom's toothbrush stood alone in its ceramic holder. Dad's lay askew on the edge of the sink. I picked it up and stood it, straight and upright, in the little hole next to Mom's. Then I went to bed. As I was drifting off, I thought about the drive-in . . .

I don't know how long I'd been sitting on the swing but the movie had already started. On my way back to the car, I winced at the heavy smells emanating from the nearby snack stand and turned to take the familiar detour to the fountain on its other side. Hoping it would still be there, I anxiously turned the corner in search of the trio of squirrels. To my relief it was still there. Weather-beaten and slightly discolored, it stood where it had always been. The squirrels, perched on its rim, had suffered the effects of the elements as well. Timeworn and aged, the middle one was so smooth in places that its features were barely visible. A large crack ran down the center of the big one from the top of its head to the tip of its tail, splitting it almost completely in half. Surprisingly, the smallest squirrel had fared quite well. With the exception of a few minor chips, it was basically intact. Standing with my legs on either side of the steps, I leaned over and took a long, slow drink. Then I turned to go.

Opening the car door, I realized that I hadn't seen a single firefly. The damp speaker was cold and heavy as I clumsily positioned it on the door. Tuning it in, I heard the Vampire Lestat say, "But what if I could give it back to you? Pluck out the pain and give you another life? And it would be for all time? And sickness and death could never touch you again?"

What if you could? I thought, and reached into the brown paper bag at my side for a stick of strawberry licorice.



bernadette at the diner
Adam Kluger

a journey in 1944

Michael Goldman

The doves' flapping retreat under the vaulted ceiling of the departure concourse, the send-offs from people on the platform, faces turned steeply upwards towards the passengers in the windows. Send my love to them back home. Thanks so much for coming. Come back soon. No, next time you can come visit us! A conversation at the last moment that rises to a frenzied crescendo at the second the doors are slammed shut. Goodbye! Thanks so much! Send my love! Hugs to Auntie! Come back soon! Byyyyyy!.....

Wave, wave ...

A young woman takes a few steps on the platform still holding tight to her boyfriend's hand, which the train is about to carry off. Her face is dead serious. I watch her stop and wave and become smaller and smaller, walk to the other side of the platform, where she can be seen better, still waving. Finally she disappears, and I sense how she feels, as she turns her back and, alone, walks up the steps of the train station, while the train puts kilometers and minutes between her and her boyfriend. She was wearing a little red hat, holding a handbag.

Why do I remember her and none of the others that were there?

An older woman in a tent of silver fox holding two hatboxes forces her way through the aisle. She is both panicked and offended by the fact that she hasn't been able to find a seat yet.

"Won't you let me get by," she hisses at me, and I shrink to my thinnest possible form under her punishing gaze. "How am I supposed to get by," she says in the same tone to the next one, but he is a tall, traveling businessman, bright and imperturbable, who, in his own good time, collects himself to have a look at her.

"By moving your legs," he says, almost astonished.

"But there's a seat next to you," she screams suddenly and pushes her way back towards him with her hatboxes.

"But that is mine," answers the traveling businessman.

"You can't take up places like that," she says triumphantly and is already past and about to remove his hat from the seat.

"Yes, you can."

"It says so in the newspapers!" With an ingratiating smile and pleading face she angles for agreement from others in the car, oblivious to the fact that they already hate her intensely.

The traveling businessman goes to stand outside in the vestibule, can't be bothered to take part in this any longer, leaves it to the others to explain the truth of the matter, and get her out.

They do. We can hear her demanding voice from the next car.

Five minutes later she comes back from her fruitless hunt. Attacking with her hatboxes, she fights her way resolutely through the aisle.

"I don't care. I won't stand for it," she says, ripping the businessman's fedora from the seat, smacking it down angrily on the neighboring passenger, planting herself heavily and adamantly in the seat, and continuing, without looking at anyone, to speak aloud about excessively gross inconsiderations.

The traveling businessman stands in the aisle staring at her, with a faraway look in his eyes. Suddenly his attention piques, due to a terrible suspicion. He rises to his full height, with a smoldering look in his eyes and murder in his voice.

"Tell me. Are you sitting on my hat?"

The lady looks nobly away. A man, smiling, hands the hat out to him - intact.

"Oh, thank God," he says relieved, sinking back into his imperturbability, putting the hat on his head. "Then I will have to let the conductor remove you," he remarks to the lady and turns to leave again.

"You can be sure, that in another country a gentleman would not make a lady stand," she says in his direction, nodding to herself. She got him there, and it might be a good thing that others heard it too.

"I wouldn't either, if it were a lady, we were talking about," he replies, looking at her uncomprehendingly.

On a trip. Something I ought to do only when forced by bitter necessity. Tall rowhouses turn into low bungalow developments, to storage yards, to factories, to developments without buildings, with only isolated houses shot up like flowers of speculation from the fertile earth. Slowly we distance ourselves from the capital, slowly the public railway chill begins to creep into my extremities. I have layered myself with sweater, coat, wool scarf and trenchcoat. While reading the newspaper, I feel my feet turning to ice, freezing solid in my shoes despite my thick socks. At the stations, it seems that the train is also frozen in place. It stops for so long that it is startling when it finally starts up. I almost forgot what I was here for. I guess the conductor has too, for the cars start rolling slowly backwards towards Copenhagen. It appears that they need to find a more agreeable position on the tracks, maybe more room to accelerate, for whenever it gets moving again.

But the Express, the wonderful Express! How I drank a glass of dry sherry at the bar and hardly had time to wipe my mouth and pay before we were at the Great Channel ferry. And who even needs a sherry in the express train? Here is where there ought to be sherry - a comforter and a bottle of sherry! Now the chill has reached my knees ...

The train is still stopped. At intervals I shift around in my seat, when there is a jerk through all

the cars . It's the same trick you meet at certain restaurants. Just when you have reached the utmost level of hunger and impatience and are about to call the manager, the waiter arrives with a knife and fork; your expectations are buoyed and you calm down. Ten minutes later, when you realize this was just an underhanded trick, that you have been fooled, you then are put at ease by the arrival of a napkin.

It is raining as the train starts rolling. The drops whip against the berth window, blending with the coal dust, running in strange erratic courses down across the pane, preventing any view.

Across from me a lady is sitting with her legs intertwined in a brown, plain, woolen blanket. She's in her mid-forties, the tall, lean type, considered elegant at the turn of the century. A heavy heirloom of a bracelet is resting over her glove. She is sitting with closed eyes trying to sleep, her long pointy nose red with cold. Most people are sitting with eyes closed, have given up on any activity, are trying to sleep away their suffering. Only one man at the table in the corner window differentiates himself. He is working intensely, not wasting a second, writing, taking notes, looking in a book and taking more notes. He has removed his jacket, as if it were a summer day, and hadn't we noticed? A couple of times he looks around absent-mindedly at us, and gets an even more smug look on his face. Hale, hearty and efficient. Second by second he is distancing himself from us, and he notices this with satisfaction. Once, unsuccessfully, he suggests opening a window, to let in the fresh air, and afterwards his halo shines even brighter.

Oh, I know you. I know you, my good friend! I know your type back from my school days. You warm yourself inwardly by rubbing your self-satisfaction against your sparkling conscience. If I weren't sick I would smash you in your satisfactory existential underpinnings and cause you to slink ashamedly along the walls of buildings for the rest of your life. What would you say, if suddenly I got up, did two minutes of quick gymnastics according to a particular system, rinsed myself with ice cold water, gave a lecture on vegetarianism, demanded a cross-breeze and wrote three short stories before we arrived at Vordingborg?

But I am too sick. I am doomed by this creeping railroaditis. The cold has reached my heart chambers.

A hot cup of tea!

When I get up to go out to the aisle, people open their eyes, look sickly at me, to check if I close the door fast enough, so not too many of the accumulated degrees of warmth can escape.

Berth doors closed everywhere. People hiding in their half-dreams behind closed eyes. One reading a book with a plaid blanket up to his neck. A bald man pulling his hat down over his head, trying to lean back and sleep with it on, cursing its shape. A suitcase where gloved hands are playing cards.

Please Leave the Toilet in the Condition in Which You Would Like to Find It. That's asking a lot. It would take several hours of hard work to comply with that request.

A glimpse of autumn forest, all of autumn's flaming colors zip past the window and a little white house sails gracefully by on a field farther away. A pine woods, black in the grey weather and

with telephone poles' white chimes hurrying along the edge.

Trying to cover myself better with my coat is help at all, because it is also cold as ice. The lady's nose has turned blue and her face is even paler. How many traveling businessmen will survive this winter? But it is the intention of the state railway to kill people. Like an enormous squid it covers the country. Come into my ice cold embrace! Healthy and red-cheeked you enter at one end of a rail line, and at the other end you are delivered as a corpse frozen in sitting position.

A station with a restaurant. I charge in, order a bitters, a matter of life and death.

"We don't have any."

"What do you have, then?"

"Nothing. Lemon seltzer, maybe."

"Is it cold?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"It's been in the refrigerator!"

The Great Channel Bridge - an impression seasoned by repetition, but suddenly individualized, imprinted as a momentary picture, because I glimpse a tugboat with three barges sitting deep in the water, working heavily out towards the Baltic Sea. And I guess it made me think, seeing them struggling to make headway against the wind and current, while I glide above past them in a train to another destination. Or maybe I would like to think something, but couldn't and lost my breath because of something beyond words. And a short-circuit occurs in that second, in that flowing stream of impressions, and a momentary picture enters the memory's collection. Bridge pillars, steel girders, coastlines, the gray sky and sea, flat under the wind, is built up, is stretched out and straightened in perspectives around a tiny tugboat with three barges, no larger than beetles, seen from this height.

How did it look half a minute before I caught glimpse of that boat? I don't know. I can only know in general how the Great Channel Bridge and the Great Channel look.

A strange combination is the remembered and the not remembered. The steady stream of impressions from the beginning of a journey until it ends - and the journey can be from the cradle to the grave - what sticks and why? What disappears, and what is incorporated in the memory's kaleidoscopic collection? Everything is seen, only a glimpse is remembered. The light continues to shine only on fragments.

Late in the evening after a trip in 1944 I arrived at a private train station on Lolland Island. I phoned the closest taxi. It couldn't come. I called other taxis, and finally reached one that could pick me up in an hour and a half. So I walked down a muddy path in the dark to a