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THE LIGHTER, VOLUME 28, FALL

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AMERICRUISER

The fields page by, moving rectangles.
The dust coughs up at the edge of the road.
A farmer's wife waves as she hangs out the washing,
A forty-year life in slow, blurred seconds.
A hitchhiker thumbs by the side of the turnpike,
brakelights his hope, exhaust his reply.
The cows never move. They sit like black and white boulders.
A leaf pile burns in front of a caved-in red barn.

The man next to me, we sit in "No Smoking".
He's reading a novel 'bout death in the South.
His washing's hung on the edge of his necktie,
angular lines, seven miles wide.
Could live on his lapels with room for the neighbors,
drive busses across them and grow wheat and corn.
He looks up from his book, not smiling, not friendly,
and goes to the back for his second-class smoke.

I smile at the old lady in the next seat over,
her shopping bag full of grandson's success,
newspaper clippings of ballgames and honors.
Tears fill her eyes as she looks to the floor.
I turn away to prove I'm not staring
and see a flabby arm sprawled on the black plastic rest
The person in front of my knees is a mother,
scolding a child unseen in next seat.

As the signs, farms, and buildings become more familiar,
the busdriver's mumble tells us we're home.

by Bill Rohde

A STORY?

Shall I speak to you of flowers
along a grassy track,
Wind blowing 'till they shower petals from their backs?

Easier to hold sunlight
 captive in your hand,
Imagine rather your sight
and make the image grand.

by Terri Herman
Great Yarmouth, England

Carol E. Jennings
red
is a pigment of the
imagination
blood isn't really
red
neither is the hottest temperature
and certainly not hearts
but towers are not always ivory
and they're still towers

by S.M. Buss
I remember once,
When I was young,
A tree.
A small tree.
Alone,
In a large field.
And it was autumn.
And the tree was full of brilliant reds and oranges and yellows.
The air was cold and still,
And the sun smiled brightly in an empty sky.
And I remember the way the tree caught the light from the sun,
Colored it with its brilliant reds and oranges and yellows,
And then tossed it back out into the barren field.
A breeze began to blow.
Very weakly at first,
Almost unnoticeable.
Cautiously, it spun quickly by the small tree,
Tantalizing.
The still leaves came to life,
And they waved and fluttered ever so lightly.
And the sea of tall grass in the field around,
Still green and living,
Began to move erratically to the silent music of the wind.
The music grew stronger and steadier,
And the leaves and grass grew bolder in their dance.
The tree swayed gracefully as the supple wind whisked by.
Its beautiful colors blended in constant motion,
And life filled its branches.
Sparse white clouds moved slowly into the blue sky.
But the tree continued its game of catch with the sunlight.
The wind crescendoed,
And tugged on the clinging leaves.
The clouds turned from white to grey and moved slowly across the sky.
Shadows dulled as the sun was swallowed,
The air grew colder
And the wind grew stronger.
Helplessly, a leaf lost hold and went floating away.
And the wind blew even harder.
One by one,
Red after orange after yellow,
The leaves were ripped from their branches.
Their graceful dance was turned into a violent struggle.
And the tree's beauty dissipated.
Finally, all of the brilliant hues were gone.
And the surrounding land was filled with grey air.
Where there was once color,
There was now a knotted, twisted mess of naked, pallid branches.
And the tree stood bare in the cold wind.
And I remember that it began to snow. by Timothy D. Kolzow
FROM A DARKENED SKY

Drip, drip, drip...
The rain falls, down from a darkened sky
Upon the earth to lie
In silent repose
Within a puddle reflecting back the sky

Drip, drip, drip...
The reign falls, down from a golden throne
Unto those who've sown
Reap now the wind
And then to plant again upon a throne

Drip, The blood falls, down from an open wound
Upon the empty ground
That pleads to God
To wreak vengeance and bleed a new wound

Drip, The life falls, down to the bloody earth
The land of children's birth
Sows souls to dust
To grow and bleed like rains upon the earth

by Geoffrey Thomas

MISS MACKENZIE'S WIDOW WALK**

It provided her with a clear view of her world
A perfect spot from which she could observe all goings-on below—a safe, strong, castellated vantage point.

She built it herself—it had always been her passion, her life's work and definition.
Every mourning was devoted to fitting another faceted post into its all-encompassing railing.

Miss MacKenzie was an inherent widow.

**"in New England, a railed rooftop gallery on a dwelling designed to observe vessels at sea" "used by the wives of seamen during their absence on a voyage"
MY UNICORN IS BLACK

Why does everyone feel,
That if unicorns are real,
They must be white or pearly,
Those aren’t the only colors surely.

My unicorn is black,
Some would suggest he lacks,
True unicorn airs,
But he is most fair!

With a shining coat,
He’s beautiful, (and I gloat),
With a silvery horn,
He’s dark in the morn.

He has violet eyes,
Though he never spies,
He sees every need,
And takes very careful heed.

With a black mane,
Putting horses to shame,
My unicorn flies,
When he runs through the skies.

My unicorn is black,
There’s nothing that he lacks,
Those who suggest he does,
Have never known a unicorn’s love.
ONE SOLUTION

Have you seen anything real lately?
Go ahead, give it a try
Muster up some courage
dare to take a peek outside your skull
and see what's really there
Try to get a handle on something...anything.

Like mist, it passes through your fingers
leaving only a cold and damp suggestion
that anything really was
Or was it?
A world made of concrete and steel
and yet
nothing is really solid enough to put your hands on
But maybe it's best that way.
After all, if you did grab something
would you be brave enough to look it in the eye?
Instead, give up
Admit that it is not to be grabbed
seen
felt
or studied with the hands
eyes
heart
or mind

anymore than the line between this
and that
or you
and I is to be drawn with a straight edge
and a number 2 pencil.

by V. William Gerth III

HAVEN

Vivaldi is awake. No, not the red priest,* but the cat.
No matter. Vivaldi's music fills the room as his namesake slinks in from amorous debate. After all, he is neutered.

"Which one?" my husband asks, knowing full well Vivaldi might have been a virgin priest, as he was wont to be.

Our Vivaldi is an alien to his castrated state; he addresses the female felines as if in full possession of his progeny-producing innards.

"Ask for a refund..." Well, it matters little; no need to foment a "tempesta di mare"*** (ah, ha, my Vivaldi joke!) for we all seek comfort and joy and safety from all harm, when day is ended, and we have no place but home to seek, to stay and to become sequestered.

*Vivaldi's nick-name: he was a priest, and he had red hair.

**sea storm: a section, so-called, from a Vivaldi composition.

by Margaret Perry
AND THERE WAS LIGHT

For Carl Sagan and scientific friends of the world

Dim light and weak candle flame,
giving an unsure sign,
to make the ambient dark
more confidently present
—at least on margins.
Were that a reminder to our larger world,
suppressing its need to have
a light lit up,
To such the candle seems to say,
"It's getting late."
Fleetingly it sparks when struck
off a flint's edge,
And not much more when flaming forth
in stormy bolts.
But long ago its greater rays appeared
in every place,
The very day the world itself was born.
And each little candle's timid flicker
sends us a message,
that we hold light dear,
lest time itself roll back before
that wondrous feat.

by Walter Rast
W E A T H E R I N G

"Although the continents have been periodically inundated by seas, such seas have been only shallow, and the continents have always emerged again."

- Collier's Encyclopedia

I. In Silhavey’s Valley you gave me names for every carved-out place: the hollow where a tree had been, where the earth had shifted to cover things. You would have turned any roads to get back to the beginning, to the peneplains, lying low and pale; then to move forward again, folding, falling, dusting off. Years ago, you said, shaking a fistful of soil, this clay was a firm thing.

II. I’ve discovered, too, that rock has two layers: silt from summer and winter clay. We always thought summer was easy, sliding over stones, while winter clawed in and held. But I’ve seen that one is no greater than the other. Clay is weak and silt blows. There are times, my friend, when the deltas drive them both down to nothing.

III. We are equal at zero, as the sky presses to us, positive. Of course, what’s negative rises from within to propel us from that nothing where we live. We leave with upwarps, faults, unconformities; the secret names of rising mountains.

All this is what you study. Because, you say, there would be no time without fossils, without things that touch, then turn away, without borders that contain and collapse.

IV. We’ve come to this farm that I will someday inherit so you can put everything in its time. We see where the delta once ran through here, just where the water swelled, then began to dry, until there was nothing but the mark of one who’s stretched too far and pulled back. Even now, though, as you bend, you lift a stone that has conformed in secret, tracing the underside of its past. We too are always breaking, becoming, eluding the shame of what runs below.

by Terri Muth
Beneath the soiled discarded rags of a passerby, the dirty pained, stained glass windows of the city lie broken. Shattered reminders, twinkling glittering jeering out God's love.

by Len Stephany
CITYSCAPES

old man city,
are you out there?
are you listening?
old man city,
do you care?

like ink smeared across my hand,
a reflection of the black asphalt of a street
paved across the city of my palm—
cupping the life that I so want to hold;
music blaring in my head,
piano and synthesizer and pulsing lights
hazing my shifting senses,
actively dazzled by twisting tubes of electrified gases—
Neon! Neon!

delving with a personal god
into relationships I never knew existed,
no longer embalmed in self-persecuting mental isolation—
partaking deeply of the mass communion
offered through urban experience—

close your eyes—
can't you feel this is eternity?
clothed in the stunning feel of non-physical sensuality
I thought that only God could dream,
trapped as it were inside an omnipresent field of time,
evolving in the course of reality—

bicycling past beat-up apartment buildings
with gang insignia splashed in white paint
on the rusty red brick walls—
children playing on the sparse grass
between sidewalk and street,
beneath the trees, spilling out into the
cracking pavement of a sidestreet
when a ball passes the boundary of the curb;
parents and neighbors gathered around
old chevrolets speckled with corrosion
exchanging their views of the day—
dead-fish smell of the river providing
background music...

yes, there are trees in Chicago...

throw open your receptors,
your camera lens and satellite surveillance,
detecting the continuation of life,
god in God in simple phrases...
at the lakefront, bicycling into dusk
with a friend at side;
stopping and watching as the violet, velvet clouds
fill the sky behind the skyscrapers,
which one by one turn on to the night,
the horizon becoming a luminescent forest of steel
jutting into the heavens,
blazing with light that transforms
thought into neon vapors--
lake water washing up onto the concrete embankment,
cars speeding to their day's destiny
on Lake Shore Drive,
trees metamorphosing into dark silhouettes
against the crimson of sunset seeping
through the bars of a pedestrian overpass--
a young man capturing passer-bys on video tape...

wandering night lit streets
under the phosphorescence of liquor store signs,
headlights reflecting on the slick pavements
like ribbons of silver
flowing under the wheels of the autos ahead--

dramatization of so many steps,
chemical analysis of acts one, two,
and a forthcoming three--
deciphering how all the segments fit together
for a photograph less than the whole.

leaving an evening spent in a store-front theatre,
laughing along with others in the audience
who have become less anonymous as the play progressed;
at intermission filling the cramped lobby
and standing outside lighting cigarettes and
speculating what was to come next--
afterswards waiting in a parking lot,
an apartment stereo making conversation louder,
and people walking with friends down the avenue
to seek further entertainment
as the city begins to erupt to life,
and the neon lights grow brighter in the darkening night--

frenetic approach of closing night
through the mist of a blurred audience,
and blinding theatre lights--

in dreaming lie and lying dream,
is the world all that it seems?
and decades of yesteryear
humbled for the moment--
standing and waiting at two thirty a.m.
for the bus that will never come
even though one has passed by in the opposite direction--
leaning against a post of the scratched plastic rain shelter,
watching the cars,
the few people at the other bus stops
and knowing that the city never sleeps.
that there is always life
under the quiet illumination of the rows of street lamps,
in the chill that permeates heart and hand;
silently praying for that green bus of salvation
that is passage once again to home,
and sighing with unrequited relief when it stops for the light
on the other side of the intersection,
the driver a welcome figure framed in the windshield.

the world has to be survivable--

and I know that I would never trade it
for a place where security is taken for granted,
as it makes the end of the journey
all the better--

a placid residential street
with a house covered with mottled grey and black siding,
the garden in front filled with
lilies and marigolds and evergreen hedging;
a dog barking out the second floor window
as people walk past--
grey concrete steps with newly repainted black rails
leading to the front door,
and the feeling that indeed,
home has been reached once again,
welcome memories of journey's beginning and end,
ingled with the people
that make life--

I'd rather live in existential daydreams
than be burdened with a static reality
that seems to make no sense--
instead racing to where life confronts you
with no middle ground...

old man city, are you listening?
are you there?

and a final ensorcelment,
entrenchment in the soul,
a last deed
filled with idealistic expressions
caught in a fading cry of
neon, neon...

by Eric Appleton
HEAT LIGHTNING, WHITE STORM:
PUERTA VALLARTA, MEXICO

The rain has swollen the sky dark
and full as a mother’s breast.
I wonder why it touches
so deep a thing as my sleep.
Leaving Karen still sleeping,
I unroll the sheet and
go to the glass door,
drawing back the curtain,
heavy as humidity over our bed.
Rain puddles around hibiscus,
aztec lilies;
drops form on bougainvillaea over
the porch,
seeping under the tile floor.
The Pacific breaks nearer,
flooding the beach,
our cobblestone walk.

What will I tell her
in the morning,
when we find our villa drifting,
chameleons caught in the
corner of our ceiling,
past the Sierra Madres,
past Los Arcos,
along the malecon,
riding the crests with the school
of dolphin we saw by skiff.
Touching her oily skin, I will
watch all her
overlapping parts surface,
becoming salty,
flippant as this night
when the rain
salts our dreams
with restlessness.

by Terri Muth

CONTINUUM

Slowly, slowly, shifts the view
As spokes turn, wheels turn;
Sky above streaked pink in blue,
Sun illumines golden field.
Marshland moves the scented air,
Redwing blackbirds, russet weeds;
The weeping willow’s tattered hair
Brushing low to meet the ground—
Shady forest wraps around,
Cool air moves the autumn leaves;
Robins startled by the sound
Of coasting on the darkening road—
The panorama homeward goes
And lonely stretch the open fields;
Left behind the even rows,
The setting sun, the cycle wheels.

by Chris Grusak
WINTER EVENING

In the half light of early evening
I struggled to stand aright in the
skates, snugly fastened to my
feet; feet flat and awkward—
I dared not float forward
for fear of falling. O,
but then I did;
and felt the
breeze burn my face;
and heard the laughter around
me, and laughed, too,
at my fears, even as
falling, I dreamed to
conquer worlds beyond.

by Margaret Perry
(Kalamazoo, 1949)

SENSE

We march along the road,
Seeking riches, pots of gold,
We stride through days of many,
Looking for money and reaching for plenty.

When life turns its smile on us all,
We share a dream that cannot fall,
But when it gives us a shoulder cold,
We see life in a somber mode.

Today, the day for us made,
In its sweet essence is quietly laid,
Tomorrow, the day beyond us now,
Is helpful being away somehow.

And yesterday, the day we love,
Is now a memory up above,
That no day need be near the same,
As to bore the soul that we remain.
is like a leopardess
silently
stalking
her unsuspecting
prey.
It rips,
tears,
and rends all innocence,
leaving behind
only
a soulless
husk
of
vulnerability.

Love
sometimes senseless
even when necessary,
wrenches at my crumbling mind.
I don’t understand.
When feelings seem to reverse,
a once loving gaze
becomes a wistful glance.

Does this mean the love is gone?
by Christopher S. Peet
Twisted and torn, fragments of time, Gathered. Tossed into pages hurriedly. A semblance of order, long thoughts emerge, Preserving the past.

by Len Stephany

Rana Said
GOODBYE

Sign the yearbook,
say you'll write,
"We'll keep in touch"
"I won't forget you"

Yet we all know
we won't write,
we won't call,
we will forget.

by Sandy Pekarek

Laurie Dojan

by Sandy Pekarek
DEATH BY CRYSTAL

I took a walk during an ice storm.
Rain like meltable glass chips pelted down.
The trees were laced with coats of ice, glinting under the streetlights.

Every bud, branch, and twig wore the brand of frigid beauty.
Nothing was spared
Not even a small sparrow trapped by the crunchy wet snow.
Her small body was varnished in layers of ice, tiny curled feet poking the air.

A natural figurine encased by nothing more than frozen water which in the springtime would have only quenched her thirst.

by Patty Ward
THE CREATION OF MAN

No face
He had
Eyes like rain
To see
No face
But saw
A man
In the dust.
Rain like tears
To fall
And raise up
Standing
To face
No face
A man.
And breath
To live
To liven
What is good.

Geoffrey Thomas

ESCAPE

Clinging thoughts, I try to get away.

From the security of romantic ideas,
or the ideal for which I wait?

What am I afraid of, what do I fear?

The future?

Lonliness?

Being single?
I am now.

I am nearly free.

Must couples be so blatant in
their happiness?

Must the love of children tempt me?

Visions of romance dance in my bed.

NO, go away thoughts, go away fantasies.

You are the relics of my traditional
childhood, an arcaic culture,
a past idea.

BE GONE old bones, skeleton of the past.

The skeleton on which I grew.

Where do I grow now?

Look ahead, blaze a trail,
find a way.
In the beginning God created the heavens, the earth, the alcohol distillation process, and teenage college students.

And the social life of the college students was dark, void, and prohibited (thanks to V.U.'s alcohol policies).

Then God said, after seven weeks of course, "Let there be alcohol and parties with alcohol".

And God saw the alcohol and the parties with alcohol, and it was righteous and bitchin'. And God separated those days without alcohol, and called them weekdays, from those days with alcohol, which he called weekends.

Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of these 'days', and Let this expanse be able to fill the weekdays and separate them from the weekends. And Let this expanse be called 'classes and homework'".

And then God said "Let these teenage college students go to classes and do their homework on weekdays, but on the weekends let them party until their 'COOKIES CRUMBLE'!!!

So take heed all college students, and obey these sacred scriptures...

by M.R.H.

---

STILL WE HANG ON

Still we hang on
Like dead leaves in winter
Turned brown
Refusing to let go.
This wounded wing will fly once more
Before the sun sets
And the wolves come
Before the wind blows cold memories
And frosts the glassy eyes that stare
While we hang on.

by Geoffrey Thomas
SPANISH DREAM

I must eat wax paper cups, even though I am full.
A woman's face rises from my lap,
speaking Spanish,
begging for scraps.
I give her what I can.
The next day she comes back for more.
Of course I tell no one.
Mama speaks to me. "Estas bien?"
"Si", I reply, folding
the woman's hair in my skirt.
I feed her my cup, my napkin, my plate, silverware.
She promises to leave.
My bones begin to hollow,
my skin puckers like a spent chrysalis.
The woman grows into me, though
I try to shave off her ears,
slice her throat.
Her arms take over, eating bones
Her eyes are hungry for my face.
I peel from her.
She wraps the brittle shell of me in a basket;
takes me to the park
where she attaches me to a Fall limb.
She wants me to climb down in the Spring.

by Terri Muth
YOU DON'T KNOW ME

I speak the words you've heard before
And close the door
to reach the heart that beats in vain
Against the muscles that strain
to reach the final meaning
Of a moment in its amber-yellow core
is fixed for all eternity
-You don't know me.

I leave no memory in your mind
Of passing time
that marks no course to flow along
Like fleeting shadows soon gone
to mark a hollow human
And a wave that ripples vanishing
to a mirror surface staring empty
-You don't know me.

by Geoffrey Thomas

SELF-PORTRAIT WITHOUT PAINT

I write a self-portrait of myself
Brian McGovern—on the last edge of 19
5'11" maybe six feet.
Wavy hair shaved on the sides
A single hoop hangs in the left ear
The face is nice—A broken nose
and glassy eyes.
A long neck which connects my head
to my shoulders. 140 pounds hangs on about
200 bones (is it 208 or more? I can't remember)

The inside is harder. Guts and
blood and cells are contained by the skin
A slice would make them
come pouring out.
The feelings
Are contained by something more solid.
It seems like an iron box of pride (or is it stupidity)
is clamped around my brain.
My tongue is tacked, nailed to my palate.
So many people will listen to me. But I won't
talk to anyone.

I will take a special knife and cut my forehead.
Then I will peel the flesh off, over my eyes, off
my nose, over the lips and away from the chin
down to my neck. With my knife I will cut
a line across my shoulders right to left and pull
the skin from my chest and leave it hanging
dangling around my knees like farmer's overalls.
Two cuts on my thighs and the skin will peel
off my legs, my shins, my feet. Ball it up
and throw it in a corner.
Will I be like a snake
who peels his skin and is
reborn. No
It will still be the same old me. Having
no skin wouldn't change anything.
I'd just be slimier to the touch.
One can see a long way in the country
Fields of corn and solitary oaks
Mist hanging low in the quiet pasture
And a long old paved road
On and on into the soft red horizon

Time measured by seasons
Thoughts measured by the earth
The soil, breathing while it can
An honest living

The vast expanse of cultivated creation
Surpassed only by the deepening sky above
As far as the eye can see

by Steve Volz
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