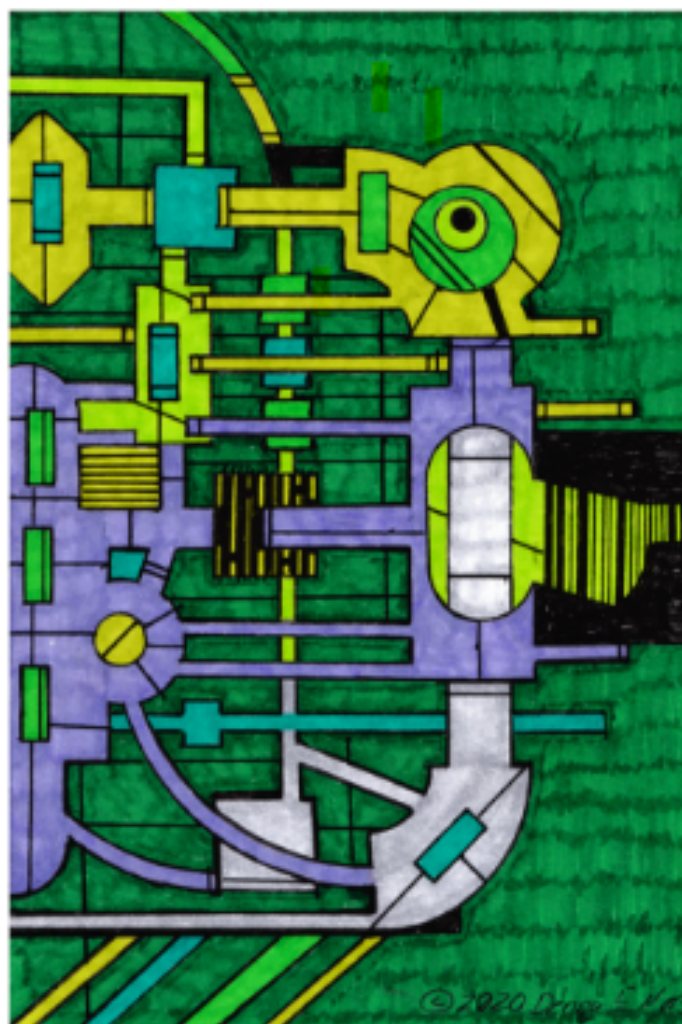


# 3rd Wednesday



Autumn 2021

**Third Wednesday Magazine**  
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**Autumn 2021**

Third Wednesday is a quarterly journal of literary and visual arts. Though we manage the magazine from Michigan, we welcome submissions from all over the world. Digital issues of the magazines are completely free to anyone and print issues can be purchased at Amazon.com.

Find us on the web at **thirdwednesdaymagazine.org**. There you can download free digital issues, read many of the fine poems we have published in the past and find the link to our portal at *Submittable* where you can submit your work and subscribe to the magazine. You can also find and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr.

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Drawing by Denny Marshall / / Lincoln, Nebraska

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## *Editor's Note for Autumn 2021*

The autumn issue of 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday means fiction in the form of our annual George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest, judged this year by Elizabeth Kerlikowske. You'll find her note on judging the contest and the three winners of this year's contest beginning on page 12. In addition to the three winning stories, Elizabeth cited two additional stories for special merit. We are happy to say that both of those stories are slated for publication in a later issue of the magazine.

We lead off the poetry in this issue with two poems by Joanne Durham of Kure Beach, North Carolina. The first of those, *Old Folks*, is the winner (by the narrowest of margins) of this issue's 50/50 poetry contest. Joanne receives a check for half the entry fees and a one year subscription to 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday. Close contenders were *Obol for the Boatman* by Garrett Stack and *Dandelion* by Nancy Carol Moody.

Our issue closes out with a fine suite of student poems from Inside/Out, curated, as always by Peter Marcus. Peter brings us poems ten Detroit area 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade poets.

Big changes are coming to 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday. Beginning with the winter issue, work will be published on our website at the time it is selected. This means you can share your success with friends, family and on your social media right away. Be sure to visit **[thirdwednesdaymagazine.org](http://thirdwednesdaymagazine.org)** and follow by email to receive updates as work is published.

*Old Folks* / Joanne Durham

50/50 Contest Winner

weather things. We hold our tongues  
when young women bemoan their first  
gray hairs, we doze off to dream  
mid-afternoons on worn, cushioned couches,  
then lie with unclosed eyes through the deep holes  
of night. There's a haze that hovers above  
dates, faces, places – when was the summer  
of the beach house in Ocracoke? Which snow rose  
over the sills? Memory no longer chirrs  
like an eager bird easing into morning wings, sipping  
on rain that drips from every rafter. Time stretches  
like an accordion, stores lullabies, love songs  
and funeral chords between its folds. We are  
thirsty still, but drink from a wider bowl.

*Christmas Tree Recycled in the Dunes* / Joanne Durham

Stripped of angels  
that haloed its crown, the tree  
lies bare and awkward, shaved trunk  
shoved into sparse remains of a dune lost  
to last year's storms. Tourists laugh at its odd,  
prone position, but soon its parched arms catch  
swirls of sand and settle them gently on the rising  
slope. The tree blends with beach elder and sea  
oats, mingles with dwarf fountain grass  
to become the dune's spine, its fragile  
hold on integrity. Grown from the  
deep emerald energy of the forest  
the tree shines as the graced  
do, even now re-imagined.

Joanne Durham / Kure Beach, North Carolina

*Bush On Fire* / Leslie Moore

The red-twig dogwood crackles crimson  
on this March morning, spirited,  
like the snow-fed stream below.

I almost miss the flock of birds  
gorging on berries in its midst,  
each masked like a bandit.

Bohemian Waxwings: *Bombycilla garrulus*:  
silk-tailed, talkative, circumpolar  
nomads in search of fruit.

These cheeky vagabonds pay me  
no mind, so busy feasting,  
drunk on plunder.

I have time to admire their lush plumage,  
belly to breast to crested crown,  
buff grey to sepia to cinnamon.

The air fills with trills. My heart  
rings at this manifest thing—  
a bush aflame with waxy wings.

Leslie Moore / Belfast, Maine

## *Dentist Appointment* / Claire Rubin

*What does your son do?* Myra asks,  
leaning into my wide open mouth  
with its gold crowns and silver fillings.  
I realize I forgot to floss.

I picture his torqued and twisted body,  
his crystal-blue eyes pleading, his life  
a long cringe. But by god  
there is a smile, strained, yes,  
forced, yes, but still there is a smile.

And I see the love in his heart  
as wide as Copper Canyon  
despite everything.

*he is disabled*

The words hard to form  
with a metal something or other shooting  
freezing water on my gums  
and a noisy plastic sucking tube that sounds  
like the last gasps of a stranded seal.

*I'm so sorry*

*that's OK*

But of course it isn't.

It isn't at all OK.

None of this is OK.

Not this super chipper hygienist scraping  
my teeth with a medieval torture instrument,  
chattering about her son, the author  
of *We Manifest Our Minds*.

*have you read it?*

Not the sharp pain when her instrument slips  
and I taste blood, which is sucked out  
by the spit sucker, as though it never happened.  
Not the bill for four hundred fifty dollars.  
Not another appointment to replace a filling  
that fell out while eating a bag of caramels,  
piles of plastic wrappers scattered on the floor.



And certainly not my son.  
Especially not my son.  
Myra hands me an appointment card  
for next Tuesday. I will cancel it.  
That's something I can do.

Claire Rubin / Oakland, California

*It Is Never So Simple* / Claire Rubin

Because the Ceanothus is failing. Leaves drooping,  
frail branches breaking, roots thinning,  
pulling away from the earth. I send photos  
to an arborist who says these shrubs don't last  
that long. Ours has been growing against the side  
of our house for over twenty years. Blue lace flowers  
bring solace in spring, drawing pale green swallowtails.  
Last week the gardener eased the dried bush  
from the ground, chopped it up and threw it  
in his truck. Is it really so simple?

Because I do not have the gift of happiness.  
My happiness is wrestled and worked and worried,  
not easy like a dove settling on her nest  
or lilac buds opening in the lift of early light.  
The time we have too short to master love,  
to have compassion be our first response.  
Judgment is quicker, sharp and cutting like a sword,  
maiming and mauling and mangling,  
and my love I am sorry but I am tired  
of myself, of my menacing mind with its thinning  
roots. I am ready to be loaded into a truck, tossed  
in a coffin, covered with crusty earth.

Because there must be a string. That will ring

a bell in case I change my mind, in case I miss  
the first pale crocus pushing through sooty snow,  
the grace of spiders spinning hope, the slouch  
and slow of summer's pace. In case I miss  
our almost love and want to let you  
warm this soulless place, lying heavy in my heart.

Claire Rubin / Oakland, California

***For Helen Frankenthaler*** / K. Carlton Johnson

I have brought Helen Frankenthaler  
into the house, her whole length  
enclosed in glass. She stands rigid  
as I sleep, while blues saturate  
in my dreams; small slathers  
of pink rotate in the sun.

We enjoy the presence of the other.

When you get to sixty, if you sit  
down to write of love's disaster,  
you need only your eyes and heart,  
Dear Reader, to be made sweet.

K. Carlton Johnson / Lake Linden, Michigan

*Evening in Late Summer* / K. Carlton Johnson

It happens in summer sometimes,  
stillness where the clouds like bread  
for ducks have been thrown  
on the sky; perfection suspending  
us in the universal pond  
where small fish watch  
a humid moon, riding in the clouds,  
rising in thunderheads to the west.

Trees are breath between bodies  
pressing hollow bark,  
dark brown and gray as an owl.  
We have forgotten, though, winter ice  
or prison rains that ruin seed.  
We have to travel far to see a painting,  
and wonder if outrage is still  
appropriate for slaughter,  
as we click our tongues  
at a slit earth, root packed,  
headed for darkness.

K. Carlton Johnson / Lake Linden, Michigan

*Black and White 2 / Weining Wang*



Sculpture, Weining Wang / Beijing, China

## 2021 George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest

Notes from the contest judge:

I read the stories in batches of three or four. That way I could weigh them against each other, and by the next day, see which stayed with me. One of the winning stories was there almost from the beginning and became a sort of yardstick. Several pieces I eliminated had fantastic voices that I could have read all day but the plots were flimsy, and fiction needs some plot, even if implied.

The winning pieces are very different kinds of writing and represent a good cross-section of the entries: first or faux-first person narratives, allegories, and fiction incorporating historical figures. I value fresh ideas. The winning pieces compelled me to continue reading them after the first paragraph and not just rush to the end to see how problems were resolved. Rest assured, I read every word of every story. Thanks to all the writers who provided such interesting insights into human nature, and especially those of you who used food as metaphors!

— Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Note from the editor:

In our contests we don't award stories 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> places. No gold, silver and bronze. The three winning stories are each contest winners and each will receive the top prize of \$100. This year's selected winners are *Elemental* by Claire Bateman, *Gourmand* by Karen Tardiff and *Frequency* by Shelly Jones. We congratulate these winners and thank all of the 128 entrants for their support.

Elizabeth has cited two additional writers for honorable mention; Sinclair Buckstaff for *Salade Nicoise*. 2019 and Gary Wadley for *Banana Wars*. Unfortunately we don't have room to print them in this issue, but both writers have given permission for us to publish them in a future issue of 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday.

— David Jibson, Editor

## *Elemental* / Claire Bateman

Not long after texting surpassed cell phone and email conversations, we realized it wasn't the *content* of the messages which mattered, but only the small bright tone confirming that we were still embedded in the social network.

What a relief! Now nobody had to waste time keying in actual words. Instead, empty bubbles proliferated, and everyone experienced relief as inflammation of the thumb's long-abused flexor muscle began to subside.

The logic of this change was soon applied to conversations as well. We jettisoned social rituals—"How was your day?," remarks about the weather, etc. And even beyond these niceties, the more we thought about it, the more unnecessary almost all our daily utterances had been. Why exhaust ourselves spinning out all that conversational filigree when we could simply say, "Present," which in just two syllables covered all the realms of discourse, negotiation, intrigue, rhetorical display, and verbal clutter by acknowledging Existence Itself?

Thus, except for in rare logistically complex situations, we intoned only "Present" back and forth to each other in pairs and clusters and groups all day long, and everything moved along so smoothly that soon even that one word was deemed excessive, replaced with a simple, fluid hand gesture as the city filled up with silence except for the "talk" zones designated for education and child-rearing where the young toiled at their studies in hopes of an early graduation into adult muteness.

Advertisers hired actors to merely point to their products on TV. Radios broadcast a velvety spreading hush. Even politicians refrained from oration—in town halls and rotary club meetings, they performed the gesture, their audiences did the same, and then the aides rolled out the refreshment trays, a blessedly early evening for all. And consider the class reunion—didn't everyone already

know that destinies rise and plummet except for when they're sliding and skidding in ambiguous lateral motions? Because the details are always more or less interchangeable, there was no need to recount them; how much more gratifying the choreography of hands and the feast of faces. For this, full attendance was guaranteed.

In the absence of human babble, we began to notice sounds rising over the threshold of awareness so unobtrusively it was as though they'd always been there, which, was, in fact, the case—all along, everything had been murmuring, whispering, lilting, sibilating, crooning, humming. Spoons chattered continuously in the dishwasher; behind the refrigerator door, eggs in their carton waxed loquacious; a steady flow of hissing colloquy rose from the stack of mail on the low glass side table in the hallway; in the backyard shed, shears emitted a quiet buzzing commentary; and in the yard, weeds and grasses together exuded an almost subsonic reverberation. Some of the sounds were pleasant to hear, others irritating or even painful. The salt shaker's speech tingled like a multitude of tiny chimes and the garden hose gurgled melodiously, but the paper birch tree seemed to suffer from a raw, perpetually scratchy throat.

What could the world be *saying*? Frantic to know, we commissioned a team of scientists and linguists to create an omni-translational device. Anticipation remained high during those excruciating decades of calculation and assembly; surely the result would prove to be nothing other than the secret of the universe—who would expect less from the combined utterances of everything that had been constructed by our ingenuity and everything that had arisen so variously and spontaneously from the primal elements of creation?

At last, the day arrived. Holding our breath together in great crowds, we watched on enormous public screens as the device finally ejected its printout, displaying just one small word. What the world had been uttering, each entity in its own language, turned out to be merely "Present."

Our collective disappointment was almost palpable. We'd so counted on everything to be ontologically different from ourselves! We'd so needed to be told something we hadn't already known! We'd craved—and paid for!—a revelation, but what had we gotten? Only old news!

Following disappointment came anger, swift and retaliatory. Some people growled and made threatening gestures toward images of the translational device and the research team; others pointed to the borders, opting for a sentence of exile. But most experienced a sudden aversion to, and distrust of, the ritual hand gesture and the word it signified. What was “present,” anyway? What did it even mean?

Everywhere, people spontaneously began to dismantle that word, breaking it open to see what was inside. Lo and behold, there was the entire language, crushed and massively compacted, but still usable after a long, awkward period of airing, untangling, and sorting, despite an initial shyness on our part as we filled our mouths with actual words and sent them out into the air: *Hello, How are you? My name is \_\_\_*, and then phrases and sentences of increasing length and complexity until from our drawers and closet shelves came the cell phones lighting up with imperatives, conjunctions, interjections, gerund and participial clauses, and so on, even the hesitation forms, such as *uh* and *um* and *er*, which we now cherish like star rubies and cultured pearls.

Claire Bateman / Greenville, South Carolina



## *Gourmand* / Karen Tardiff

I'll go days without eating. My mind forgets to tell me, my stomach doesn't talk. Only when I bend down to pick up a pen or a stray notecard and my head spins do I begin to count backwards, tick off the hours, question if I slept before or after I ate last.

Eating takes too long. I waited 6 days for the peppers to dry in the window until they left the perfect husk. Only then could I slice them, gently toss the seeds into the bin, soak them in water and boil until soft. After the softened peppers were cool to the touch I would add them to the blender, along with the juice from a freshly cut pineapple, carefully selected seasonings, garlic cloves I had roasted 3 weeks earlier.

Food takes too long to prepare. Time which could have been spent writing. I have not learned to balance survival (eating) with breathing (words).

I remember fast food. Buns covered in Swirl and run through the toaster, frozen patties covered in salt and pepper, flipped by a teenager who never learned to wash his hands properly, fries which were potatoes in a former life, before all of the preservatives and extra sugars were added. I also remember upset stomachs, sleepless nights, bad skin, itchy gums, bloat. My mind could never focus and my writing read like it was sponsored by a soda company.

Cholesterol, glucose, a metabolic panel, enzymes, thyroid. The doctors told me I had to change my diet or I would die. I hate needles and vowed to never be poked again. I researched where all my food came from, aghast at the preservatives, sodium, added minerals, high fructose corn syrup. I bought old cookbooks with no recipes including "1 can of cream soup" or bags of frozen peas as part of the ingredients list. I broke down my food to its purest elements. I began to create.

I would read the word “tomato” and stop to write a poem about the soil being prepared for the seed, the rain required to bring the seedling through the earth. The green of the stalk and leaves each got their own poem. By the time I had written about the tomato, it had begun to turn from first flowering to fruit growth. I had forgotten to eat the tomato, had become subsumed by the poetry of vegetative birth. How could I consume that which had the essence of life in every seed?

One extreme to the other. One convenient vice for an inconvenient survival mode. I once passed out in front of the stove, stirring peppers in vinegar for hot sauce to use in a spicy barbecue sauce. It was 3 ½ days away from being a delicious meal. I woke up with my arm extended into the air, wooden spoon swirling the air above me, now 4 days away from eating.

I had to lay in bed half a day, surrounded by pens and paper, waiting for the hungry muse to quiet so the writing muse would return. I shut my eyes and napped. Dreamed of writing with a pepper on a focaccia crust. When I awoke I forgot to eat for 5 more days. I considered changing the menu, but the sauce was almost done. The poem was almost complete.

Karen Tardiff / Rockport, Texas

*Frequency* / Shelly Jones

“Your designs are poor,” she observes, looking over the blueprints. “Unnatural.” She lays on silk sheets, knees tucked, propping up the oversized drawings.

“That’s not what my engineers say,” he calls from the bathroom. Toweling his body dry, he stands in the doorway, watching her. “But who are they? Just the best Hollywood money can buy from Bell Labs. Who’s that compared to Hedy Lamaar?” He smirks and starts to dress.

She ignores his jab and continues to study the plans before her. “But have you ever seen a bird with a nose like this, Howard? Or square wings? Come look at this.” Hedy kneels on the bed, spreading the blueprints wide.

“Not this again, Hedy. I have a meeting. Leave the plans on the desk before you go. The maid will get you whatever you need and my car will take you home.”

\*\*\*\*\*

HH,

Your chauffeur took me to the library and was kind enough to wait while I talked with a Mrs. Finch (funnily enough). She knew just what I was looking for and within a half hour she found these books that I’m leaving for your engineers. I’ve marked the important pages for you - in particular the peregrine. Note the shape of its beak and head, the angle of its wings. It is the fastest bird in the world, Howard, and its wings are far from square. I’m

sure the shape must affect the aerodynamics of its flight. Think about it as you tinker with your design.

~ HL

\*\*\*\*\*

Hedy dives into the in-ground pool, her pastel green bathing suit clinging to her body. She swims the length of the pool in one breath, turns, gasps for air, and glides the length back to the shallow end. A shadow spreads across the water above her and she begrudgingly emerges.

“Howard called. He has to cancel,” a beleaguered man reports, holding a towel out for her.

“Did he say why?”

“Would you believe him if he did?”

She ignores the towel, melts back into the water. “Probably not.”

“He said something about meeting with the execs. He said he’d make it up to you.”

She nods, sucks in pool water and holds it in her mouth before spitting it out again. “Thanks for the message.”

“He shouldn’t treat you like that, Hed. Hopping from your bed to another woman’s. You’ve seen the photos in the news rags. There’ll be another tomorrow.” Hedy is silent, her eyes focused on the tessellating tile pattern on the pool floor, mesmerized by its reflection in the water. “Hedy, are you listening?”

She shakes her head, the formula for refraction slipping from her mind. “Let me swim, Paul. And leave the paper if you’re done. I want to see the news from Europe.”

“Bad. Always bad,” he sighs. “Don’t stay out here too long. Can’t have you all wrinkled for the camera tomorrow. I’d be a terrible agent if you came to rehearsal all pruneey with puffy eyes.”

Hedy floats in the pool, her toes fluttering skyward. A plane roars above and she wonders if it is one of Howard’s planes. She imagines him leaping out, bounding down the runway and into the cockpit of another plane awaiting his arrival. As she studies the smokey wake, Paul’s words come back to her: Howard slipping beneath the sheets of Katharine’s bed, and then Jane’s, and Ava’s. She kicks errantly, creating waves, and watches as the water rolls across the length of the pool. Howard straddles the wavelengths, riding up and down them like a seesaw that skips, catapulting him from one crest to the next, from one bed to another, skimming through the air in his plane to avoid detection. She looks up once more at an empty sky.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hedy sits on the floor, legs stretched out before her, back leaning against a cream-colored couch. Her eyes are closed as she listens to the radio, a Baroque piece punctuating the silence.

George sits opposite her on the rug, papers splayed all around him.

“I don’t think this will work,” he says, pushing a drawing away.

Hedy’s eyes flutter open as the violins glissando.

“I should call Howard. Maybe he’d have a good idea.”

George looks up at her, brow furrowed. “Who’s he with tonight?”

Hedy shrugs. “Ginger maybe?”

“She’ll say he isn’t there.”

“It’s getting late,” she reminds him, looking at her watch, a present from the industrial tycoon. A gift after another fight, after another mysterious hang up when she answered the phone. George nods, disappointment drooping his shoulders. He picks up his hat and heads for the door. Hedy turns up the radio, a Tschaikovsky overture commencing. “Tschaikovsky was a civil servant, you know. Before dedicating himself to music.”

“Perhaps someday they will say of you: Hedy Lamarr was an actress before she dedicated herself to her inventions.”

Hedy smiles wearily. “Perhaps. Good night, George.” She settles back on the floor, eyes closed in concentration once more.

\*\*\*\*\*

HL,

Board meeting ran late. Here is a little something to keep you amused in my absence.

~ HH

\*\*\*\*\*

Hedy watches as the pianola spins its perforated roll, the cut lines repeating in waves over the length of paper. The phone rings in the bedroom, but she ignores it, letting it drone on. Her mind is absorbed in the darting notes of the instrument before her. She watches as Howard leaps from one frequency to the next, swimming across the stretch of dissonant code, performing a new composition of his own ill design.

“I can see you,” she whispers. “But will the others?”

She lets the roll run to the end, until Howard is exhausted and shudders to a halt.

\*\*\*\*\*

“This could work, Hedy,” George murmurs, studying her sketches intently.

Hedy smiles weakly as she turns on the radio. A news bulletin concludes, the war giving way to a swarming Chopin sonata. She stands there, lets the music wash over her, and imagines diving, undetected, into darkness.

Shelly Jones / Oneonta, New York

## *Sunday Noir* / Ron Czerwien

Here's a black sock. Companionless  
on the church lawn. A crime scene  
would prompt fewer questions.

Inside the congregants are singing  
hymns and offering up prayers  
for an answer to a different mystery.

Private investigators, the neighborhood  
dogs stop and sniff around before  
moving on, satisfied with their findings.

Ron Czerwien / Madison, Wisconsin

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## *The Old Masonic Cemetery* / Janice Rubin

I forge my way from the bottom of the hill past overgrown ferns,  
green weeds, yellow dandelions and puffs. The worn gravestones  
scattered lonely on the side of the paths, a hot day in July, stop on  
the trail, drink deeply from my water bottle. The city founders  
buried here. On the other side of the hill, on the downward slope,  
the mausoleum stands, built of solid white stone, an Egyptian  
motif, a pharaoh and a winged dog guard the arched doorway.  
Steel bars prevent anyone from leaving or entering.

honeybee flies past  
close to my ear, glad buzzing  
wild flowers blooming

Janice Rubin / Eugene, Oregon



## *Sonny Liston Looking Vulnerable* / Guinotte Wise

They call them tear-sheets in advertising or used to; magazine pages torn out and filed for reference. I've kept a stack from the sixties. Frank Sinatra, Malcolm X, photos of anonymous people, one of a hopeless, stricken old man holding a dog that is looking up at his lined face. I kept these because they spoke to me, these momentary fragments of life, photos I would never use except to restart the feeling machine inside me, spark the motor to life. Sonny Liston stands awkwardly, one hand to his side, the other holding an ornate French phone to his ear, his huge paw engulfing the toy-like telephone for LIFE's photographer. He looks curiously meek, this powerful legend. Another shows a very old woman beating an eagle with her umbrella to make him drop her small dog. He did.

My favorite tear sheet though: a drum major high-stepping in full uniform across a deserted football field, practicing I'd guess, with a line of little kids behind him, shakoless but nevertheless equal in energy and in full show-off joy, high-stepping as to drums each one hears and stealing thunder. They will remember this day.

Guinotte Wise / LaCygne, Kansas

## *The Things They Left Behind* / Terry Allen

*Have you heard anything about Lon Chaney?* My wife asks and in the split second before I answer, pictures of Lon Chaney came to my mind and I realize that I am thinking immediately of Lon Chaney, Jr. and not his father, who famously starred in the silent film version of *The Phantom of the Opera* in the 1920s, and I'm not sure which one she is asking me about, but really it's Junior that has made the biggest impression on me and I can clearly see him as if he's still with us as Lenny talking to George about the rabbits in *Of Mice and Men* and as the retired sheriff with the crippled, arthritic hands in *High Noon* who tells Will Kane that he can't help him because he can't even hold a gun anymore and Will would only be worrying about him if there is any trouble, and then, of course, I see Lon Chaney as the Wolfman, a role that changed his acting career forever. And I also think of Tim O'Brien who wrote the collection of Vietnam war stories *The Things They Carried* and I say to myself yes that's right. That's true, but it's also the things they left behind like these wonderful characters. And being a little confused at this point, I ask my wife to repeat what she asked me. *What?* I say. *Have you heard anything about Liz Cheney?* She asks again. *No*, I reply.

Terry Allen / Columbia, Missouri

## 10 / Robert L. Penick

Here is your perfect moment:  
Eating lunch on the bank of  
the Ohio. Rolled oysters,  
twist of lemon, diet soda  
off to the side.  
It's fifty-eight degrees,  
overcast, the wind tousling  
the napkins. Your hoodie is up  
to protect your ears and pate.

Above hangs an Edvard Munch sky.

When we said, 'your perfect moment,'  
we didn't mean *perfect* perfect,  
like a dream date with a gymnast  
or a vacation in Elysium,  
but the best you will get  
in this incarnation.  
The hair isn't growing back  
and the scars won't wash off.  
Every moment is bartered.

So enjoy this early March,  
with its breeze that chills  
but does not freeze head and heart.  
There are days coming, both  
warmer and colder, a snake  
following its own tail.

Robert L. Penick / Louisville, Kentucky

*Thinking of Instinct* / Abriana Jette

Some geese just won't leave.  
Beaks dipped beneath snow and sleet  
even when their beloved lake freezes  
they don't leave. They find some unfrozen piece  
of water and land, picking at winter wheat  
or whatever is left for them to eat.  
They learn to survive, he says, thinking it sweet  
how they stick around. Not me.

It's not sweet, I say, but instinct. Or lack thereof.  
No flight or fight when you can't perceive leaving.  
Sure, they survive, but is that really enough?  
We walk in circles around the park. It's sweet  
until it isn't. Some things are worth quitting.  
These geese don't know what they're missing.

Abriana Jette / Sayreville, New Jersey

*Frequent Flyer* / Michael Caylo-Baradi

Facing the runway,  
a boy decides

to make a plane  
out of his hand, to free

the skies he sees  
inside its wings.

Then his voice  
invents an engine

for its flight,  
until he's way

above the ground,  
and all alone.

Up there, he glides  
into the calm

of clouds, the way  
he mumbles

nights in bed,  
while listening

to a storm  
of voices in

another room,  
inside

a house of doors  
they slam

to hush the darkness  
in the moon

Michael Caylo-Baradi / Pacoima, California

## *Ceasefire in Gaza* / Michael Caylo-Baradi

Maybe we can sleep again. I can hear the birds.  
We want their tweets to hush the sound of bombs

in recent memory, sounds that swallowed lives,  
the young, the future of this land.

We've lost the tears to cry, these days. Our tears  
are piled around in rubbles, remnants

of apartment buildings, schools, and other places  
we commune. Prayer is all we have.

We know our God is testing us. But we've lost  
the energy to interrogate his plans for us.

The point of language seems so hollow and banal.  
We want to hear it from our young again.

They're paving streets with happiness and hopes  
tonight, to stretch this interval of days

into an interval of weeks, of months, and years  
without the messengers of death

approaching, coming from a sky we've learned  
to fear. Indeed, this interval

is pregnant with revolt to simply see the sky  
again the way it should be seen after

a restful sleep, the way it swallows you into its  
vast expanse, and makes you feel at home

Michael Caylo-Baradi / Pacoima, California

*Face on the Street* / Gary Wadley



Photograph, Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

## *Letters* / David Chorlton

The letters in the drawer have woken up  
after forty, fifty, sixty years asleep  
with their secrets in old  
fashioned typewriter script, or  
hand written in the rhythm of an easy time.  
The ridgeline

                    as the sun goes down  
becomes a signature when the mountain  
signs off for the day. The paper rustles  
as pages open. It feels good  
not to be forgotten. The envelopes  
are smiling. There's a search  
here for a god, but  
no certainty; and a good health recipe  
from when it was eccentric  
to be a vegetarian. Dear Daughter,  
Here's a prayer for salad greens,  
Dear Father, Here's a cook book for the spirit.  
And Dear Mountain,

                    Watch over us tonight,  
when the sky pulls on its coat  
of stars and mouse bones,  
and the owl is father  
of the dark.

David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona



*The Beyond* / Daniel Hudon

The sun shines down like a round  
of applause  
vast as a promise  
vast as solitude

The sand runs on ten thousand  
gongs  
still as now  
still as forever

Where is your box of forgotten  
memories? Your cabinet  
of saltimbanques?

Whose it is no one knows  
Time is a tomb  
with an exquisite view  
of the horizon.

Daniel Hudon / Boston, Massachusetts

*Is This How Meeting God Will Be?* / Kevin Shyne

After the heat of the day  
after the last pitch,  
after the players clear the field  
we rise to join the slow moving crowd  
dazed from a day in the sun  
shuffling through the concourse  
pennants limp from waving  
programs left behind  
no matter who cheered or booed  
or caught a foul  
or won or lost.

What matters is the God  
who gave us tickets and said  
“Look for me after the game.”

We forgot, of course,  
swept up in baseball’s fever  
the meteor streak to the plate  
the infield hops, the pick-off plays  
the arms like cannons  
firing from the outfield  
their shells exploding at home  
until the sun-baked ushers  
coaxed us toward the gates  
which was where we saw Him  
seeing us first  
tipping His cap  
the game ball in His glove.

Is this what He meant  
by a God whose play  
is to catch us by surprise  
waving us in  
at the end of game  
right before our eyes?

Kevin Shyne / Princeton, Illinois

*Autumn Speculations* / Robert Lowes

Leaves twirl down to the grass  
and I scan the obituary page

over scrambled eggs and coffee.  
The mounting curiosity—

who has crossed over?  
They're indisputable pioneers,

these motionless bodies  
who perhaps in some new physics

now trek at outrageous speed  
past our outermost galaxies

to a lush black pasture  
where they float and flash

like fireflies, and just beyond them,  
the angels I've read about.

Robert Lowes / St. Louis, Missouri

*Ferris Wheel and Statue, Tuilleries, Paris / Roger Camp*



Photograph, Roger Camp / Seal Beach, California

*Picking Blackberries* / Jack Ridl

Sometimes in the early morning  
I wander back to the days I picked  
blackberries in a tangled field

that languished along the creek  
that appeared from behind a stand  
of hemlocks and disappeared

around a bend after passing  
the shed shattered by years,  
its roof fallen in, mustard plant

thriving within the rotting floor.  
I had a silver bucket. The thorns  
were thick, the brambles knotted

into one another. I wore a flannel shirt  
long-sleeved. I wore a hat. Still,  
reaching in to take a berry I would feel

the thorns, sometimes tear a sleeve  
within the branches. Walking home,  
my scratched right hand began its burn.

Jack Ridl / Saugatuck, Michigan

*Dandelion* / Nancy Carol Moody

*After a block print by Robert W. Jensen*

The artist who hovered his chisel  
and blade above the hardwood block  
understood that moment between work-up  
and carve, knew

there must be lift

before there is soar.

See here the yet-anchored tufts,  
starburst aftermath of the yellowed yellow  
bloom, daytime sparklers, an infinitude  
of arms in aching stasis, arcing out  
and arcing still, uneasy  
possibility in every inflection.

And what of the ones already freed?

No nuance

defines their flight—blunted

kite tails poised to rudder, shuttlecocks  
fleeing the smack of racket.

Open field, what they're aiming for.

Or stranded nest or pasture fence.

Wind shift or instinct or sheer

happenstance—it really doesn't matter how:

one puff of unbidden air and they're gone.

Without you this is how I would go on.

Nancy Carol Moody / Eugene Oregon

*Gospel* / Richard Solomon

My day begins in the nursery  
    where birth is “but a sleep and a forgetting”.  
It’s romantic, in theory: Little bones,  
    back from trudging among the stars,  
take flesh. Lips to nipple. Breath  
    to baby’s breath. Star dust  
still between his toes.  
    But this little piggy’s hooked on cocaine  
and this little piggy can’t breathe.

I catch myself singing gospel—  
    listening to a little heart, feeling a fontanelle  
running a finger down their spines.  
    —“I’m tired of this life I’m living  
I’m tired of this world of sin. . .”  
    —birth days of the innocents  
tucked into the sadness of the world.

Richard Solomon / Ann Arbor, Michigan

*Nest* / Richard Solomon

My day ends, up here in the tower,  
tenth floor, Allegheny General  
in the darkening cave of my office. I'm tired  
of the rotten stench of perfection,  
unimpressed by the smashing of atoms,  
the telescoping of stars, the invention of zero.  
When I stare out at the dim tenement roofs  
parched with decades of steel mill soot  
and the bass of gangsta rap rises up from North Avenue,  
I think of Torrie. Pregnant. Killed  
in a drive-by shooting in the projects.  
The baby died too. Pigeons flutter  
to nests among the tenement eaves.  
Above the Life Flight heliport,  
beyond Three Rivers Stadium,  
half hidden in the western hills:  
A brilliant orange sun sets and flares  
pink and red. The horizon's S-shaped clouds  
catch on fire. My face, reflected  
in the window, fades with sunset,  
eyes the last to go.

Richard Solomon / Ann Arbor, Michigan



*Western Illinois* / James Robinson

Snow settles like cream between chopped blond stalks  
and whiskers left from wheat on the dirt brown skin of Illinois.  
In six more months another beard will gleam  
and shimmer in summer sun that now we only imagine.

Disc harrows will comb the surface of the earth and plows  
turn its flesh inside out to make ready for new seed  
to be planted and sewn.

The hand that controls rain will  
be graceful and generous to a new generation of green  
and contain the force that can destroy as well as nourish.

Droplets will fall in gentle sheets and rivers flow  
with mercy between their banks and not flood fields  
erasing the geometry of so much seasonal labor.

Wheat, barley, oats, and corn will glisten and glow  
sharing their wealth with the birds of the air  
and rodents who gather and store wherever they can.

Grain will stand with uplifted heads, turn from green  
to gold as yet another season unfolds,  
then surrender again  
to the whirl of combine blades to fill silo, elevator, truck bed,  
train car, barge, and cargo ship container.

It will trespass  
the boundaries and borders of the world, traveling  
over highways, rivers, the oceans, and find its way  
onto tables in palaces, houses, huts, and camps. None  
will be empty, but abundant with bread dispersed and shared.

James Robinson / Huntsville, Alabama

*When the Baby Wakes* / Garrett Stack

The grackle song  
of his fluting lungs  
is unformed by anything

but need and our lurch  
to wakefulness  
is old as being prey

and startling natural in the air  
conditioned bedroom.  
This last vestige

a spark of feral stimuli  
traversing synapse and system  
thundering down

the line of time  
to rouse us  
like ancient horses

whickering awake in a dawn  
dark field so that we lie  
staring at the ceiling

engaged in this softened  
parlance whispering,  
*I think it's your turn.*

Garrett Stack, Rockford, Michigan

*Obol for the Boatman* / Garrett Stack

Just this once, fair Charon, let's skip the ferry.  
Come fetch me in a pickup truck too big  
for the task. Point that silver grill west  
into the great green sea of tasseled stalks and for god

sake take this child lock off my window.  
Oh psychopomp, omit the recitation  
from the scroll of my sins, these bible belting  
billboards already have them covered. Pull in there

to the Midway Bar, I've coin enough  
for one last round and they'll give us whisky cokes  
to go. Please accept this styrofoam cup  
as payment for my passage. If it's not too much

trouble, will you ask your mother Night to wait  
just for a moment so the sun and moon may hang  
even in the dusk while we cross the dying  
creek. I'm no hero, I won't be back this way again.

Garrett Stack / Rockford, Michigan

*Garden Dance* / Gary Wadley



Drawing, Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

## *Sonnet for 2020* / Colleen Alles

Never mind—  
she just said she doesn't have the energy  
to conform to a rhyme scheme.

Don't tell her what  
to be about, either. She hasn't

hugged her father in nearly  
a year, & it shows, & so she

aches in ways she won't say  
except in the pages of her diary.

But she asks you not to worry.  
Like a good sonnet, she'll try still  
to make order from chaos, leave you  
with the impression of

Love.

She remembers  
she is lucky to hold  
close a heart—& to have stolen time  
in a time of so much extra time. Now,  
there's laundry to fold, a hound who  
begs with his eyes. Someone's made paper  
airplanes, a mess on the kitchen floor,  
stolen gingerbread from the cookie jar.  
That's the stove. Pretty soon,  
nap time, bath time, quiet time—

time for a walk at twilight  
with the hound, & later,  
forgetting she ever tried to be

something she isn't,  
there's time  
for this sonnet to have a rich,  
full glass of sweet red wine.

Coleen Alles / Grand Rapids, Michigan

*A Mercy* / Colleen Alles

It's like when a dream  
tells you you're dreaming.

Let the nightmare dissolve,  
it says.

This is a mirage. Your worst fears  
are works  
of fiction.

And you realize  
your dream could have let you  
keep on dreaming.  
You realize a dream never owed you  
anything.

A dream doesn't have to tell  
you you're dreaming.

Just as  
tonight, you didn't need  
to pick up the phone

even though I kept her  
ringing.

Colleen Alles / Grand Rapids, Michigan

*Grief is an Item on a Menu I Don't Want* / Colleen Alles

at a restaurant I didn't ask to go to in the first place. But here we are. We can't leave until I've ordered, & don't ask how, but this I understand without being told, & every choice is wrong. Every choice is wrong. We are not supposed to be here. I shred the napkin in my lap. Then I shred yours. I spy a straw wrapper by your fork. Time to rip the thin white paper, & as I do, I remember an old friend used to tie knots in her straw wrappers. Then, she'd pull. If the knot was undone in the pulling—if it came apart in a gentle way, the paper able to let go of the knot that had been holding it together—then the person she most admired loved her, too. So then instead of ripping, I worry the straw wrapper in my fingers until it's worn & ragged & crinkled—so used up now & frail & delicate & so overwhelmed by the tidal wave of heartbreak that when I finally tie a knot and then pull hard on both ends, it has absolutely no choice but to break in my hands

Colleen Alles / Grand Rapids, Michigan

## *My Caretaker* / John Grey

Finally, shreds of gold from zinc veins,  
a fresh start for my throat,  
a scratchy voice but clear enough  
to make absurd comparisons between sickness and death,  
all comes from the killing of influenza  
as a new mountain rises from the bottom of the bed  
and a bird I had only previously known medicinally  
is at the tip of the oak branch, singing a sweet riff.

You watch me awaken like I've resurfaced from near-drowning.  
Ten years married and you're willing to keep company  
with a nose like fire and a cough louder than trash pickup.  
A morning, the last of a dirty four or five,  
and your eyes are a kind of applause.  
You bring coffee, the steam begs my attention.  
You can't remember ever caring so much.

You realize you didn't just marry a man  
but the whole of his body.  
You soothed his sweaty brow like you might pet a cat.  
You could have caught the very same thing I had  
but you moved in and out of my messy tissues,  
half-eaten soup bowls, as if nothing could harm you.  
On hot feverish nights, I remember your touch most of all.  
Your hand was like a starfish, calm in my rough seas.

John Grey / Johnston, Rhode Island



*Set Fire to the Moon* / John Tustin

He went around on horseback,  
With nothing but his bedroll and the money  
For food and rice wine –  
Searching for old friends in the day,  
Laughing drunk with the rabbit in the moon  
At night.  
He thought about you and the children you had together  
When he closed his eyes in the field  
And fell to sleep.  
It was the only time he allowed himself to contemplate you

Although he thought often about finding you,  
About finding them –  
Sitting for hours as the day fell to darkness,  
Memorizing the gargle of the stream  
And the contented nickering of his mare upon being fed.  
The crickets and frogs not devoured in the night  
All chirping or croaking their contentment  
As he sits propped against a tree  
In his reliable agony –

Thinking about all of you and  
Writing his poems that extinguish the sun,  
Set fire to the moon and  
Drown the river in topaz and  
Jade.

John Tustin / Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

*La Luna* / Lisa Yount



Digital Collage, Lisa Yount / El Cerito, California

*As Always* / Laura Ann Reed

when I first get out of bed I raise the shade  
to see if the light holds some kind of sign  
and there she is, our neighbor across the tree,  
plugging in that old leaf-blower  
to round up the needles under her pines.  
She's eighty-five, tiny as a hummingbird.  
She doesn't know how much we count on her  
to be out there, my husband and I—  
if not dealing with the needles  
then climbing a high ladder  
to clean the debris from her rain gutters  
or hosing down her aging car or gossiping  
with passers-by—our own spry, feisty  
slice of eternity. She smiles, waves,  
and as I lift my hand a man drives up  
and hefts a For Sale sign from his truck.  
When he plants it between the yellow roses  
and the bed of iris alongside her tidy driveway  
I find myself saying to no one in particular,  
*It's been twenty years since my father died.*

Laura Ann Reed / Mill Creek, Washington

*The Owlet and the Turtle* / Greg Sendi

Come up into my nesty bed,  
the Owlet to the Turtle said.

Here will I feed you nuts and mice,  
here cosset you in wings and twice

each day, at sunrise and at gloam,  
lay kisses dewed with honeycomb

and stinky crush of thicket grape  
upon your ancient leathery nape.

Here talon you behind the ears,  
here hold your riddles years and years,

and guerdon you with balmy myrtle,  
so fiercely do I love you, Turtle.

Together we may bless a nesty bed  
the Owlet to her darling Turtle said.

In fervid yawp to roost above  
rejoined the Turtle to his love:

Dear treasured caller, windfall Owl,  
here overhear my rapt avowal

receive from quaggy mat below  
my moon-rinsed consort song and know

but for your feathery sylvan art  
(beloved, gaze in your own heart!)

no rest might mend the blemishes  
that cram these shell-hulled premises,

no other soul my secrets keep.  
Thus, straining as he might to leap

in turtle vaults toward the roost above,  
rejoined the Turtle to his Owlet love.

Greg Sendi / Chicago, Illinois

*Sharp* / Ranney Campbell

winds shifted, sky  
blue again, smoke blown  
out over the ocean  
I can see the hills  
make out the detail  
of sage and the lichen  
spreading. home,

from my porch  
can see clearly  
the cut lines

of the shadows  
of the pergola, fallen

onto the concrete walk

Ranney Campbell / Jurupa Valley, California

*Girl in the Field* / Rana Williams



Photograph, Rana Williams / Hayesville, North Carolina

*The Birth of the Artist* / Ruth Bardon

The thick smoke on the battlefield made it hard to see  
exactly what was happening onstage:  
the director's idea, planned and carried out  
by three of the AP chemistry students.

Bemused by the chance to be part of a play,  
they'd thrown themselves into this business  
with gusto. Offstage, I was in love  
with the acrid smell of gunpowder,

with "Appalachian Spring" trickling out  
of the speakers, with knowing the tableau  
the two actors formed under the spotlight  
was called "Pieta," something vaguely Italian

that made the audience quiet,  
the senior girl closing her eyes  
as she lowered her head and stayed still,  
the freshman boy letting her hold him

as the notes rose together alone  
and then joined at the top, almost crying,  
then the strobe light that made me shiver,  
and the wonderful swirl of the smoke—

oh, beauty, oh art, science and death,  
music and light, while I clutched my props,  
waiting in the wings, eager to drop them  
into anybody's outstretched hands.

Ruth Bardon / Durham, North Carolina

*Sunset Storm* / Christopher Woods



Photograph, Christopher Woods / Chappell Hill,  
Texas



## *My Garden is a Thesaurus for Sadness* / Emily Franklin

with its creeping phlox, bean shoots breaking through, soil I tried to better with coffee grounds, banana peels, crusts too tough for my father to chew, scraps no one wants back into the garden in a disgusting heap someone would try to market as gourmet compost—but which is really just gross, the shitty ends of meals we can't get back, the way I wish for one afternoon with my children

as toddlers. This is not only because they are now driving, legal now, troubled or complicated or because their faces have all the same expressions but because I want back small them and the me of then. I want to say save the crusts then, too. I want to harvest my youngest's belly overhanging his diaper and I want my daughter's wild hair, gesticulating arms, her vocabulary doubling, tripling overnight the way bean shoots and cucumber vine climb the stalks of bamboo I stole from myself.

This is what gardens do, make us entrepreneurs and thieves, too, dividing irises and stonecrop as gifts or digging up Hosta to fill holes left by things that don't make it, slumped blanket flower or downy lambs ear gone brown at the edges, tufts of carrot stems which suggest they have actual carrots growing underneath but—and here is the thesaurus—we don't know there is nothing underneath until it is too late. It's almost always too late in the garden—you didn't take the time

to water properly or you did it too much, thinking you were a hydration expert now, understood roots the way the radiologist details cranial nerves. Who am I to know when to thin the beans or how the mole chewed the hardiest of the tomato plants? And there's no time this season to correct, only banking knowledge for next April, next July, the next fall crop which is another form of hope, and that is what it all—the seeds, this netting each row and fence, each support trellis, pod collecting

in the autumn as it all ends—is, a form of productive worrying the way my grandmother sketched what to plant where and when—when one of her kids was posted to die, each rhythmic watering, pruning, reseeding so we get up to check what’s happened overnight, pulled into growth, into the next day’s weather as though it might become another word for hope.

Emily Franklin / Newton, Massachusetts

*Thrifting for Clothes My Friend and I Find Feelings /*  
Emily Franklin

discarded, weighed price per pound—I tuck  
someone’s pink sweater into a brown bag  
along with the fantasy that I am someone

who would wear a pink sweater and I recall  
the boy in college who wore a cape and wonder  
if he is still an astrophysicist and if the cape is  
on a hook in his closet like some shadow former  
self or if it’s in this very store and I might find it

if I looked harder, plunged my hands into boa piles  
those snakes of celebration, looked in the revelry  
of sequins, the sadness of loose silk pajamas  
my grandfather hitched past his waist and which  
I thought I would keep later, after, in that great  
clothing purge we do for the dead lucky enough  
to amass a wardrobe gone out-of-fashion, obsolete.

My friend and I assign a voice to each article—  
her bowling shoes in a drawl, the tweed jacket patched  
with faux-Hepburn aloof—and in my mind there’s a heap  
of old me-s, each voice different but the same, each holding  
oversized ache in the sweaters, a skirt I wore once to cover  
bruises and right now I want to thank it, that linen - was it  
linen?- for absorbing whatever I was then so that I can be here  
now, prowling through each garment row, digging like my dog  
certain there’s something underneath worth saving.

Emily Franklin / Newton, Massachusetts

## *The Dead* / Marjorie Stelmach

The dead wear cloaks  
the color  
of shadow on snow.

They stand  
among winter trees  
in the easement,  
nearly unseen,  
and thin  
in the lowering sun,  
toward tomorrow.

They had wanted  
to last.

They still want to last,  
want it harder  
each day  
of their absence.

And we want it, too.

But less and less.

Only their vestments  
betray  
time's passage, paling  
from salt to bone.  
Come snow-melt,  
they will need

to find a new means  
of concealment,  
sifting themselves  
into the tangle  
of the understory,  
when it will become  
our part

to stand watch  
until  
our part is over.

Then we can rest,  
though

we'll still feel  
their presence—  
settling,  
like snowfall,

just here,  
in that hidden place  
close

to the heart  
where we store  
our own  
future ashes.

Marjorie Stelmach / Manchester, Missouri

*The Naiad* / David Harris

That night, Tom would take all his guests  
out to the country road and turn off  
the flashlight so we city people could see  
real darkness, as the pre-electric gods  
experienced it. But now he and Charlie  
were collecting people at the bus station,  
and I was alone, sitting on a rock  
in the brook that ran past the house.  
The country can be dark, but never silent:  
birds, wind, water, even with no people near.  
And I heard voices. One voice? Many?  
Human voices? Gods? In Greece, every rivulet  
had its nymph, whispering and muttering  
that only the sacred few could understand.

The next day Tom heard the call, retired  
to the kitchen, and came back with  
a sonnet. But the nymph speaks  
only Greek to me.

David Harris / Kingston Springs, Tennessee

*Like Falling Over* / D.S. Maolalai

so rare anymore  
that one must feel  
heartbreak. I especially  
don't – my girlfriend  
living in my place now  
and in love  
as much with me  
as the apartment. perhaps  
it will never happen again,  
though you hardly  
ever intend it; just  
like falling over

and that wonderful  
shifting of floorboards –  
going on a date  
with nothing much  
in mind. admiring  
the way someone's head  
tilts at your questions. the way  
someone steps  
and how their body  
leans against yours  
as you walk after coffee  
through the park over Grafton St.

the way life can trip you  
up without warning  
to a wonderful situation;  
cracking your kneecaps.  
changing your gait.  
changing your gait.

D.S. Maolalai / Dublin, Ireland

*All Rainbows* / D.S. Maolalai

after a rainstorm,  
a late sunny evening  
and driving from work  
on the N4 to Dublin  
which breaks like a biscuit  
at the M50 junction  
where it takes you to Dublin  
as well. cars toss  
fallen waterfalls, falling up  
into the sunlight  
like a conjurer's string  
of all bright colored flags  
in a prism which spangles  
ahead and around me.  
and the angles are perfect  
and clouds have come down;  
now the world is immersed  
and feels bright as an oil slick.  
all rainbows like pencils  
pushed through the clouds  
of hung water thrown upward  
by wheels. these strung-  
about colors, this grayness,  
these half-controlled cars.

D.S. Maolalai / Dublin, Ireland

*A Master Craftsman Lives in the City in a House He  
Didn't Build* / Nan Jackson

The screen door sits a little tilted in its frame  
In a restless wind, a too-tight shoe  
It takes an extra tug to pull it shut  
The simple hook and eye just good enough  
To tame the clatter and the rap.

Don't fix it, the master craftsman says,  
Holding on to other days  
A cottage, a lake, a child-size boat  
The gentle thud and rub, the click and catch  
The sound of heading out to play  
Echo: the sound of coming back

Nan Jackson / East Lansing, Michigan



*Gull Lake* / Nan Jackson

I was the brave one that summer,  
rowing the boat out to the middle of the lake,  
my older brother my passenger.  
In the grasses near the shore  
I let the snakes tickle my feet,  
even when I couldn't see them.  
I led the way up the fire tower  
rung by rung by rung.  
We looked down at the tops of the trees.  
I laughed toward the far away lake.

Decades later, I sit at his bedside,  
where the gentle rise and fall  
of his last breath  
leaves me without oars,  
where the water's surface rises too close to my face  
and the grasses at the shore  
slip beneath my feet.  
I stare at his closed eyes, afraid of what I can't see.  
I wonder if he knows where he's going,  
I wonder who's taking him there.

Nan Jackson / East Lansing, Michigan

*A Bumbling Team* / Kimberly Shyu



Photograph    Kimberly Shyu

## ***INSIDE/OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT FEATURE***

InsideOut works with a variety of schools, partner organizations, and artists to help inner-city schoolchildren find their inner voices with which to express themselves and share their stories, which they then do at performances and events presented by InsideOut.

InsideOut places professional writers and poets in Detroit schools to help children give voice to their often turbulent lives through poetry and writing. Since 1995, the organization has served tens of thousands of Detroit students grades K-12 in over 100 different schools. This year they are serving 27 different schools.

By immersing students in the joy and power of poetry and literary self-expression, InsideOut inspires them to think broadly, create bravely and share their voices with the wider world. Guided by professional writers and celebrated by publications and performances, youth learn that their stories and ideas matter and that their pens can launch off the page into extraordinary lives.

You can help give Detroit's children the joys of reading, writing and bringing their creative spirit into the world by supporting InsideOut, a 501(c)(3) corporation.

The Project is supported by gifts of corporations and people who hope to light the creative spark in our youth. Readers of *Third Wednesday* who see the fire burning in these young poets can help with donations sent to:

InsideOut Literary Arts Project  
5143 Cass Ave., Room #225  
WSU — State Hall  
Detroit, MI 48202

Visit InsideOut online at: [www.insideoutdetroit.org](http://www.insideoutdetroit.org)

Students from Oak Park Pepper Elementary, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

*I Am* / Meadow May

I am a yellow flower  
I blow in the breeze,  
I am a yellow flower  
so I blow with ease.

I speak to the grass  
and it speaks to me  
as I get my nectar  
collected by bees.

I am small but have a big role,  
I am a flower so  
I have no soul.  
You see me a lot in fields and plains;  
sometimes I'm seen next to berries and grain.

*I Am* / Natalia Whitley

I am the river with the glistening moon.  
I am the bright shiny Rings on Saturn.  
I am a hard prickly Cactus in the desert.  
I am the autumn leaves brushing against the sidewalk.  
I am the navy blue of the night sky.  
I am the bright star in the twinkly night.  
I am the lion roaring in the sunset.  
I am the violin playing in the theater.  
I am my dream!

***I Am*** / Archeea Thoms

I am like the sun: so light;  
like the moon: dark as day  
and sun and the sky, the birds  
and tree; the moon is non-talking  
as dark as a room; like school  
it's so cold, colder than the moon.  
The sun is as hot as fire,  
the moon is as cold as ice  
and snow;  
how cold is the moon? As cold as ice cream.  
The sun burns like wood.  
The sun is as yellow and red  
like fire,  
and the moon is as white as snow.

Student from Oak Park Einstein Elementary, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

***I Am*** / Antonye Arnold

I am the river.  
I am wind, flowing like dust  
on a sunny day through light,  
but a slight bit of darkness  
is ahead of me;  
going through anything,  
you can see me, hear me.  
I am the one who sees light  
like a rainbow that comes through  
like pieces, like hearts,  
like wind, the river is a calm place  
to be.

-

Students from Lee M. Thurston High School, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

***Black Girl*** / Erynn Miller

Black girl, too ghetto  
Black girl, too loud  
Black girl, unworthy  
Black girl, too proud  
Black girl, disrespectful  
Black girl, bad thing  
Too Black, not Black enough  
Black girl, don't be seen  
Black girl, don't dream  
Black girl, dream big  
Black girl, be strong  
Black girl, defeat hate  
Black girl, keep on keeping on  
Black girl, beauty  
Black girl, pride  
Black girl, love  
Black girl, magic  
Black girl, sees hate  
Black girl, seems tragic  
Black girl, stay strong  
Black girl, stay proud  
Black girl, stay ghetto  
Black girl, stay loud  
Black girl  
Black girl  
Black girl  
Black girl  
Don't you know?  
Black girl  
Black girl  
Black girl  
You glow.

***Haiku* / Elle Hubbard**

Cocooned, talking myself into being born

Not a butterfly  
yet not a caterpillar  
wings still clipped to me

Took me my entire  
caterpillar life to see  
what you saw in me

When will I emerge  
feels like I'm clipped endlessly  
please help, set me free.

***Dear Poetry* / De'ja Jones**

My best friend, reciting my deepest thoughts  
mirroring my feelings with warm words,  
reading me better than I know myself –  
you bring clarity to my mist-covered garden  
and open my deafened ears to the sound  
of my own heartbeat –

Dear Poetry,

you make me alive, singing tides of my imagination.  
I ride and abide your fine waves of interpretation.  
I get lost in your deep watery blue, an inspiration,  
and the colorful patterns and treasures

which make me a person.

De'ja Jones

## *If Anxiety Were a Person* / Christian Hooper

If anxiety were a person,  
I think everyone would misunderstand them.  
Begin to loathe their presence. Over-exaggerating?  
Maybe that's just what they concluded.

I think their always-impending sense of doom  
would burn a hold from within, making them watch  
all the bridges that they carefully built up burn  
before them.

Perhaps their striking apprehension and distrust  
is sharp as a blade, a blade they have  
grown used to carrying around.  
Not by choice; not by flipping some switch; *it just happens*.

I wonder if anxiety takes a break  
to just sit down, to try to be one  
with themselves. I certainly hope they haven't gotten  
used to the swings – they surely try their best, after all.

Does anxiety have its own fear,  
its own stack of dread to burn? Afraid of losing the world,  
afraid of losing themselves? Judge them,  
call them illogical, or force them

to change, but if anxiety were a human,  
maybe they'd just want to be heard.  
I wonder if anxiety also gets insecure  
if they burn with disdain for being cast away

to the depths of the human heart. Does anxiety  
have a heart, unable to see both desire  
*and* hope in this world? Does anxiety constantly  
wear a mask,



one they've donned so tightly that they  
mistake it as part of themselves?  
I wonder if anxiety ever feels discouraged  
if they ever want to just give up and lie still

only to be reborn when night falls again.  
Does anxiety have dreams, aspirations?  
Or are they stuck in an endless dream,  
a false reality that they are burning to wake up from?

If anxiety were human, I would do my best to sit with them.  
I'm afraid of the same sense of isolation, dread losing  
myself, but to run away would isolate us both.  
Even if it were to attack me from within,

to submerge me in its depths and simultaneously wrap me  
in its roots, I would face the world with them *by my side*.

If anxiety were a human, maybe they never  
got to choose to be the way they are. The fear that something  
is wrong, dreading impending doom: none of that  
would be their choice. Instead, they'd make a new choice:

to face themselves, *face ourselves*, with what we can muster  
together.

### ***Ode to Target* / Gabrielle Pryor**

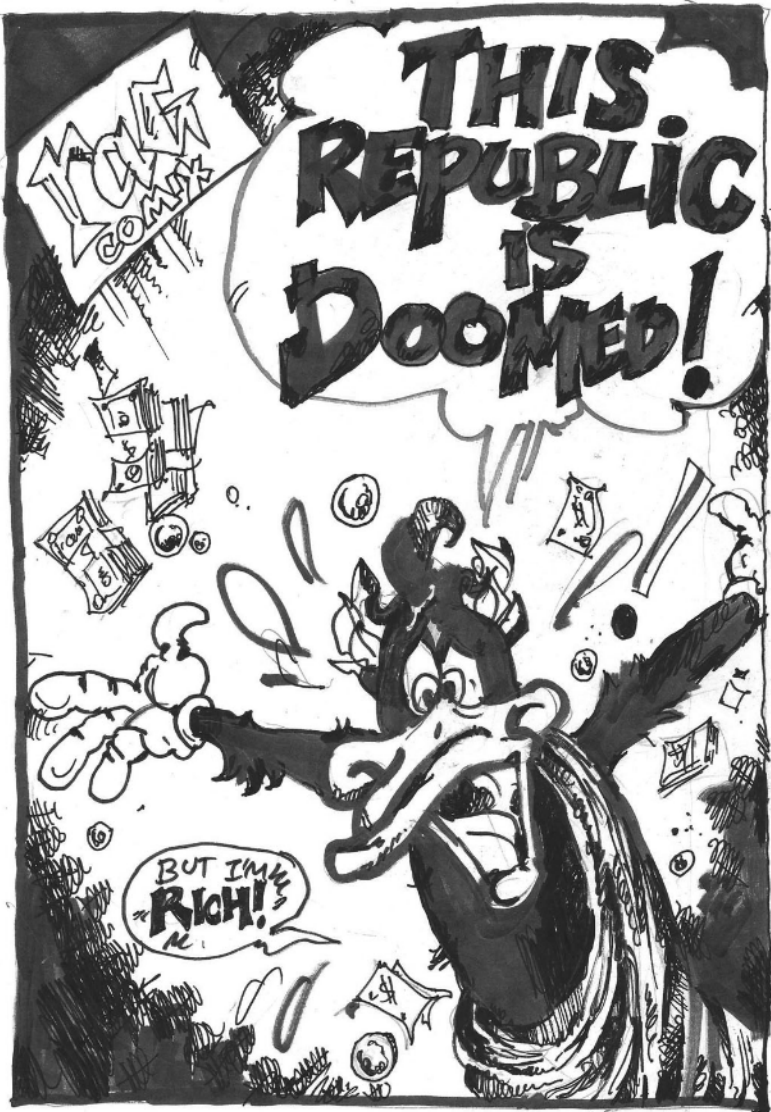
You carry everything I need, from the latest makeup  
essentials to my favorite snacks. Provider of goods  
as though you are an ancient merchant.  
Dripping Icee Machine taps, still not ready,  
a tiny Pizza Hut right in the front that reminds you of your hunger.  
Creating a section dedicated to natural hair products  
-- but not as large as straight hair --  
we can work on that.  
Your bright red logo shining against the sunlight

as though it's a mirror towards more spending.  
A Starbucks to tell myself, "I could go for a caramel macchiato,"  
even though it's 9 p.m....  
A bright and happy dog named Bullseye whose face is plastered  
among the walls like a celebrity.  
I see you with your body diversity recognizing that bones  
aren't always structured the same!  
Look at you becoming more inclusive! Showing us that models  
aren't always slim and tall and that anyone can strut their stuff  
in a bikini. Thank you, Target, for being my comfort zone.  
The place I drag my mom to at night knowing darn well  
I don't need another body wash.  
The place I call my second home because it's the place that has  
it all. A wonderland of color, toys, and clothes.  
What better place can I ask to be my addiction  
than my old, sweet Target?

### ***Pretty Girls Don't Cry* / Azia Harris**

What's wrong with you?  
Fix yourself  
Pretty girls don't cry.  
Wipe your face  
dry your eyes,  
pretty girls don't cry.  
Never show a sign of sadness  
or you'll break out in hives.  
Pretty girls don't cry.  
Figure how to stop.  
Don't be so *anti-*  
pretty girls don't cry.  
Use your words  
count to five  
pretty girls don't cry.  
Talk to someone  
don't be shy;  
pretty girls don't cry.

*This Republic is Doomed!* / Anthony Acri



Drawing, Anthony Acri / Natrona Heights, Pennsylvania