

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

Connections

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LITERARY MAGAZINE

Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND
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The Magic of Musical Doodles

Cierra Nestor-Gray

Once again, I am in Friday’s art class listening to Mrs. Whitaker go on about how art is magical. Anything I draw ends up looking like an incredibly sad set of road map directions that my 3-year-old brother drew. I mean, come on; I am in the 7th grade people! “Okay everybody, it is time for us to create our own Magical Musical Doodles!” Great... another one of Mrs. Whitaker’s projects where we’re supposed to “be the art.” “For this project you are going to pick a song that is school appropriate and create a painting that represents the feeling and your interpretation of it with a partner!” I thought it was bad when she said project; but partners too?!

Mrs. Whitaker starts naming out groups, and I am on the edge of my seat, hoping that my worst nightmare does not come true. “Ms. Abigail Roberts, you are paired with Ms. Emelia Kirk.” This cannot be happening! I place my hands into my head clicking my heels three times thinking that the Wizard of Oz is real and can come save me. Emelia and I have not talked since my birthday party, ever since we got into a huge fight over some stupid TikTok our classmate, Vince, posted.

“Hey Abby” said Emelia. “Hey Em,” I reluctantly replied. Complete awkward silence. There is no way I can complete this project with my ex best friend. Mrs. Whitaker asked us to plan with our partner how to complete the project over the weekend. I take a deep breath, remembering what my grandmother always

said, “If you want things to change, speak up.” I look over at Em to break the ice. “Meet me at my house later? So we can figure out what song we should pick?” “Yeah. I’ll let my mom know and ride over on my bike.” The bell rings and I start to head towards the door, “Okay, see you later Em.” It’s four o’clock when Emelia arrives. We are sitting in my room for what feels like hours. “What about “Karma” by Taylor Swift?” I propose. Em tilts her head to the side, humming the lyrics.

“I like that song, but I think Mrs. Whitaker would question the meaning.” I nod in agreement. We go through different songs, but nothing sticks. However, it sure didn’t take long for things to go south.

“Are you being serious right now Abby?! For the 100th time, I did not tell anyone about your secret or tell them to post on TikTok.”

“Oh really, then how did they know about the one thing I asked you to keep a secret?”

“Abby, I promise you. I don’t know.”

“Yeah, “okay” Em.” I wish I had stopped talking here, but I didn’t. “You know what, I’m so happy that you’re not my best friend. I don’t have to pretend to listen to your stupid problems anymore.”

Emelia looks at me distraught. She grabs her things with tears down her face. “You know what Abby, the song we should do is, “I wish we were never best friends.” She walks out and bikes home.

It's now Saturday and I am replaying the conversation repeatedly in my head. "Why did I say that?" I whisper to myself. I open the app that started it all and pop up the Tik Tok profile, but I notice something. The page is live with Vince and his mom! I turn up the volume; "To Abigail Roberts, I owe you an apology. Emelia didn't tell me about your crush. I overheard you telling her in the cafeteria and decided to post about it on TikTok. She came up to me and told me to delete it before it spread around our class, which is why you thought it was her who told me. I'm sorry." I am consumed with guilt. I ruined the only true friend I had since preschool. Tears are running hot down my cheeks. How am I supposed to fix this?

I gather myself and go downstairs to see my grandmother baking. She loves to play music when she is making sweets; helps her "get in the groove." Ben King's "Stand by Me" starts playing and I can't help but think of the time Em and I made our entire handshake to this song. My walls break as I start to sob while my grandmother quickly consoles me, and I tell her everything. She doesn't hesitate to tell me once again, "If you want things to change, speak up." She gives me a tissue and turns up the music. Then it hits me. "This is the song!" I say out loud.

I grab my paint supplies, my speaker, and place it in my art bag, and start biking towards Em's house. I see her standing outside and I hop off my bike. I yell walking towards her, "Em, I am so sorry! I didn't mean the things I said. You are my best friend in the entire world. I know you didn't tell anyone, and I should have believed you." Em stares back at me, tears swelling up. I know she's still hurt. My voice timid, unsure of how she'll react, I say, "I've been thinking about our project, and I think this would be perfect." I grab my speaker and start to play, "Stand by

Me." Em looks at me confused until she realizes. She heads over to me, and I stop in my tracks. "Wow, we really need to upgrade our handshake." Em laughs. We look at each other busting out into joyful laughter with tears falling. I reached over and gave her the biggest hug. I reach over and give her the biggest hug. Pulling back, I look at her. "I guess Mrs. Whitaker's was right, art is magical."

From the Maryland Side

Patrick Allen

A lonely road is a bodyguard – Roseanne Cash
I am writing this message to the dream of you
Whom I have never met
Vibrations sent out to the tree shroud hills
Across the Potomac from where I sit.
Though unseen, I hope you are there
Head turned, ear cocked, toward the muffled echo
Of nighttime Fireworks in Alexandria just up the river
Or the exultant “sharit, sharit, sheer, sheer, sheer”
Of a scarlet Cardinal, just out of sight, on a crisp, late
Spring day.



Little Rescue, Richard Taylor

Injunktion: How to Live Uncluttered

Jennifer Fossell

If you pass a suit of armor in a thrift-store window,
its gaze a cypher beneath polished visor, do not
stop to meet it.

Harden your heart, do not
make way for ducklings, seven miniature hunks of
alabaster parading

across the listings of Facebook Marketplace.

Let tired tombs on prehistoric Irish graves rest in peace
alongside “Worlds of Whirligigs,” brittle pages unruffled
still by quick fingers.

Leave the faded chalkware kewpie, the nubby bear
of long-ago carnival midways to the
dignity of their obsolescence.

Do not pause in wonder at the celluloid lion,
its majesty eclipsed by a sure fate of
flame or gravity.

Be brutal. Resolute. Disciplined.

Gird yourself against the lure of garage sale,
Goodwill bin, antique mall, eBay.

You cannot rescue them all,

these cast-offs that clamor for a
second life.

Let memory, and history, and your tender
clutching heart dissolve and

yield to

no

thing.



Water Tower, Diane Payne

Fifty Shades of Squirrel

S.M. Berberich

Frisky Gray Squirrel raced up to his family's nest in the tallest white oak tree. "The black squirrels are coming into our neighborhood, Papa. They are climbing into our tall oaks ... where we live!" he said as he twitched his tail rapidly from side to side.

Papa Fuzzy Gray Squirrel woke from an evening nap. He yawned while flapping his ears around, "It is okay. Frisky boy, if the black squirrels want our acorns, no worry. We buried all our acorns around our home trees. Our acorns are better, you know. And we know where our acorns are buried. At least I think so."

Frisky Gray Squirrel stomped his feet on the tree limb cradling the family nest of leaves and twigs. He chattered stubbornly, "But, you always say we should bark loud and chase outsiders away from our trees here over the humans' condominiums?"

"That's true, son. Chase away chipmunks, blue jays, and even cats if we can. Hmmm, now it's the black squirrels too, I guess."

"Well then?"

Papa Fuzzy Gray Squirrel looked over the edge of the nest. He swiveled his supple body quickly left and right looking out over the ground below, "I don't see them. Hey, you know what, Frisky boy? We are all squirrels, the grays and the blacks.

Besides, there are a lot of black squirrels now on the swampy side of the condominiums. There may be too many black squirrels to support them in the short willow oaks and scrub pines down there. They don't enjoy our advantages here on the high side of the condos in the gray squirrel's neighborhood."

"They are just hungry and come up here for the big acorns, Papa?"

"I don't think so. I bet you those trespassers are just a scurry of rambunctious black squirrel teenagers. Maybe they are jealous. I don't know. But more likely they are just curious. We grays have been prosperous up here for a long time. Relax, Frisky. Here, take some of these high-energy sunflower seeds your sister brought up yesterday from a bird feeder on one of the condo balconies."

The grays lived very well indeed with their nests in high positions in the tall trees at the condo complex. Papa Fuzzy's family of gray squirrels resided, ate, foraged, and prayed to Squirrel Heaven in the tallest of the white oak trees on the high ground behind the 3-story condominiums. Their sky-high neighborhood of 25 grays lived in nests supported by the sturdy crotches of tall stately oaks, some more than 100 feet tall. Papa Fuzzy Gray Squirrel, Mama Cozy Gray Squirrel, their daughter Chastity, and son Frisky were descendants of great, great, great grandfather Moses, a vagabond gray squirrel who came across the highly nourishing and abundant giant acorns and settled in the tall white oaks. The grays prospered and lived comfortably.

Lately, however, young grays were leery and feared the upstart neighborhood of black squirrels on the lower side of

the condos. Many of the older grays were watchful as the black squirrels gained in numbers by multiplying more rapidly than the grays. The blacks had migrated to the wooded complex of condominiums from southern counties, which had become overpopulated with squirrels.

The black squirrels segregated themselves apart from the grays safely and quietly in nests of the small willow oaks on the lower, swampy side of the condos where they enjoyed an abundance of shade and fresh water. But the willow acorns were small and sparse in contrast to more plentiful large acorns from the white oaks where the grays lived.

Besides their fur colors, the grays and the blacks were both nimble, bushy-tailed rodents who were indistinguishable in behavior. Both clans enjoyed a fondness for chasing, frolicking, and often floating down to Earth from their trees guided only by their strong plumose tails. Yet the fur color difference was enough for each of the two squirrel neighborhoods to be skeptical of the other.

One serene summer evening on the opposite lower, swampy side of the condos, Pa Steadfast Black Squirrel confronted his two sons as they returned to their nest in the small willow oaks. Steadfast stood high on his back legs to put a halt to their playful scampering up the family tree, "I heard that you two were on the trunks of the white oaks today where the grays live." Pa Steadfast barked to his oldest son, the handsome Chase Black Squirrel, and young Lumpy Black Squirrel, whose primary trait was a voracious appetite. Pa insisted, "And, I want the truth."

“I was hungry, Pa,” Lumpy Black Squirrel admitted.

“I went along with Lumpy for adventure,” Chase added. “I heard the gray squirrels are mean and fearsome. Just wanted a look-see, Pa. Honest.”

Pa Steadfast Black Squirrel quickly scolded his boys. “That is not what I hear. If you cannot chirp something good about somebody, don’t chirp at all. Protecting your brother was a good idea, however, Chase. Now about the grays, I don’t know them well. But we know that the grays have the better acorns while ...”

“I’ll say they do. Oops, sorry Pa,” Lumpy cowered and ticked his head back and forth in shame.

“Don’t interrupt. I was about to say they have the better acorns but we have abundant water on the lower side of the humans’ condos. Seems like a fair tradeoff to me if we ever get to feel the need to cohabit and somehow empathize with the gray squirrels. There is too much antagonizing chatter about them to suit me right now, however. Until that day when we can all just get along, the grays might want to protect their cache from the likes of you two. Stay away. I don’t want to upset them. And I don’t want you to get hurt.”

Lumpy was filled with mouth-watering hope. “Wow. Now that you say that, Pa, ah well, maybe they are not too bad because their giant acorns look scrumptious,” said Lumpy. “One day, I saw one of those big oak acorns rise from the ground in a soaking rain. I wanted to take it but was too afraid.”

Chase twitched his whiskers up and down, and side to side, nervously. He said, “Lumpy’s stomach will get us all in trouble with the grays one day, Pa.”

“Your little brother’s name is not Lumpy,” Pa squealed angrily. Your brother’s name is Tiny. Get it? Tiny.” Pa sat on his hunches and held Tiny’s (Lumpy’s) chubby paw affectionately. “Calling my baby Lumpy will give him a complex. Stop it.”

“Okay, Pa,” Chase laughed and continued, “But Lumpy was his baby name. It stuck. Sorry. Pa, can Lumpy and I go over there again? I mean me and Tiny? There are some cute gray squirrel girls and ...”

“Don’t even think about it.”

Frisky Gray Squirrel was again in a panic in the next few days, bobbing his head madly and jumping all four feet at a time. He bounded in desperate leaps up the family’s home tree. He mumble-chirped, “No, no. Can’t be. She can’t. No, no.” He again startled his Papa Fuzzy when he reached the nest.

“What’s with you, Frisky boy? You know it’s my nap time,” said Papa Fuzzy Gray Squirrel. “Catch your breath and tell me what is so important to wake your tired old Papa.”

“I had to see you. It’s Chastity. My own sister is being courted by a black squirrel teenager!”

“Oh? What makes you think so?”

“She offered him a bite of one of my special acorns. You know, the ones I soaked in chewed-up chestnuts. They were for the holidays. I was busy digging some, just minding my business, when she grabbed one for her boyfriend.”

“And?”

“Isn’t that enough to run him off?”

“I’m tired. I want to go back to sleep, Frisky. Ask your mother.”

Frisky Squirrel was not through, “And now they are playing the game ‘here squirrel, here’ with Human Lady Yellow Head. You know her, third-floor balcony, lots of plants, bird feeders, gives us sunflower seeds in the fall?”

Gray Squirrel Fuzzy yawned with a loud clicking sigh. He replied, “Yeah. Lady Yellow Head drops good stuff, sometimes on purpose. She’s keepin’ us fat, see? Ha-ha.” he rolled onto his back and rubbed his bulbous white belly.

“But, but she’s ...”

“What now, son? I’m tired.”

“Lady Yellow Head is tossing bits of bread and cheese, yelling ‘here squirrel, here’ from her balcony to Chastity and a black squirrel teenager together down there, see?” He jerked his head to the left and pointed down with his right paw.

Papa Gray Squirrel didn’t bother to look down. He said,

“Alright, I give. What is that game you call ‘here squirrel, here’?”

Frisky scratched his head with both paws rapidly, “Oh, I thought you knew. ‘Here squirrel, here’ is a game Lady Yellow Hair plays with Chastity and me. It is our game, Papa. Chastity shouldn’t play it with the black teenager.”

People living in the condos, especially gray-squirrel-friendly Lady Yellow Hair, were often delighted to watch the squirrels’ antics, both the blacks on the lower side and the grays on the high ridges. The two clans displayed identical behavior. They chased around continually, flicking tails high, screeching. The humans love to see the squirrels foraging and courting. Any given squirrel would race to catch another squirrel coveting a morsel of food tossed by the humans. Still, others simply played keep-away games or were taught foraging lessons by their parents—all under the watchful human eyes above them.

After more pestering by his son Frisky Gray Squirrel, Papa Fuzzy rubbed his eyes and replied, “Okay, let me see. Where? I don’t see Chastity. I don’t see Human Lady Yellow Hair either.”

“There, by Lady Yellow Hair’s balcony,” Frisky insisted.

“Hey, Cozy,” Papa Fuzzy called over to his mate, Mama Cozy Gray Squirrel, who was in the back of the big nest holding a broom of shrubby greens. Papa Fuzzy asked her, “Frisky said Chastity is down there with one of those black squirrel teens. Can you see her?”

“Of course not,” she snapped. “I’m still busy cleaning up

after you and the kids. And you and your buddies made a mess back here last night playing that stupid game, drop the twig, onto the human kids playing below. And you lost a lot of perfectly good acorns betting, you old fool.”

The very next day, in the swampy foliage of the willow oaks, handsome Chase Black Squirrel welcomed a forbidden visitor.

Oh so quietly, Chastity Gray Squirrel sat wide-eyed and bushy-tailed in Chase’s secluded hideout as his exclusive guest for a taste of his special treat.

Pretty Chastity Gray Squirrel had spent most of the day preening her soft gray coat of tracts of brown and white fluffy belly. After several dates off the condo grounds cooing and bustling about in circle dances and mutual tail-chasing around tree trunks, Chastity had become hopelessly smitten. But, this date seemed special. What is his ‘special treat’ she had wondered all day.

“I shouldn’t be here, Chase,” she said with little conviction. “You and I have lots of fun together around the humans’ condos, but I’ve never before been in your neighborhood. When my Papa Fuzzy Gray Squirrel wakes up, he will be angry when I am missing. Oh, what are you doing? What’s that stuff?”

Handsome Chase Black Squirrel stirred something in the branch crevice with a stick shaped like a spoon. “It’s black squirrels’ sweet-acorn pudding. Our Pa, Steadfast Black Squirrel, makes it from our late mother’s recipe.”

“Is it good? Doesn’t look good. What’s in it, if I may ask?” She looked as if she felt regret for doubting him. She sat with her tail wrapped around her bottom. Her twitching and wagging tail might otherwise reveal the love building in her heart for handsome Chase.

Chase was delighted with her. He clicked repetitively and said with a big smile, “It is composed of sweet pea flowers, leaves of the marshmallow plants, Pawpaw fruit, and mashed-up willow oak acorns in marsh water.”

Chastity tasted the delicacy. “Mmmm, delish,” she purred softly.

Chase confessed, “I brought some over here to my hideout this morning from a storage pot in my family’s tree. It is forbidden to remove some, but I was hoping you’d want a taste.”

“Glad I did, Chase,” she whispered, purring louder. She twitched her tail from side to side. He smiled warmly. He then touched her cheek lightly with an open paw. “Me too. You are so lovely, Chastity.”

She recoiled a bit, glancing around with quick rapid head shakes, “You mentioned your mother.”

He nodded, brought a paw to his eyes, and wiped off a tear, “She is dead.”

“I’m sorry,” Chastity said.

He composed himself and explained, “It was one of the

humans' machines racing out of the condo parking lot. The crazy driver stopped. He looked regretful and placed her limp body in the euonymus bushes, I'm told, around the air conditioning units down there. That was at least considerate from our perspective, away from the evil eyes and slashing beaks of the turkey vultures. Those vicious creatures from hell are always circling above."

"I hate them," Chastity said and quickly regretted uttering such a nasty comment. "Sorry."

"That's okay. Say, you should have been there for the ceremony. I think all 37 black squirrels in the willow oak neighborhood climbed out to the end of branches to watch and mourn."

Over time, with an abundance of water and marsh plants, the black squirrels invented many moist recipes with the willow oak acorns, while the gray squirrels on the upper side of the condominiums relied on recipes of drier foods made primarily with the giant, nutritious white oak acorns, sweet leaves, birch nuts and wild herbs.

The next two generations of gray squirrels still resented the black squirrel latecomers to the condo complex. The grays ran them off as much as possible to protect their busy lives of parenting, housekeeping nests of leaves and twigs, storing food, nursing babies, and teenage courting. On the swampy side of the condos, the black squirrels also held on to their resentment of any intrusion by the haughty gray squirrels who might threaten

their happiness.

However, time eventually wore down the fears of the grays and blacks. They began to dine in each other's trees. The teens regularly attended mixers under the big leaves of the hydrangeas in the condo shrubbery. Over the next several decades, attitudes changed as more and more squirrels of both fur colors raced and frolicked around the trees during warm days and rested long hours in nests during the cold winter months.

Changing times led to inter-squirrel governing as squirrel numbers increased. Older males of both colors walked the neighborhood boundaries as sentries. A community council settled occasional disputes. The gray squirrels and the black squirrels elected one elder as their official 'Teller' of stories to pass along ancestral history. It was a time of cooperation worth remembering, just as Pa Steadfast Black Squirrel once prophesized to his sons Chase and Tiny.

A legend chirped far and wide that a beautiful young girl squirrel named Hope strongly resembled her great, great, great, great grandmother Chastity Gray Squirrel.

Just like Chastity, Hope was strong and alert but lacked Chastity's distinctive gray coat.

Hope Squirrel's fur was not black or gray but a shade in between.

Hope was a member of a generation of tranquil and smart youngsters who only knew and remembered a peaceful life around the condominium complex, both on the high ridges of tall

white oaks and below in the swampy grounds of the willow oaks.

Because of her resemblance to the legendary Chastity, Hope Squirrel was intensely curious about her ancestry. She often heard tales, perhaps myths, of the old days of conflicts between black and gray squirrels. She wanted to learn more. One morning, Hope got enough courage to approach her generation's all-knowing Teller Squirrel. She climbed a tall stately beech tree where the Teller lived alone east of the condos.

When she reached his nest she found Teller Squirrel meditating. He sat with his paws on his knees and chin up showing white fur of great age around his face and chest.

When the Teller opened his eyes, Hope was frightened. She hopped back instinctively disturbing some small tree limbs. She nearly fell.

She asked, "Pardon me, Teller Squirrel, sir, what were the gray and the black squirrels like in the days of old? Were they like us, Teller sir?"

The Teller stroked Hope's little furry head and said, "The grays and the blacks were the same as you and me. Just like us, the blacks and the grays ate, foraged, courted, and prayed to Squirrel Heaven in the tall oak trees on the high ground behind the condominiums as well as in the squatty willow oaks in the swamps on the other side of the buildings. All the same. All like us today. No difference in behaviors or beliefs, my dear. Just different coat colors."

Hope's nose squinted up and down, revealing her disappointment. There was nothing new in The Teller's words. She pursued, "But I heard that the blacks and the grays were segregated. Is that the word? And they feared each other."

"Yes, I think that was the word they used. They got that word from the humans. That was nonsense, of course. Then, there were too many squirrels. Too many grays. Too many blacks. Not enough tree crevices to nest in. Not enough acorns. They had to pioneer beyond the condo park. They did this together, traded, shared life's trials and tribulations, and got along fine, thank you. Yes indeed. After much of that, in generations untold, they finally got along just fine."

"Tell me, Teller, if you please, why haven't I seen any grays or blacks?"

"My dear, there are no more blacks and grays, but they are within us. We are them both. Have you not noticed? Squirrels today are, well I'd say, different shades of dark gray. Oh, I'd say there are now some fifty shades of squirrel."

Hope Squirrel's eyes widened as she looked about at other squirrels on the ground and in the trees. "Oh, I see. Thank you, Teller Squirrel."

"You go run along and play now, my dear. I need breakfast after my meditating," said the old Teller as he turned toward a plastic plate of nuts and berries delivered earlier by his altar boy squirrels.

Enlightened and joyful, Hope returned to her family nest.
She told them what the Teller said.

Her father was pleased but quickly asked Hope about
brown squirrels that were beginning to migrate into the squirrel
community from the north. “What did the Teller say about those
brown-fur squirrels?”

“I forgot to ask,” she admitted. “I’m so sorry, Daddy
Squirrel, but I haven’t seen them yet.”

When the Treetop Sings

Chani Fletcher

When the treetop sings, everything stops
The beauty in the chords dance gracefully within the
branches

The words flow like the leaves in the wind
The clouds cry to the harmonious sounds
Tulips arise from dirt to beauty
When the treetop sings, the world looks a little brighter
The people look happier
Colors brighten under the sun while a rainbow forms amid
the dark grey skies
And that’s what happens when the treetop sings

We Try

Chisom Okoroha

in the night we can dance
and see our future in the sky
and the truth will come up with the sun
and the music will soon stop
and eyes of our love may close
but at least we made it good

Skimming

Kathrine Lassman

This morning along my commute
I'm so immersed in work-related thoughts
that it takes a bump beneath my car wheels
to realize the Benedict Bridge
has been repaved. Then I'm skimming
over the Patuxent, smoothly as a water-strider.
How blue the river's surface
under the light of sunrise,
how vibrant the clouds of ivory
and mauve, their edges all on fire!
How soft the sky's transition from warm yellow glow
low at the treeline to ethereal azure above!
How often have I crossed bridges,
so focused on the other side
or on fighting sun glare
to navigate traffic,
that I did not even notice
my own crossing?

devil's advocate

Randy Bridgeman

the only evil i've ever seen
done is by humans
who else had the devil or
God
seen fit to work through
after all we are their bodies
here on earth
sometimes it's hard to
understand
who has the upper hand
God or the devil
like when someone walks
into a school
or a movie theater
or an office building
and shoots as many people
as they can
and we are always surprised
like we haven't been killing
each other from the beginning
with rocks

or the jawbone of an ass
or anything we could get
our hands on
how about when we rode into
an indian camp and shot
their women and children
or blew those little girls
up in that baptist church
in the south
or sent missiles into a village
in afganistan to get one man
God even killed all
of the first born sons of egypt
during the passover
and when he sent his son Jesus
to wrestle back some control
over his children
hell we killed him too
no killing is in our DNA
the only way out of that
is if God would have pulled
the plug on his little experiment
back when he had
the chance

Blessing of NO Father

Brandon Hansen

Where are you, where are you
Tell me why you left me

anger and pain has driven me for so long
Its made me feel like I belong

Yet sharing my informational story
is what I prolong

Lord help me with my rational decision
to stop my prolonging

I need your help, I dont want to miss my blessing
I sweat I've learned my lesson

Praise to the Lord
my anger and pain is my blessing

I learned how to father myself
So I finally turn my lesson to a blessing

Stella and Stanley

Richard Weaver

we named them. Paired Giant Canada geese
who made their home but not a nest across
the bank from us where the Jones Falls way
empties into the Chesapeake Bay's mouth.
A constant source of amusement from our
9th floor westside balcony. Stanley is anything but
an alpha male. He has nothing to do with other
geese should they appear. His life is a series
of honks. He's always goose-splaining to his mate, Stella.
Goose-splaining how and when to make a leap,
to proper distance to fly from the water to the bank above.
Depending on the tide, a 4-6 foot air adventure.
He's patient. He's persistent. She'd balked
until she'd had enough, and then they would both attack
the water with their wings in a desperate attempt
to lift high enough to clear the bank's stone edge.
Only once did they fail. Correction. Did he fail.
Smacking breast into stone and bouncing backwards
into the water. There to preen. There to wait for his mate.

Child of Glass

Jennifer Polhemus

Glass embedded in my 7-year-old heel
and my parents yell, Go Away!
from behind the locked, dining room door
where they play cards
with Carolyn and Norm
for hours and hours and endless hours.
In the bathroom, I sit, alone
alone...so silent and alone
staring at the chunky clear shard
willing myself to grab,
to pull...just pull
my heart through my frightened throat,
afraid to scream or even cry.
And all my unfallen tears
still try to wash away the drops of blood
on the cracked, tile, floor
mixing with bits of forgotten dust
and talcum powder.
So much lonely blood...running
like my dreams

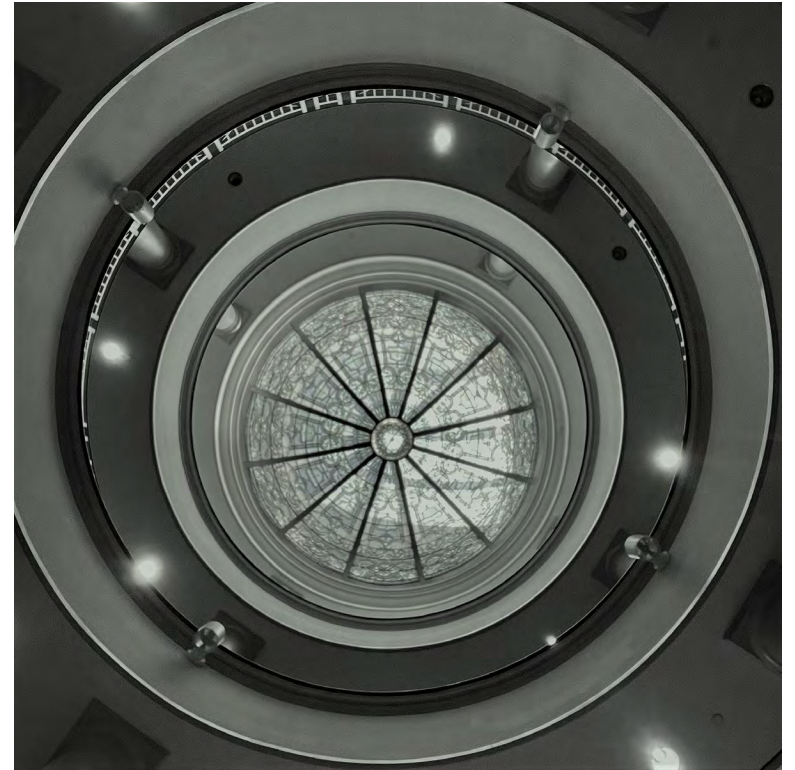
to hiding places
where doughy arms gather me up
to bosoms of comfort,
where strong hands lift me
to laps of security
beyond this tiny, airless room
and me, even smaller,
more breathless
than the plastic flowers
in the vase of obscene white
resting, waiting, watching
on the top of the toilet tank.
And what do I tell my shame
when it asks me
Why are you here?
Why do you need?
Why were you even born
if no one was there to catch you,
to cut the cord gently
and claim you,
create a new connection
that glass can never sever
even when you tread clumsily on it...

scattered like diamonds
across an unforgiving floor
that cries out to be cleaned,
to be attended to,
to be loved.

April's Crowning Shadow

Karen Smith Hupp

rotunda shadow
baily's beads or diamond ring
no, just sine die



Oreo

Markala Pharr

Being black in a predominately white town is being asked
out as a joke, never being able to tell if
you're truly capable of being liked by someone.

Being black is convincing yourself you were constantly out
of place, that you never belonged
somewhere.

It is rarely seeing a doll that looks like you while seeing a
plethora of dolls in different "shades"
of white.

It is being deemed an "Oreo", for not acting Black enough;
Black on the outside, yet white on the
inside.

It is begging your mom to perm your hair since all the other
girls around you had pin-straight
hair while you had thick, nappy hair.

All because the kids won't stop looking and touching it.

Because of the coil forest that is on my head, will only be
seen as a petting zoo or toy to mess
with.

I am not a thin, straight-haired white girl despite what seems
to be all around me.

I am not and never will be at those standards.

Which is more than okay; a concept that took me far too long
to understand.

I was born with dark, beautiful brown skin and a head full of
curly hair.

I was born with an attitude that is often deemed aggressive
by my white counterparts.

But who are they to determine my value?

Who are they to determine what I can and cannot be?

Being black in a predominantly white town is learning
my worth.

It is learning that I am Black and beautiful.

Rivering

G.H. Mosson

Interweaving across rocks, water smooths
downstream and releases bubbles, which burst forth
oxygen and fuel the lush, fern-dazzled banks
where toads erupt
among May blossoms
with open mouths,
so too I zigzag through the language
with pen as passport to open lands
where tufts of grass hiccup
out of last year's wildfires,
where I pause by the flow to journal
revising what I know.



Wandering around Portugal, Mona Weber

As She Rises

Sherbie Corazza

the wave, she does not apologize
before slowly collapsing
in upon herself.

neither should you offer them repentance,
sweet girl, as you fold
beneath their weight.

feel the gilded sunshine on your shoulders
and Rise, every time.
a little closer

to the life you'll be proud to call yours.
the place where your hair
is free to dance

upon the breeze of change.
with no fear of becoming
all that you are.

Contributors

PATRICK ALLEN is retired and is a College of Southern Maryland professor emeritus.

STEPHEN M. BERBERICH best known for his thrilling mystery "Fatal Deadline," has published six novels and some short stories. He was a science and medical reporter before becoming impassioned, about writing fiction. He most recently turned another page to release a heartwarming children's picture book, "Punkie Speaks" about a homeless kitten. Berberich lives in Charles County, Maryland with his wife Diane and three rescued cats.

RANDY BRIDGEMAN holds a B.A. and M.A. in English and Creative Writing. He has been honored with the esteemed Edward T. Lewis Poetry Prize. His poetry has appeared in various poetry journals and collections. Randy has authored four poetry books: "South of Everywhere" (2005), "Mechanic on Duty" (2008), "The Odd Testament" (2013), and "The Poet Laureate of Cracker Town" (2015). His fifth book, "The Not So Happy Hour Poems," was published in April 2024.

SHERBIE CORAZZA is a local photojournalist, barefoot mural designer, picker of wildflowers, and overall seeker of silver linings. She loves her wife and their six children with the whole of her heart.

CHANI FLETCHER is nearly 19 and in her second semester as a first year CSM student studying English. She is from Waldorf, Maryland. She wrote her included poem on Halloween in 2022.

JENNIFER FOSSELL has worked as a mental health counselor at CSM since 2016. Before pivoting towards a second career as a social worker and mental health therapist, she worked as a writer and editor, and earned a B.A. and M.A. in English. She has always been fascinated by language and story and is continually surprised at the possibilities for insight and transformation that lay at the center of both writing/reading and the therapeutic process.

BRANDON HANSEN is in his early 20's and is from Prince George's County, Maryland.

KAREN SMITH HUPP is an avid photographer and writer, lives in Southern Maryland, works at the College of Southern Maryland, and finds the awesome in the ordinary of each day's journey

KATHERINE LASSMAN is an adjunct instructor of English composition and writing tutor at the CSM La Plata and Prince Frederick campuses. She holds an MFA in poetry from George Mason University and lives in Waldorf, Maryland, with her husband and three spoiled rotten felines named Joy, Grace, and Zany.

G.H. MOSSON is the author of two books and three chapbooks of poetry, including "Family Snapshot as a Poem in Time" (FLP 2019) and co-author of "Simultaneous Revolutions" (PM Press 2021). His poetry has appeared in The Tampa Review, The Evening Street Review, Smartish Pace, The Hollins Critic, and has been nominated four times for the Pushcart Prize. He has an M.A. from The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University, where he studied English meter on a teaching fellowship, and an MFA from New England College. For more, see www.ghmosson.com.

CIERRA NESTOR-GRAY is a 20-year-old residing in La Plata, Maryland, pursuing a degree in early childhood education. She aims to complete her associate degree first and then move on to earn her bachelor's degree at a university.

CHISOM OKOROHA is a first-year student at CSM. He picked up poetry his senior year of high school and has been writing ever since. He wants to pursue a career in acting and writing.

DIANE PAYNE is a full-time marketing specialist for the Marketing Department at CSM.

MARKALA PHARR is a senior at Huntingtown High School, is part of the early college program at the Prince Frederick C campus. Delighted to contribute to Connections Magazine, she is gaining confidence in her writing, which serves as a creative outlet. With this positive experience, she looks forward to future publishing opportunities.

JENNIFER POLHEMUS, an internationally published poet, lives in Central Pennsylvania in a concrete valley surrounded by

verdant mountain ridges where she goes to escape metropolitan madness. She has been publishing her writing for almost 30 years and started offering editing and creative writing coaching services about 10 years ago. She was nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize in Poetry. Her current projects include finding a publisher for “Hells and Heavens,” a novella co-authored with her mentor and former high school history teacher and completing “Her Believing Heart,” a multi-genre collection documenting a segment of a journey toward personal transformation.

RICHARD TAYLOR has recently retired from Mail, Shipping, and Receiving for Operations and Planning at CSM.

RICHARD WEAVER, post-COVID, has returned as the writer-in-residence at the James Joyce Pub in Baltimore. He published his first poem in Poetry Magazine in April 1975. He’s the author of “The Stars Undone” (Duende Press, 1992), and wrote the libretto for the symphony, “Of Sea and Stars” (2005). His 200th prose poem was recently published.

MONA WEBER feels that one should never stop taking a moment to look at nature to appreciate and enjoy its beauty.

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