

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

*Connections*



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COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND  
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*Alone on a Hill, Mona Weber*

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# Reading Byron's Mazeppa

*Patrick Allen*

It is said that the poetic is all around us  
If we but seek to see it.

I

It was that time in McMicken Hall  
I had just left ENG 411, Poetry of the Romantic Period.  
Walking across the green flecked marble floor  
toward the stairs  
And the large Cathedral windows at the end of the hallway  
When, there it was.  
Stuck in the crack between the yellow crepe sole  
And tan suede leather upper of my Thom McAn Desert Boots,  
A slip of paper, no bigger than a Chinese fortune, that read  
"To you, from an unknown friend."

II

Imagine the great lover strapped naked,  
Tied to the back of a wild stallion tearing across the Steppes.  
Then the fearless Cossacks, swooping down on Warsaw  
Their great Hetman, Mazeppa, at the head of their troop,  
Seeking his revenge on Count Casimir.

III

I remember Doctor Boyce's disapproving tsk, tsk, as he parsed  
the text,  
"Look at old Mazeppa  
Bragging about taking his revenge on Count Casimir,  
When it was his own lustful choice to bed his lord's wife, the  
beautiful Theresa,  
That had caused all the torment and the pain in his life."

IV

Staring at that little missive between my fingers  
I was a sea in the irresistible power of forbidden love  
And the petty thirsts for revenge within my own soul.  
So, all these years since,  
I written my best to say Thank You to all those friends,  
Both unknown and known.



*Africa, Kwaito Urban Groove, Georges Tadonki*

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## Patuxent Cinquain

*Amada Febres*

River  
Past my window  
Supplements my daily prayer  
With crab and oysters, drum and bass  
God's grace.



*A New Journey, Robin Karis*

---

## THURSDAY NIGHT DINNER AT POP-POP'S HOUSE

*Robin Karis*

Returning from  
Dodson's dockside  
store in Olivet with  
Sunkist oranges,  
fudge bars,  
hot dogs, penny  
candy, and Parkay  
in the squeeze bottle.

Bags dropped on  
the green kitchen  
table that is balanced  
by a matchbook, pushed  
against a white  
panel wall next  
to the staircase, as  
dinner prep begins.

Feeling the breeze  
from the window over  
the sink as it teases  
the pantry curtain door,  
worried the movement will awaken  
a specter from the bowels  
of the rustic  
closet that rarely has  
a bulb in the

---

single socket hanging on  
a cord from the  
ceiling. Fingers crossed  
because it's my turn  
to fetch the molasses bottle  
with the lion on the  
front; clammy hands feeling  
for the sticky bottle  
in the murky lair  
of colonized grand-daddy  
long-legs, making it feel  
like Halloween in June.  
But Aunt Stelle's hot  
rolls need molasses,  
so I have no choice.

Standing on a white  
painted iron chair pulled  
over to the stove,  
small hands holding forks  
with hot dogs speared,  
roasting them over the  
blue flame while Pop-Pop  
stands behind us.

The eat-in kitchen doubling  
as a concert hall,  
my brother, Jeff  
and I, gobbling scorched  
marshmallows for dessert,  
singing along  
with Jethro Tull  
on the eight  
track of "Bungle

---

in the Jungle"  
over and over again.  
"Well, that's all  
right by me, yeahh".

Shadeless  
lamp in  
the parlor  
making eyes  
squint to  
see The  
Waltons at  
eight o'clock.  
Never finishing an  
episode, but snuggled  
on the couch under a  
crocheted orange blanket,  
falling asleep, wondering  
what culinary delight  
awaits us for breakfast  
at Pop-Pop's house.

---

## Inside of a Five and Below

*Lily Benneer*

the blue afternoon is not the sun

the blue afternoon

is coped with—light dripping onto charcoal, grey  
superimposed, black the hot sky,

it could be penetrated but—it's a hole for a mouth, spitting up  
tiny records of "Feed me!" and "I

need to be changed," since when can a newborn talk?

there's a way out, oblong and white and—a hot pink pelt curls  
between my fingers, one of the

softest ever made, cold blushing millions and I mean millions

okay, focus, if I turn here—it dances, croaking some tune I  
heard once, two beads the size of my

thumb, I see myself in its eyes in splashes of citrus red 2 and  
yellow 5 washed out by the

---

blue afternoon, okay

I've passed the babies and the pelts and I'm so close to that  
white exit and—

oh my god, it comes with batteries



---

## Oh, Siri...

*Donna Sperry*

Me: Hey Siri, please play “In These Shoes” by Kirsty MacColl.

Siri: I don’t see that in Music.

Me: Oh, sorry sorry sorry!

Siri: No problem.

Me: Hey Siri, please play “In These Shoes” by Kirsty MacColl in Spotify.

Siri: Now playing “Love in Any Language” by Sandi Patty in Spotify.

Me: No! No! No! Stop! Stop! Stop! (enunciating) Hey Siri, please play “In These Shoes” by Kirsty MacColl in Spotify.

Siri: Now playing “In the Middle of a Great Erotic Fantasy” by Christine Michael in Spotify.

Me: Hey Siri, you’re killing me.

Siri: Hmm...is there something else I can help with?

Me: Nah, I’m good.



*Ollie and Mollie, Richard Taylor*

---

## Lovers of Valdaro

*Kathryn Dolan*

do you think if ash came falling towards our bodies  
we might struggle to breathe in our solitude  
that history would remember us as one?

or would your bones face away from mine on our final resting  
grounds as you decide my body is  
too warm to sleep next to or my hair itches your face or the  
skin on my knees is too thin so they  
poke you in a way that is not of your liking

maybe osteologists would be able to trace the position of my  
teeth and declare it as full of life or  
full of nothing at all

archaeologists will swoon at the rubble around our rotten  
frames we have held together for so  
long

only God will know our names  
only God will know our love

and I am afraid the best of us will come when we know  
it is the end

---

## What is Love?

*Morgan Carder*

Asking, “What is love?” is an awfully big question, a  
question that has a slightly different answer for every person.  
I haven’t lived long, but I’ve lived long enough, loved and been  
loved enough, to have an answer of my own.

Love is sharing rumbling laughter with my best friend.  
Laughing so hard that my stomach starts to hurt and tears  
prick in my eyes, and I’m filled with the type of brightly  
colored joy we had as kids. Joy that feels the same now as  
it did all those years ago. Though, it’s grown up with us. We  
have gotten to grow together and stick by each other for the  
better part of a decade, and I can’t thank her enough for all the  
laughter-filled days she’s given me.

Love is going into my sister’s room to tell her,  
“Goodnight,” only for one of us to tell the other, “Oh, one more  
thing, really quick—” We procrastinate going to bed to tell one  
more story from our day or one more joke or one more thought  
that hits us right in time to stall. “One more” is often ten more  
and time blurs past us; we don’t know how we got from Point A  
to Point... whichever letter we end up on, but going to bed way  
later than intended is worth it. It is always worth it, no matter  
how tired we are when we say, “Goodnight” for real.

Love is the pride I feel when I say something funny and  
my dad laughs, deep from his stomach. (I feel really proud  
when he goes off to tell someone else what I said!) He has a  
way of mixing his quips with moments of wisdom that he  
shares with me on one-on-one rides in his truck. Both sides of

---

him, the Jokester and the Wiseman, are deeply appreciated. I'm honored to see them, to see my dad in a more grown-up light. He still teases me, as he's done since I was little, but his humor has shifted as I have grown, as I have shifted. In ways, I have seen my dad grow.

Love is persistence. If anyone has been persistent, that has been my mom. Pushing me to do my best relentlessly. Re-lent-less-ly. It is her way of looking me in the eye and telling me, "I know your potential, now you have to see it," and knowing I can do something and pushing until I can see it, too. Sometimes, the push is hard, and maybe it's what I need to go forward. My mom has told me for a long time that I tend to get stuck. Deeply stuck, in one place, on one thought or track of mind, and she has been there to help unstick me many times over. For as deeply and terribly as I have gotten stuck, she has worked to get me out of it. To have my back. To go up to bat for me and fight against the dumb, the ignorant, and the cruel who don't know what to say when I am stuck. I don't know where or what I would be stuck in now if I didn't have her persistence.

Love is silence. Peace. The lack of stress with having to constantly talk with constant energy. I like to talk (A. Lot.), but I like silence, too. I like being understood without words, being read easily when something is off. A lot can be communicated without words, and I like learning what all that is.

Though, there is plenty of love in: "I know you," "I'm here," "You can tell me what's wrong," "Don't worry, I've got it," "I'm grateful for you," "Look at you go!" "I admire you a lot," "I'm proud of you, if I haven't said that in a while."

---

These words and this work may look very different in a handful of years, I know that much. But I will also say that right now, at these crossroads in my life, of reaching two decades old and having an entire world in front of me, I am surrounded by love. I am surrounded by it at every corner, even when I cannot see it. I have lived long enough to find love in all its forms, that of which I may never be able to express my gratitude for.

---

## A Letter to My Sister

*Jalynn Cozzens*

A letter to my sister  
who feels so alone,  
who hates her body  
so much that  
she cuts her wrists  
with scissors  
in the dark  
where nobody can see.

A letter to my sister  
who is so loved  
but does not accept it,  
who is worthy,  
and cared for,  
and brings so much happiness.

A letter to my sister:  
I love you,  
and I am here for you,  
always.

A letter to my sister.

---

## I Heard the Moon

*Gurneet Gill*

I am easy company for a quiet night.

My aimless thoughts roam,  
Carried by soft winds as I look to the moon.

Its light shines and dims among glistening stars,  
While clouds eagerly race across the sky.

In a moment where the sky cleared,  
The gaze of the moon affectionately fell onto the earth.

Between the prying winds and the shifting moonlight,  
It almost became a conversation.

In this peace,  
We shared an understanding of how time moves on.

From that eternal vantage,  
The moon's wonder naturally called our fondness.

Simply in taking its place in the sky,  
In simply being, there is abundant meaning.

Returning to the whims of the breeze,  
As the moonlight faded, I was left to watch the world.

Guiding the shadows of the trees,  
Where life continued to heal, dream, sing, and fly,  
The moon shows me how the night lends itself

---

To the imagination of the world.

I take in the cool air,  
Listening to the songs of the night,  
Answering my loneliness,  
As if the earth remembered me.

The bright moonlight returns.  
Under my breath,  
I whispered to the moon,  
“What do you want to show me now?”

Then spoke the moon,  
“As I am, so are you.”



*Stairway to Heaven, Richard Taylor*



---

## 222

*Angelia Carson*

for now i'm a lone star,  
feel free to wish on me wherever you are.

we'll share a record player  
and take each other for another spin.  
all the flowers you gave me  
i've pressed and kept in a tin.

and that song that was stuck in your head  
becomes the words i look for at night.  
i've got the fire baby  
if you need to bum a light.

every night i say goodnight to the honeycomb moon,  
and everything in my room.  
i'm sorry when i take my sweet time  
counting on sheep  
and on you.

do you still see me in the roadside flowers?  
remember when we laid in them  
for years or for hours?

i said i'd live for him — he said he'd kill for me.  
ever since you fled to the city,  
i still see you in everything

ya gotta find the poetry.  
i know you're on your way home,

---

so i'll make you a cup of tea.

rainbow paint  
raining down your chest  
i miss when you would tell me how to dress...

do you still see me in the roadside flowers?  
remember when we laid in them  
for years or for hours?

you say in another dimension  
everything is square,  
i say maybe everyone  
wears flowers in their hair.

i know you'll love me  
no matter what i said,  
i know you'll love me  
till my last breath.

if i lost you  
between the crack  
between my bed and the wall  
i'd still find you  
222.

i know you'll be the cause of my death  
and i've been praying for you baby  
since the moment i left

---

# The Knife

*Brenna McLaren*

It's 8pm, and Vega is thinking about killing herself. She's sitting on the roof of some building she doesn't know the name of, watching the moon between the high-rise apartments around her. It's dark out, and the air is still and cool. She's high enough up that the street sounds barely reach her, and there's a tense sort of quiet as she thinks. See, death is something Vega thinks about quite a bit, even when she doesn't have a Knife in her hands. But tonight, she has the knife, and the rooftop, and probably some bleach under the kitchen sink if she feels like going back home. Vega is surrounded by death.

She's never met another person with a Knife. Not in person, at least. There are stories of Knives all over the news, and drawings of them on the internet, and warnings in school about what to do if you suddenly get one. The Knives are everywhere, and yet Vega's own Knife is the only one she's ever seen. Then again, most people with Knives generally don't show them off.

But Vega lives in a modern world, where the Knives are considered an archaic oddity, one that can be managed and even healed. She's read page after page on theories on what the Knives are or why they appear. Some say it's the sign of a sick society, where people are so disconnected from one another that their cut ties can physically manifest. Others believe it to be an ancient curse, one that will go away if you swear to the right deity. Most healers say it's an imbalance in one's natural magic, a tragic physical flaw that can be fixed with supplements. Even Vega is on the medications

---

prescribed by her doctor, the ones that are supposed to make the Knives go away.

Her Knife does not seem to care.

It's beautiful, Vega admits. And terrifying. The blade is a shimmering silver metal, and it has hypnotic black patterns running down the length of it. She turns it over in her hands, admiring it. So sharp. It would cut through her skin so easily, and then it would all be over. No more waiting. No more hushed whispers from her parents, no more visits to the doctor or therapist, no more aching certainty that this is how she dies. She doesn't realize she's pricked herself until she sees the blood running down her finger.

Vega's face feels cold, suddenly. Then warm. Then—oh. She's crying. She sits for a moment, not bothering to wipe away the tears. She's very small, she realizes, out here under the cloudless sky. Even the skyscrapers rising around her can't block out the feeling of vast emptiness. She closes her eyes, and leans forward, and then she's tumbling off the roof.

For a moment, everything is dark. Cold. Finally.

And then the wind is curling over her body, wrapping her limbs in magical warmth, and she is floating in midair. When she opens her eyes, still upside down, she's high above the buildings, gazing at the city spread out below her like a reflection of a starry sky.

"Thanks," she murmurs. The wind—her patron and friend—sends a rush of icy air up the back of her shirt. Vega swears and rolls in the air so she's right-side-up again.

---

“Hey! I knew you’d catch me, it’s fine!”

She lets sparks of power flick off her fingers in retaliation. The wind’s grasp on her vanishes, and she’s falling again. The weightlessness is comforting, and so is the warmth of the wind that hasn’t left her, even as she free-falls. The Knife clutched in her clean hand feels cold in comparison.

The wind slows her fall, drops her a few feet too high onto the same roof she slipped off of and she’s sent rolling across the cement.

“Ouch.” The wind is flickering and tugging at her clothes, asking what in the stars Vega was thinking. She isn’t sure, now. The flight had filled something in her, chased off the cold gnawing at her chest. The Knife in her hands is even colder than the roof she’s laying on. Hm.

Vega stands, annoyed. The wind is still whipping around her, still agitated. A chilly warning breeze trickles up her neck.

“Relax, I’m not doing that again.”

The wind seems unconvinced, but she can deal with that later. She studies the Knife in her hand. Shimmering. Tantalizing. An end to the exhaustion, the waiting. She lifts the blade, and—

She hurls it off the edge of the rooftop.

The wind twists, warm and delighted, and Vega watches as it lifts the Knife in its coiling grasp and begins carrying it somewhere far, far away. It won’t last—the stupid thing will show up again eventually, like it always does. But for now,

---

there is no Knife. There is no looming certainty of death, no grasping void in her throat, and no inky venom clogging her mind. Vega is free, and the wind is flickering warm over her face and hands, and everything is right with the world. She jumps off the roof—and this time, she’s pulling on her power to sail across the night sky.

It’s 9pm, and Vega has shit to do.

---

# Counterpoint<sup>1</sup>

*Stephanie Sweeney*

## A.

Everything—the ground, the leaves, the walls—is damp with morning dew. The birds are so loud, not a chorus but a riot, a flash mob of birdsong. You are nearly blinded by the shimmer of the grey world.

It's all coming through you in a flood. On one hand, you could feel guilty for the excess—the indulgence! But on the other, you might accept that you are powerless against this grace and ride the wave until it inevitably recedes. You are a vessel, and this is not about you. (Though of course, you want it to be.)

And it is about you. You remember the ugly orange carpet, fibers fuzzing up in whorls—don't you? The one you learned to crawl on? It

## B.

Your father dreamed like this: in long stretches of lyric and melody, downstairs, late into the night. You fell asleep to his voice crooning softly over piano chords, or to the contemplative wail of the saxophone. (And when it was the saxophone, it was always from the basement, with the door closed—your mother needed her children to sleep.)

Sometimes, he got started before it was time for bed and played a tune for you and your sisters to jump around to, *accelerando* and *crescendo* until the three of you were giddy and breathless, whirling around the room. He must have been tired after a day of work and shuttling ballet dancers, violin students,

---

was like this then. A rush of feeling and sound, the smell of wet rice, and what is this and how do I?—the weightlessness of transition.

You remember shrieking as you fled from the inflatable kiddie pool, docked in the shallows of a dry grass ocean; shrieking because a bee dared to sting you while you cooled off from the thick, hot stillness of summer. You remember the beautiful, battery-operated puppy with curly white fur that could walk across the carpet—so cute and awkward you almost believed it was real.

Everything is real now. That is the blessing and the curse of growing older. You are trying to catch what you can in a net you are weaving of words, because you know it all goes: the good, the bad, the beautiful.

and gymnasts; still, he descended the stairs to practice after dinner and found something like a reason. A doorway to himself.

You wonder what doorway your mother had.

Maybe, after working all day herself, mothering three children, making dinner, and maintaining an orderly home with four messy housemates, she had no use for a doorway—what she needed was a bed.

You wonder whether your father was swept up in a flood those nights, blinded by the shimmer. Whether he was a vessel for something only he knew had to be birthed. You wonder whether he felt guilty for the indulgence.

You think: we are all just trying to catch what we can before it goes.

*(continued)*

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*(continued)*

<sup>1</sup>“*Counterpoint*: The combination of two or more independent melodies into a single harmonic texture in which each retains its linear character.”

*Merriam-Webster*. [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/counterpoint](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/counterpoint)



*Blossom, Diane Payne*



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## Residents of Perfection Announce the Passing of Better Way

*Mary Johnson*

The Better Way perished yesterday, leaving behind a number of off-spring including Dogma, System, and Authority. Mayor Perfection mourned, all the while, vehemently denying any involvement in the demise. “Perfectionists have always stood up for the Better Way,” he’d insisted. “We didn’t see it coming, and that’s not like me,” said Mr. Disdain, the leader of a local club chapter. He went on, “Our Cluster alone started 50 years ago. Better Way is gone, but we’re beyond confident, we’ll determine what to do”.

Better Way devotees ask supporters to hold fast at their stations. After all, Better Way Backers gather strength in numbers and remain clannish with dominance. Their sagacity, however, can’t clarify the loss. Over time the community of Perfection watched Faultlessness bloom and Thoroughness reinforced. Sure, there’d been some uprisings from the Mundane now and again but those weren’t worth mentioning. That last one was a doozy though. Authenticity and Reality broke into the mix. “Why can’t they see that we’re trying to help them?” became the battle cry of the BWB. “You Know We’re Right!” splashed on screens and car bumpers. The tactics, although widespread, failed.

The Better Way may have foreseen an early expiration as these final written remarks attest. Addressed to those concerned: “As the Better Way, it is an honor to patronize

---

those so deserving. When I leave you, please know, that hereafter, my place is secure. As long as there are Rules to impose, Practices to admonish, and Revenge to exact—I will live on in you.”



*African Woman, Portrait, Georges Tadonki*

---

## Indigenous Perspective

*Madison Scott*

Kutâputunumuw wuchee wamee tyâqasuneesh  
Our men are out on the herring run  
Kutâputunumuw wuchee keesuq  
A strange figure on the waves, what hath god made?  
Kutâputunumuw wuchee anaquhsak  
Their ship makes a crash as it pulls up to port  
Kutâputunumuw wuchee ahkee  
A massacre, concealed in a disguise of aid

Kutâputunumuw wuchee seep8ash  
I guess white man didn't like our hosting  
Kutâputunumuw wuchee kuhtahanash  
Or something of the sort  
Kutâputunumuw wuchee wâmee awaâhsak  
Can you imagine the look on Moshup's face  
Kutâputunumuw wuchee wâmee nâtôqahsuk  
As Thanksgiving was served alla-morte?

Anunumâuneân nâmunât weepêe wâneekuk  
This is the story they won't teach in school  
Anunumâuneân useenât weepêe sôpwâk  
You're eating turkey, with a side of genocide.



## The Majesty of the Eyo Festival

*Moyosore Adesanya*

### The History and Spirit of the Eyo Festival

As dawn breaks over Lagos, the air buzzes with anticipation, alive with the sights and sounds of the legendary Eyo Festival. A tradition deeply symbolic for the people of Lagos, a Yoruba tribe in Nigeria. The white robes of the Eyo masqueraders billow like clouds, gliding gracefully through the city streets under a sky washed in hues of blue and gold. Each Eyo carries a beautifully carved wooden staff, symbolic

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of the Yoruba ancestors, as their rhythmic movements are matched by the resonant beats of talking drums and haunting flute melodies that echo across the city. Originating in the 19th century, the Eyo Festival began as a ceremonial tribute to departed kings, uniting the past and present in a powerful celebration of Yoruba heritage. The masqueraders, known as Eyo, embody more than mere performance, they are spiritual guides honoring those who came before us, dressed in white to represent purity and respect.

### A Living Legacy

Growing up, I remember standing in awe as the procession passed, listening to my grandfather's stories of his youth at the festival, where he first learned the values of honor and connection to our heritage. The Eyo masqueraders, with their graceful movements and flowing white robes, seemed almost mystical to me back then, like figures from another world. Today, the Eyo Festival remains a living legacy that stands as a powerful testament to the enduring strength of cultural identity. In a world where globalization often blurs cultural lines, the yearly Eyo festival celebration binds us to our past and inspires hope for the future.



*Defiance, Sue Strickland*

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## The Spider and the Beetle's Wish

*James Coleman*

“Last call!” the spider announced with a performed glee in his voice. He raised all six of his arms before theatrically slamming them on the bar counter.

Cheers, chirps, and chitters erupted from the various patrons of the tavern. It had been a particularly rowdy night as spring was still freshly upon the bugs of the village. The rain showers continued and what felt like every bug in town packed themselves in the bar to celebrate. It was a time of new beginnings and everyone was excited. Valen, the spider, did not share in that joy as he was already preparing another round of Bloody Mayflies and Silverfish Sunrises. With a smile and a sigh easily drowned out by the drunken singing, he passed down the drinks to the numerous bees, beetles, and ants.

“Wait, I asked for some apple juice please!” the diminutive voice was just loud enough to not only be heard by the spider, but the rest of the patrons.

A deafening silence shot through the tavern like a wave. Valen looked down to see a cloaked figure with two large mandibles protruding from the hood. She carried with her a large pack filled with all sorts of trinkets and survival gear. A chorus of laughter erupted from the delirious drunken bugs of the tavern.

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“Oh, sorry about that ma’am” he said, puzzled and completely off guard.

Someone asking for something not alcoholic felt like a sin with the way this night has been so far. He took her previous drink and immediately slid it down the counter not caring which bug took it. Then he turned to pour the juice, but suddenly the hairs on the spider’s arms tingled with the vibration of heavy footsteps now behind him.

“HA, I knew it! It IS that crazy stag beetle lady!”

He turned back around to see a group of insects crowding and laughing at the beetle. They pulled off her cloak and were messing with her pack, poking at the trinkets.

One began to speak. “So, what is it this time? Magic beans? Golden eggs? A cursed skull?”

“My name is Darla and it’s a wish granting clover!” she admitted, while also wrestling for her pack with all four of her arms. “It’s super rare, only growing at the beginning of spring.”

“The one from the children’s story?” a mantis shouted from the back, followed by more laughter.

The beetle sighed. “Actually, do you mind if I take this drink to go? I promise I’ll return the cup.”

Valen shot her a judgmental glare. But when he did, he saw the tears welling up in the corner of her eyes. There was hesitation but he gave in. “Yeah sure.”

The beetle quickly yet politely grabbed the drink from his hand and briskly left the tavern. He doubted he was

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getting that cup back. Later that night, Valen closed up. He unsurprisingly had a lot of floor mopping to do. So now he was more tired than he would’ve liked to be. His mind began to work on autopilot. But the crack of thunder broke his already loose concentration. He looked out of the open windows and saw the rain pouring down harder. Then he looked at the remaining mess of the tavern. All eight of his eyes slowly blinked. And with not a thought more, Valen went home.

Darla rose from her bed with a yawn. She stretched her upper arms as her lower arms pulled off the covers of her bed. Ever since her estrangement from her family, this lonely little apartment on the outskirts of town had been her home. Darla’s parents were not fond of her carefree lifestyle, especially with their upper-class reputation on the line. As soon as the beetle was of age, her parents cast her out as a disappointment. The memories of that night still brought tears to Darla’s eyes. After swiftly changing into her usual gear, she opened the circular cover to her window that everyone uses to block the rain. The world was beautiful and adventure felt like it called around every corner. She just wished she had someone to share it with.

Darla shook the sad thoughts away and finished getting ready. But before she set off, the beetle had a cup she needed to return. Unfortunately, what should’ve been a quick pit stop turned into disaster when Darla rounded the corner to see the soggy rubble and remains of that spider’s tavern. It looked like it was sunken into the ground and half of the roof caved in. Valen was already there to open up but now he was knee deep in the rubble, pulling pieces aside and sifting through it frantically. The spider’s eyes were red from tears and the hairs on his body were all standing up in a frustrated frenzy. Darla tip-toed through the rubble and tapped him on the shoulder.



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“What are you doing here?” he said with equal part annoyance and weariness.

“I came to stop by and give you your cup back,” she timidly passed it over. “How did this happen?”

Valen gave out an exasperated shrug with his upper arms as his lower ones kept busy with the sifting.

Resigning herself, Darla continued. “Oh, well for what it’s worth, I’m sorry. Here I’ll get out of your hair now.”

“Wait. You’re looking for that stupid clover from the story, right?”

“I mean I wouldn’t say stupid, and it’s not just a story. But yes.”

Valen looked down at all that remained. A broken frame laid atop the rubble. He picked it up and saw the image of a spider holding her child. They stood in front of the tavern with big smiles on their faces. Tears began to swell up once more and the grief made it all but inevitable what he said next.

“Wait, take me with you,” he desperately pleaded.

Thus began their journey to Clover Meadows, with the sun now high overhead. The pair started their trek with a steep hike down the hill where their village was located. Valen brought with him a small pouch as he never packed for a big trip before. His entire adult life consisted of three locations: home, the tavern, and sometimes the market. Now they were under the clear blue sky in midst of nature. The breeze flew gently through his hair and the sun felt like a warm hug on his

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skin. He missed this feeling from his youth. And although he had been rather occupied with grief, the spider was surprised and took note of the beetle’s resilience and knowledge. When they had to cross a treacherous stream, she had a staff tucked away to make sure they didn’t get swept away in the water. When Valen’s pouch quickly ran out of food, she kindly gave him some of hers. Even as they hiked through the thick grass of the field, she marched on with determination. Not bad for the crazy beetle lady. And as he thought to himself, Valen locked deep eye contact with Darla. But just as he was about to apologize, she began to speak.

“Sorry for staring at you. I just still can’t get over having another person with me on adventure.”

Valen tried his best not to sound surprised. “You’ve been alone this whole time?”

Darla paused for a moment and looked away again as she continued. “Well, yes, actually. Ever since I got kicked out from my parent’s place it’s just been me. It’s okay though I’m used to it,” She looked back with what he knew was a forced smile.

“Oh. Ohhhh wait a minute. Isn’t that really sa-?”

Darla outstretched her arms in front of Valen, stopping the both of them, her jovial demeanor now gone in an instant. She placed a finger over his mandibles to quiet him as she scanned the skies overhead. The silence was chilling and the air was completely still, save that for the feint rhythmic vibrations he felt throughout the hair on his body. The sudden tension unnerved the spider like he wouldn’t believe.

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“What is that?” He had to ask at last.

Darla shushed him before speaking as softly as she could manage. “Look up, it’s a damn kestrel!”

The predatory bird hovered in the sky like a malevolent god. Its features were silhouetted by the fading light of the sunset. The only thing they could make out was the twinkle of its eye gazing straight down upon them. They were now spotted. Valen’s heart sank to his stomach. His mind now a flurry of anxiety and memories, so much so he began to shiver. The willpower was draining from his body and fatigue was seeping in to take its place.

“Hey hey, look on the bright side. We’re nearly at Clover Meadows. But we got to now, look!” Darla screamed while pointing skyward.

In an instant the kestrel’s wings retracted, beginning its transformation into a living torpedo. Its spotted feathers were a fiery glow casted by the sunlight that only grew more intense as its divebomb began to pick up speed towards the two bugs. Darla grabbed Valen’s hands and together they made a mad dash deeper into the field. Blades of grass, one-by-one, turned into clovers as they continued their sprint. But there was no time to marvel at it. The kestrel cast a shadow on its prey and its shriek was now ear-splitting. The gap had been closed and time was up.

But just as abruptly, the chase ended when the two bugs tripped and tumbled down a ledge in the ground. With a powerful boom, the kestrel crashed into the ground and tumbled forward over the ledge where the bugs now hid. It

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continued to careen ahead with the momentum, thrashing all the while until it got enough control to ascend back into the sky.

Darla chuckled in disbelief. “Well, that was lucky. But now we need a plan because otherwise we are doomed. Are you okay though?”

Valen was now full-on hyperventilating. “That bird. That’s the one that killed my mother,” the memories were now fully vivid. “It was not long after she opened the tavern and we went out to celebrate. She set up a picnic in the field and there that monster was. In the blink of an eye, she and it were gone.”

“Oh wow, I am so sorry Valen,” the beetle kneeled down and placed her hands on his shoulders. “Listen, I’ll distract the bird so you can get the Wishing Clover and get out of here. Go wish for your tavern back.”

“Wait, how did you-?”

Darla stood up with a smile and pulled out the staff she kept in her pack. “C’mon man. It was obvious.”

The kestrel announced its return with another shriek, but this time the beetle responded with her own battle cry as they locked eyes. Once again it prepared to divebomb. The spider darted away deeper into the patch. Darla said the Wishing Clover had four leaves but right now every clover was a blur of green as he kept on running. The sounds of combat were growing ever more intense. In his panic, he tripped and his pouch exploded onto the ground, spilling out all of its contents. Valen looked down at all that remained, and amidst the supplies his gaze laid upon the photo of the two smiling

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spiders. He tearfully smiled, placing it back into his pouch. It was all but inevitable what he did next.

Darla dashed around to the side of the kestrel, deflecting a few of its pecks with her staff. She made a lunge for its wings but the beast rose into the air and knocked her back with a gust of wind. Then it made a lunge of its own towards the beetle. Darla pulled out her staff, readying herself for one last adventure. But then suddenly the kestrel was struck in the side of the head. It bellowed a cry as there stood Valen, offering a hand down towards her, to which she promptly took.

“You came back? But what about the clover?”

“Darla, right now my only wish is for us to get through this. Together.”

The kestrel rose back to its feet, shaking off the surprise attack, but the pair of bugs already were set. The spider dashed straightforward while the beetle flanked around the side. The beast opened its maw but Valen wrapped all six of his arms around its beak, keeping it shut. There was a thread of web kept in his pouch so he began to wrap it around the beast’s mouth. It thrashed about, but this time Darla kept firmly planted to the ground, waiting for it to turn its back to her.

Once the opportunity presented itself, she leaped forward onto the beast. In a panic, the kestrel once more swiftly took off in the air. The sudden winds of the sky made Valen lose his grip on the beast. Darla outstretched her upper two arms while her bottom two remained firmly held on. With all her strength and what was left of her luck, she caught him and pulled him back on.

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“You’re going to want to hold on for what’s next!” she shouted.

Darla crawled up forward towards the top of the beast’s back. There, she wrapped her staff around the front of his neck and with her two large mandibles, she squeezed into the kestrel’s throat. The bird’s flapping grew faster and more frenzied until finally, it gave out. Like a meteor, their fast descent began. The beetle had barely anytime to react before BOOM. The ground.

Darla woke up. Once more in bed. She jolted up, forgoing her morning stretch. But soon a rush of soreness all over her body brought her down to her knees. But as she fell, six arms appeared and caught her, sitting her back down on the bed.

“Relax. You’ve been out for a week. You need to eat,” Valen used a spare arm to pass her a bowl of soup.

“What’s in this?”

“Kestrel meat,” The spider smiled. “Yeah, after we crashed, I had to drag you back to town.”

She shook her head “Wait! What about the Wishing Clover and your tavern?”

“Yeah, that was the least of my concern. Besides I just got my wish.”

The two gazed into each other’s eyes, longingly, both seeing the future and a world of possibilities within them. But then Valen continued.

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You know, I have been wondering though. What were you even going to wish for?"

With a smile she placed her hand on his. "It doesn't matter because I think I just got mine as well."

The two embraced and a day later, Darla recovered. Together, they set off on new adventures.



*The Despair of Masking, Victoria McCreary*

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# Zany Brainy

*Zane D. King*

It is I  
aware of self who differs brain power.  
Fixating; corresponding to an assembly line  
and all I daily keep on inside out.  
Chatters whimsically o' noiselessly of thy' attract  
directly, and off I go to act  
out of the limited cavern of imagination:

La' figure I see of woman out the cavern, clothed flesh  
amidst outlined ladies thus fresh  
done and do earth-like or out of this world.  
Insist to observe and favor fantasies at its finest!  
Exceeds by art; the stiffest  
so, said.

Brainy  
yet too angst to record feminine names of the imagined.  
Stuttering; neural mash of words constantly randomized.  
Heavens o' mighty, bore it daily and fixating other trivial tastes  
that bothers my nerves and refrains my true, creative  
activities  
o' that deficit complementing in vain!

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Zany  
no matter, I do so visibly best to speak  
the human standard peak.  
Fervor of endless dreams  
fun to nostalgia that gleams out there on me.  
For where I stand in la' continuum, is advantageous to  
open up  
the noiseless entrance, out to present my cerebral distinction:

I am Zany...am Brainy.  
Shines like rose quartz in the cavern  
valuable in that spectrum.  
Sparkles best thy' progress pursuing skills of intellect  
that attains the visible self in me to all.

Zany Brainy  
the unique and imaginative cavern I thus relate amongst thee.

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# The Library

*Kaleena Gonzalez*

The library is not  
as quiet as most believe.  
The moment she steps in  
the busy scents of  
cleaning supplies, paper,  
sweat, and perfume hits her.

The sun, though silent, shines  
bright in her eyes to greet her.  
She sits in a cold chair  
with fake leather that sticks  
against her legs, and she listens.

A child is crying.  
His mother shushes him.  
Two teenagers chat  
while they shuffle through pages.  
Car and house keys click together,  
and patrons clack at their keyboards.

A dad and his toddler  
crash two wooden cars.  
The toddler shrieks with laughter.  
Somewhere, a constant woosh  
from some machine  
fills the air.  
The child is crying again.  
The mother keeps shushing.

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Even the books  
are loud in their own way.  
A rainbow of covers  
begging to be read.

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# Infection

*Taylor Tanner*

Exterminating pests  
is a common practice.  
We kill them at their roots,

a job well done.

We're so proud to stop parasites  
that may spread.  
Invasive species and plagues prevented,  
but who's to say humans aren't a virus?

Society sneers at invasions,  
destroying them before the takeover. They claim everything  
around  
until it is only infection that remains.

We seek to control the spread -  
"cures" created every year.  
Yet when Mother Nature sends havoc our way,  
who's to say she's not doing the same?

We spread like a virus  
contagious to everything in our path.  
Innovation and colonization  
infecting our earth.

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Humans are an invasive species  
taking over the earth.  
Who's to say Mother Nature  
won't exterminate us herself?





*Untitled Submission, Heather Christian*

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## Flowering Bee

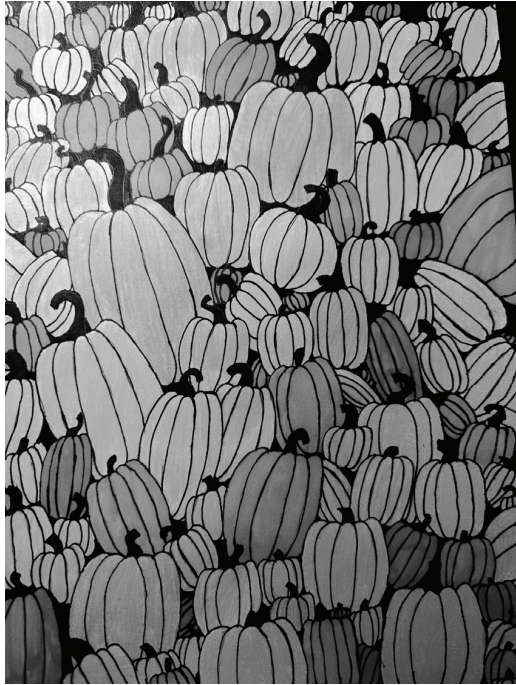
*Micheal (Cole) York*

Among the fields of clover,  
A lone daffodil is crushed,  
Spotted with a broken stem.

The caring bee pollinates—  
Her smile,  
Her laughter,  
Her touch,  
Her care.

Life returns to the flower,  
But the bee cannot stay.  
The broken flower watches  
As it flutters away.

Repaired stem,  
Broken heart, the flower wilts all the same.



*Pumpkin Patch, Liam Reeb*

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## Day Sail

*Catherine Tilley*

The mainsail popped as the wind picked up. Whitecaps broke atop the rolling swells on the Chesapeake Bay and we knew the hull speed had quickened to at least Force 6. The sailboat heeled deeply raising a tightness in my chest. Sailing is a constant negotiation. The captain is never completely master.

We have always been water people. My brother, Walt, and I spent many summers on the island of Newfoundland where my mother immersed us in the culture, music and outport life of her beloved island. Now I live on the Chesapeake Bay where gulls roll in the air overhead and Ospreys build their nest in the top of the channel markers. Among lines of pilings and boats tied deftly into slips, the wharfs' gray weathered boards lay stacked with crab traps and strewn with lines and tackle. My sailboat jumps at its cleats, always ready for the wind. It is hard to conceive of any life away from a shoreline.

As I worked to reef the mainsail I shouted to Walt "pull the jib down." He passed me a look as he reached for the winch handle. Walt liked to sail without pushing the limits and felt that the bay was not a place to prove anything. I raised myself out of my seat while holding tightly on the wheel, scanning for debris or other boats. Suddenly, the wind changed coming around a point and moved to what had been the leeward side of the mainsail. The boom instantly swung hard across center. "Jibe!" shouted Walt. It hit me hard on the right hip and

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when the boom's energy transferred to my body I was lifted instantly into the air.

I seemed to hang in the air for an unnaturally long time. The wild waves and whitecaps were raw and beautiful from that perspective. I pondered the best way to enter the water — shallow dive, hands over my face, Superman style with one mighty fist forward — and also wondered whether the Bull Shark spotted recently at the mouth of the bay could have traveled northward. Then I plunged into the water.

I kicked while my arms pulled my body through the green expanse. It seemed like an endless climb until I finally broke the surface and began treading water fiercely as I rose and fell on the rolling swells. I recognized my grave errors — I had not put on a flotation jacket nor clipped on when the conditions changed. Praying that Walt's rescue skills were still honed, I suddenly remembered my first rescue.

At every level in our sailing classes, we spent the last hour performing crew overboard drills. Each student would take the role of captain as a bright orange float we had named Bob was thrown overboard. The float represented the unfortunate overboard victim. The appointed captain would take command of the rescue: he would designate a spotter, bring the boat to a beam reach and maneuver through both the figure-eight method and then the broad reach-close reach methods. Bob would be pulled from the water during both exercises. On the first day of this exercise, I fumbled and lost the float, then watched it slip away in the waves. I had to turn to the instructor and crew and confess, "I killed Bob." My reputation was sealed in that moment.

I could not see the sailboat as I dropped into the deep

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alternating troughs of the waves. Cold panic spread over my mind laying images of a dark outcome. The sudden hard smack of a life ring landing on the surface close to my shoulder startled me to action. I quickly guided an arm through it and held on tight. Walt tied off the ring and pulled me over to the boat's leeward side. As the hull rolled hard in the swells, he wrangled a ladder over and helped me climb back on deck. I was cold and my legs were shaking uncontrollably. Walt sat down and ran his hand over his face slowly as he exhaled in relief, then he looked up at me. His face softened, "Welcome aboard, Bob."



*Kaisergebirge, Mona Weber*

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## Passing Days

*Larrissa Wolford*

Morning:  
Golden sunshine lays  
her hand on my sleeping face,  
I arise with warmth

Evening:  
Gentle whispers urge  
me to bloom in the sun winds,  
but I wilt moon graves

Night:  
Crystal stars guide me  
through frozen moonflowers where  
my peaceful dreams die.

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# wintering in

*Randolph Bridgeman*

this morning, winter is falling everywhere  
gathering, softening lines  
blurring rooftops

it has come to the coast  
to the chesapeake bay where it clings  
to what it can  
sand  
rock  
scarred wooden pylons that know  
the waters resolve

spreading ice beneath the docks  
the collective force of the undercurrents  
buckling  
cracking  
folding in on itself  
leaving marks below the surface  
a damage uncovered in the low tides  
of summer

ice has white-knuckled the edges of the bay  
and mirrored this graying eternity  
that drifts through barren limbs  
looping itself in the branches  
like cursive chalked  
on faded slate  
in these woods my morning walks write  
the existence of something human

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upon this landscape

i go unnoticed in this universe  
where the tracks of some poor creature  
is heading for the tree line

or the muffled howl of something hungry  
is heard there in the underbrush

or the screeching of a timber hawk  
returning with something half-alive in its  
talons make me look up at the tops  
of the forest bowing in the direction of  
a persistent wind

vines through a rock wall reach toward  
a winter sunlight and my thoughts turn  
toward the sermon in these woods

the theology in the seasons fading one  
into another  
a renewal  
a resurrection  
a salvation of sorts beneath the snow  
as the tops of trees push into  
low white clouds like poles  
against the canvas of that revival tent  
last August where the feet of the saved  
trampled this very meadow beneath it  
out on the highway snow has covered  
the two lanes  
one toward the city and the other  
running away  
telephone poles are set about

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like druid stones  
those blue rocks of Wales on that icy plain  
the light is aligning inner circles  
of electrical wires laden with ice  
the low  
dull hum  
of civilization  
in its transformers  
my tracks have gone missing  
traceless in the snows drifting  
no distinctions between earth and sky  
field or highway  
my voice going unheard within these  
insulated woods  
except by some rodent clearing the door to its den  
or a gray tipped owl enduring  
or the outstretched wings of something circling

winter subdues my mind  
it's an estranged light that profiles my soul  
in transition

my aimless depression as i track home  
this wintry mix

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## Contributors

**MOYOSORE ADESANYA** Mo, as she is fondly called, is an international student from Lagos, Nigeria, and a mother of two adorable kids. She is currently taking prerequisite courses at CSM to enable her to enroll in the associate degree in nursing program. Adesanya has a degree in business administration. She believes it's never too late to start over again.

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

**LILY BENNEAR** is a sophomore at the College of Southern Maryland.

**RANDOLPH BRIDGEMAN** holds a B.A. and M.A. in English and creative writing. He is the recipient of the prestigious Edward T. Lewis Poetry Prize. His poems have been published in numerous poetry reviews and anthologies. He has five books of poems, "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 the summer of 2024.

**MORGAN CARDER** is a second-year student at CSM. Carder is majoring in English, and is grateful to be able to share pieces of herself through her writing to anyone who will read it. She shares herself best through poetry and prose.

**ANGELIA CARSON**

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**HEATHER CHRISTIAN** is a CSM alumna who received a bachelor's in graphic communications last December. For as long as she can remember, she has had a passion for photography, poetry, and the arts.

**JAMES COLEMAN** is 20 years old and from Waldorf, Maryland. His fascination with the world around him and his passion for storytelling is what guides him. He says even though he is just a novice writer taking his first steps, he is trying to go the distance and hopefully have a career in writing.

**JALYNN COZZENS** is in her first year at CSM. She plans to transfer after this year to a four-year institution so she may earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In her free time, she likes to spend time with her family, read, and go to country concerts.

**KATHRYN DOLAN** is a second-year student at CSM.

**AMANDA FEBRES** says her name means "beloved." That's how she feels; she is blessed to have many people in her life who love and care for her. She says she is not a writer but God does his work. She loves being back in college after many years and loves all of her professors who really take time with her. It is beautiful. Every morning brings its blessings through you. I live by the river and I love nature, especially the sunrise and the early morning.

**GURNEET GILL** is a nursing student at CSM from Leonardtown, Maryland, who loves art and is working on making more time to be creative!

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**KALEENA GONZALEZ** is a CSM graduate. She's currently studying psychology at St. Mary's College of Maryland. Writing and reading have been her favorite pastimes since she was little.

**MARY JOHNSON** is a HR Generalist Total Rewards specialist at the College of Southern Maryland.

**ROBIN KARIS** lives in Maryland and enjoys writing, photography, music, and genealogy. She is convinced that somewhere in the family tree is a relative who owns a castle. Karis was first published in "Connections Magazine" in 1996, after attending Professor Dwyer's creative writing course. She has had photos, poems, and a short story published.

**ZANE D. KING** is 20 years old, is autistic, and is a student at CSM who explores the world with a creative outlook. King has digitally illustrated original characters and written personal screenplays and other forms of literature. He has also written a personal script called "The Convulsive Investigation and the Frantic Congregation," which was featured in a high school event based on literature called PAXpression. In 2024, he participated in an art exhibit at CSM, in which he displayed his works, "Stopping in Motion" and "Gouache Garden." After pursuing his education goals, King aims to become a screenplay writer and director for animated films.

**VICTORIA MCCREARY** A phenomenon quite common in the neurodivergent community is to mask in public. The term means to hide your true personality and adopt the traits of others to fit in. "It's a struggle that often leaves people, like me, feeling extremely drained and empty as we try to do everything expected of us to fit in."

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**BRENNA MCLAREN** is a student at the College of Southern Maryland.

**DIANE PAYNE** is a fulltime marketing specialist for the Marketing Department at CSM.

**LIAM REEB**

**MADISON SCOTT** is an Indigenous junior at Maurice J. McDonough High School. She finds escape through writing and reading, and she plans to study theoretical physics in the future.

**DONNA SPERRY** This is her 26th year at CSM teaching mathematics and her 49th year enjoying the whimsy life sends our way.

**SUE STRICKLAND** was a mathematics professor at CSM from 2001 until her retirement in 2019. Now that she is retired, she enjoys walking every day and traveling, always on the lookout for interesting shots along the way.

**STEPHANIE SWEENEY**

**GEORGES TADONKI** is a geographer and humanitarian. He has travelled extensively to discover and serve the most vulnerable communities on earth. However, he often encounters humanity in its simplest form, through people, especially women and children. He uses photography as a universal visual language.

**TAYLOR TANNER** is a first semester CSM student who graduated from Patuxent High School.

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

**CATHERINE TILLEY** has been going to college “since God was a private,” as an old flame of hers used to say. Having finished an Associate of Arts in English this summer at CSM, she has applied to the University of Maryland as an English major with a focus on creative writing. She will know if they’ll endure a boomer in classes by the end of the year. Ageism is an ever-present monster. Retired, Tilley shares her life with two brilliant cats, Katy and Rosy, and a skinny stray tomcat recently sent to her by the universe’s cat distribution system. She will know what his name is when she gets to know him a bit better. “I don’t want to get to the end of my life and find that I lived just the length of it. I want to have lived the width of it as well.” — Diane Ackerman

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

**LARISSA WOLFORD** is a student at CSM. She has a passion for writing and after she graduates in May with an associate degree in English, she will go to a university to get her bachelor’s in creative writing. Her dream is to become an author and share her stories with the world.

**MICHEAL (COLE) YORK** is majoring in electrical engineering at CSM. He has always been an artistic person, but unfortunately, he never seemed to grasp the arts that he tried, whether it was drawing, painting, violin, or singing. While all beautiful expressions of art, none seemed to be the right fit for him, and after time, he started to think that he was born with two left hands (instead of two left feet for dancing)

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but that changed since starting his fall semester at CSM. Since starting this semester, he has pushed himself to be more trying and social by joining clubs, attending events, and going to concerts, and from doing these things, he has met a lot of great people he is happy to call friends.



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