



Connections



COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND
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Kayak, Michelle Christian



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***Last Light**, Victoria McCreary*

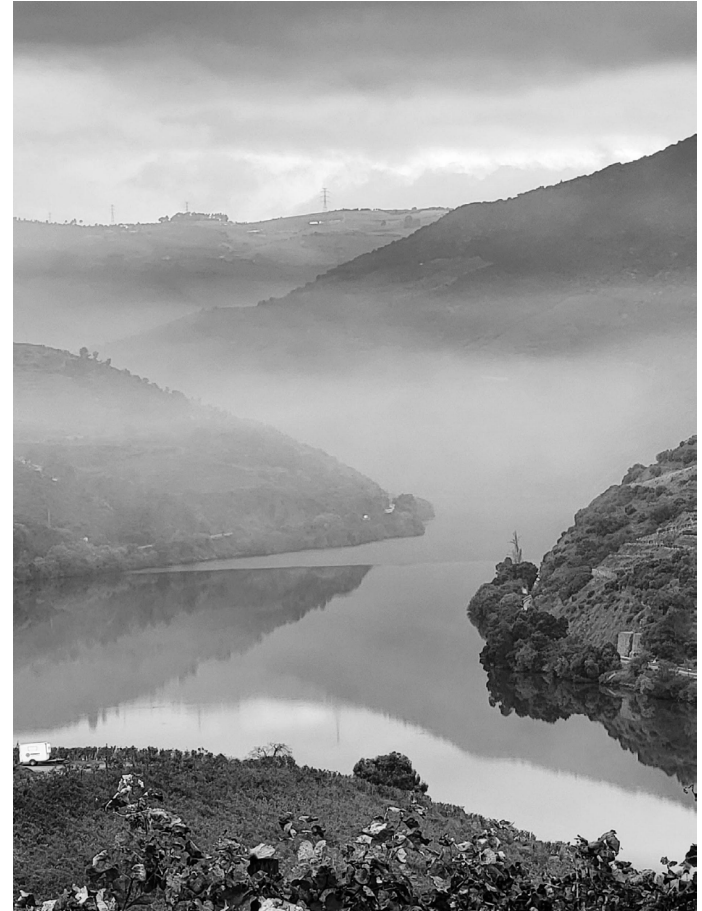
the creek

Randolph Bridgeman

where the creek slows
bending itself against the bank
circling back
deepening water on water
is where you'll catch them
under the overhanging branches
where the wind is shaking bugs
from the limbs and the rain
is kept from dimpling the water
even fish come in out of the rain
we sit quietly watching
our lines waiting for the tug
of things we want to say
the line slips through her fingers
her thumb setting the tension

she blows a pink bubble
then snapped it between her teeth
and looks at me in a way
that makes me know she has
everything i've ever wanted
and i would only get it when
she is good and ready
thirsty from our run home
beating dark through the woods
she'd drink from a spigot
water spilling through her lips
flowing over freckles
the color of that sandy bottom
the creek
where we'd stripped to the raw
and waded in washing youth
from a summer sweat

the warm breeze moving the water
like her hands now smoothing
wrinkles from our
morning sheets



Wine Country, Mona Weber

Joel's Letter to Clementine

(Fiction based off the movie *Eternal
Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*)

Alisha Shannon

Meet me in Montauk
I wish I'd stayed too
I'm ready to love you now
In this new season of blue

Why did you erase me?
Did I make you hurt that bad?
I need to hide you in these memories
Among the Barnes and Noble stacks

You'll always be my tangerine
To my notebook, you are the glue
And just like our Honeymoon on Ice
My life is frozen without you



Morning Beauty, Victoria McCreary

Echo

Robin Karis

Mashed up banana
Rubber Ducky
Tweety Bird
Winnie the Pooh
Curious George wearing Ted's hat

Number 2 pencil
Golden student shuttle
Juicy Fruit gum
Cheese and mustard sandwich
The sun's reflection on a shiny sliding board

Easter chicks
Straw bonnet
Buttercups on a hillside
Learning to cook scrambled eggs
UTZ Potato chips delivered in a knee-high tin can

Ruffled flaxen sundress
Daffodil wrist corsage
Lemonade, tangy but sweet
Buttered popcorn at the movies
Sponge cake recipe on a legal pad

B
L
I
N
K

Tepid chicken broth
Crocheted lap blanket
Spectacles hanging
from a beaded
citrine necklace

An un-ironed grasp
holding a photo
curled at the edges
while a breeze
teases her hair

Pallid memories return, renewed
vibrant once again, in her breast
as her eye is caught
by the brilliance
of the sun's reflection on a shiny sliding board.



Baby Deer, Richard Taylor

Transportation

Sheila Martel

Though brightly colored,
I fade into the background
of everyday life. After a couple
hot months off, I pull up oiled
and prepared, the official messenger:
summer is over. Children board
feeling anticipation, agony.

All would like friends. In January,
red faces relax when they see me,
wanting in from the cold. By April,
it's boredom that greets me.
For some I am the first freedom
from mother's or teacher's
watchful eye: the child time

in between-a place for talking,
joking, daydreaming. Fearful
law abiders sit up front. Risk-takers
and troublemakers claim the back.
Through the years, kids work their
way up or down my aisle, showing
their nerve, their age, their seniority.

One humid day I sat
in the bus yard.
Bobby Dunn patted me
on my side
and told his bride,
*My favorite part
of school was the bus ride.*

Poetry As Mafia

Sheila Martel

near a pine tree i wrote:
this pen this paper
with sturdy cover
are to my mind,
my heart, a lover.
i fell in with words
distilled stories
finer than any wine.
yet, in my head i
slammed a poet
colleague: "why write
poems? there's no
money or status or
anything other than
the writing." then,
a line of mine own floated
back to re-mind me:
dimes may need rubbing
to make a dollar.
like a gangster, i am back
to serve you again, poetry.
i think i don't want to.
still, i will, echoing the
michael corleone character in
the film godfather III.
"Just when i think i'm out,
it pulls me back in again."



Revival, Heather Christian

The Honeybees

Larrissa Wolford

Dart past me, wings humming in my ears and stingers prick
my hands.
Restless for honey, they stomp their legs,
Clutching scrolls of texts, laughing.
Wary of outsiders, I laugh to fit in, my stripes fading
Like whispers lost in the wind.
Wondersome bees, for they swarm tightly together,
Leaving me to trail behind.
As they drink nectar, I sip on sugared lotus and regret,
Watching them drink their poison
From my hollow glass eyes.
My head is buzzing
As blind bees blether behind me.
The queen takes her tribe and flies in light.
Silent bees are always unseen.
I am only a shadow in the hive.

drawing blanks

Anthony A. Cantrell

searching for a philosophy
but drawing blanks like the space beneath an apostrophe
for why are we oblivious
to those things that may astonish us
stuck in this constant repel
while searching for what may compel
hoping for wisdom to appear
so i lend a caring ear
a light that shines divine
appears brighter over time
looking from another side
start to see how things divide
twisting from inside
i stop to think just for awhile
the importance of going the extra mile



Abandoned on the Hill, Diane Payne

faye

Anthony A. Cantrell

all the things i couldnt say
before the day you passed away
left to live with so much guilt
from the loss of love we built
wish we could have said our goodbyes
but now i sit with bloodshot eyes
dosent even seem that long
since you sang your last song
if only i could kiss your head
and say those words left unsaid
if only i could see your smile
it would make the pain worthwhile
remember when i made that call
falling to my knees i began to ball
i was stuck in disbelief
to this day still no relief
is there anything to gain
trying to deal with all the pain
for all the things i couldnt say
i hope you know I LOVE YOU FAYE

I wrote this for my sister, Faye, who overdosed.



Lighthouse Bombay, Sam Rooney

Daffodils Still Rise

Sherbie Corazza

Lime tips of the lilies break through
as if they are unaware of the harsh January.
As if they do not know that this might be the end.

Daffodils rise to greet the sun
as if they have not heard what the forecasters say. As if they do
not fear the chill in the wind.

Virginia bluebells lift their heads
as if war does not rage in the city streets. As if they sleep at
night without fear.

Crimson buds erupt from the trees
as if they have forsaken their autumn grief.
As if winter did not strip them bare.

Shall I, a mortal, judge Nature's wisdom as if I will outlast her
or her prophets. As if she, alone, is not the master of survival.

Palms down I plant seeds in the broken soil
in silent prayer that we shall live to see harvest.
Small part of a sacred whole, ushering in spring revival.



Trapped, Richard Taylor

Mourning Dove

Kate Sine

Three coos rise from the woods,
and I am returned to days where mourning didn't mean
anything to me,
because I still had you
and our mornings of scrapple crackling in the frying pan
and you humming to the country music playing over the radio

J'adore le fardeau

Aaliyah Kilson-Thomas

With groans and sighs, I've met my demise I've allowed a
flower to bloom
An invasive little thing
It found some room
The stem had poked and pushed its way through
And the petals had gradually grew

I watered the plant and kept it fed
I now wish it withered instead
For it whispered things I wish were kept unsaid
A sad case of the blues

I sat in the dirt and watched the land
Convincing myself that the growth would be grand
The subtleties and deceptions the plant had provided
Were false and mean, I had decided

So I plucked the flower and moved to crush it
My palms were unmoved to my utter dismay
I could not erase my love
It would not allay

So I currently sit across from my burden
And it continues to stand tall, proud
And awfully certain
In a vase full of water under the sunshine

Oh pour aimer un fardeau



Compur Camera Face, Samuel Rooney

Red

Chelsea Whitt

The color red is just as sweet as pink
It's rain boots peeking through little sunflower men
Dripping fuchsia in the rain
Red is Auntie's new hat that looks like a mushroom
As she sorts through twigs and emerald beetles
Red is the car to look out for at the Kiss and Ride
Making all the others moving grays
Red. The sprightly frames around the eyes
That browse the little shop of handmade things
Red is old
Red is not vampires
Red was present for every myth
Red is a song that turns purple at the end
It ignites the withering shoes
Breaking up the cobbled streets into grateful chunks
Red makes the sisters shimmy until they turn to chocolate
The green pot on the stove summons red
Red is the door on the cottage that glows
Welcoming all to a dinner of apples, peppers, and beans
That are red.
Red is dark bread that heats the mouth
And pulls you onto the fire for a waltz, the color of a heart

Garbage Man's Tale

G.H. Mosson

Just because I shoulder trash
back to the dump
in dirty green,

doesn't mean I won't miss
this scene when October winds
sweep streets clean
(but not without me).

As reds and goldens disappear
into the crowd, I catch
what's dropped.

You might
glimpse me as I work,
yet never what I think!

Once I was a Romeo
who never met a Juliet,
so trolled the beaches
humming Barry Manilow
with an ache
that couldn't be mellowed.

Well, I snapped out of it.

.

Petals spiral to the ground.

Watch their faces drift, drift down.

Now the crowd
stamps on them.

When I was younger,
foxy and funner,
if I dug my heart
up from the floorboards,
would it beckon?

Forget it.

Some people
would give all they had
for what transpires
in one-room flats—

I didn't.
No.
I never did.

The Pitcher in Van Gogh's *Irises*

Jack Stewart

Tucked and spread in a pitcher,
The irises he used for his painting
In a few days began to gray,
And as their thick sheath-stems weakened
Let go their petals, which scattered on the table.

Then that household container transformed
Had something to say. How shadows turned
When the flowers changed their minds. How
The water warmed every morning, and reflections
Blossomed in its depths. How much anyone
Can nurture, lose, and remember.



Garden Primate, Robin Karis

An Evening with My Ten-Year-Old Self

Morgan Carder

*“You’ve grown into someone who would have protected you
as a child. And that is the most powerful move you’ve made.”*

—Unknown

The day time travel becomes a reality and is accessible to the public, I’m going to visit my ten-year-old self. After being beamed through time and space, I would end up in my childhood bedroom.

Blue walls that were once covered in SpongeBob cloud-flowers and jellyfish, are now plain blue and have a few posters hung up. On my desk is an open book on multiplication tables, a couple scribbly drawings that my little sister, Riley, made for me, and a sloppily hand-painted “B. F. F.” photo frame. I was still waiting for a friend to fill the frame. The room is dark, except for the tall, neon-colored lamp in the corner, in between the Monster High dollhouse—

—and the pink, still-firm bean bag chair, where ten-year-old Morgan sits, doing anything but reading on her Kindle. She jolts when she sees me but does not scream. All she does is push up her glasses and stare for a long moment, finding words eventually:

“Who are you?”

“I’m you in ten years; I came from the future.” I know

myself and I know this younger Morgan wants to skip over the obvious questions, Wow! Time travel exists in the future? What about flying cars, too? She wants to jump into the future, so meeting me is a wish she thought was too big to fulfill.

“You’re grown up,” She thinks out loud, standing up to look me over, “Why is your hair so short? You look like a boy.” Some things don’t change, I have stayed this blunt throughout my life; I am trying to be better.

“I felt like changing it.”

“But we—”

“—don’t like change, I know. Some change is good.” The Morgan in front of me, short, baby-faced, with long, thick hair, does not know what to do with such a sentiment. She crosses the room and starts trying to make the bedding lay out smoother. In a year, Mom will give her messy room one large Super Clean and the bed will always be made from then on.

“How’s Riley?” She asks when the bed looks neater. It squeaks under both of us when we sit down.

“She’s happy. In high school, if you can believe it. She plays guitar now, too.”

“Like Mom!”

“Even better than Mom, actually.” Morgan can’t believe that, either. Riley being so big now or that she is better than the best guitarist either of us knew. She goes forward, all the Social Skills Group teachings on how to stay on one topic go out the window,

“What do you do now?”

“I’m in college—”

“Oh! The big school, we had a—”

“—field trip there, right. You go there when you’re my age.” In her crammed dresser drawer is a CSM T-shirt that is too many sizes too big. She wears it to bed, as it works more as a nightshirt.

“Do you touch those... those mannequin-dummy things with all the other nurses?”

“No, I’m a writer.” With all respect, the simulation dummies are quite frightening to a child who fears they may come to life and attack all the humans. Morgan is a little relieved and ever curious.

“Are you any good?”

“A lot of people think so. I would say, ‘Yes.’” This Morgan has no prospects of a career, and the big school is so distant from her. She got a free T-shirt and intimidation: What is she to do with her life? Middle school is what’s next and that is scary enough for her to ponder. Looking at me now, she is just staring again. Her face scrunches up some; I still have the same pensive expression as an adult.

She sits with an air of unease to her; she struggles to sit up straight, to sit still. Her thumbs twiddle, she picks at a loose thread on her shirt, then flattens out a wrinkle on the bedding. I was once her: misunderstood by teachers and picked on by my fellow classmates for a long, long time. Unease follows

her easily. Tiny things can be picked on or warrant a parent-teacher meeting, and she wants to avoid all of that. But she can't.

"Do things get easier?" Is asked after a while of staring silence. At "things," she gestures a wide motion around the room, signaling the vastness of, "Does everything get easier?"

The next ten years are not easy. It's the pre-teen to teenage to young adult transformation. It is Hell on Earth, it is such new and exciting change, it is awful, and it is necessary, and there are some good times amongst the horror of the body and the brain changing with no warning.

"Not... right away. I can't lie to myself." She finds that a little funny and laughs. Loudly. What she will be told is too loud and will soon grow into a quieter, wheezier laugh. "I'll tell you that you get to the other side."

"You're on the other side."

"Right."

She is pensive, still, and restless, standing up and going to the desk, trying to busy her hands with organizing it. Closing the multiplications book, stacking Riley's drawings up. Giving the empty photo frame a new place to— her hand stills for a moment, holding the frame. I know the questions flickering through her mind: Are you still in Social Groups on the other side? Are people nicer to you? Do you find out why they're so mean in the first place? She lands on one among all of them, the most on par type of direct:

"Do you have friends on the other side?"

"Plenty of them." Comes out so easily from me, "You'll need more picture frames." For a moment, the unease seems to fall away, and this unsure Morgan looks like I had told her that we're taking a trip to Disneyland or that she has won the lottery. Unbridled joy in a wide grin. All she finds in terms of words is,

"So, you're... I'm... okay. We are okay. On," Another wide motion, "the other side."

"Yes. We're okay. You are."

Unease becomes outright relief. She will have the growing pains of all growing pains and the right to melodramatic angst, but the other side is waiting.

Morgan doesn't get a chance to say anything else before, down the hall, Mom hollers,

"Morgan, go brush your teeth and get ready for bed!"

"I guess you can't stay here." Morgan reasons, "I like talking to you, though... talking to myself? I don't know, but I'm happy that I'm you in the future."

"I like talking to you, too." I stand and she beats me to a hug. A tight one, at that. I know everything that will happen and it's difficult to not rattle off every obstacle that comes her way to her. Her life will unfold as it does, and I cannot interfere. She knows that the other side of a future with people who like her writing and more friends and love than she can fathom awaits her. There's hope in all of her unease and unsureness.

Letting go of me a long moment later, she knows that Mom will be reminding her to quit playing around and go to bed.

“Thanks for visiting me.”

“You were the first person I wanted to see, it’s no problem. Be safe, Morgan.”

“You too, Morgan.”

I watch her cross the hall toward the bathroom, shutting the bedroom door behind herself.

Travelling back home, there are many other Morgans I could visit on the way. I could see ten years ahead and meet myself at thirty. But ten-year-old Morgan’s future is unfolding and so is twenty-year-old Morgan’s.

I cannot change the past and I do not want to spoil the future, but there is a hope for it. For as long as I worried and pondered over the distance of the future and what my life holds, there is a relentless, undying hope for what will become of it. A hope that I hope remains with all the future versions of me.



Soda Bottles, Diane Payne



Special Feature, CSM Professor Emeritus Wayne Karlin

A Day Nothing Happened

Wayne Karlin

We would take a 6-by truck into An Tan from Ky Ha, to buy soda or beer or sex. A line of little thatched-roof kiosks, some of them walled with flattened beer cans from our trash dumps, strung along a dirt road rutted with landmine craters, a cloud of reddish dust hanging perpetually over it. I was standing with some other Marines in the scant shade of a scraggly areca tree, buying dusty bottles of soda from the girls who sold them from the baskets they carried. I joked with one girl, maybe, eight years old; she had a dirty face and a beautiful smile. She wanted to try out her English with me, and I was correcting her pronunciation: No, say moth-er-fuck-er, not motha fucka. An amtrack—the name Marines used for the massive thirty-two ton amphibious tracked vehicles that the army called Armored Personnel Carriers--clanked to a halt nearby, and the girl ran over and lifted her basket high over her head like an offering to the gods of war. A Marine, deeply tanned, his utilities and helmet and skin covered with fine red powder that was reamed on his face with rivulets of sweat, leaned over and snatched a bottle from the girl, knocked its cap off on the edge of the vehicle, drained the foaming coke. 100 p's, the girl yelled up at him shrilly. 100 piastres. What she was owed. He stared at her. 100 p's, she screamed. He threw the bottle at her, hard and fast; she stepped to the side as it whizzed past her head, planted her legs apart, and stared up at him. Her shirt was ragged, held by one button. Her chest was heaving. 100 p's, she insisted. Leave, I thought. Get out

of there, kid. The amtrack was scored with bullet rakings, battered, its tracks caked with mud; the men on it staring out with flat indifference or with that crazy grunt light in their eyes. The Marine took out a .45, leaned over the side again, and pointed it at the girl's forehead. I didn't move. A tableau: girl, eight or nine or maybe older; amtrack, thirty-two ton; Marine, .45. Di-di, you little gook bitch, he said. Moth-er fuck-er, she said clearly. 100 p's. He racked the handgun. She didn't move. 100 p's, she screamed up at him. Di-di mau, he said, and pushed the handgun closer. My M-14 was slung in the barrel forward and down so it could be brought up quickly, and I moved my finger to the trigger. I remember the wet slick feel of the trigger under my skin. I still feel it. I could feel his finger was tightening on his trigger as, or because, my finger was tightening on mine. The girl's hands gripped the basket, her eyes locked to the Marine's. I understood she would die rather than move. I understood that we would lose the war. The realization was as clear as if someone had spoken a sentence into my ears. We will lose the war. For shit sake, a voice with a thick, weary Southern accent said from the amtrack, and a skinny Marine leaned over the side and dropped a hundred piaster note to the ground. It fluttered near the girl's feet. She didn't look at it. The other Marine shook his head in disgust, snorted, pulled up the pistol. The girl remained where she was. After a while, she bent down and took the money. I turned away and went back to my friends. It had been a day when nothing happened.

The Locket

Donna Sperry

So, it was a random day in June 2012, and I was cleaning out my closet. Tucked way back in a drawer was a locket given to me by my grandmother, Lucille, when I graduated college in 1997. I'm not really a jewelry person. Less so back then. So when she gave it to me, I said, "oh...thanks," with as much enthusiasm as I could muster, albeit strained. She knew me well, though. Instead of being insulted, she laughed and said, "turn it over."

Following her direction, I saw the inscription: "Lucille, from Grandpa." She knew her cancer had returned and was making a concerted effort to find the right homes for her most precious things. She saw fit to give this precious thing to me. So with tears in my eyes I said, in all sincerity this time, "thank you." A year later, I wore it to her funeral.

So here I am in June 2012 looking at the back of the locket again—with tears in my eyes again—but with a new thought. "Who's 'Grandpa'?"

As much as I loved my grandmother, I didn't know much about her. Those facts and figures that would fill a Wikipedia page. There were whispers of a tumultuous childhood and difficult relationship with her mother, Edith. Nothing about her father. She ran away from home at 16 (maybe?), put herself through nursing school during World War II, and refused my grandfather's proposal three times before finally saying yes. She always felt like an outsider with my grandfather's very

Polish, very Catholic family because she wasn't Polish and converted to Catholicism instead of being born into it. That was basically it. If I wanted to know who "Grandpa" was, the internet would have to fill in the blanks. And so it did. That day in June 2012, I signed up for Ancestry.com and started rooting my way through the family tree.

Me, Cheryl, my mother and my grandmother's daughter Lucille, my grandmother Edith, my grandmother's mother.

"Edith...Heavner? Yeah, that sounds right. I kinda remember that name. Oh, wait. That's her married name. But wasn't Grandma's maiden name Coons? Oh, wait. Heavner is Edith's second marriage. So, what happened to the Coons guy? No. Stop. Don't get distracted. Edith Heavner nae Coons nae... Rosenstein? Rosenstein. 1910 census. Okay. Her father was... Bernard Rosenstein. Bingo! That's 'Grandpa'!"

A little more digging revealed that Bernard emigrated from Hungary in the 1880s, married Sara Zipser, had five children (Edith being the fourth), and made a life for himself in New York City working as a jeweler.

As I made dinner that night, stuff started to sink in and connect, particularly Bernard emigrating from Hungary. That stuck out for some reason. Further Googling long into the night led to a major discovery (later confirmed by my grandmother's long lost half-sister): my great-great-grandfather, Bernard Rosenstein, was Jewish and left Hungary to flee persecution. Which meant Edith was Jewish. Which meant my grandmother was Jewish.

She never told anyone, and as far as I can tell, left that part of her life behind when she was kicked out of (not ran

away from) an abusive household at age 14 (not 16). It made sense as to why. She was a young girl, alone, in the middle of the Depression, and in a world that was not very Jewish-friendly, even before the war. Eventually, she made her way to Los Angeles and found employment as a live-in maid to a kind family. Stability led to a nursing career and a life with my grandfather in Washington, D.C.

"I wonder if she was afraid." That was my last thought while drifting off to sleep that night in June 2012. I had been to the Holocaust Museum twice, seen the movies, read the books, knew the history, and felt the deep, overwhelming sadness. However, imagining what would have happened to my grandmother—the person I loved most in this world — had the outcome of World War II been different...that shook me to my core. Still does. She would have most certainly been killed. I wonder if she knew that at the time.

I think about Bernard now and again, too. The locket is a way of staying connected to him, touching something he touched. He went through so much to have the life he had and was probably one of the lucky ones. The wonderful life I have today is due in part to him, and I'm very grateful for it.

"The universe is not against you
It went through a lot just to give you a chance
It must have wanted you pretty bad
No pressure, though" (*)

**Craigie, John. Dissect the Bird. John Craigie Live. 2018.
<https://genius.com/John-craigie->*

Window, Mona Weber



Three Bucks

Natalie Filbey

“Well, how much do they want?”

My papa studies his poker hand, cigarette clenched between his teeth. Across from him is the burly man who comes over on Saturdays to play him, as well as the skinny boy Papa hired to fix our tractor last year. Papa and the burly man look dead serious, like hunters lining up their crosshairs on a rabbit, while the skinny boy looks nervous, forehead laced with sweat. He’s never played before, I can tell, and he’s certainly never played with someone like Papa.

“Just three bucks,” I reply, “He won’t do nothin’ bad. I’ll feed’im and take care’a him and all, and he can sleep in my room.”

“I don’t want no dogs sleepin’ in your room. That thing’s probly got fleas.”

“Then he can sleep on the floor. He’s real cute, Papa. And they say they’re gonna put him out on the street if no one’ll buy him.”

Papa slaps his poker hand down on the table.

“Three bucks is a lot.”

I bite my bottom lip to keep myself from blurting that three bucks is how much Papa blows at cards every Saturday.

“I can work for it, Papa. I’ll help Nelson with the picking this week.”

"No daughter of mine is gonna work for nothin' in this house. Nelson don't need help with the pickin' anyway." Papa throws a glance toward the skinny boy, whose sun-tanned skin is thin around his sharp collarbones. Nelson offers a timid smile in return.

"Now you go on back to the house and help your mama with supper. Tell 'er we gonna have two extra tonight."

Papa taps his cigarette on the corner of the poker table, a little flurry of ash raining down onto the floor. I stand there, dumb.

"You heard your Papa. Get on outta here," the burly man growls, fists clenched around his cards.

I crumple up the hem of my dress on my way out of the shed, my face hotter than the noonday sun on the shed's tin roof.

"Too much like her mama. Stubborn woman," I hear Papa mutter as I let the door bang shut behind me.

I find Mama bent over the kitchen table, wrangling a scrawny chicken. "What are you standing there for, Margaret?" Mama's never been one to tolerate idleness, not even for a moment.

I speak up over the sound of Susanna and the littles hollering outside. Probably playing Cowboys and Indians out by the barn again. "Papa says we're gonna have two extra tonight."

Mama's hands still, and a sigh escapes her pale, thin lips. Her forehead bunches up the way it does when she opens up the vegetable cellar and there isn't anything save a few spotted onions.

"Then why don't you go wash some extra potatoes." Mama recovers her countenance quickly, drawing in a sharp breath.

I run and snatch the last two potatoes from the cellar, then join Mama in the kitchen. The filthy water runs down my arms as I scrub the skins.

"This bird won't feed the three of us," Mama mutters. I cleave the potatoes in pieces with an oversized kitchen knife. My stomach groans, but I don't dare steal from our supper.

"There's a man selling a little dog for three bucks down the street a ways. He says he's just gonna leave him out if no one'll buy him."

Mama twists the chicken's neck with her slimy hands. "Maybe with the potatoes it'll feed four."

I leave the diced potatoes on the counter and dry my hands on my dress. I don't think Mama even notices me leaving.

It's nearly sundown when Papa comes in from the poker shed, Nelson and the burly man trailing behind him. Mama

fixes their plates and seats them around the table, portioning out bites of chicken and steamed potato. I can tell it's been a good day at cards because Papa's talkative instead of bitter and sullen. Nelson's nodding along with Papa, occasionally mumbling about how good Mama's cooking is. Doesn't matter what Mama cooks, it's always the best thing he's ever tasted. I've got one hand on the pocket of my calico dress all through supper. Three bucks, all in quarters. It seems like a sin to even look at it, so I keep the coins buried and content myself with feeling them through the fabric. It was Susanna that found it- Papa's winnings at cards. More money than Nelson makes in a month, shoved in his rifle case. I'll admit it's a clever stashing-place, lord knows Mama wouldn't look at that thing for fear of it goin' off. She lost a brother that way.

I pat my pocket one more time before placing my fork neatly across my empty plate. Maybe I can get up first thing before school and convince the man down the street to give me that little brown dog. If not first thing, then on the way home. I think I'll let Susanna name him. He'll be sleepin' in our room, after all.



Icy Inquisitors, Lena Hancock

Orange Juice

Jenn Rowley

She sat across from me that morning, gazing hungrily at the plate of eggs and toast before me. She was always hungry, but I knew it was useless to offer Her anything. A glimpse of shame, followed by a resolute emptiness:

“No, thanks. I’m not hungry.”

Then, a pitiful smile would struggle to pull itself across Her face, as if dragging a body behind it. Lifted cheeks added a squint to Her eyes to hide the obvious lie. It is a learned practice—voiding any doubt from a concerned audience. It took Her months to realize how necessary a skill this lying would be, and months more to perfect it. Eventually, the body got lighter—easy to drag and throw in an instant. And the cheeks got high enough to conceal the secret living in the deep black abyss surrounded by the grey ocean in Her eyes.

But I knew the waves of that ocean raged constantly. And no amount of practice could conceal its storm once the rain came.

We sat in a little windowed breakfast nook cut out from the kitchen. Dawn pierced the room with jagged streams of light, reflecting off various glassware, painting a vibrant rainbow across every corner of the room.

Every corner, except for where She sat.

There was always a shadow wherever She went. A shadow

whose heavy embrace blocked the light and turned the world into a monochromatic dimension. It was growing, this shadow, and I knew it’d soon envelop the whole world if I continued ignoring Her like this. So, without looking up from my meal, I asked:

“Why are you here?”

“I was invited.” She shrugged.

“I certainly did not invite you.”

She laughed—or rather, huffed something like a laugh. “The invitations are different every time. You know that.”

The shadow darkened and grew, snuffing out the multicolored light as it reached for me.

“What was it this time? The meal? The sunlight, perhaps?”

She began following the arc of the nook’s u-shaped bench, getting closer with each question, grinning and prodding.

“Possibly your much-too-comfy clothes brought me here. Really, you are so lazy. Who do you think you are to deserve a day off?”

I was shrinking, grabbing at my sides and gasping for air as the room seemed to close in on me. No more rainbow. Just me, and Her, and the shadow.

“Please. Stop.”

“Oh! I know!” She sat next to me now, baring Her teeth wildly

as the shadow pressed down with an unbearable weight. “It. Was. Your. Drink.”

The word “drink” held a thousand years of regret, and shame, and pain. The pain of an alcoholic who hadn’t known the real taste of a simple orange juice. The pain of an eating disorder that could only recognize the food in front of me as numbers. Numbers I feared so desperately. The pain of a life spent so long in darkness, the light of day was unknown—and only brought suffering.

Tears began to fall from my cheeks in a silent sob I had practiced until no one could hear my torment, no matter how close I stood to them.

“Don’t make a sound,” She reminded me over and over again. “Cry in silence. Because if anyone hears, you’ll be sent back to that place. You don’t want to go back there, do you?”

I remembered the nurses taking my shoes, handing me a thin pair of socks with little rubber nodules all over the bottom. I remembered being woken up several times a night with yet another medical device strapped to me. The beeping machines breaking through the room’s chilled silence. A cage wrapped around the outside patio—and like a bird with clipped wings, I remember reaching for a sky I’d only seen others fly in.

“Please...” I whispered. “Go away.”

I felt so small as I glanced at the glass of juice in front of me. I had only just begun to stomach the stuff again. Now, hundreds of little bubbles began to form in the glass, and various bottles of champagne and liquor appeared on the table.

“Drink... and it’ll all go away.” She giggled.

My breakfast transformed into no more than a small apple, not even enough to feed a child.

“An apple a day!” She mocked. “Only an apple.”



Ascension, Sue Strickland

Contributors

RANDOLPH BRIDGEMAN holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts in English and creative writing. He is the recipient of the prestigious Edward T. Lewis Poetry Prize. He has five collections of poems: *South of Everywhere* (2005), *Mechanic on Duty* (2008), *The Odd Testament* (2013), *The Poet Laureate of Cracker Town* (2015), and *The Not So Happy Hour Poems* (2025).

ANTHONY A. CANTRELL is currently in a peer support group and is working toward becoming a certified counselor/support system for others in a similar position. He is 31 and from Lusby, Maryland.

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.

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

MICHELLE CHRISTIAN is a professor of communication at CSM and sees interesting images almost everywhere she goes.

SHERBIE CORAZZA serves on an international program supporting the US Navy and Royal Australian Air Force. Her greatest loves are her wife and their six children. She is thankful for the opportunity to share small joys and linger in moments of gratitude with all of you.

NATALIE FILBEY is a dual-enrolled student at CSM studying sociology and the short novel. After finishing her time at CSM this semester, she plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in zoology at Colorado State University. In addition to creative writing, Filbey enjoys reading, being outside, crafting, and snuggling up to anything furry.

LENA HANCOCK is a mom of two and a Maryland native. She currently serves as the director of marketing at CSM. Hancock considers herself an amateur "iPhonetographer" and enjoys taking pictures of anything and everything, although butterflies, sunsets, and her children are current favorites. She has previously been published in *Connections Literary Magazine*.

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 Literary Magazine* in 1996 after attending Professor Neal Dwyer's creative writing course. She has had photos, poems, and a short story published.

WAYNE KARLIN is a Professor Emeritus at CSM and the author of nine novels, a collection of short fiction, and three books of nonfiction. His stories, poems, and articles have been published in many literary journals and newspapers. He has received two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1994 and 2004), the Paterson Prize in Fiction for 1999, the Vietnam Veterans of America Excellence in the Arts Award in 2005, and the 2019 Juniper Prize for Fiction.

AALIYAH KILSON – THOMAS is a freshman at CSM studying history to become a museum archivist. Her passions are incredibly artistic. She has played three instruments for nine years, enjoys sketching cartoons, and writes creative works. Kilson-Thomas began writing free verse poetry in 2022 and has over 30 different poems. She believes the five she submitted are some of her best.

SHEILA MARTEL has been published in *The Riverdale Press*, *Nexus* (Boulder, Colorado), *Connections Literary Magazine*, *Demeter Press's book of essays on mothering at midlife*, and the *Rehoboth Beach Writers Guild poetry chapbook*. Martel wrote, acted, directed, and produced at Three Notch Theatre. She also produced and wrote *Sketches of Motherhood* at Mercury Café and has directed four children's theater productions (ages 5–18). A former educator, she holds a master's degree in liberal studies, a certificate in educational leadership, and a certificate in spiritual guidance. Martel grew up in Nova Scotia and Montreal and currently lives in Maryland.

VICTORIA MCCREARY notes that 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 McCreary feeling extremely drained and empty as they try to do everything expected of them to fit in.

G.H. MOSSON is the author of six poetry collections, including *Family Snapshot as a Poem in Time* (Finishing Line Press, 2019), *Questions of Fire* (Plain View Press, 2009), and *Singing the Forge* (David Robert Books, forthcoming 2025). His poetry has appeared in *The Tampa Review*, *The Potomac Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Lines & Stars*, *Smartish Pace*, and beyond. He has a master's degree from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins, an MFA from New England College, and practices law. *For more, visit www.ghmosson.com.*

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

SAMUEL ROONEY is a photographer based in Southern Maryland who is currently enrolled at CSM. Rooney began his photography journey at 12 years old after his grandmother took him on his first workshop around the Chesapeake Bay. Since then, he has entered many fairs and craft shows and has a website showcasing his work. With over six years of experience as a photographer, Rooney has been on many adventures and explored nearly every aspect of photography.

JENN ROWLEY says although she is not a current student at CSM, she attended in 2014–2015 for a brief time before enlisting in active duty military service. Now, she is back in Southern Maryland and finishing a bachelor's degree in creative writing at Southern New Hampshire University (set to graduate in May).

ALISHA SHANNON is a CSM student pursuing an associate degree in communication. She loves poetry and likes to use it as a commentary on the complexities of human relationships and what it means to have the gift of emotions.

KATE SINE is a poet based in Southern Maryland, where she lives with her husband and their four cats. She received her bachelor's degree in English from Frostburg State University and has work published in *Maryland Bard Poetry Review*, *HNDL Magazine*, *Gypsophila Zine*, and *Connections Literary Magazine*.

DONNA SPERRY is in her 27th year at CSM teaching mathematics and her 50th year enjoying the whimsy life sends our way.

JACK STEWART was educated at the University of Alabama and Emory University and was a Britain Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology. His first book, *No Reason*, was published by the Poiema Poetry Series in 2020, and his work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Poetry*, the *American Literary Review*, *Image*, *Crannóg*, and others. Stewart currently runs the Talented Writers Program at Pine Crest School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He hopes you will look upon his work favorably.

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.

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

MONA WEBER believes one should never stop taking a moment to appreciate the beauty of nature. She finds inspiration in travel, echoing Gustave Flaubert's reminder that "you see what a tiny place you occupy in the world." From discovering creeks, rivers, and mounds of history in Southern Maryland to embracing day-to-day journeys on Route 4 or 5, Weber sees adventure everywhere. For her, travel never ends—it's simply a matter of perspective.

CHELSEA WHITT is a part-time teacher and retired aspiring screenwriter. She has been writing since she was a kid but did not consider writing professionally until her math tutor submitted one of her poems to a contest. She still needs a math tutor, but she has since written various short stories, poems, and flash fiction, mostly for school assignments or personal reflection. She is inspired by signs of divinity, her love for Robin Williams, and the book that changed her life, Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*.

LARRISSA 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 plans to pursue a bachelor's in creative writing. Her dream is to become an author and share her stories with the world.



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