The Rescue

By Jonathan Lewis, Washington, D.C.

When the old tourist collapsed
at the Smithsonian metro stop,
it must have been a terrifying descent:

tumbling down the escalator, backwards,
hat flown off and white hair flowing,
hurtling toward a harrowing crash.

But we all leapt forward: commuters
with our bags and backpacks flailing;
we rushed up to him like a mighty wave.

Absorbing the shock of a falling body,
grasping for moving handrails,
fighting for footholds in the sharp staircase,

we interrupted fate. He stopped;
strangers still clung to each other,
as the old man, shaking, regained his balance.

Thank you, he mouthed, a bruise
slowly darkening his temple. We breathed,
and raised him up like an obelisk.