

# Esprit



Spring  
2021

# ESPRIT

The University of Scranton Review of Arts and Letters

Spring 2021

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## Spring 2021 Awards:

### The Berrier Poetry Award

Amanda Tolvaia  
“route 180”

### The Berrier Prose Award

Bethany Belkowski  
“To Rule and Guide”

### The *Esprit* Graphics Award

Jack Golden  
“Snow Day Hand”

## Spring 2021 Award Judges:

### Poetry:

Alexis Ward graduated from The University of Scranton in May 2020 with a triple major in English, philosophy, and Asian studies. She was a member of the SJLA Program and the Honors Program. While at the university, she was a staff member for *Esprit*. She currently lives in rural nowhere, Pennsylvania, where she works from home and continues to write.

### Prose:

Catherine Johnson graduated from The University of Scranton in May 2020 with a double major in English and philosophy. She was a member of the SJLA program and served as Editor-in-Chief of *Esprit* and Production Manager of *Discourse*. She is currently navigating hybrid learning from the other end as a theology teacher at Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes Barre, PA.

### Graphics:

Darlene Miller-Lanning, Ph.D., teaches at The University of Scranton and is the Director of its Hope Horn Gallery. Her BFA from Wilkes University and her MFA from Marywood University are both in painting. Her doctorate from Binghamton University is in art history. She has co-authored several books on American and local art history.

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# nonbinary in blue, nonbinary in pink

*Quinn Stanford*

do you see it, blair?  
there is a creature hiding behind  
the pillars, in the alleyways  
of this colorless world.

i spotted it first when i was young,  
too young to know it,  
it crept from my grandmother's words  
sapping the color from my dinosaur toys.

it was unrecognizable until mariah's  
baby shower, when i saw one hue,  
just one, cool blue on the background  
of the "son of a beach" banner.

overwhelmingly, one color or another.  
or there is nothing. these are its  
dimensions, and we are just pages.  
it frightens me, blair. my life

defined by the clash between birth  
pinks and insubordinate blues. no one  
has the cones to see my complexity.  
we all see in two colors. the wrong ones.

*Next page...*

**Apartment After Rain**  
*Jack Golden*



## To Rule and Guide

*Bethany Belkowski*

My mother always told me my guardian angel had a sense of humor, just as her mother said to her, and her mother before that. No matter what I did, he always saw. And no matter how much I tried to hide it, he always made sure I got what I deserved. He was good for tripping me up the stairs after I shoved past my sister, or for guiding the thick pointy teeth of a pricker bush branch into my leg after I let it swing back at whoever was behind me. He once even took the liberty of smiting my ice cream from the heavens after I jumped out from behind a corner, scaring my mother half to death. I remember how she bit her tongue, choking back the bitter words crawling up her throat. With the power of a saint, she resisted, only demanding I clean up the half-melted mess before it left a stain.

Now I wish I had her prudence as I speed the short way from our house to the hospital. My sister, always better at listening to my mother's weary advice, sits next to me, bawling her eyes out in the passenger seat. I berate her for her lack of composure as I scream insults at the driver in front of us. With my full weight, I lay into the horn, but the prehistoric white Chrysler continues to do ten under. Craning my neck, I try to spot the ambulance, but it must have already turned in. I sink my foot further into the gas, inching close enough to see flecks of paint chipping off the cheap car. My sister wails, begging me not to hit the driver. "*Desdemona! Desdemona, don't!*" Nearly snapping the crucifix chained to my neck, I turn to her in disbelief.

"How *dare* you?" I roar, my voice embodying a tone I'd only ever heard my mother use. "Do you think I'd just *hit him?*" She shrinks back, surely fearing I'd smack her. Blinking away tears with unsteady breaths, she turns towards the windshield, refusing to meet my bulging eyes. I continue to stare, wondering if she thinks I'm a fool. I watch as her eyes go wide. Then, the sound of my name breaks the silence.

“*Desde!*” she shrieks, attempting to save precious milliseconds with my nickname. My eyes jerk back to the road. A few loose fragments of white paint are the first to collide with the windshield.

\*\*\*

I hadn't heard her scream like that since the summer after I turned fifteen. It was then that my guardian angel perhaps performed his boldest act yet. The days were long and hot—*filled with opportunity* as my mother would gravely say. My sister and I spent the hours volunteering at the retirement home, only a fifteen minute walk from the house. Each day before eight we'd leave with our drawstring backpack loaded up with snacks, gel pens, and an overabundance of hand sanitizer. You could never be too clean. We spent our time changing sheets, wiping surfaces, and removing dirty dishes. And by three o'clock, we were free to go, signing out at the front desk with one of the pens we had packed. Whoever carried the bag there, didn't carry it on the way back, but that day my sister was particularly tired, so I bore its weight for a second time. My mother always said taking up another's cross may lessen your own faults in the eyes of God.

We walked side by side, the drawstring bouncing off my back with every step. The trek was always worse in the afternoon. The two of us trudging under the weight of both heat and hunger put Moses's fifty years in the desert to shame. We had worked straight through lunch with only a five minute snack break, one I failed to take advantage of that day. Our mother had packed us a baggie of round shortbread cookies with purple jelly crammed into their carved out centers—the kind I could never bring myself to eat. They resembled eyes so dark you could no longer find the pupils. It seemed wrong; my mother always said the eyes were the lamps of the body.

My stomach growled as a bead of sweat trickled from my scalp and down the back of my neck. I felt it slither through my shoulder blades and over a few vertebrae before slipping beneath the band of my bra. I shifted the drawstring on my shoulders, hoping to jerk it loose, but it was already forming a nasty stain I'd have to scrub out later.

The splitting of a wrapper broke my concentration. I looked over. My sister had a granola bar. “Where'd you get that?” I asked, hoping to God

she didn't steal it.

"The head nurse on my floor had extras; she was giving them out so they didn't go to waste," she replied, handing the snack to me to hold while she squeezed three large squirts of sanitizer into her hands. She winced as she rubbed it in, surely burning as it seeped into her dry and cracking skin.

"Can I have a bite?" I asked, my stomach begging like a trapped soul.

"No, it's mine."

"But mom says to share if you want God to—"

"I haven't *done* anything today though."

"But I carried the bag both ways!" I pleaded, still shuffling my shoulders as sweat rolled down my back.

"*I said no.* Just give it to me," she snapped, reaching for the bar.

Before her fingers closed around the foil, I jerked it back and took a ravenous bite. "*What's wrong with you?*" she cried. I laughed a little in response, chewing my prize. "Why do you always do that?" she said, snatching it back. "You know something bad is gonna happen!" I scoffed, but I knew she was right as soon as she said it. And about two seconds later, I felt it.

It began with a buzzing feeling behind my two front teeth. Ten seconds later, the vibrating had spread to the gums of my lower jaw. I pressed my fingers inside my mouth, searching for the root of the sensation. Then the realization hit.

"*What's in that?*" I hissed as my sister chewed her food.

"What?"

"The bar!" Her eyes went wild in her head as she flipped the wrapper around. The remaining bit of the snack fell out of its casing, exploding into a million pieces on the sidewalk.

"No, no, no..." she trailed off. We started to run while I still had the air left.

Our feet slapped the pavement with panic as I clawed at the pendant bouncing around my neck. It felt like it was getting tighter. At the same time, I felt around my mouth with my tongue, searching for any remnant of my assailant. Dislodging a hard crumb from a molar, I spit what

I could of it into my hand as we moved. What I saw was a half-chewed wad of dried fruit—apple to be exact.

As children, my mother had just finished slicing up the same fruit when my sister began wailing in the other room. I had hidden the eyes of her Mr. Potato Head under the couch cushion and refused to give up the location of the missing facial features. She always put them in the wrong place anyway. After continuing to withhold the whereabouts of the eyes, my mother scooped me up and placed me in time-out. By the time she recovered and restored Mr. Potato Head's sight, my arms were covered with hundreds of their own angry, red eyes right where she had grabbed me. She monitored me for hours, blaming herself for being terse, and watched as they slowly faded away, vowing never to bring apples into our house again. Yet there we were, bursting through the front door, bringing the devilish fruit back into our home.

I couldn't tell if my throat was closing or if we had just run that fast. I pressed my hands to my face. It was hot. I turned to my sister who, after washing her hands, began tearing through the medicine cabinet, looking for anything that could be of use.

"Call Mom," I said, the warmth of my cheeks beginning to spread throughout my body.

"We can't!" she shrieked, tears rolling down her face.

"*I don't care,*" I said, my voice sounding more hoarse than it did just moments before.

"You know we can't! She's with the lawyer! We can't, you know we can't, she said not to—" She cut herself off, choking on tears.

"*Please,*" I begged, feeling my eyes start to burn, "It'll be my fault, I promise." She reluctantly nodded through sobs, pulling out her cell phone to dial. Tears welled up in my own eyes, but I wasn't crying. I stood there long enough to hear my mother's voice explode through the phone before running to the mirror in the bathroom.

I could barely wipe my flooding eyes fast enough by the time I felt my way to the sink. It was then that I realized my second mistake. I had touched the entirety of my face before even thinking to wash my hands. I fumbled for the soap. Finally finding it, I furiously pumped the top, but we were out again. I hoped water would be good enough. I scrubbed until my

hands burned, and splashed water in my eyes until they didn't. The mere exertion made it even harder to breathe, each inhale now accompanied by a wheeze.

When I could finally see clearly, I flinched at the sight of myself. The slants of my nose had disappeared, each side so swollen that they blended right into my cheeks. My eyelids were bulging too, resembling the plump lips of the botox-filled reality TV stars my mother abhorred. The longer I stared the less I could see, each second stealing a bit more of my world as my eyes tightened at their corners. I almost wished it'd happen faster. I couldn't tear myself from the demon in the mirror. I felt like the young girls in the horror movies I watched when no one was around, possessed and deformed, yet just recognizable enough to strike fear into those who knew them before. Perhaps my angel was punishing me for that too. My mother always said such movies romanticized the evil spirits of this world.

Aside from my twisted reflection, my grandmother was the closest I had ever come to seeing anything like the horror movies in real life. Much like I was, she had struggled to breathe too. They had inundated her with tubes and wires, and had strapped a mask to her face that worked so hard it left her scarred and deformed. I remember crying after seeing her, asking my mother who that scary woman was. I was never told the painful details, but whatever happened after we left her that day was bad—so bad, that now my mother was meeting with a lawyer. I began to shake. I couldn't tell if my body was collapsing out of asphyxiation or fear. I crumpled to the floor as the world began to spin.

For the next half hour I slid in and out of consciousness. My eyes fluttered as my mother burst through the front door with a look in her eyes I had never seen before. She helped me to the car and suddenly we were in the emergency room. My whole body began to tingle as a nurse wheeled me to a room. 300A. Soon, a woman with brown hair and a white coat appeared. She stuck my arm once, twice, three times, four times. I lost count. She couldn't find a vein, so she moved to the other side. My mother began to sob as I lifted my veinless arm in front of my face, speckled with the marks of failed attempts. My skin was red. *My whole body was red.* The nurse assured my weeping mother I was going to be fine; the

epinephrine was already kicking in. But she wasn't crying because of me. She explained to the nurse that she had sat on the other side of the curtain bisecting the room just six months before.

I turned to face the curtain on my left. It seemed to bubble and pulse, thousands of hands pushing against the fabric from behind, tracing its folds, relentlessly clawing—perhaps the beast my grandmother couldn't slay was trying to steal me away through the curtain too. The monitor pace quickened. I began praying under my breath as my chest heaved and the fluorescent lighting played games with my mind. The beeping got faster. The lady in white came to stand over me, the fixtures above bathing her in heavenly glow. *An angel of light.* As the room began to fade, I prayed my mother would forgive me. I prayed my guardian angel would forget.

\*\*\*

I gasp as my eyes burst open, humid summer air overwhelming my lungs. An alarm wails, but it's no longer the monitor, but rather the car. I push aside the crumpled airbag and begin to fiddle with my seat belt. Unable to get it loose, I look down—yet another mistake. My head pulses in time with the alarm, sending all the blood in my body rushing to my head. It hits like the airbag did, but doesn't stop. I scrunch my nose as the blood streams out of it, producing a rough crunching sound I hear in my head. Finally, I find the buckle's release.

Without stopping to wipe the stream surging down my face, I slide out of the car, the front crushed and jagged like my nose. My sister, already hobbling towards my side of the wreckage, halts at the sight of me.

"It's *everywhere*," she whispers with a horrified look in her eyes.

"The blood? I know."

"No, *the glass*." I follow her gaze to my chest. Tiny shards of the cracked windshield seem to be embedded in my skin, forming a shining necklace around the edges of the one I already wear. Beneath some fragments lie flecks of white paint.

"It's fine, maybe it'll help," I say. She nods in agreement. Then we start toward the hospital, limping through the field that separates it from the road. When the automated door slides open, all eyes immediately fall on our tattered appearances.

Without a word, my sister heads for the front desk and I limp



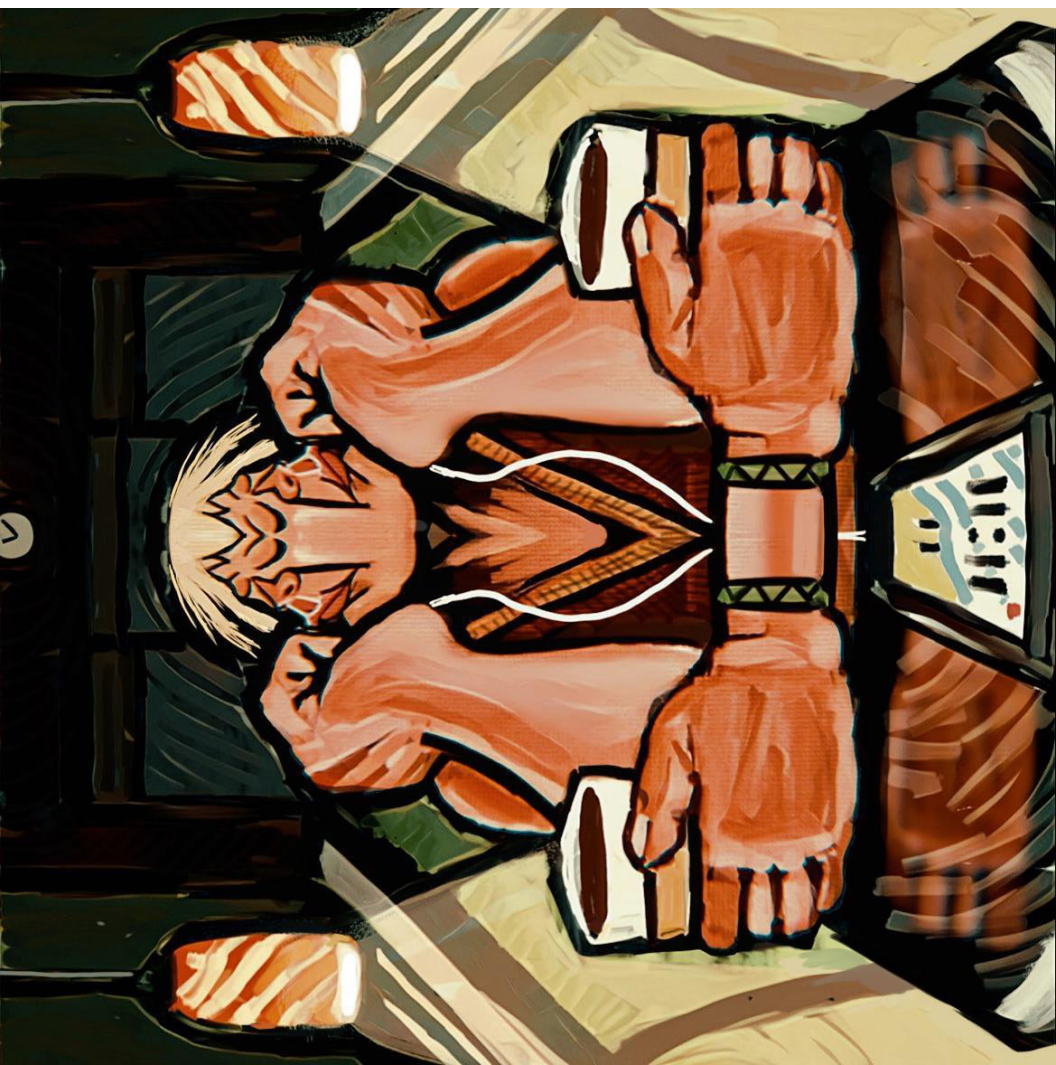
as fast as I can towards the emergency bay, ignoring the calls of various personnel behind me. With every step, I feel a red droplet spring from my nose and go speeding towards the floor, leaving a breadcrumb trail for the nurses on my heels. The tiles change from grey to white as I enter into the emergency wing. They look too much like the tiles in my kitchen—the tiles she was laying on when I found her. My mother, who praised God the moment my body was renewed by epinephrine crying, “*She was saved! She was saved!*” had crumpled onto the tile floor just as I had five summers ago. The paramedics explained she collapsed out of stress, perhaps a stroke. The lawsuit against the hospital was floundering. That was surely the cause. But the “why”—*that was me*. I had almost convinced myself this day of reckoning would never come, but he always made sure I got what I deserved.

Suddenly a nurse grabs my arm from behind. I jump, realizing the extensiveness of the airbag’s bruising. “Ma’am, you can’t be back here. This is a...” she begins, but I tune her out, my eyes fixating on the room to my left. Inside my mother lies, wires and tubes erupting from every opening. I stumble into the room, leaving the nurse in the hallway. Doctors pile in and begin to work, but I still refuse to move, muttering prayers under my breath I didn’t think I would remember. I glance at the curtain that bisects the room every few seconds, searching for any signs of movement. It remains as still as my mother on the table. Later, a nurse steps in and asks if I want a Bible, but I refuse. My mother always said we wouldn’t understand it.

Just as she leaves me, a monitor in the corner explodes into a frenzy. I watch as my mother’s eyes shoot open. She searches wildly for anything recognizable, finally finding my face. I jerk away, scrambling to find something else to look at. My mouth goes dry as my eyes lock onto a small plaque next to the doorway. Room 300B. Tears roll down my cheeks, mixing with the blood from my nose. The salt blends with the metallic taste in my mouth as the curtain begins to flutter behind me. The monitor slows. I continue to stare. And the two zeros stare back.

*Next page...*

**Coffee Night**  
*Jack Golden*



# Lily of the Valley

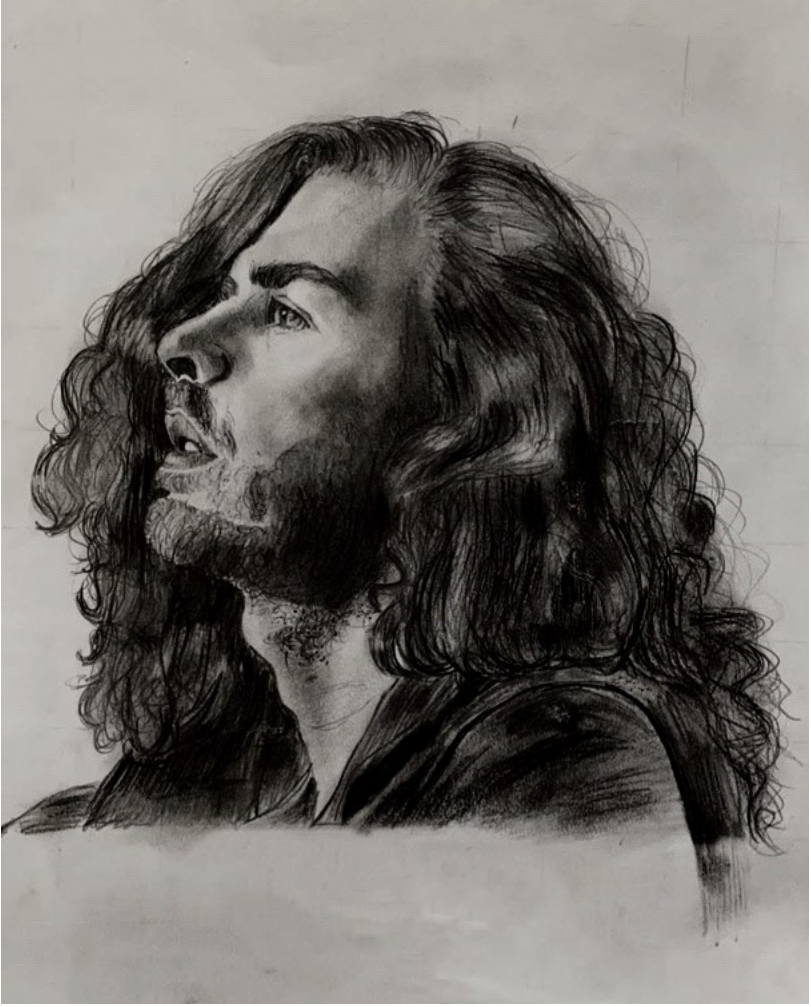
*Mary Purcell*

we learned to count by breaking  
the striped carnations in your mother's garden  
stripping their limbs and hoping to find enough  
arms to hold one another with

in the beginning I wrote the language for you  
and now you speak in every tongue but mine  
so we become tangled roots  
certain in our suffocation  
before taking from the garden

you are reminded of the flowers  
we plucked at the neck and  
crushed between pages  
and I must be pretty because I cannot breathe  
between the words you have written  
so please show me how I can

crush too perhaps inside  
a sealed jar where the lid cracks suddenly  
and Lily dances through  
I will pray she offers you a kiss



**Portrait of A.H.B.**

*Molly Neeson*

## Late Night Poetry

*Bethany Belkowski*

Once evening has reclaimed the avenue,  
and her father has locked every door,  
she opens a window and slips  
into clean sheets.

We crack spines like caskets, unveiling  
embalmed pages adorned  
with sticky tabs and grocery receipts.

Chewed nails bleed with the pensive prick  
of worn pages until I say,  
“Stop.”

She whispers  
senseless words, brimming  
with senseless beauty. She creeps  
upon each syllable as if tiptoeing  
through Queen Anne’s lace, searching  
for an open field in which to dance.

She stipples stanzas with stars,  
just out of reach. Ink of our own  
lies locked in desk drawers, too  
messy to emancipate.

But for the moment, a loophole  
in the taut, blood-red thread  
laid out for us emerges, and  
responsibility leaves her.

Breathless  
by the last word, I know  
to offer my own.

I read of adventures beyond these  
pages. Of answers  
not worth finding. What's lost  
behind apostrophes.

I read of chronic corporate  
climbing. The flights of  
unhinged soldiers. Watching the sparks  
that begot the blaze. Of the sun's

violence smeared across the rising  
dawn. Calls for those with pen to lay down  
and pick up their sword.

We stagger, crushing petals under  
the stab of the sun beginning his siege.  
He ties knots in loose tongues,  
and drowns flames that spoke  
stolen words as if they were  
their own.

Gagged and drenched,  
I press onwards, knowing we will  
dry by evening. Tonight,  
she and I will continue  
saying the world.

*Next page...*

**Halfpipe**

*Sarah Liskowicz*





# Left Behind

*Emily Bernard*

FADE IN:

INT. CAR IN FRONT OF GREEN HOUSE - AFTERNOON

KURT (mid-40s) runs his hand through his slicked-back hair and takes off his sunglasses.

He aggressively rubs his eye with his hand then squints at the small home in front of his car.

Kurt reaches to the passenger seat door and pulls out an open and dented pack of cigarettes.

Kurt takes the lighter from the center console and clicks the lighter several times.

After a few failed attempts, he lights the cigarette.

EXT. FRONT OF GREEN HOUSE - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

As he walks slowly on the ice-covered walkway, he presses against his jacket pocket and nods to himself.

His boots crunch the ice beneath his feet.

A gun shot is heard in the distance, followed by a bird screeching. He jumps.

He stops and turns his head behind him and watches his breath pierce the cold air in front of his face.



He scratches his beard on the front porch and knocks on the screen door. No answer.

He knocks harder. Still nothing.

His foot hits a rock that rests next to a worn-out "welcome" mat.

He taps the rock with his foot again and creates a rattling sound.

Kurt picks up the rock and turns it in his hands frantically.

He locates a small flap on the bottom of the plastic rock and pushes his thumb through.

He smirks and shakes his head as he retrieves the rusty key.

He swings open the screen door with his foot and tries the key in the door.

INT. GREEN HOUSE - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Kurt gently pushes the creaky door open and fixes the cigarette that is drooping from his mouth.

He walks a few steps forward and then jumps at the sudden and loud chime of a grandfather clock heard in the other room.

INT. DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

He grits his teeth and makes a beeline for the clock.

He opens the glass screen and yanks the chain inside. The chimes abruptly stop.

Kurt breathes rapidly for a moment and then

relights the cigarette that is in his mouth.

His hands shake.

He looks around the cabin and runs his finger across a shelf.

He scrunches his face at the amount of dust that appears on his finger and wipes it on his pants.

Kurt switches on a light and walks down a hallway into a bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

He runs his fingers down the side of the door archway and looks at the penciled writing that is on the wall:

*4 ft, 5 in - Wilson and 4 ft, 8 3/4 in - Kurt*  
Kurt smiles as he stares at the pencil marks.

He picks up a frame on the dresser. It is of a man, a woman, two little boys, and a little girl.

The second drawer of the dresser is partially open, and Kurt pulls it open as far as it can go.

He rifles through and reads the back of a piece of paper. In small handwriting, it says:

*Kurt, second grade, November 12, 1978.*

Kurt flips over the paper and smiles as he looks at a stick figure drawing.

Above the smaller figure, it says *Kurt* and above the larger figure it says, in messy handwriting, *Super Dad*.

He rifles through the drawer again and pulls out

another piece of paper.

Kurt's name is scribbled at the top. His eyes follow a line that reads:

*When I grow up, I want to be a superhero just like my Dad.*

His smile quickly drops.

He stares at the floor as his eyes well up.

He clears his throat and puts his head in his hands. Kurt sighs and wipes his eyes with his sleeve.

He reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a gold locket and clicks it open.

One part of the locket shows a black and white picture of a woman in her 30s and the other side shows a man in his 30s. The same people in the picture frame.

He places the locket on the dresser and rips off a piece of paper on notepad on the dresser.

He writes *Mom* and pauses.

Kurt continues to write and then folds the paper and puts it on the pillow of the bed.

He slides the door shut and stands up slowly.

As he walks down the hallway, he stops and peers into the kitchen. The sink is trickling water.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Kurt walks up to a half-full pot of coffee on the kitchen counter.

He hesitantly places his hand on it to check its temperature and jerks his hand away.

He examines his hand for burns and furrows his brow as he looks behind him.

He notices the pile of napkins on the counter move slightly.

He looks next to him and notices that the back sliding glass door is open.

He runs to the partly open glass door, peeks his head out and looks both ways. He does not see any sign of activity.

He stands and rubs his beard as he looks at the floor. Wind chimes ring in the distance.

INT. CAR IN FRONT OF GREEN HOUSE - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Kurt snuffles loudly and clears his throat. His eyes are very red.

He turns the key in the ignition, but the car does not start.

Kurt tries to start the car as his teeth rattle from the cold.

He stops trying and slams his hand on the steering wheel, which lets out a honk. He continues to honk the horn in frustration.

Kurt suddenly stops hitting the horn.

His breathing increases rapidly and he rests his head in his hands.

FADE OUT.



*Amanda Tolvaia*

my love and i are going to bed  
rock city, arizona, a stop  
before we collect a love  
sized spider, fifty-five inches leg to leg.  
we've already chosen a name: cane  
for the curve of its limbs and  
the sweetness of our drive-  
thru milkshakes, though maybe we'll change  
our minds and call her baby puss  
in homage to the sculpted sabretooth,  
rehabilitated like the raptors.

*Previous page...*

**Clementine**  
*Simal Sami*





**Snow Day Hand**

*Jack Golden*

## For Daniel

*Editorial Note: This piece contains depictions of depressive and suicidal content.*

*Joshua Rudolph*

Daniel left the only lottery ticket he'd ever bought on his nightstand, unscratched. You don't lose until you play, was his rationale. Jeremy usually asked, "Why buy it at all?"

But so there was Daniel, on his second smoke of the day, third of the weekend, strumming out the chords of some folk tune. He sang the right lyrics, or the wrong ones. He sang the ones he thought right without checking. He hadn't listened to the original in years. Jer was sprawled out on the futon, neck positioned to guarantee future soreness.

A ding sounded from Daniel's pocket. He fumbled for his phone.

"That better be Anika man. Don't stop playing unless it's life or death or sex," Jer said.

"No, it's an email. I fucking hate email. It's like, people think they can just email you whenever they want. It's despicable."

Jeremy hit pause.

Daniel read no more than the subject line. "It's my goddamn boss asking when I can come in. Always asking when I can work. It's like, I don't even know man. You try taking a bus in this city. No goddamn public transportation. It's fucked up. If I could like, project my life into his brain, maybe he'd get it. I've got things to worry about."

He worried about Anika. There are certain in-betweens in one's life where one *isn't* a whole lot of anything. You can't really attract anyone based on like, accomplishments or whatever. So Daniel just tried to think interesting things.

Jer hid an eye roll. "I get it man, but maybe just respond. You can do a few days in the office. Take a late shift. You don't do anything there anyways, so it's like you can do whatever."

Something like that sneaks up every time Daniel says he hates his job. Imagine this: you're talking about your partner and you mention they want to do it *all the time*. To the inexperienced, it seems like a blessing.



Constant physical validation. Serotonin on tap. The bad reveals itself in time. You want to listen to a record and halfway through it starts again. You can't focus on the record because now you're getting your neck wet. You say to your friend, "Man, I can't listen to a record without getting my neck wet!" Your friend responds, "I'd kill for the level of neck wetting you're getting." Your friend doesn't get the problem.

"It's not that easy, man." Work, at least Daniel's call center work, keeps you busy enough but bored enough so you spend the little energy you have left thinking about the misery of the job.

Daniel picks up his guitar again, "I envy the fucking janitors in that place. They get to do something. What do I do? Wait for calls and fuck around on Reddit?"

Jer wanted to call him ungrateful, but didn't, seeing the expression his buddy wore.

"What'd he even say in the email?"

"I'm not gonna read it. I know it's gonna annoy me and I'm just gonna get mad. He always assumes that just because I'm not busy, that means I'm free."

Jer thought for a second, scooting back on the futon. "Yeah, it's like, what if something real fucked up happened and you couldn't come in. Like you needed chemo or something."

"Or I tried to kill myself."

Jer laughed. "Can you imagine that? He'd be all like, 'Oh man that sucks, but there's nothing here you can try again with, so like, coming in is a blessing.'"

That got a laugh. "No, I swear he would say that though." Daniel laid down on the dirty carpet. "Say, what if I did though?"

"Did what?"

"Tell him I tried to kill myself."

"That would be fucked up."

"Yeah, but like, it would be kind of funny."

"It would be a little funny, I guess." Jeremy stared at Daniel from the couch.

Daniel felt his head sink deeper into the dust. The texture of the Artex ceiling started to shift and morph, becoming the pieces of a Van

Gogh that Daniel couldn't remember the name of. "What would you say in that email, Jer?"

"I don't know. 'I tried to kill myself, cut me some slack.'"

Daniel thought a lot about suicide. He once mentioned it to Jeremy. He said, "Not in a like, I'm gonna kill myself way, but in like, the word gets stuck in my head way." It passively drifted through his mind a few times a day.

When he smoked or drank or thought or did anything to excess, he'd return to the same daydream. Train station, abandoned, 3:13a.m. Daniel enters, wearing his Sunday best. A man in a fedora and suit, reading a newspaper covered in gibberish, sitting on a metal bench. Wind sounds.

The man says, "Early in the morning to catch a train."

"I don't make the schedule."

"Where you headed?"

Apprehension washes over Daniel. He can't remember. He can't take out the ticket to look.

"That's me," the man says.

When Daniel blinks, he's gone.

"No, Jer, that's too aggressive. If you're willing to take yourself out, you don't expect anyone to owe you anything."

Jer raised his eyebrow. "You know, that makes sense." He didn't wonder how Daniel knew this.

What happened to the mood? Jeremy now had to lay back and seriously contemplate the internal life of a suicidal person for what he thought was a joke. It's like, the air went grey, he felt.

Daniel took more time between thoughts. "If I'm writing this email, I'm starting with an apology. Dear boss, I'm sorry I have to do this, and I'm sorry to get back late, I've had an emergency." The email was starting to differ from what Daniel would actually do. If Daniel really tried, which he wouldn't, he thought to himself, he would tell as few people as possible. The email needed to be artful and compact. Precise.

"That sounds sorta guilt trippy." Jeremy smoked nervously on the couch.

"I've had a medical emergency. Maybe I just hint. Leave a trail. Tell him a psychiatrist recommended I stay at the hospital for a bit."

“Daniel, this is a little fucked up.”

“Just enough pieces for him to put it together.”

“Don’t you think?”

“Let’s see him harass people about the schedule again.”

“I’m sure he’s stressed too.”

“What if this had been real?” Daniel snapped at Jeremy. “Then what?”

“I guess we’ll find out.”

That night, Daniel laid in his bed, a draft of the email typed in his phone. He figured he couldn’t send it on the day it would’ve happened. It had to be around 3a.m., the one after the next.

Daniel and Anika were far from being “something,” but Daniel was fine with how it was. Every day of his life was the same. So, he found someone he liked. It didn’t matter whether she liked him. He put hopes on her to have something to think about. Any sort of definite answer would be a buzzkill.

He found himself waiting up for a text from Anika that he would decline to open until the morning. That was fine. He downed a couple too many sleeping pills and passed out.

Daniel only dreamed about two things: work and suicide, never at the same time.

The suicide dreams didn’t bother him. The work dreams did. Especially the ones with little inconveniences, the worst of which is the “office is too cold and my nipples are showing” dream. He believed those. Anything that made work any worse bothered Daniel more than the most violent in-dream suicide he committed.

He woke up, shook off the suicide dream and read the draft. It seemed good. He changed a few words, removing the poetics. He thought that if he were to do it, suicide, and fail, the character that he was playing would hang himself. He still played his work persona. A real suicide attempt would be liberatory, he thought. A removal of the mask. Like shaking off Melpomene.

The email was fine and would be fine. It was something to think about.

The day was spent as the last, bullshitting with Jeremy about nothing, smoking and waiting it out. Jeremy didn't bring up or didn't think to bring up the email.

That night again, Daniel stayed up alone in the darkness of his room. Darkness was a strong word. The blinds were shit and the city switched the streetlights to LEDs. The lights shone on him in little stripes. He imagined himself as a tiger, mumbling little growls and pretending to stalk his prey. He'd never admit it, but there was something freeing about this.

After his jungle roleplay, Daniel threw on some music to pass the time until 3a.m. when he would send the email. Bill Evans came to mind.

After he finished to the duet record with Jim Hall, it was 2:56. Maybe it was time to send it, he thought. A precise time like 3 might make the orchestration of it obvious. But he didn't want to feel impatient, like he couldn't wait for people to think he tried to kill himself. It was 3:02 when he sent it.

It had been what, a week? Since Daniel got the email back from his boss. An early morning, "Don't worry about it. We'll figure it out. I've had a rough time of it too lately!" Dan could imagine it — his boss coming into work at 8, or maybe he saw it earlier on his phone. His boss sees the email, decides to respond, and doesn't know what to say. The boss's email came at 8:20a.m., so 20 minutes of silent contemplation. Or maybe his boss came in late. There's a chance he didn't think about it at all. He cared immensely or didn't care at all, Daniel thought.

He spent the last week retreating into his apartment with Jeremy, ordering food and theorizing about the whereabouts, whenabouts and howabouts of Anika. He hadn't talked to her since the email—rather—she hadn't talked to him. A text back would be too definite, anyways.

Most of his dreams were now mystically suicidal, the suicide that never came, the rope in the corner that no one hung up.

Jeremy sat by that week not doing much at all.

Daniel decided that night at dinner, when the fun, food, the beer, and the Spotify subscription had run out, he should go back to work. He sent an email explaining a brief schedule.

And he texted Anika. Not to get her attention, though he did want it (and as mentioned he did not want it), but to ask about makeup. He'd need some bruising around the neck.

Daniel saw a Shepitko movie where the main guy got hanged at the end and he admired that in a weird way. Think like this: If you're depressed (Daniel reminded himself that he wasn't), you have a certain outlook. It's a chemical imbalance, sure, but depression is also a philosophy (he guessed). *The world is shit*. Why? Fill in your own reasons. But if the world is *fundamentally shit*, an unchanging, unmorphing pile of feces, the only thing you can do is take yourself out. Fall through the cracks it made for you. Not that Daniel felt that way or anything.

He got himself on the schedule for a few days a week. His first day back was a Tuesday, less tension than a Monday. Anika briefed him about makeup through a text. He chuffed the "Why?" with something about making a short film.

The masked-up bus ride to work was a blur. It was a flurry of thoughts and memorized routes. The world becomes wallpaper when you go the same way one thousand times. When he got to the door, streaked from people pushing it rather than using the door handle, the whole reception room rolled their eyes to Dan. The makeup was mildly convincing from a distance, especially with the turtleneck.

The receptionist said hi to Daniel. He said hi back, or didn't, he couldn't remember.

When Daniel got to his desk, he took a long look at his boss across the office. It was difficult to tell whether lying to him made Daniel feel bad. On one hand, he was lying, which was bad. He was lying about something serious, so, double bad. His boss was never intentionally cruel (Daniel hoped), but he wondered how ignorant you can be before it was your fault. And his boss was getting over a divorce. It happened a long time ago, but Daniel wasn't sure if you were ever done getting over a divorce.

On the other hand, Daniel found something grating about his boss. Maybe it was the not-real-bossness of a floor manager as opposed to a branch manager. Daniel didn't like the way his boss talked. He had an uncanny ability to make you feel like a prick for enjoying things. Most of all though, and Daniel could not stand this in anyone, was his boss's ability

to turn conversations into *conversations about him*. Poor sweet Dana, the receptionist who said hello earlier, got it the worst. Her kids had moved to other states—but oh god his boss’s kids, he never saw his kids. She had health problems—oh god his back, his horrible back.

Daniel did the calculus and found that even if he felt bad, he didn’t care that he did.

The footsteps came plodding down the cubicle aisles. Daniel’s heart dropped mundanely. No one else walked so heavily in a quiet workplace. He buried his head in his keyboard, pretending to type.

“Hey champ.” Daniel’s boss loomed behind him. Monolithically. Like a Rosetta Stone of ways to annoy the fuck out of you.

“Oh, hey, how’s it going?”

“Oh good, you know, we’re busy around here.”

Daniel’s thoughts read like DNA. So much information, so little of it meaningful.

Example: FUC KYO UFU CKY OUF UCKYOU Iho peh edo  
esn ’tk now FUC KYO UFU CKY OUF UCKYOU FUC KYO UFU CKY  
OUw hyi she her eno wFU CKY OUF UCKYOU FUC KYO Uke ept alk  
ing tom ean dil ldo itf orr eal FUC KYO UFU CKY OUF UCKYOU

Daniel nodded, scratching his neck, covertly lowering the turtle-neck.

“I hope you’re taking it easy, buddy. Let me know if you need anything.”

“Okay, sure, will do.”

Daniel buried himself in his keyboard and pretended to work the rest of the day.

It went as follows: Take a couple calls, get pissed and slam your head on the desk, sit waiting for someone else to take a call wait fuck I’ll get it, head on desk, cigarette. Etc.

At 4:30, a specter broke Daniel’s worktrance.

Annaliese from IT.

Clad in all black and skull jewelry, black-masked, Daniel had no idea how she managed to keep a job in this place. But he was happy about it.

“Heard you tried to kill yourself.” Annaliese wastes no time, her

voice ripped the words out. She spoke in zipties.

“Yeah.”

“That’s pretty bad.”

“Yeah.”

“Were you suicidal?”

“Guess so.”

“Been there.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Annaliese hovered over him for a moment, looking over his shoulder, investigating his computer.

“I’m supposed to tell you that you’re logging tickets to the wrong places.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Seems kind of rude right now though.”

“No, that’s alright.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. Just log the onsite stuff to onsite and not to hardware, please and thanks.”

“Sure.”

She walked away.

When Daniel laid down to sleep, he felt the whole day was anti-climactic. He could imagine how his boss might feel, but he never saw it on his boss’s face because of the mask. Daniel made a few faces his boss might have made. Daniel had a choice to make. Ramp up the drama to get the reaction he said he wanted, or accept it was kind of a bust. The first felt sort of sociopath-y, Daniel thought, so not that.

He wondered—Annaliese, really? She was suicidal? It puzzled him. Daniel imagined (only imagined) that a suicidal person would not feel comfortable expressing the aesthetica of death. The goth isn’t suicidal, he imagined, the goth is comforted by death. Is that a form of suicidality? Or was it like, some sort of bushido-like acceptance? Example. Ian Curtis wanted to die. He never accepted it though, right? The world crept up on

him like an oil spill, sinking and drowning him. Counterpoint. Nick Cave loves death, and is, as of now, alive. He bathes in death. Daniel assumed people that love death wouldn't want to die. Obsession itself seemed like a sort of distancing. Figure 2. You'd never say the football player is obsessed with football because he is football. But the die hard, the painted fan, is obsessed. It signals a certain distance. So why did the goth want to die? It sounded like a setup to a joke for which Daniel had no punchline.

He stared at his phone. It was on his dresser, face down so he couldn't see if notifications came. It was better to assume Anika hadn't texted him rather than confirm it. It's like the Schrödinger cat box, both at once, but never open it and you're fine. Keep it closed. Don't worry about it. Do something else.

Another suicide dream. No work dreams, which was nice. In this dream, Daniel was listening to some music on the radio of a car he did not own. He drove around a mountain. The road wrapped around the mountain several times with no on or off ramps. For a while he didn't mind, he had a few CDs with him, no phone. When the music stopped, and he was out of CDs, he unceremoniously drove off the side of the mountain. The gas gauge did not change during the trip. It just sort of stayed the same. But the music ran out.

Work was a bore and a blur besides a few moments with Annaliese. She stopped by once a day on the pretense that Daniel was logging tickets to the wrong place in the system. Daniel encouraged her by continuing to do so. Anika had not texted him back. He decided to get over it.

"I'm over it," said Daniel.

And nothing really changed.

Whenever he had time to think during work, he basically only thought about killing himself. As he should, he supposed. If he were to get away with it, he needed to play the part. You don't just get over it. Did anyone assume it was odd that he'd only been out a week? Was that the norm? He asked Annaliese who had no idea because she hadn't made it that far.

He grew more anxious of being discovered even though the week was fine. He ought to have something to be worried about, and the Anika thing was becoming a chore. He couldn't worry about going to grad school



or getting a better job because who cares? So he worried about the act.

The next week he drooped his eyes more, spoke in lower tones, looked directly into his coffee instead of making eye contact. All the things he thought a really truly honest to god suicidal person would do. The suicidal person wouldn't be dramatic, right? Not about the sadness. That's how Daniel knew he wasn't suicidal for real—every bad feeling he had burned through his entire body.

When Anika texted him back, he didn't open it. He didn't want to know. Best leave it closed. It was the middle of the work week when she did. He was on a 12-8. Best leave it unopened.

He spent an hour in the mornings with the bruise makeup, referencing yesterday's makeup and healing gradually. A little yellow today where yesterday's purple ended, he thought. It made him sick. He kept a whole bottle of Tums on the bathroom sink and downed four every morning before applying the makeup.

He retreated. Daniel, you must start acting like you just attempted to kill yourself, he thought. Daniel, you have to act like *Daniel* if he was suicidal. The genericisms won't cut it anymore. Okay. Sure.

Daniel spent most days thinking about what it would be like if he were suicidal. He'd cave in. He'd think about it all the time.

And where was his boss? What of the email? It was a bust as far as Daniel was concerned. The repercussions of a fake suicide reveal would surely get him fired from the job he hated, and it would make the family he was useless to hate him. Where was everyone else in all of this? Who are you convincing?

Every time Annaliese approached she asked questions about the suicide. Daniel had to figure out how Daniel would act if he was suicidal. It came naturally when he saw it that way. He answered: "I don't know exactly why, better to go than stay, I guess. No, I don't know anyone else who tried. No, I didn't really talk to anyone at the hospital. Yes I'm on antidepressants. No, I don't know what brand, I haven't thought to look."

She hung heavy over him. She saw right through him. Or she didn't. It didn't matter, but he could imagine her seeing through him. That was enough. He couldn't be found out. So, okay, play the part.

In bed that night, he imagined himself as deeply, deeply suicidal.

For whom? He tries and survives. Why hadn't anyone asked how? Did they assume Jeremy saved him? Doesn't matter, okay. You're deeply suicidal. You attempt. You fail. You spend a week in the hospital. You get released back into the same shit job, doing the same shit thing, but you're on anti-depressants. Do you take them? Maybe. Would he? Doesn't matter. So okay. Are they working? He didn't feel it. They take weeks to kick in. Okay. Shouldn't someone be checking on him? Maybe. The real and the unreal meld. He was convinced of a few things. Not of some others. Okay. All things considered, in this situation, what do you do?

First, okay, you look out the window. That made sense. The tiger stripes shone on him. That made sense. His phone buzzed on the dresser. Don't open it. Okay. You're looking over the edge, looking at the people down there. You can't see their eyes, so you imagine what they'd look like, and they're bleak. Now, keep in mind, Daniel said to himself, this is an act. You're imitating suicidal Daniel. He sees the sad people. What next?

He took out the guitar and strummed a few things, but he barely heard it. Did he play quietly because Jeremy was sleeping? Sure. He couldn't hear how the chords worked together. He just played them. Okay. That doesn't make sense. No tension, no release. Okay. And when he put it down the music stopped. Okay. You're post-suicidal. What do you do next?

He stood on a shoebox when he did it. When it went rolling after he kicked it, it flipped over wildly, landing in the closet. Didn't open one time on its way there.

*Next page...*

**Bled Dense**

*Samuel Marranta*





# black and blue

*Michael Quinnan*

trespassing gunshots  
bolted apartment windows  
pain and injustice

*Next page...*

**Untitled Hand**

*Bodo Johnson*



# Our Houses Lie Under the Willow Tree

*Mary Purcell*

the fractured glass  
brings a breeze from the river  
where we gathered the stones that made the walls  
breathable

near the trees I find myself  
as a child and hold her head  
under the water so that she may see  
how small our pockets  
of air really are

I teach her how  
to float to feel  
the weight of her body against the surface  
tension our mother does not see  
herself when she looks at us she reminds me  
when I was born I would not cry  
so now she will not jump

into my grave and for this I scrape  
the bottom of my cherried belly  
and dip my brush in the pooling paint  
of my wounds (which will soon be golden  
with age) hoping to move her  
with the saturation hoping to make the transparent walls  
of her house blush red

*Next page...*

**Amira**  
*Sofia Zingone*









## Contributors

Bethany Belkowski is a first-year English major in the SJLA Program.

Emily Bernard is a senior English and history double major.

Jack Golden is a senior psychology major.

Elisabeth (Bodo) Johnson is a sophomore philosophy and political science double major in the SJLA Program.

Kasidy Leggin is a senior physiology major.

Sarah Liskowicz is a sophomore neuroscience and biomathematics double major in the Honors Program.

Samuel Marranca is a junior history major in the Honors Program.

Molly Neeson is a sophomore environmental science and philosophy double major in the SJLA Program.

Mary Purcell is a senior English and philosophy double major in the SJLA Program.

Michael Quinnan is a sophomore biomathematics major in the Magis Program.

Joshua Rudolph is a senior JREM and philosophy double major in the SJLA Program.

Simal Sami is a first-year computer science major in the Magis Program.

Quinn Stanford is a senior English major.

Amanda Tolvaisha is a senior English and philosophy double major in the SJLA Program.

Sofia Zingone is a sophomore physiology and philosophy double major in the SJLA Program.

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## ***Esprit* Submission Information**

Deadline for Fall 2021: October 29 at 11:59 p.m.

*Esprit*, a review of arts and letters, features work by students of The University of Scranton and is published each fall and spring as a co-curricular activity of the English department.

We will consider a maximum of five visual art submissions and five literary submissions (poetry and/or prose) per author/artist. *Esprit* does not accept resubmissions, works currently under consideration elsewhere, previously published works, or works published to social media accounts.

### **Manuscripts (Electronic Submission)**

Original stories, poems, essays, translations, features, sketches, humor, satire, interviews, reviews, and short plays must be typed and saved in Microsoft Word file format (.docx). All manuscripts, except poetry and short plays, must be double-spaced. Every page of the manuscript must list the title and page number in the upper right corner. It is recommended that all manuscripts be submitted in 12-point Times New Roman font. The author's name must NOT appear at any point in the manuscript to ensure that all submissions are judged anonymously. Each submission is to be saved as a separate Word file, and all submissions are to be attached to a single email and sent to [espritsubmissions@scranton.edu](mailto:espritsubmissions@scranton.edu) from the author's University email account.

The body of the email must contain the following information:

Writer's name  
Royal ID number  
Year in school and enrollment status (full-time or part-time)  
Major(s) and honors program(s) (Business Honors, Business Leadership, Honors, Magis, or SJLA)  
Genre(s) of submissions emailed (poetry or prose)  
Title of each work submitted in the listed genre(s)

If you are submitting a work of translation, please include a copy of the original text along with your translation.

Submissions received late, mislabeled, or emailed without all of the above information will NOT be considered.

### **Graphics (Electronic Submission)**

Black and white/color photographs and pen and ink drawings work best in this format, but pencil drawings, collages, and paintings will be considered. Your name must NOT appear anywhere on the submission(s). Upload your submission(s) to

OneDrive through your my.scranton email account in the *highest possible quality*, and share that OneDrive file in an email to [espritsubmissions@scranton.edu](mailto:espritsubmissions@scranton.edu). The body of the email must contain the following information:

Artist's name  
Royal ID number  
Year in school and enrollment status (full-time or part-time)  
Major(s) and honors program(s) (Business Honors, Business Leadership, Honors, Magis, or SJLA)  
Title of each work submitted  
Medium of each work submitted (photography, painting, charcoal, etc.)

When the work submitted is a study of, or is otherwise dependent upon, another artist's work, please supply the other artist's name and that work's title.

Submissions received late, mislabeled, or without all of the above information will NOT be considered.

All submissions are reviewed anonymously. All accepted submissions to *Esprit* that are the work of currently enrolled full-time undergraduates at The University of Scranton will be considered, according to genre, for The Berrier Prose Award (\$100), The Berrier Poetry Award (\$100), and The *Esprit* Graphics Award (\$100).

Please do NOT address questions regarding submission policy to [espritsubmissions@scranton.edu](mailto:espritsubmissions@scranton.edu); this email address is expressly for receiving submissions and will not be accessed until the *Esprit* submission deadline has passed. Questions should instead be addressed to the Editor-in-Chief for the Fall 2021 semester, Nia Long ([nia.long@scranton.edu](mailto:nia.long@scranton.edu)).

