

# ESPRIT

SPRING 2023



# ESPRIT

The University of Scranton Review of Arts and Letters

Spring 2023

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## Spring 2023 Awards:

### The Berrier Poetry Award

Molly Neeson

“Late Night Conversation (Between Lovers)”

### The Berrier Prose Award

Zane Price

“Taz and Rose”

### The Esprit Graphics Award

Max Messenger

“Dante Outside of Alumni”

## Spring 2023 Award Judges:

### Poetry:

**Eric Dittmar** graduated from The University of Scranton in May 2022 with a double major in computer science and philosophy. He was a member of the SJLA Program and served as the Technology Manager of *Esprit*. He is currently putting his college education to use working as an EMT in Bangor, PA.

### Prose:

**Sarah White** graduated from The University of Scranton in May 2022 with a Bachelor's of Science in biology and philosophy. A graduate of SJLA and a past Production Manager of *Esprit*, she currently serves as an environmental justice advocate in Orange, California. Having successfully brought Scranton's rain to the previously sunny California, Sarah is excited to begin her next adventure- a PhD program in Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology at The Ohio State University.

### Graphics:

A native of San Lucas Tolimán, **Byron Maldonado** began his career as a documentary photographer for Fr. Gregory Schaffer, founder of the town's San Lucas Mission, which University of Scranton students visit on International Service Program trips. His one-man show “Mayan Narratives: San Lucas Tolimán, Guatemala,” representing the indigenous community there, was featured in the Hope Horn Gallery last semester.

# Contents

<i>Bathed</i>	Sofia Zingone	<b>Front Cover</b>	
<i>Solar Power</i>		Michael Quinnan	4
<i>Evening Gathering</i>		Bodo Johnson	5
<i>Up is Down</i>		Conor Dougherty	6
<i>Late Night Conversation (Between Lovers)</i>		Molly Neeson	7
<i>Taz and Rose</i>		Zane Price	8
<i>The Kingsroad</i>		Devang Patel	16
<i>Heart-Cut Spirit</i>		Bethany Belkowski	17
<i>Blood Moon</i>		Sofia Zingone	18
<i>My Body is a Temple and I've Got a Can of Spray Paint and a Grudge.</i>		Katherine Fangs	19
<i>I will work at the diner this summer on one condition.</i>		Katie Till	20
<i>Uncle Rick</i>		Bodo Johnson	21
<i>Sunny</i>		Devang Patel	22
<i>the model</i>		Michael Quinnan	23
<i>Moments of Masculinity</i>		Max Messenger	24
<i>my mother and i</i>		Faith Montagnino	25
<i>To Helen:</i>		Molly Neeson	26
<i>Dante Outside of Alumni</i>		Max Messenger	27
<i>We Were Villains</i>		Britney Walsh	28
<i>Fantails</i>		Max Messenger	39
<i>Ginger Run</i>		Brandon Lam	40
<i>view from sunday morning</i>		Katie Till	41
<i>Closer Than Anything</i>		Chloe Devero	42
<i>Siamese</i>		Max Messenger	45



## Solar Power

*to my mother*

*Michael Quinnan*

*you hate the winter, but  
you still get up every morning to  
decaf coffee, half and  
half, no sugar. thirty-  
minute commute, stuck behind  
slow tractors who turn after  
the only traffic light. bell  
rings, twenty five-year-olds  
at their desks, you are dressed in  
your sweater, khakis, and high-heeled boots.  
through the temper  
tantrums thrown by tiny  
humans, you teach them how to  
be human.  
eight hours pass; you  
come home to clean, cook, and  
make tomorrow's lesson plan.*

*(some nights, you even splurge and watch Harry Potter.)*

*on the weekends when I  
come home to dust the cabinets  
we listen to Lorde sing about the  
summer and we long for  
warm weather. I never want to leave  
you, so for now, I will  
spend all the evenings I can with the woman who raised me.*





## Late Night Conversation (Between Lovers)

*Molly Neeson*

We wake, and the  
silver quiver that slips  
along your lip strips  
my spine: shiver.  
Unskined, sounds sidle  
from my mouth, taken  
up by your tongue. Bow strung.  
We toss tautologies but clasp  
our cognates: locked and unknotted,  
fluency beginning to form  
the fletching. I drawl  
closer as you round out  
my vowels and construct  
our consonance: cupid's bow poised  
parallel to my own— *pull*—  
and with one more spit of silk, I sing  
your words. Struck. Unwound-  
-ed. Unbound boy, sink  
your Eros: see me  
flicker in your fundus. Pull me  
into our home of shafts and sounds.

# Taz and Rose

*Zane Price*

Energy hummed in the restaurant. Hibachi grills lit with the fire of their knife-whirling masters. Artists, mesmerizing customers with their control, succinctly cut and pristinely rolled sushi. The hellish flame and oceanic calm sat at ends of the building with the patrons in between. Waitresses sprung rapidly among tables and gifted their patrons a bit from each side. This constant heating and cooling of appetites electrified tongues desperate for more. In the vacancies between courses, these tongues rattled away on love, on disaster, on the lurid, and on the desperate alike. As multitudinous in category were the patrons themselves. Lawyers sipped Tokyo mules. Twelve-year-old partygoers slurped down virgin Shirley Temples. A greying couple shared a scorpion bowl. This kaleidoscopic nature of the venue, distorting the humdrum lives of Scrantonites with heat and craft and conversation, dimmed closer toward the entrance. A single front of house window, showing the sleeted streets of Courthouse Square, shattered the mirage. To sustain the suspension of disbelief, the owner placed a single table there in an effort to conceal the façade. At that table sat a glass of water and a Coke Zero.

Taz wiped the cola from his slobbering lips. The wet made strands of his sprawling brunette mane latch onto and inside his cheeks. That same dense hair overflowed out of his rumpled shirt at his wrists, at his jugular. The blue light of the fluorescent 'Open' sign showed stains of various widths, drips, and colors: a Jackson Pollock of an outfit. This all matched with the demeanor of the man ravaging his miso. The sipping, *pew*, inhaled the soup from his spoon like the vacuum of space, and the splashing, *bick*, of the spoon back into the bowl sent more details to his painted garment. This one-two process continued until Taz clanged his spoon into an empty bowl, looked down at it in sadness, then peered to his left as to where the waitress was.



Rose folded her napkin as a coaster for her water. She inspected her spoon closely for defects in hygiene. She looked down at the liquid salt with a mushroom staring back at her. A vein on her neck visibly tightened. She put down the spoon and fixed the tuck of her graphite grey blouse into her waist. She looked across to the withdrawal patient, fingers tapping and tongue salivating. After a conversation of eyes, Taz took the bowl from in front of Rose and began fueling again. Rose watched the neanderthal, and listened to his *pew* and his *bick* until the vein in her neck sent her head down to her phone. Her polished finger moved past the Tinder app to her messages. Multiple enthusiastic inquiries from her friends flooded the inbox; she gave stock responses. She swiped to her midterm notes, though the environment afforded her little concentration. Isotopes and soy sauce and uranium and “Happy Birthday!” and plutonium all California rolled into a blur that faded with a conclusive *bick*.

“You have kinks?” said Taz parting his hair like curtains. Those words accompanied with his warm breath chilled Rose’s blood. She tightened her countenance, giving off the complexion of steel. Under the table, Rose put her phone in her handbag and searched with her fingers for perfume. Taz sent his greasy hand across the table saying, “You know? Kinks.” Rose made a feint, yelping alarm to which the lawyers looked over and began to reach for their business cards. She cut the cry short, seeing the true intention of Taz’s finger pointing at the vein in her neck. “I get those, too; sometimes I rub my neck against the bedpost to get them out. Midterms, am I right? I hope it gets better for you, Ro.” Taz took a finishing swig of his drink, then rose it in the air rattling it for the waitress’ attention. Rose looked at Taz the way Jane Goodall must’ve looked at those chimps. She unclasped her hand from the bottle and left her phone in there as well.

“Another soft drink, sir?” asked the waitress looking down at Taz.

“Ro, you have to try this stuff; it’s like Coke but not Coke at all,” said Taz. Rose stared at Taz, his eyes pleading, cartoonishly wide. She then turned to the waitress to deny but caught a glimpse of the

elderly couple. The old duo, an obese man and a pencil-thin woman, sipped out of their mixed drink together in the manner Lady and the Tramp ate spaghetti. She fixated on the image and perked her ears as if hearing echoes. Taz bubbling his drink brought her back to the table now set with two Coke Zeros. The staining brown soaked into to the makeshift coaster where clear water used to be. Taz blew through his straw into the drink again, getting some blow back on his brow. “No sugar, but the same fizzing power!”

“Fission power?”

“Yeah, fizzing power!”

Rose looked down at her blouse, slightly untucked from her skirt. She looked at the missed spot of nail polish on her left ring finger. She looked at the thumbmarked glass: its carbonation rising, its condensation falling. She delicately moved her hand to the straw and undressed it. She folded the wrapper carefully and placed it to the side. The first sip made the vein decompress.

Taz had ordered his steak “well rare” to express his desire for it to be more carcass than cooked. The cut was red enough to have been prepared at the sushi bar. He wrestled with it as physicists do with quantum mechanics. He ate it bit by bit, chewing it to gum before digestion. This arduous strife of a meal equaled in time Rose’s Ship of Theseus meal. She sent it back for seasoning on the vegetables, the al dente of the noodles, the MSG in the rice, the veins in the shrimp. After four roundtrips of the dish, Rose accepted the paradox with the ease of someone who does this often. She divided her plate to avoid cross contamination; Taz used his third soda as a dipping sauce.

Rose nibbled at her lightly salted steamed vegetables.

“Some Red Hot Chili Peppers, some Nirvana, but nothing like super deep into their albums either. I’m into like Mitski, or Maggie Rogers, if you consider them alternative?”

“No, Ro, no. I’m talking about the carnal, make your parents get you a therapist shit. Soul Glo, black midi, fucking.” Taz worked through a hard swallow of his mutton, “Death Grips!” Rose saw the whitehots of his eyes and let a breathy laugh through her nostrils.

“That’s the only shit worth listening to now,” to which Taz added, “you know, if that’s what you’re into.”

Rose chewed on her perfectly cooked noodles.

“And I take care of all the pool toys and make sure the kids don’t drown, but only in the summer.”

“So, you’d let kids drown during the other seasons, Ro?” To this, Rose wore the face of an owner watching their puppy’s first roll over. Taz picked at his collar.

Rose ate the whitest rice.

“Microscopic, yeah. The very fabric of our physical world.”

“And you’re learning to master it, Ro?” Taz asked stabbing the white gristle. Rose flipped her chopsticks in her fingers: top to bottom to top to bottom. She stared at her glass, whose carbonation versus condensation race had ended. She looked to Taz, gnashing his teeth on meat paler than his teeth.

“Trying to.”

Rose devoured her plump, pink shrimp.

“No fucking way, Ro!” Taz’s nose spouted cola onto his just cleaned plate. Rose flung back in her chair in the same manner of convulsion and spilled sesame seeds onto her skirt.

“Slurped it down in one shot! He had this face like a, like a-”

“Like a horse who ate a sour radish?” said Taz, sending Rose into another fit of laughter. She steadied herself by grabbing Taz’s sleeve.

“Then he asked me all stern like, ‘Ma’am, why do you serve such an odd poolside drink?’ I told him, ‘Well, sir, usually people use that as a dipping sauce and not as an actual cocktail.’”

Over the course of the meal, the whole of the restaurant’s mirth zoomed in towards Taz and Rose. It was as if each of the leaving customers deposited their levity at the door, leaving only this supercharged pairing by the end of the night. The culinary samurais cleaned their blades. The waitresses cleared and collected the greens on the tables. The owner herself placed the check in between the messy man and giddy girl. Rose reached into her handbag.

“Uh, uh, uh, Ro; I got it, I got it.” Taz flung crumpled bills



onto the table; they unwrinkled upwards and outwards like yeast. A debate of eyes occurred. Just as Rose began to drop her credit card back into her handbag, Taz returned half the crumpled bills to wherever dark crevice they were birthed. Taz flipped Rose's credit card toward him.

“Primrose Bird: quite a hot name, Ro.”

“Haught, for sure. I always thought it was a bit overkill. My mom once said, ‘Rose. Since you are a Bird, Rose is just fine; the ‘Prim’ is self-evident.’” Taz moved the card back toward Rose's set hand; their fingers touched.

Taz and Rose entered the mudsnow of Scranton. The precipitation drizzling down matched the quantity of gravelly slush being flung upwards by the tires of Subaru. Streetlights reflected off the frost-shined dark, creating a prismatic glare. The chill hit Rose, nearly penetrating her newly ruddy cheeks. Taz grabbed her by the forearm. They trekked the hills back to her dorm. They passed stoic, fluorescent study halls. They evaded the beer can littered lawns of strobing house parties. Taz led the way. Rose viewed her burly sled dog, gnashing teeth at any prospective catcallers. She untucked her blouse fully.

Rose pulled out the keycard to her dormitory. She stared at the card half covered by her thumb; she chuckled looking at the abbreviated name ‘Primro’. She opened the door and turned with both a smile and a question on her lips. The recipient of that question had already entered through the doorway before she could speak.

The two entered the dorm room. A symphony of buzzing neon bulbs sang; they visually resembled Homer Simpson's flashing control panel. The shag carpet yelled at their soles; Taz took off his shoes before Prim did. Lavender scents poured into their nostrils. Rose walked toward her desk as Taz began swarming around the room. He knocked over her Blu-Rays, her Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science plaques, her multi-vitamins in an effort, seemingly, to mark his territory. Rose sat at her desk and pulled out some flashcards: ‘coolant,’ ‘containment,’ ‘meltdown.’ Behind Rose, Taz continued rummaging through another man's treasure. Rose checked her phone. Her ears perked at a friend's message: “I told you, Rose;

opposites attract!”

“Holy fucking shit, Ro.” Rose turned to the stunned Taz, holding the bottle of Khor Vodka which he unearthed from beneath her mother’s quilt.

Strip games happen with no concrete origin just as the universe does. There is an origin, ultimately, unknown to even its most intimate members. A misread glance here, an almighty being there; a misheard word here, a phenomenon of density and temperature there. Excessive alcohol hinders this search for truth in the same way time does. In this cosmic, single-bed lodging, shining with the celestial galaxies of trendy lights bought from Amazon, sat Taz and Rose, both none the wiser of how they got down to their undergarments.

“Alright, here’s the fucking money question, Ro,” said Taz leaning with his neck against Rose’s bedpost. His bare skin is a clogged drain of mismatched hair, gooped in an unknown substance. Patches of clean-shaven skin, where his tattoos are, marred his body like leprosy. He bore the appearance of a werewolf caught mid-transformation. He held a loose grasp on consciousness and the flashcards. “Where are the three,” he designated the number holding up his thumb, middle and pinky fingers, “places corium, whatever the fuck that is, has been created unin-, unin-, unintentionally?”

“Chernobyl,” said Rose. She slouched in her desk chair: arms and legs spread wide. Her shoulder acne, the birthmark on her belly, the row of scars on her inner thighs showed to her audience of one. The dark circles of her eyes combatted her flushed red nose for dominance on the battlefield of her countenance. She gave up tugging at her left shoulder bra strap after the particle acceleration question. She smiled with her teeth.

“Those fucking Russians, Ro!”

“It’s actually in modern day Ukraine.”

“Well then, those fucking Ukr... well shit.”

“Number two is Fuk-, Fuk-, Fuk-”

“Fuck, fuck, fucking what, Ro?”

“Fukushima! It actually happened three times there in 2011, believe it or not.”

“I’ll believe anything you say about this shit, Ro.”

“Three. Three, three, three,” said Rose, slamming the last of the Kohr. “Three Mile Island!”

“Where the hell is that?”

“You don’t know about Three Mile Island?” Taz smiled at Rose, who returned an unsatisfied stare. “Wait, you really don’t know? It happened here: PA. A two-hour drive from here.” Taz stared into the whitehots of Rose’s eyes. “It could’ve been just as bad, even worse, as Chernobyl; and you didn’t know? You didn’t,” Rose swallowed back a burp, “fucking know?” Rose stood up and stared down Taz. “All that radiation, the shit that did get out, made you, didn’t it?” She firmed her hand on the bedpost. “You human rug. You beast boy. You follicle cascade. You, you,” she said, gripping her whitening knuckles on the wood frame, “you fucking Elephant Foot Man.” She crashed into Taz.

Taz and Rose embraced. Rose kissed Taz from the top down. She kissed his eyebrows and tasted some sticky cola. She kissed his wooly neck and spat out some hair before diving back in. She kissed the ‘Frank Ocean’ tattoo on his chest. She avoided the belly button lint while kissing his navel. She kissed the ‘Tweety Bird’ tattoo on his right hipbone. She began to pull down the elastic of his boxers with her teeth. She stopped. A vein on her neck burst into sight.

Taz stared up at the ceiling, into the truth of the universe, with a wide smile. “Having a problem with the fuel rod, Dr. Bird?”

Rose stared at Taz’s pubic hair: cut perfectly short like the greens at Glenmaura, tweezed into shape like bonsai, washed clean like the ice after a Zamboni.

“Everything ok down there, Ro? Ro?”

Rose let the fabric out of her mouth. She walked over to her folded clothes and began redressing. Taz, visibly befuddled, came over to Rose. He massaged the kink in her neck; Rose’s arm swatted the initial attempt away, but let the subsequent attempt continue. Rose let out a long, cool breath.

“Everything ok, Ro? What did I do?” Taz worked his fingers on the vein in a pattern of soft and hard touches. Rose turned to face the pensive smile of the mutant.

“Why is all of this,” said Rose, motioning her arms about Taz’s body, “different from that?” she finished pointing to his crotch. Taz decompressed in laughter which steadily decreased in volume as he looked at Rose’s eyes, demanding an answer. All was silent except the light humming of bulbs.

“Hygiene, Ro,” Taz answered.

Rose’s vein multiplied across her entire body.

“Hygeine?!” said Rose, tossing her hand into Taz’s frizzled locks. She pulled a handful in front of Taz’s eyes. “You call this hyg-?” A sniff stopped Rose’s berating. She put her face deep into the brunette mane.

“Ro, the vodka has you all fucked up. Maybe just sit down?”

Rose pulled back with the coldness of oncology patients. She turned her head to the hair products on top of her dresser then back to Taz, his hair glistening in the rainbow colors of the room. She felt the unmistakable viscosity of hair gel on her fingertips. She looked behind Taz to his clothes: neatly folded and stacked like hers. She frowned at his tattoos.

“I think you should go, okay?” said Rose calmly. That was all: no further outburst, no shouting match, no meltdown.

Taz redressed in a whirlwind. In between shoving limbs through holes, he snuck looks at Rose, staring coldly at her desk. He took out his wallet, lined with bills crushed into it and expensive business cards tucked away carefully. He took out one of these cards, grabbed a pen from the desk, and wrote a message. He left the dorm with his shirt on inside-out.

Rose cleaned her room to *channel* ORANGE. She placed her clothes in the hamper. She put her flashcards, wet with Taz’s thumb-marks, back on her desk. She wet-wiped vodka spills that were not there. She switched her stainless sheets out for stainless sheets; she replaced the topper with her mother’s quilt. She picked up a piece of lint, feeling of cashmere and smelling of fabric softener. She picked up the card and rested on the hereditary hand-me-down.

“Hope the highs outweighed the lows, Ro,” was the barely legible message written in a hybrid of print and cursive. Rose flipped the card in her hand to the other side: “Theodore Deville, Student

Teacher' and then the identical phone number as the opposite side. Rose fell asleep flipping the card repeatedly, trying to decide which was the front, which was the back. It floated out of her hand down onto the shag carpet; it landed on neither side.



**The Kingsroad** - *Devang Patel*

## Heart-Cut Spirit

*Bethany Belkowski*

Materialize. Metastasize. In 1999,  
your father distilled your mother  
to sip on you: bottled  
-in-bonds. He downs and drowns your spirit,  
mouth capped with running wax,  
searing words that crave. Blank pages  
remain. Untouched, you age  
your ink. He poisons  
his dram because wasted talent only makes you  
more erotic.

Materialize. Metastasize. Twenty years in  
your eyes. Press to mine. In your father's luxury shower,  
we ferment foolish poetry;  
let it circle the drain. *Aqua vitae*,  
you whisper. And I find my perfect blend:  
still trapped in his cask, you become my angel  
-share. Your sweet words  
fog the glass of my lenses. As you write  
with water on the walls, I collect  
condensation on my tongue,  
and get drunk on your smooth verse.





**Blood Moon** - *Sofia Zingone*

**My Body is a Temple and I've Got a  
Can of Spray Paint and a Grudge.**

*Katherine Fangs*

My Body is not:

Boundless  
ocean teeming  
year-round with fish

Perpetual motion  
machine Every  
movement effortless Every  
exertion allowing every  
delicate gear to never break  
down

Vegetable garden  
Bird's nest built secure  
Atacama Desert in Spring

Damaged

Early or  
delayed

Finished yet

Mine

My body is:

Artificial  
pond stocked teeming  
each spring with fish

Car gassed up every  
morning Every  
night Change  
the oil every  
two weeks or it'll break  
down

Seedless watermelon  
Hen coop behind barn  
Arctic Desert in Winter

Damage Control

Fourteen years  
delayed

Work in progress

Mine.



# **I will work at the diner this summer on one condition.**

*Katie Till*

Lookit, yous:

I'm comin' back this summer an' I don't want no trouble.

None- I swear to Christmas the first time one of yous even  
*thinks*

about lookin at me the wrong way?

I'm gone- believe it.

I'll take my ass down to wawa,

pick up a hoagie and diet coke

an' walk home

an' I won't even feel bad about leavin'

*anybody*

in a lurch durin' the lunch rush.

You don't like it?

Tough.

I'm not your pops-

you can cry all day so much as I care.

An' by the way:

I want a raise.

I'm not sweatin' my arse off

back on grill for no

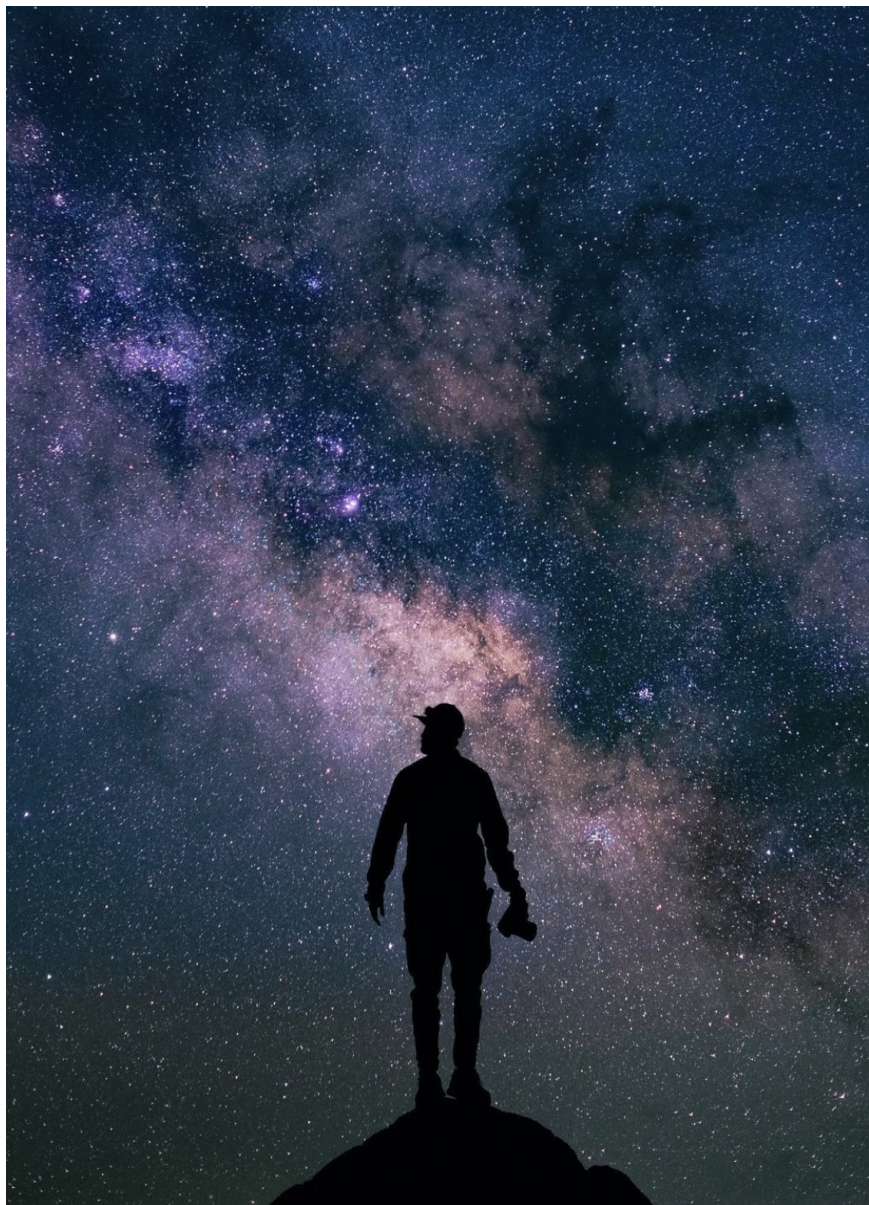
\$7.25 an hour.

Miss me with that shit,

respectfully.



**Uncle Rick** - *Bodo Johnson*



**Sunny-** *Devang Patel*

**the model**

*Michael Quinman*

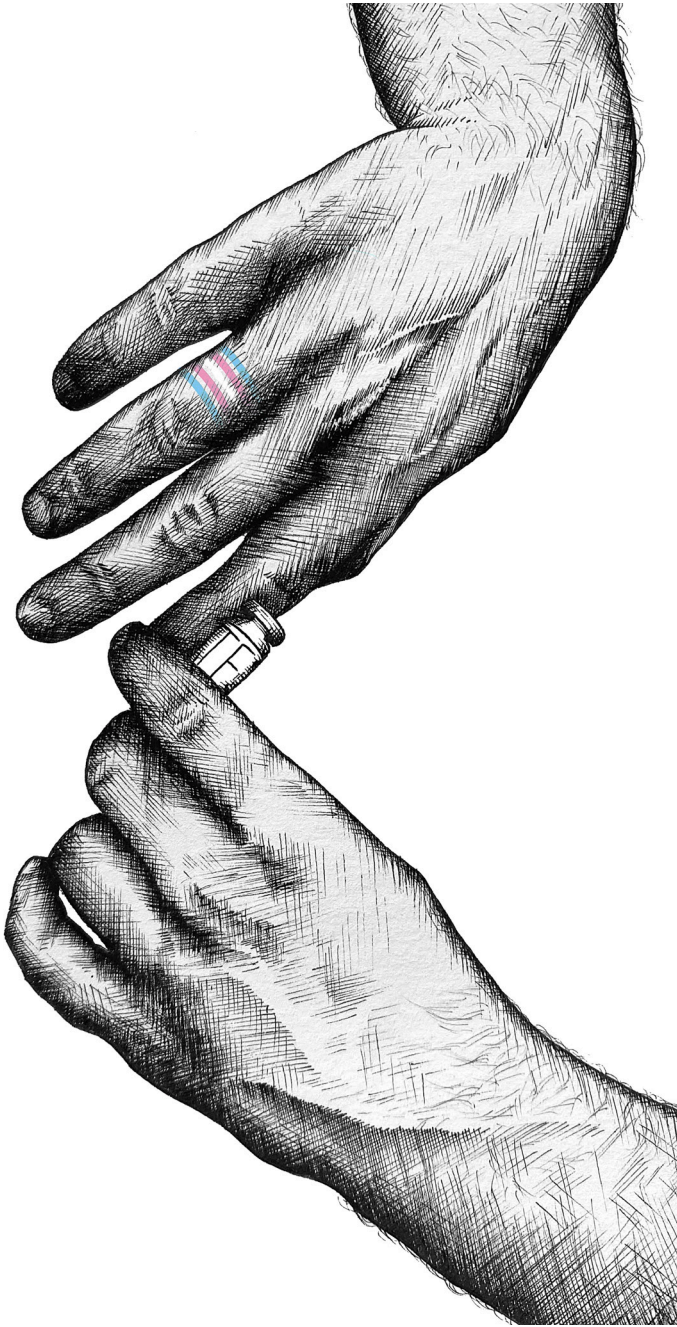
new and beautiful  
raindrops on rose petals roll  
off into the ground

green grass grows in the  
garden freshly mowed for the  
dinner party guests

sacred equinox  
the searing reaps of the sow  
still warm from the sun

cold frail limbs loose like  
lips that once locked with strangers  
that no longer live.





Moments of Masculinity - *Max Messenger*

## my mother and i

*Faith Montagnino*

sitting here at this wooden table,  
me and my mother  
my mother and i  
with our green sweaters,  
green mugs,  
green eyes,  
when her question takes me by surprise:  
“how do you take your coffee?”  
“i’ve never liked coffee, mom,” i reply.  
“not even with milk and sugar?”  
“only you enjoy milk and sugar, mom.”  
she looks up at me, the branches around her pupils are  
swaying, beckoning.  
i take their hands and enter the woods, the leaves  
waving as i pass.  
they say: “come, stay, be,” but i cannot, i know better.  
i reach the roots, as i always do, and i ask for a piece of  
them, holding them tenderly, “i am  
desolate, can you not spare one fragment?”  
they refuse, tell me to try the milk and sugar.  
my mom looks down and stirs her coffee, the black  
turns to brown.  
i close my empty eyes and ask her for a sip.  
and my wooden table holds us up,  
me and my mother,  
my mother and i.

## To Helen:

*Molly Neeson*

Am I allowed to want  
to be you: cursing swansong coursing ichor.  
Gods could do whatever they wanted  
when we were girls. And mother  
pleaded as pistils sprouted  
from our fecund fields— veiled until till—  
watched as we swelled with seed  
of the pomegranates promised in our youth.  
Pity. How could I not  
forgive you? No,  
I find myself fettered  
to the folds of your face. Launching  
ships of men, bucking hips and head-  
strong in their heat. The city burns.  
Stallions storm their gates and sink  
their teeth and spew their thin *oxygala* into the name of woman  
to consecrate yours. Silly girl.  
Pistil plucked before bloom. How could I blame  
you: the goddess who took our lives  
carries the casket of my daughter  
& her daughter  
& her daughter  
& me.



Dante Outside of Alumni - *Max Messenger*



## We Were Villains

*Britney Walsh*

I am my best self when I am performing on a stage. I love dressing up in my concert attire, an all-black outfit that I know I'll sweat through by the last note of the concert, and a large sash that holds every single pin I've earned. Each pin signifies a competition I've attended, from Districts to Nationals. The callouses and cuts on my hands that I've developed over the competition season will feel so worth it as everyone in the auditorium stands up and claps, and claps, and claps. I have seen it all before, and I love every moment of the thrill when I get to perform. I smile as I see my professor wave at me from the front row. Everyone on stage bows twice as the auditorium continues to erupt in applause. It's always the same. The lights will come on, the curtain will slide across the stage, and the thrill will be immediately over.

In the back room behind the stage, I quietly pack away my sash, along with my viola and music sheets. Others go around hugging one another, congratulating them on their accomplishments. I feel a tap on my shoulder, looking to see the last person I want to speak to right now.

"Oh my gosh, Kl!" Hayley screeches in my ear as she embraces me into a hug.

"Good job today, sounded good, I'm sure," I compliment as best as I can.

"You're so silly! You're the one who should be being praised! I mean that solo, come on, so beautiful."

The solo that Hayley is referring to is the solo the guest composer had written for this year's Regional Orchestra. Our composer, David, had claimed that the arrangement of Saint-Saens: "Danse Bacchanale" he 'rewrote' was revolutionary. In reality, all he did was change the key and had a lucky viola player play the melody for 20

measures. I preferred the original.

I was surprised I was even offered the solo when I auditioned. Regional Orchestra this year was by far the most competitive year since I started performing competitively. Not only did they cut down on the number of musicians accepted, the quality of auditions this year was incredible. That only means the State Competition is going to be even more competitive than it has been in the past.

“Thank you, Hayley. Sad to hear that you only got fourth chair this time around.” What I want to tell her is how relieved I was we weren’t stand partners, especially because of what happened long ago.

“I took it easy,” Hayley shrugs. “Besides, it’s just Regionals, States are all mine.” She smiles and walks off with a wave.

“Best of luck.”

A few others from the viola section come to wish me a safe trip home, shaking my hand, some even offering a hug. I wait in the hall for my teacher who is speaking to some other musicians who attended the concert and other teachers as well. I lean against the cold, dark blue cement wall. My phone in my hand continues to buzz with Instagram notifications of tagged posts I’m in.

“Kate!” my professor calls to me down the hall. I walk over to the group of them with a wave.

“Theresa, you have a real gem of a player,” the woman with short purple hair, Ms. Rosenthal, says. The teachers all nod in unison.

“Kate is very gifted,” Theresa places a hand on my shoulder, “but she could also still use some practice.” I fake a smile and nod. Each person takes turns congratulating me on my success of being first chair my third year in a row. As exciting as it sounds to be praised, all I want to do was go home now and start looking at the music for states.

“I’m going to wait in the lobby,” I tell Theresa. Before she can make me stay, I turn around and walk down the hall to gather my things.

Carrying my bags and my case to the lobby, I sit down and wait for Theresa to come back so we can leave. My foot taps against

the wooden floor which made an annoying creaking sound. *Kind of like a G#*, I think to myself, and silently laugh.

“Hmm, that creaking sounds like an A flat.” To my right I see David, the composer. I chuckle thinking of all the memes we made throughout rehearsals making fun of him. One of the bassists created a whole picture of him photoshopped with light sabers and the death star. Another one had him looking a little like Hasbulla.

“Tomato, tomato,” I reply, crossing my arms and looking away from him.

He laughs, “I knew I wouldn’t win with that one.” David holds out a card to me. I hesitate for a moment, before I end up snatching it out of his hands. On the card it read:

**David Brookes**

**Associate Professor, Music and Performing Arts**

**Carnegie Mellon**

**Contact: Email: [David.Brookes@CMelon.edu](mailto:David.Brookes@CMelon.edu)**

**Cell: (570) 555-8995**

“You can have this back,” I say, holding it back out to him.

He holds out his hand to decline and does not attempt to grab it.

“You keep that for when you need it,” he says, trying to act cool after I practically declined his offer.

“I will be sure to put it with the others,” I shrug, taking out my ‘business card’ wallet, and slip it inside. “Have a good night.”

David hesitates before saying, “You are by far one of the best musicians I’ve ever seen and heard play. I am sure you hear that all the time.” I don’t budge or say thank you. Every single school representative says the same things, just in a different way. He sighs, “If you change your mind, give us a call. We’d love to have you transfer.” I slowly nod.

He waves me a goodbye as he walks out of the auditorium lobby. I don’t plan on giving him a call at all.

On the way home, I notice Theresa is quieter than usual.

“Do you want to stop for food on the way back?” I say, as we take the exit onto the highway.

“Hm, not unless you’re hungry. But I hate Chinese food so I don’t want that,” she says, skipping through her songs on her road trip playlist. The songs, of course, were all classical. She also slipped in various Broadway shows like *Hamilton* and *Les Misérables* in their instrumental recordings so it could still be added to the playlist.

“I could go for something once we get halfway,” I say, placing a twenty-dollar bill in her cupholder to cover the cost. Theresa just nods, and I don’t budge on why she is so quiet.

I think back to the encounter that I had with David, and wonder if it truly would be worth it to transfer to a school with a better music program. However, none of those programs would have Theresa there, the one person who actually did believe in my musical abilities from the start.

“You know Hayley goes there?” Theresa says, interrupting my thoughts.

“Huh?” I say abruptly, looking out the passenger side window.

“Hayley Marks, she goes to Carnegie Melon now as well.”

“Of course, I know she goes to Melon, she’s their best musician as well.”

“Did you know that she went to Mansfield before she went there?” Theresa did not look at me.

“That I did not know,” I say, “That’s stupid of her to leave Mansfield.”

“I used to be her professor,” Theresa says, changing the song once again. I don’t respond to her comment.

I remember my first year competing, everyone was shocked to see my name at all at the top of the viola section. One of the judges from my blind audition had confessed that they thought I was Hayley when I did my audition.

“I thought Hayley had improved so much this year,” I remember him saying, “I didn’t think that it was someone completely

new!”

It bothered me a lot that first year, when everyone continued to compare us. I felt especially upset for Hayley, who I knew did not take it well that I was first chair of the viola section my first year.

“You know I’m not leaving Mansfield; it’s my home,” I reassure Theresa. She just nods, looking straight forward at the road.

“We’ll see.”

For the next month, my only focus is practicing for States. Besides the couple of phone calls with my parents where I update them about school, and they update me on events happening in Tian-Jin, if I’m not in class, I’m in the music wing practicing the pieces late into the night. When I flipped through the ginormous folder of music we were going to play, I knew I had to get started right away. When I saw “Winter I - Allegro Non Molto” from Vivaldi in the mix, I got so excited that for once it wasn’t a piece from “Spring.” I’ve been playing “Spring” since I was young, and it is starting to get so boring. I am even more impressed when I found out we are also going to play “The Swan” from *Carnival of the Animals*, one of my favorites.

“These pieces are so incredibly old,” I hear Amelia complain to John not too far from me. We are sitting on the stage of the auditorium penciling notes and different cues. John is also trying to guess what parts they would audition us on.

“I think the pieces are very lovely,” I say, highlighting some of the crescendos I was missing from the last run through we did.

“That’s probably because you were raised to listen to them and play them by ear,” Amelia commented, and John nudged her side, giving her a face of disapproval.

“Okay, but would it kill them to do something modern? Haven’t they heard of *Interstellar*?”

“Or *Ratatouille*?” John chimes in. I let out a chuckle, imaging everyone playing such serious, refined pieces, and then switching to “Music from Pixar’s: *Ratatouille*”.

“I heard Darth Brookes is stepping in as composer again.”

Amelia wiggles her eyebrows and John slaps her shoulder.

“Yeah, I heard that the other composer dropped out or something.”

“If you ask me, I think he’s trying to recruit. He’s losing a lot of seniors at the end of the semester,” John says. If David was the composer at states again, I’m sure he would ask again if I thought about transferring. I forgot all about the conversation I had with him after Regionals until they brought him up again.

“I’m sure that David wouldn’t ask any of us about it.” I say briefly, before standing up and grabbing my viola from the stand.

“Alright, we should run through Tchaikovsky first.”

The coach ride to Slippery Rock is not fun at all. All of the instruments in the bottom of the bus move around each pothole we hit. If we didn’t pack them well, I am sure they would be broken into a million little pieces. I listen to the playlist of the pieces we are performing that I made on repeat. Halfway through the trip, Theresa comes over and sits with me.

“Hi, honey.” She smiles, handing me the lunch she made us. “You nervous?”

I nod.

“Just a little bit, but I’m feeling okay,” I assure her. I put the meal she gave me in the seat next to me and started to eat the meal I packed instead. She gave me a weird look.

“I heard you practicing, it sounded well,” she awes.

I roll my eyes. “Yeah, we’ll just have to see at auditions.”

“You’ll have to do a lot to beat out Hayley,” Theresa replies.

“I’m not worried about it.”

Before our auditions, everyone is piled into the auditorium to unpack our things. When we got there, we were all surprised to see the state of the place. Some of the light fixtures hung from the ceiling by just a thin wire. There were splotches of mysterious stains on the floor as we walked through the aisles. The armrests of the seats seemed to have a sticky coating on them regardless of how many

times I tried to wipe it down with a Kleenex. It seemed to have kind of a 'thick air quality' especially with how hot it was in here.

"Gosh it reminds me of one of those oriental East Village restaurants in New York, gross." I hear Theresa say.

"Oh my god, I'm sorry," Amelia whispers next to me, "I don't think she can say that." I suppress a laugh before it got too out of hand. "She's fine, I'm sure she was just kidding."

I walk away from our group and prepared myself for my audition.

The directors assigned us rooms to wait in for auditions. "Winter" and "The Swan" were the pieces picked as our audition pieces along with another piece that will be picked on the spot in the audition room. Out of the 34 violas at states this year, I was last to go. *You've got to be kidding me.* In the room we can't look at a single piece of music or try to play anything that will help with the audition. Most of us brought extra things to pass the time. However, some people just sit in here and stare, which I find incredibly disturbing.

After about an hour, I hear them call for numbers 13 and 14.

*Yup, I am going to die in here,* I think to myself.

"Hey hey K!" Now sitting next to me is Hayley yet again.

"Hi Hayley, nervous?" I ask, still looking down at my coloring book.

"Not anymore, now that we are going to be stand partners when you get to Carnegie Melon."

I stop coloring. "Excuse me?"

"Well, aren't you transferring?" she asks me, digging her hand into a bag of Cheez-Its.

"No, not at all! Where did you hear that from?" I ask, sitting up straight.

"Dr. Brookes told me you were interested in joining the program."

"I told him no such thing," I say firmly, "I'm not interested."

"Oh!" Hayley says, a little wide eyed, "I'm sorry I didn't know!"

“Why would he tell yo-” before I can finish my sentence, they announce Hayley’s number.

“That’s my cue! Good luck out there.” Hayley winks, just before leaving for her audition.

“You’re going to need it.”

Finally, my number is being called from the loudspeaker to make my way to the audition room. Before we go to audition, we can meet with our professors to help with some of the nervousness we may have. Outside of my audition room, Theresa is there waiting for me.

“Hi,” I wave, giving her a smile. “I finally got out of there, phew!” I laugh.

She says nothing to me and hands me an envelope. I read through it briefly, to see it was a letter from me.

“I didn’t write you this.” I say to her, but she does not buy it.

“This is how you repay me, by transferring out on me? I give you an opportunity and you snub me? Typical.” She says, clearly upset.

“Theresa, I just told you that’s not from me! I have no idea who wrote or gave you that.”

“I cannot believe this is happening to me. I trust you people and this is what you do?” Theresa whispers.

“I just told you that I did not write that, I am not transferring! Don’t you believe me?”

“You’re not good enough to go to Carnegie Melon, or even be here as a matter of fact.”

My mouth hangs open at the words she has just told me. “You don’t mean that.”

“Every word,” she says. “You are a fraud. Go back to where you came from.” I call out to her, but she continues to walk down the hall away from me. This time my hands are shaking, but it isn’t from the nerves of my audition.

“So! How did it go?” Amelia sits next to me after my audi-



tion.

“Honestly? I don’t remember, I blacked out,” I confess. Amelia clasps her hands to her mouth and started to laugh.

“That’s crazy, how the heck did that happen?”

“Theresa got a letter saying I was transferring, even though it’s absolutely false.”

Amelia gasps, “No. Way!”

“Oh, it’s true, and I think I just fucked up my audition because of it.” I begin to tear up.

“Hey, stop that! Theresa shouldn’t have yelled at you. She should have known it wasn’t from you. You love Mansfield.” Amelia rubs my shoulder, before I stand up abruptly.

“I’m sorry, I just need to get some water quick,” I say as I quickly walk out of the auditorium.

Around the corner just before the woman’s bathroom, I notice Theresa talking to David by the water fountain. I turn around quickly, far enough to hear their conversation.

“I told Kate I got the letter. Do you think she’ll transfer now?”

It was Theresa. I didn’t even know they spoke to one another.

“She might not even place with the way you made her upset,” David says, shaking his head.

“The point was to get Hayley back into the Mansfield Program, and I can’t have her back with Kate in the program,” Theresa says, checking things off her notepad.

“I don’t even understand why you would want Hayley back in the program when you have someone as talented as Kate.”

“Because she doesn’t belong at Mansfield,” Theresa says to David and walks away.

After hours of excruciating auditions, the judges finally have results for the musicians cramped in, most likely, an asbestos-infested auditorium. Everybody rushes to the results taped to the wall, as if someone was giving out something free.

“Where do you think I placed this year?” Amelia asks, pencil-ing in notes on her music sheets.

“I think you and John made a pact to place the same, so you guys can be stand partners,” I fake a laugh, finally getting up when everyone clears out.

Amelia and I walk over to the lists.

“Nice girl, you and John got third and fourth chair,” I say.

“Yeah okay, Miss First Chair over here.” Amelia points at my name at the top of the list and nudges my side. Kate Nguyen, First Chair.

*Oh, thank God,* I think to myself, absolutely relieved that I had finally gotten it. With everything going on, I was sure they would have told me to just go home.

Reading through the list, my heart sinks to my stomach when I see her name: Hayley Marks, second chair.

“You have got to be kidding me,” I whisper to myself when I feel a tap on my shoulder. Amelia starts to walk away from me and mouths, good luck.

“Hey K!” Hayley wraps her arms around me, “Stand besties once again, what are the odds!”

“Hi,” I say through my teeth. “It’s not really a surprise, we’re both ranked in the state.”

Hayley finally stops suffocating me. “I was thinking, we could practice some of the pieces before we start the run through.”

“Mmm, I don’t think that’s a great idea,” I say, slowly moving over to my case. Hayley follows me over.

“I think it’s a great idea! It could really enhance the strength of the section if we’re both on the same page.” Hayley smiles at me, gripping her music sheets in her hand.

“Hayley, I’m sorry I just am not in the right place right now,” I say, looking down at my case.

“I’m not doing anything, Kate,” Hayley says, her smile fading. “I just want to practice.”

“I know, I’m just not in the right head space right now.”

Hayley stares at me for a little longer, “What do you mean, you just got First chair.”

“I know, but placing high isn’t always the only thing, Hayley,” I say, “I’m dealing with something right now.”

Hayley sighs.

“You are so ungrateful,” she says flatly.

“Excuse me?”

“You, your people, are so ungrateful,” Hayley says again.

“You are just upset, I’m sorry,” I say. “We can practice later if you’d like.”

“They just gave you first chair because they need more diversity in participants,” Hayley tells me. “If everyone was white, they would get sued.”

I start to tear up, but reply, “I got first chair because I work hard.”

Hayley stares at me, before saying, “Alright, if that’s what you want to believe,” and walks away from me.

“Alright everyone, if we could start getting ready to get on stage to be seated for our run through, that’d be great!” Cheryl, the lady running states this year, scream on stage. I unpack my viola, grab my music sheets, and make my way up to my seat. Hayley is already up on stage. I sit down and place my music on the stand. Hayley shoves it over. I roll my eyes and start to tune.

“Your G is flat,” Hayley says bluntly.

I let out a sigh. I tune my strings to Hayley’s liking.

She coughs, and says, “Now your G is sharp, don’t you know how to tune?”

This is going to be the longest practice of my life.







## view from sunday morning

*Katie Till*

glass-heart, girlshattered,  
scrabbles at remaining shards,  
own-blood on his hands.

oh, i can't blame you,  
bony, weed-smelling hill-boy:  
i wept for her, too.

*Previous page...*

**Ginger Run**

*Brandon Lam*



## Closer Than Anything

*Chloe Devero*

*This is a cento/patchwork poem.*

*Please see the end of this document for all citations of lines used.*

On some level, I think I always understood

That these hands of mine were clumsy, not clever

That the eldest sibling must shield or sacrifice.

And it's a secret I keep tucked inside my chest

With this heart of mine that's guilty, not remorseful

That, despite the fact that you have not earned it – I do  
love you

Then, when you ask me, “Do you still want to be my  
big sister?”

Then, when God asks him, “Where is your brother  
Abel?” he arrogantly responds, “I do not know. Am I  
my brother's keeper?”

In essence, the entire Bible is written as an affirmative  
response to this question.

And if I met him again, I think there would be teasing.

“Father, my sister's just– she's a baby”, I would plead,  
uselessly.

And, when I get righteous, “I'm only messing” – Char-

acteristically, my only obtained response.

Perhaps we could meet again as friends. Maybe bump heads, hips, shoulders.

And though I am a target of my younger sibling's rage—

(And I know that you mean so well

But I am not a vessel for your good intent)—

I still call her my little sister, my baby sister

Because that is what she is and will always be. A baby.

Because that's when I first met her.

And a spouse or a child can be replaced, but who can grow me a new sister?

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*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.

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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.

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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

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