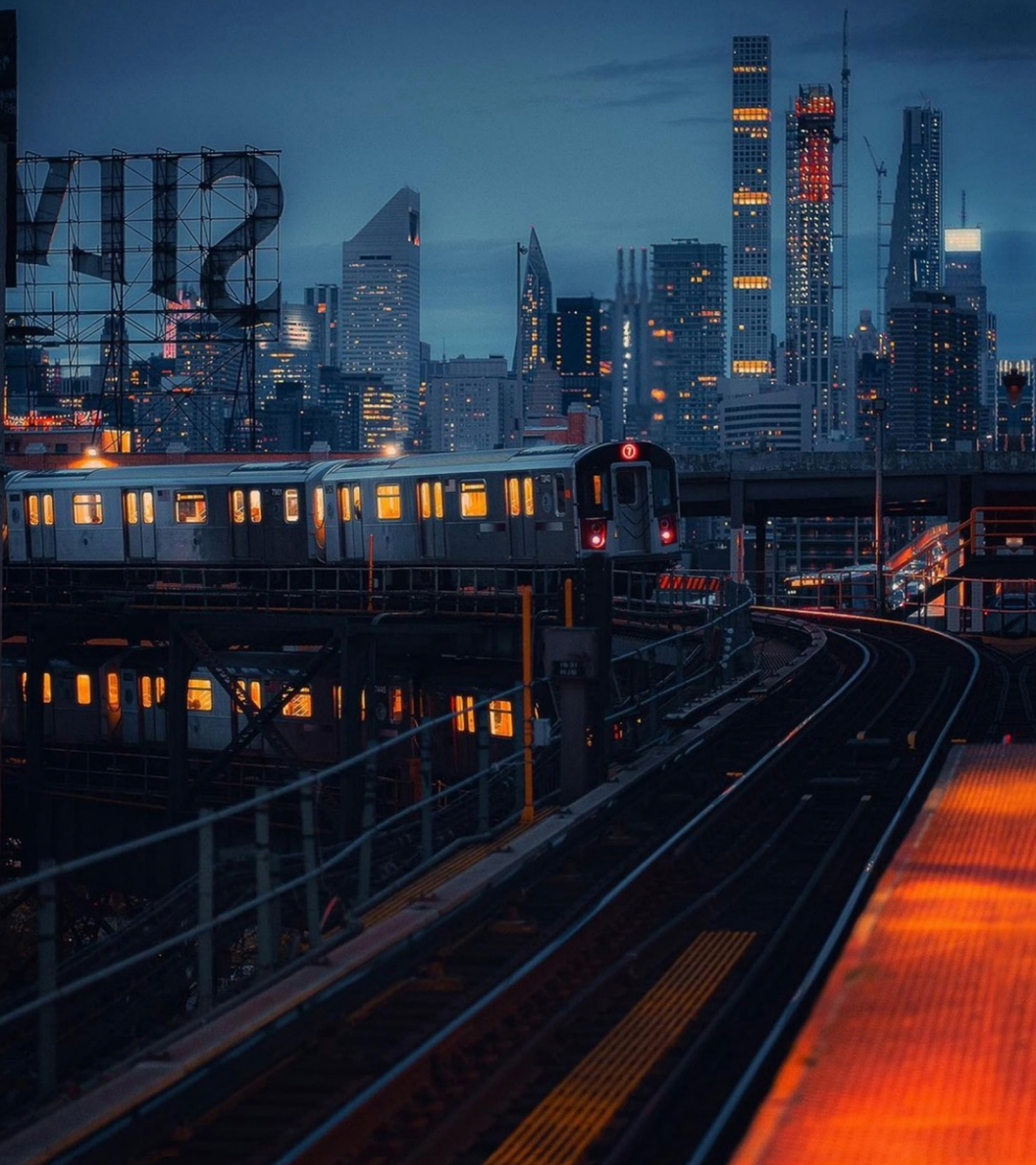


ESPRIT

FALL 2022



ESPRIT

The University of Scranton Review of Arts and Letters

Fall 2022

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Fall 2022 Awards:

The Berrier Poetry Award

Bethany Belkowski
“Breakfast”

The Berrier Prose Award

Bethany Belkowski
“What Isn’t There”

The Esprit Graphics Award

Devang Patel
“The Long Night”

Fall 2022 Award Judges:

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Sarah White graduated from The University of Scranton in May 2022 with a Bachelor’s of Science in biology and philosophy. She completed the SJLA and Magis Honors Program in STEM, and she acted as the Production Manager of Esprit. Currently living in sunny Orange, California, Sarah serves as an environmental and immigration advocate at the St. Joseph Justice Center through the St. Joseph Worker Program. She greatly misses Scranton, its wonderful people, and its abundance of rain.

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Front Cover:

The Long Night

Devang Patel

Back Cover:

Murph

Liam Moran

MEdia Mythology

Emma Graff

Suspended reality
tapping, clicking with a heart
burning.
Eyes scanning under the spell,
the potent aphrodisiac.

They can't help but taunt:
where, where, where
do you see yourself in all this

space

Infinite maze of software
and buttons.
Running on motion...
not running on truth.

Yet, the yearning doesn't
end
I want to be Midas bright and shiny.
Cover your eyes.
Cover your serpents.
Before your state is *changed*.

Sucking and drinking up the
never ceasing stream.
Temporary euphoria reflected
as Tantalus scrolls beside me.

Turn right

Turn left

a trick meant to fool you,
a faux fleece of comfort
wrapping you tighter, tighter, tighter
into the lotus patterned folds.

I ask the oracle,
my conscious council: why
do I feel alone in all this

space

[The mental cage,
trying to suppress the monsters,
whose siren smiles call me
toward the intangible sea.]

Feet fixed,
hands glued,
I stare back at my punishment.
The created myth,
the perpetuated you,
burdening my arm
with stone **weighted** truth.



Queen's Gambit - *Brandon Lam*

What Isn't There

Bethany Belkowski

"You could've gotten free ice cream," Cole said pointing out the passenger-side window at the playful sign propped against the ice cream counter. Lucy squinted from the driver's-side over his shoulder to make out the sign. She frowned when she saw it.

The bright illustration of the shop's mascot, an ice cream cone with arms and legs, wore an alarmingly enthusiastic expression. The ice cream cone man gestured toward a cartoon yardstick that determined if a child was short enough to receive a free kiddie cone.

"You made that joke last time," Lucy replied softly, dipping a red plastic spoon into her ice cream.

"No I didn't."

"Yea, you did."

"Really?" he said, raising an eyebrow.

"Yea." She poked at a chunk of cookie dough.

"Huh," he breathed, his flared ribs pushing against his black T-shirt. "I really don't remember that." The two grew quiet. Lucy looked up from her ice cream and tried to meet his eyes. Cole stared at the center console. She listened to him breathe instead.

"What flavor did you get?" he asked suddenly. Lucy stirred her ice cream in small circles.

"*Cookie Dough...*," she replied slowly, phrasing her answer as if it were a question. "What I always get." Cole's expression remained blank. "*You were with me when we ordered...*"

Cole's cheeks vaguely flushed as he turned to face the windshield. "Yea, right. Sorry." His jaw clenched. "Head's been everywhere lately, you know?"

"Understandable," she replied, focusing on the side of his face. Awkward patches of facial hair had started cropping up. He had stopped shaving. It made it harder to notice if his cheeks were still

sunken. Lucy repositioned, the seat belt digging into her stomach. She realized she must have instinctively buckled it.

After clicking the seatbelt's release, Lucy tried to calm her passenger, "What have you been up to though?"

Cole stared blankly ahead. "Uh..." He provided filler as he put his thoughts in order. "I climb now."

"Climb?"

"Yea."

"Like rock climbing?"

"Yea, I joined a special gym and all that," Cole answered, setting his dish of chocolate ice cream in the cup holder. He turned his palms face up. Lucy observed. Calluses speckled his hands like patches of deflated and yellowed bubble wrap. Red tears resided in the centers of each. She found it ironic that the gashes vaguely resembled stigmata. Cole had abandoned the notion of God years before she met him.

"Well, that's a good way to get active. What made you do that?"

"Just to go up, I guess," he replied flatly.

"Oh. Okay." Lucy didn't understand.

Cole cracked his knuckles and turned to look out the passenger-side window as a car quickly swung into the parking lot. Summer pop music spilled from its open windows. It pulled in a few spots down from Lucy's SUV. Cole twisted his left pinky, still trying to get it to pop as a couple emerged from the vehicle. They looked to be in their late teens, only a few years younger than Cole and Lucy. Hand in hand, the couple jaunted over to the ice cream counter, both clothed in sunglasses and smiles.

"I just don't know how much time I'll have to go to the gym now though," Cole sighed, still watching the couple out the passenger-side window. "My mom just needs someone else in the house right now, you know?"

"Yea, that makes sense," Lucy nodded. The silence returned. She watched as he clenched and unclenched his jaw in sets of three. He was counting. She continued to stare, knowing he could feel her

eyes.

“How is she?” Lucy watched for changes in his expression, but he only raised his eyebrows as he spoke.

“Honestly, worse than I thought she’d be.”

“Well, if she ever needs anything, I still—”

“She’s fine, Lucy,” Cole interjected.

“Okay.”

“I appreciate it, but she’s good,” he maintained.

The couple made their way back laughing and obnoxiously shouting what sounded like lines from a movie. They hopped in their car while managing their cones and flicked the radio on. Lucy watched with a tight throat as they sped off. Cole stared at the newly empty parking spot and clenched his jaw to the fading thump of the car’s music.

Lucy wanted to burst, but she refrained. “Why won’t you look at me?” she whispered.

“What?” His blue eyes darted toward her. They looked like cracked glass behind his dark hair. “I can.” His voice faltered on the second word.

“Okay.”

“I don’t know, this shit is just hard to talk about, Lu.” His gaze shifted past her.

“You don’t have to talk about it.”

“*I want to*,” he said, eyes widening.

“Okay.”

“It’s just been a while since we—”

“I know.”

“I’m sorry how things ended by the way. I really thought that by now—”

“I know.”

“Yea.”

“I told you—” she choked but quickly regained her composure. “Despite all that I’d be here.”

“Yea,” Cole murmured, reaching for his face. He ran his fingers across the haphazard wisps of hair. Lucy watched. He noticed.

“I don’t care if it looks bad or not,” he asserted, gesturing to his face. “That’s not the point. I’m just following through on something for once. And he had a beard—before he died.” Lucy tried to interject but Cole kept speaking. “I honestly hope all this stress gets to me fast. Then maybe I’ll gray like him too.”

Lucy gave a small nod, unsure how else to respond. “*How is the stress?*” she asked meekly. “Did they—did they say anything about it?”

“Nothing consistent with what they said last time.”

“Okay,” she said, trying to maintain an air of positivity. “So it’s just a little complex.”

“No.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s just fucked, Lu. That’s it. It’s just fucked.”

“But I thought all these doctors were supposed to help you get—”

“It seems like they stopped doing that a while ago,” Cole cut in. Lucy could hear the anger building in his voice but he didn’t raise his volume.

“I’m sure they’re trying to—”

“*They missed that shit in my dad’s chest,*” Cole spat tersely. Lucy recoiled, gripping her cup. He exhaled his emotion before continuing, “And I guess there’s just too much in my head.” Lucy scanned his eyes for tears but none formed so she dismissed her own.

Cole shifted his focus but still looked past her.

“So it’s getting worse?” she asked. Cole clenched his jaw. “Is it?” He clenched again. “*Cole?*” His mouth squeezed tight, but he didn’t react otherwise.

“I’m just paranoid, Lu. That’s all.” Lucy was surprised, Cole had always hated that word.

“Well,” she offered softly, “I don’t know if this is stupid, but what if we got you some kind of self-defense tool? Or mace or something? If it would make you feel safer maybe it would curb the stress, you know? Just for peace of mind.” Cole stayed quiet, watching whatever was behind her. She continued, “I don’t know, that

might be dumb. You can just tell me it's dumb and I'll shut up, I'm sorry."

"It's okay," he said dully, still staring past her. "It's just, they tell people not to tell other people when they see things, things that aren't there. If other people look or try to find them, it blurs the lines. So..." he trailed off before starting again slowly. "So, I don't know if I should indulge in what isn't—"

"Yea, yea, I'm sorry," Lucy interjected. "See, I told you it was dumb."

"It's okay, it's just better to avoid looking at—"

"Yea, I'm sorry."

"It's fine."

"No," she insisted. "That was dumb. I'm sorry."

"It's okay."

"Yea. Sorry." Lucy felt the soft trickle of melted ice cream run over her fingers. She looked down. She had crushed the left side of her cup. Setting the ice cream in the second cup holder next to Cole's, she wiped her hands on her shirt without thinking. She instantly felt stupid for wearing white. She would clean it later.

"Shit, I'm sorry mine got all over the holder," Cole said, motioning toward his untouched ice cream which had dripped into the crevices of the center console.

Lucy looked up from her shirt. "It's fine, I'll just clean it when I get home, it's no big deal," she assured, blinking away tears. "I have to be home soon anyway."

"Oh," Cole murmured with obvious disappointment. "Really?"

"Yea."

"Okay."

Lucy drove Cole home in silence. When he stepped out of the car, he leaned in the passenger-side window like he did when they first met in their high school's parking lot. "Can we hang out later this week?"

"Um, I'll have to see what I'm doing."

"I just really need you now, Lu." He picked at the door's lock

knob.

“Yea, I—I know. Yea, sure, I can do that.”

“Thanks, Lu.” He pulled back from the car. “I’ll see you later.”

“Yea,” she whispered.

Lucy watched him climb the hill that led to his house and waited until he shut the front door behind him to put the car in drive. Still coated with ice cream, her hand briefly stuck to the gearshift. She left the radio off and pulled out of his cul-de-sac.

Lucy waited until she rounded the corner out of respect. Then she pretended he sat in the passenger seat.

At a red light, Lucy glanced to her right. She imagined Cole singing like he used to when she drove him home from track practice, his smooth voice gliding through each note. But she quickly pushed the memory away. He had said not to indulge in what isn’t there.



Little Princess - *Molly Neeson*



Fleur De Tech - *Emily Sanchez*

Reading Love Letters

Bethany Belkowski

Uncommon women don't ask
to taste wild flowers wilted
in the yard. Past their bloom,
petals crumble easily
on wet tongues. Your name hangs
on postscripts I tear
from each page. Ink sticks
to my lips –sweet punctuation.

Yet I fall to your monochrome. Pages
worn with wrinkles mimic the folds
thoughts seared to your brow. Now splayed,
I smooth your edges. With wandering hands,
I let fine fingers curl round your cursive,
tracing careful lettering with naked
nails. Chipped and scattered I surrender
to your static embrace.

Here I am again,
in electric haze. I read to hear your voice
mutilated again by my own. Decadent hands
searching, I refold the pages, whispering
your name. How could I celebrate
divinity without sound? An echo of a soul
creased wet with tears
and dried with sighs.



Genesis - *Skye Rutkowski*

Failed Microscope

Devon Robinson

Lights, camera, action
Stage illuminating show
Zoom in...not that far

A Scolding/*Heard From The Closet*

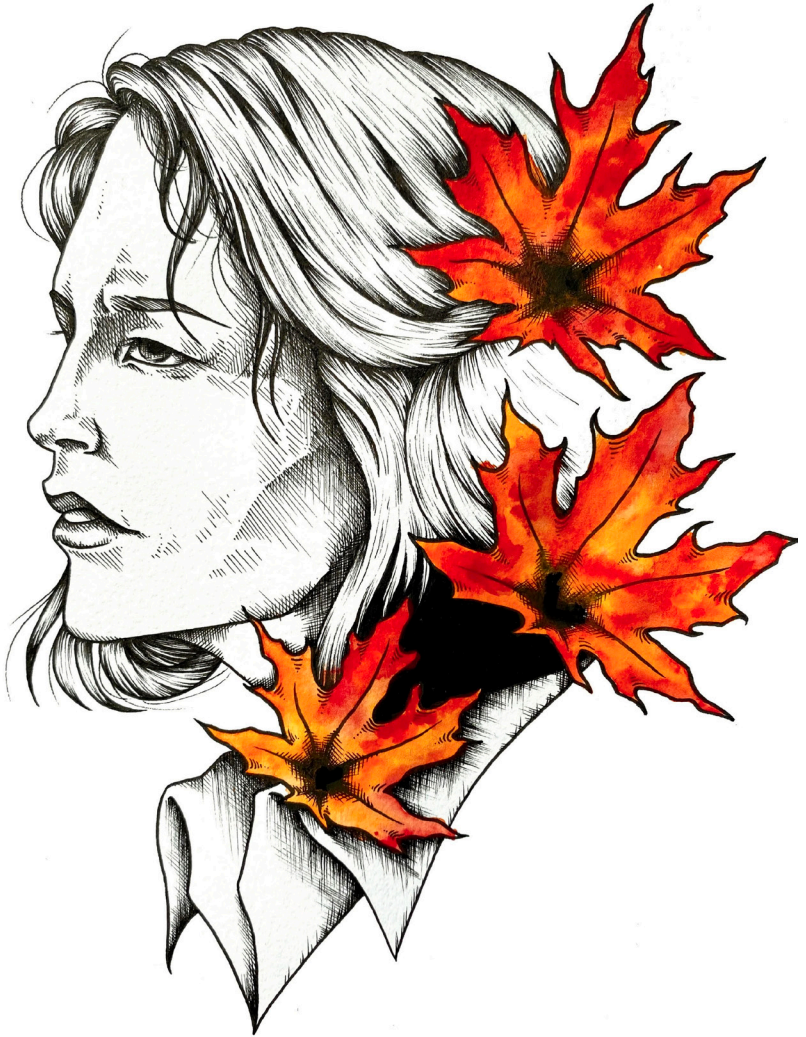
Owen Stanczak

Why are you crying?
I already looked down there.
There is no monster.

A Post For Someone I Didn't Know

Bethany Belkowski

Just a tap away,
you lay dead. On my feed,
others gather, sharing
your picture. Smiling
through pixelated tears, in their hearts
you'll always have a friend
status. Updates along the junkyard fence:
they line up to record
the machine crush the remains of your bike
into a sheet like the one they made you
sign to leave school when they told you
you weren't good enough. To live
in another town —your mother's solution
to screen a son who stole
dizzy glances at his daddy's love
of liquor. And with a single shot
on a classmate's phone, we all saw you *tragically* empty
the chamber into that football-player's
heart. That night, your hand ended
up clasped to the same spot,
they say. No one saw you
when the light turned green. Your profile launched
as your bike reeled. Fragments found your sleepy tongue,
and your mouth caressed pavement, drawing
your lips into a grin
they comment on. So I like and repost.



Final Girl - *Max Messenger*

Breakfast

Bethany Belkowski

I twist and cracks of salt remind me
of your voice. The morning you left,
you croaked out the last line
of the poem hidden in my nightstand
that I was writing for you,
but I could not finish. Still
fettered to the soft petals of your speech, I
push the scrambles 'round the pan;
they hiss like you did. "Tell me.
How am I supposed to feel?" Now, when you stare
past me, I know I would have cracked in your hands,
shelled of both poise and grace. I fold in
fresh gratings. Between us,
we know to speak in spoonfuls,
a serial communication that drifts in dirty milk
we refuse to touch. Burning,
I pull from the heat
ashed pages and blackened eggs.



Azure - Sofia Zingone

Piss Man

Zane Price

Paddy was the only virgin among the movie theater ushers as Tommy was the only guilty man at Shawshank prison. His colleagues heard this guilty plea one day while they swept up spare kernels of popcorn and authored tales of adolescent carnal conquest. Matching the pace of Wednesdays in February, they sat in the now cleaned lounge seats of auditorium seventeen. They passed around a basket of chicken tenders they found from the previous auditorium.

“It just hasn’t happened yet,” Paddy explained while tying his saddle shoes. He sunk into the brown pleather while picking patches of lint off his black pants and finger nailing the garbage juice splatter off his black shirt. Matching his solemn attire, his peers sat quietly during the melancholy ordeal. The youngest of the crew broke the silence.

“And you’re... ok with that?”

Paddy turned to the scant figure of the truly perplexed individual: a boy.

“I mean... I think I am.”

Paddy chewed on the dry chicken; his friends followed the example. They sat in the stark overhead light of the auditorium which only the ushers had the key to turn on. They stayed there for an unusually long time. Occasionally, one of the ushers would look over at the countenance of another. The acned face of each companion became, upon these observations, as synonymous as the rest of their workwear. Paddy waited until the last of his compatriots, that meager Thomas, finished his meal.

“On to the next one!”

The pack followed Paddy out into the hallway. Thomas took a last look into auditorium seventeen before turning the overhead lights off.

The movie theater season ramped from January exponentially through Christmas Day when it restarts its cycle. The theater had twenty auditoriums: ten on each side of the central hall which sold concessions. Broadloom carpets, in a pattern which no former worker can ever distinguish in hindsight, lined the straight hallway. Red burlap drapes accompanied ornate wall sconces to give the interior of the theater a ritzier ambience than its location directly next to a minor league baseball stadium and a Chipotle warranted. Various backrooms of metal vats and detergents were accessible only to the staff. Most of the workers in the complex were behind a twenty-five-yard concession bar that occupied about two percent of the total area of the building. At night the rest of the dominion, the cleaning and order of all its hallways and theaters and backrooms throughout an ever-busier year, was the domain of seven high-school boys.

There was lanky James who wore a Ferragamo belt among other rotating accessories to his minimum wage job; the boys admired his vivacious arguments with customers who claimed his accoutrements were fake. Bespectacled Norman and pious Ollie ran a successful meme page on Instagram; they collaborated often with James and Thomas on how to monetize their brand. Ollie was the only one of the crew with a girlfriend; he would flaunt this by showing them pictures of him and her smiling at his church group. Thomas held the belief that his \$7.25 minimum wage was an invitation to find added commission at the workplace. He lifted the hundreds of faux leather recliners nightly in search of coins and bills. Sometimes this proved highly profitable, and the boys walked posse style to their next theater with a jingle jangle to their step. All four were younger than the ruddy identical twins particularly beloved by the gang for their antics: jalapeño eating challenges, prank calls to managers on the walkie-talkie, switching their name badges. They garnered the nickname Mike and Ike from management as the sweetness of their presence was fleeting and turned stomach churning after too much of them. The managers themselves led this janitorial throng very little with most too preoccupied by graduate work or bass playing in local bands. It was indeed Paddy the virgin who led the way.

The theater was Paddy's church. The haughtiness of his private school seeped into his skin daily. It was only at night, at the theater, with his public-school friends where he belonged. He cleaned the snobbish soot off his hands with each garbage bag he tied. He pulled his mandated haircut into a top bun so it wouldn't get in his face as he scrubbed congealed chocolate off the cupholders. He loved the dress code as it slimmed his figure down from his huskiness in a shirt and tie at school. He dealt with irate customers more earnestly than the classmates who saw him at work; pleasantries were not always pleasant to him. Paddy bathed himself in his job; the rest followed suit.

Over the course of the summer, the usual influx of staff hiring stymied in the usher department. The rascals kept the schedule full and, furthermore, dealt with the mounting audiences as the blockbusters rolled in. Seeing this, the owner of the theater decided to forgo hiring another worker for the season in favor of putting the salary toward the lease on his Camry.

The night crew worked like dogs in the heat. As the popcorn in the aisles became easier to count in scores than kernels, the boys talked less while clocked in. Thomas and James would get cramps in their hands from sweeping. Ollie and Norman's fingers pruned from the wet wiping of seats. The tumult of tyrannical ticket-buyers left the twins tongue-tied trying to temper their troubles. Paddy worked alone and hunchbacked the entire night: tying, pulling out, and replacing garbage bags. After clocking out, the scattered squad would reconvene in silence in the breakroom: bent. Then they would laugh, and joke, and laugh some more. For weeks they toiled in this way, spending their adolescent nights in community: unbroken.

"Guys, I think I'm close to you know..." said Ollie one late August night sipping an ICEE he found during the last cleaning. He pulled the squeaking straw in and out of the plastic lid in a crude manner, "... with Hannah," he finished while grinning wildly.

"Yeah?" Norman grunted while lying on the tile with his entire left arm up the pick-up port of the candy vending machine, "What makes this time different from the others?"

“Well, gentlemen...” he said pausing for dramatic effect, “... you’re looking at Hannah’s...” he put his hands in showman position, “...little sister’s...” he declared looking spry eyed at alarmed faces, “... Confirmation sponsor!”

The mix of exhaustion and hysteria in mirth laid each one to rest. Paddy was the last to give in and with a sigh and smile sunk into the deserved rest.

Dean Collins, their manager that night, walked into the break-room with remnants of the Dominos that the rest of the managers ordered; it was a piece offering for his mercenary team. In the ramshackle commons he beheld their slumber. James and Thomas were face down in their coin stash already divvied out into proper denominations. Tweedledee and Tweedledum slept limbs sprawled and flat-backed on two of the room’s white tables. Ollie snored as he held his ICEE like a teddy bear. Paddy sat at the third table with the timecards which all indicated the boys were off the clock. Dean finally looked to the floor and saw Norman snug as a bug with the crumbs of a Reese’s Take 5 on his cheeks. Mr. Collins smiled and let the boys alone in their makeshift lodging. He went back to the bourgeois managers’ room; he did not mention their indiscretion to the owner. Instead, he went to his computer determined to reenergize his weary pupils. He went to the hiring page and emailed the first profile he saw.

“Milk Chocolate Mommy! Why don’t you walk that thang over here?”

Mya dealt with the harassment from customers with a firm hand. She pushed aside her quasi-masculine peers to shout her mind to the catcallers. She violated her new job’s code of conduct with every rebutting sentence. The hecklers always unfolded in repentance at the image of her fiery eyes in front of seven pimply bodies: Vesta and her virgins.

Mya cackled more than she laughed. She partook in the gang’s after-hours tomfoolery opting often to spill gossip on the girls the crew ogled over.

“No, no she’s in my chemistry class; she’s a bitch; like she’s not good for you, James- no, no fuck you, believe me!” Her hyena

squeal of jubilation completed their joyous choir; they finally had their soprano.

The boys came to love Mya like a brother. She became a dog like them, shouting *eureka* upon finding leftover sushi in late September. In early November, she ate twenty jalapeno slices in one minute, proceeded to boot, then rallied to clean the last nine theaters of the night. She tried to hide her slim figure and striking visage with baggy attire and bulky glasses. She rarely called off sick.

“We’re not Seven Psychopaths anymore but The Hateful- or at least The ‘Hated’ Eight, now,” Paddy quipped on movie titles one night at closing in the break room. Mya smiled at this without knowing what exactly he was talking about.

Mya did most of her work in the trash with Paddy. They talked of religion and conspiracy and hypocrisy and feminism and family and whatever made them not think of the pungent odors. Foremost, they talked about each other. He wanted to conform to the art of journalism. She wanted to join the Marines. They both hated this for one another while never voicing it.

Paddy tutored Mya in math at the city library.

“God doesn’t love white people more, you know?”

“I know.”

“My mom prays a rosary every night! Just because she can’t send me to Catholic school doesn’t mean- it’s just bullshit, right?”

“It’s bullshit.”

“You can’t buy Jesus.”

“That ‘x’ is a variable not a multiplication sign.”

Paddy began driving Mya home from work. He curated special playlists for these rides. He excised the experimental and sappy music he loved from these compilations. He cleaned his car daily beforehand of mint wrappers and crumpled poems. Mya, for her part, pleaded with her father that it was ok for him just to drop her off and not pick her up later that night. She would often come in at the start of a shift exhausted from this daily debate. She put off her driving test so much that her permit expired.

Paddy drove his worst with Mya in the car. They took the

highway northbound to its last exit. Mya would turn down the volume, tuck her knees up to her chest, and hold her tired feet up on the passenger seat. Paddy found her ember eyes more alluring than the red ones staring back at him through the windshield. He determined her straight, black, shoulder length hair was paved with more care than the potholed interstate. He believed the freeway lamps served far better accentuating her than the road; these pale oranges garnished her midnight attire and soft brown complexion with a tender light mirroring that warmth abundantly within her breast.

Mya watched Paddy pull away every night. As his broad shoulders turned from her goodnight back to his wheel, she chuckled at the soft blue hue of his car. Walking to her door, she swung her arms and hummed lightly. On average, it took her about an hour to fall asleep after getting home. Paddy passed James' house two blocks away before heading onto the southward on-ramp. Paddy perceived the twelve-mile nature of his trek only on the return leg. He pulled into his parent's driveway one mile from the theater at around 1 a.m.

Paddy saw Mya outside of work when he watched films. He went to the theater on fall mornings to catch the only showings of certain movies replaced by Dwayne Johnson crowd pleasers later in the night. He saw Mya's vulnerability in Taylor Russell watching *Waves*, Mya's power in Lupita Nyong'o watching *Us*, Mya's determination in Cynthia Erivo watching *Harriet*. He sat in one hundred fifty seat auditoriums alone. As a tick during intense moments of the films, he looked to his right.

Unlike Paddy's favorites, Marvel flicks never left the theaters. The boys seldom talked about the days in the trenches of *Avengers: Infinity War*; the patrons left popcorn by the bucket full in the aisles during *Thor: Ragnarok*; no one dared invoke the name *Black Panther*. On Christmas night, the July released *Spider-Man: Far From Home* still sputtered two night screenings one after the other in auditorium seventeen.

The boys gathered in the atrium at six o'clock sharp with candy canes in their mouths. The masses of customers flooded about taking pictures next to cardboard cut-outs of Olaf the Snowman and

Rey the Jedi. Gathering their cleaning equipment, the ushers dueled their mint sabers while Paddy arranged the paper schedule for the night. Paddy stared idly at the *Jumanji* subtitle he just highlighted: *The Next Level*.

“Hey guys, where’s Mya at?”

Paddy had the itinerary snatched out from his fingers before he could look up.

“Piss Man is here,” said Jarret sternly with his eyes tightly closed.

“J-Dog!” rang the chorus behind Paddy, still befuddled by the entire situation.

Jarret crossed his hairy arms, crinkling the paper, before restating, “Did you kids not hear me? Piss Man is here.” He jerked his head roughly to the left signaling a morbidly obese man in an Atlanta Falcons jacket. “You boys need to decide who’s going to clean up his mess.”

Urine was the least favorite of the bodily fluids to encounter for the movie theater ushers. Ample harsh detergents were available to sanitize the vomit and defecation. Semen and blood automatically shut down theaters and stalls alike. Urine rested in the uncanny valley of minimum wage work with little tools outside towels and light soap available. Furthermore, there was a deliberate nature to urine. Emergency was inherent to most other expulsions. The lewd crew even tipped their caps to semen honoring their own struggle for ecstasy. Lacking both causes, urine, especially in large quantities, signaled more than just indifference to the people who had to clean it up but pure contempt.

Piss Man was an artist of shame. He debuted at this theater in 2013 leaving his works under cover of darkness as Banksy did. Upon his discovery and subsequent banning, Piss Man threatened various lawsuits citing both medical and religious exemptions to continue his craft. Every month, he and his lawyers met the owner in the atrium to exchange threats against each other. The last few times, the crew gathered to watch the spectacle. Early in December, the owner caved and allowed Piss Man to enter on a night of his choosing in exchange

for a substantial cash payoff. Piss Man remained stoic as his lawyers patted him on one of his backs. He kept his eyes directly on what he fancied even more.

Piss Man won, and he acted like it. He brought his own *Toy Story 3* collector's edition gulp size cup to the concession stand. He waved at the security camera smiling childishly. The bottom half of his red Falcons jacket faded into a washed out pink.

"Who knew, huh? A fan of bed-shitters becoming a seat-pisser?" remarked Paddy.

Jarret frowned scornfully at Paddy. Jarret then went around to the guests apologizing for any passing vulgarity they may have heard.

"Any funnier business out of any of you and," he pointed to the walkie-talkie on Norman's hip. "Got it? Good. Figure out who's doing *it*," to which he gave a shiver, "and let's get going."

Jarret was a full-time morning usher. His long-time allegiance to the theater was evident in his now barely four-digit-per-hour salary, a fact he flaunted often. He was balding but wore a layer of hair from his neck down.

"He's like the pubes version of *Where the Wild Things Are*," once jested Thomas.

Jarret addressed customers as a matter of life and death. While waiting to clean the first auditorium, he ardently begged customers leaving to stay for the end credit scene. Upon turning on the overhead lights for his colleagues to clean, Jarret preached to the masses about upcoming movie release dates. Most patrons shied away from the bellowing thirty-five-year-old. Paddy believed this was partly on account of his eyes which were perpetually closed. In this way, he looked like an oracle channeling, among all sources of knowledge, that which could be found on IMDb.

Out of breath from his sermon, Jarret pranced the aisles as the boys labored. He pointed out missed butter drippings and rock salt smudges. He imparted his wisdom on the profitability for the theater of single-bagging to Paddy. In fairness, he did not mention the emergency call from Dean Collins he received just half an hour before the shift, pleading that the ushers were one short. The rapid

pace of this uncustomary night shift led him to take multiple breathers. The boys let Jarret play Napoleon. They collectively knew this night was the last hurdle of the year. Each shared plans for the playing of the new video games they'd gotten earlier in the morning.

Affronting the orders of the panting J-Dog, the boys did not discuss who would clean up after Piss Man; they did not need to discuss. The overhead lights in auditorium seventeen lit up as the boys entered, harmonizing "Baby, It's Cold Outside".

"Say, what's in this drink," Paddy sang roughly, trying to hit the high notes while unfurling an entire roll of paper towels. The rankness hit them as soon as they entered. Jarret, holding his shirt over his face, dared not even enter the auditorium.

"Gentlemen," greeted Piss Man, still firmly seated. He was like an apparition, as if one ghoul decided to eat the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future in a single sitting. The boys shuddered. "That last showing was so nice," he took out his damp ticket stub before slowly, painstakingly peeling a hidden second one from its back, "I think I'll see it twice."

Mortified, the boys hurriedly cleaned the surrounding seats of the caustic theater. Piss Man made splish splash noises as he turned his head about, evidently looking for someone. Holding back a gag, Paddy had his right wrist caught by a damp hand. The others froze, unable to save Paddy from his fate. Piss Man looked at the boy's name tag. He then pressed his own middle and ring fingers into his palms imitating Spider-Man.

"Catch you later, Paddy Parker," he bellowed into a cough-filled laughter.

The seven boys took their legally mandated fifteen-minute break. They sat in a different silence. The white light of the fluorescents above powdered them; they shivered. Paddy continuously blinked, staring at his seemingly stained wrist. The word 'canvass' crawled across his mind. He then looked at his shoes: grimy, resoled, relaced but still expensive leather. He flipped through the timecards seeing his name over and over. The others looked to him for the holly jolly Paddy they followed. Seeing none, they looked to the clock instead.

Each second lasted entire shifts. Time froze in the breakroom.

Paddy heard footsteps. He gathered discretion anticipating Jarret. As the steps came closer, they became lighter; a warm croon accompanied them.

“Cause I remember when you were here, and all the fun we had last year,” sang Mya behind the door before bursting through with both arms full. “My boys! I brought pies!”

James had cherry and Thomas apple. Thing 1 and Thing 2 attempted to do whip-its. Norman and Ollie argued over who would get to cream pie the other in the face; they laughed too long for this debate to ever reach a conclusion. Paddy and Mya got a piece of the Oreo dessert pie she made. Paddy took in her ornately put-up hair, the rouge on her glassless eyes, and the story of her dad’s family dinner which made her late to the shift. Mya lifted a sporkful and crammed it through Paddy’s smile.

“Well,” Mya posed with her creation as Julia Child would, “do you like it?”

The rejuvenated, complete crew stormed through the rest of the night. Carols drowned out Jarret’s public service announcements much to his chagrin. Merriment fell particularly on Mya and Paddy yapping like turtle doves the entire night. Thomas saw the way they looked at each other while the other stared into the black abyss of a garbage bag. Thomas took keen interest in seeing these two so happy.

The crew stopped in one of the snug backrooms to collect their armaments for their last battle of the night, of Christmas, of the year in auditorium seventeen. The boys filled in Mya on the situation as Paddy washed his hands preemptively.

“Gotta get clean to get dirty, fellas!”

Wiping his hands on his pants, Paddy looked at Mya’s rigid smile of support. Mya unconsciously hummed low and fast. He reached for the paper towels when a darting hand stopped him.

“Shouldn’t J-Dog, do it?” questioned Thomas. The jury looked to the speaker. “I mean, Jarret, you are the oldest here.”

The boys looked around and all perceived Mya’s lower bitten lip at Thomas’ words. They jumped in before a protesting Paddy

could.

“I mean it’s only fair!”

“You always say day shift is harder than night shift; prove it!”

“Paddy’s been working in the shit all night! All year!”

“You haven’t done a whole bunch, J-Dog!”

“I mean, work for your salary...” opened Rosencrantz.

“...it’s bigger than ours for a reason!” finished Guildenstern.

Mya transfixed Paddy during this moment. Her foot bounced, her eyes did somersaults, her fingernails scraped. This force of life, barely enough to hold in her twitching body, put its full power on behalf of him and his well-being. Shame and love pierced him. He looked down; the paper towels disappeared. He looked up; his friends, and only his friends, smiled in front of a closing door.

Paddy raced into auditorium seventeen ahead of the others. He traversed through the thick odor, scrambling his arms in front of him to clear his vision. The towels rolled before him. He followed this Ariadne’s thread of continuous single sheets to their source.

Jarret and Paddy stared into oblivion. Packets of salt and Sour Patch Kids melted into the sea. Cataracts of urine bundled over to the floor. Two canyons of relatively dry areas acted as the signature of its creator. The poor leather looked oily, exhausted, tired. The sheer amount of liquid was biblical. Piss Man left a message on the drier of his two tickets:

I was sad I didn’t see that yummy, Zendaya looking broad.

Jarret said nothing. He had two makeshift plugs in his nostrils. He plucked hairs from his knuckles. As he turned to face him, Paddy saw the whites of Jarret’s eyes for the first time. Paddy reached to the seat and grabbed the note. He crumpled it and carefully wrapped it in multiple layers of paper towels.

“Can you toss this for me, Jarret?”

The entire crew watched Paddy’s ten-minute cleaning. Each gave the shaken Jarret a pat on the back and an apology. Jarret for his part, at distance, continued to ask Paddy what he needed; he couldn’t make out these requests through the gags. Paddy dug into every crevice. He bagged sopping rag after sopping rag. He wanted the seat

to be cured of this sin; he wanted it to blend in with the rest of the seats again. After spraying an entire bottle of Lysol worth more than his hourly wage, Paddy rose. He looked to his friends, his elder, and Mya. He turned back to his patient and sunk into it.

Those boys took turns at the sink rubbing soap up and down Paddy's hands, throwing suds at each other all the while. They hugged each other ardently, shamelessly and wished each other festive futures. They spoke of Paddy in legend as he departed for the night with Mya.

"Sanitize Claus," Thomas dubbed Paddy, though the others would later take claim to originating it.

As he opened his car door, Paddy saw Jarret peel off in his motorcycle. Underneath his helmet and encumbering protective pads, Jarret seemed to make an indication of goodbye to Paddy.

Paddy's mind raced on the drive to Mya's house. He forgot turn signals. He drifted into wrong lanes. He did everything but acknowledge the raging fire underneath his breast. About halfway there, Paddy remembered to turn on the wipers to clear the mounting snowfall.

Mya admired the dust of ice forming on the hood of the car making it look like a shimmering lagoon lost in the middle of a Pennsylvania winter. She smelled the sweat of Paddy, a common scent to her over the last few months. She laughed.

"You know the best perfumes have that shit smell to them?"

Paddy looked at her quizzically; she loved perplexing him. She assumed her usual tucked position. She stared at his side profile: its budding hairs, its blackheads. She wanted to smash it open like a Christmas cracker and spread its insides all around her. She heard a faint melody: a sweet, yearning tenor accompanied by a dreamy orchestra. She turned up the volume. Paddy jerked his hand toward the knob, frustrated by his carelessness. Mya grabbed him on the right wrist. Her touch painted over the yellow hues with a red that emanated all the way to his cheeks. They both returned their hands to their original positions.

"It's a, um-"

“Yeah?”

“It’s a song from this movie, you probably haven’t seen it, it’s called *The Shape of Water*; it’s about, well...”

“Mhm.”

“Well, the plot is a little... well... but this song and the themes are about-”

“Love.”

“Yep, more or less; yep.”

“I like it. “You’ll Never Know”,” she stated reading the title. “She’s a keeper.”

“She sure is.”

The strings washed over them. The piano engulfed them. Renee Fleming drowned them. When fire confronts such a white Christmas, what else is to be expected than the deluge of copious waters? In this newest silence they sat in until, before Paddy could catch the runaway train in his head, Mya started:

“Hey, Piss Boy?”

Paddy took his eyes from the snowy highway which now seemed the length of the theater hallway. He looked over to Mya as she let down her hair. A braided mistletoe, formerly concealed, showed itself in the locks just above her right eyebrow.

“Mya?”

“Wanna get off here?”



Swallowed By Sand - *Sofia Zingone*

Argos

Molly Neeson

Familiar footsteps cross the stable;
sly side eye stings.
Have you thought of me?
In faith, love, I have not
moved since you left
me flea-full and run-ragged; trussed
to tails of untimely return.
You know I am the only one who sees you?

Once I dreamt you gave me piece
of mind, fruit *te kalliste*—
for me to taste
bitter strife strikes my tongue,
blood and metal on boneless gums.
You know I am the one in which you see you?

You want me to come;
weary body swollen with waiting,
bones sing songs of still
you will not meet me halfway.
I greet you with my gaze, you do not
see me, as I am
for you.

For twenty years, a tear—
in parchment, they will say that was enough.

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The Other



Esprit Submission Information
Deadline for Spring 2023: April 7 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 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.

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; 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 Spring 2023 semester, Molly Neeson (molly.neeson@scranton.edu).



Esprit Staff Fall 2022



Production Team 2022

