

Esprit



Spring 2026

ESPRIT

The University of Scranton Review of Arts and Letters

Spring 2026

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Spring 2026 Awards:

The Berrier Poetry Award

Meghan Wong

“Let’s Stop With the Metaphors”

The Berrier Prose Award

Christina Andreopoulos

“All my best poems”

The Esprit Graphics Award

Alek Panchik

“Morning”

Spring 2026 Award Judges:

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Zane Price is the former Editor-In-Chief of *Esprit* having graduated from The University of Scranton in spring 2025 with a double major in Secondary Education and English. He currently is enjoying a year of service at his former high school, Scranton Preparatory School, where he teaches freshman English and assists with the school’s tutoring program.

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Stephen Butler graduated from The University of Scranton in 2025 with a degree in neuroscience in the Magis Honors Program in STEM and a minor in philosophy and is an award winning photographer and was an *Esprit* editor. He currently attends medical school at Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine in Scranton, PA.

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Wonder (or something close enough)

Samantha Horsnall

i met god leaving a gas station bathroom in the middle
of *nowheresville*, pennsylvania. he offered
me his phone number, asked about my brother.
he wasn't in, yet.
i politely declined. my mother was waiting, outside.
he nodded. he stood at eye-level, slightly short;
acne scars marked his face. half-moons under his eyes.
but he looked at me, *looked* like he saw something
inside.
then, he hoped my twizzlers would be good, and he left.
i hadn't bought them, yet.

it's funny, sometimes, what we discover we miss
when we are convinced we aren't anything. if we believe
that we are nothing,
 watching ourselves smudge past like trees from
 inside the dirty car window on the highway.
i wonder if god believes in himself, too. or maybe
he, also, is lonely and lost in this roadtrip of life
in the middle of nowhere. if his shirt is sticky from the
 ride, rumpled
in the back from sitting for hours. if he too is exhausted
 and sweat-
stained, vaguely chilly and nauseous. if he too cannot
read a book in a car for too long. if he too looks,
and watches.
i wonder, if he
believes.



Midnight Butterfly - Dawson Chisbalm

reflections on God's shadows

Samantha Horsnall

i.

there is a strange
emptiness

to growing up without a god.

the world is only exactly as large as i picture it to
be. like a camera, i see the world in snapshots.

my frame finds a clenched fist slamming against
a redwood tree. i capture the sound of cracking
bark, ruffling leaves—but nothing of the echoes in the
sky.

nothing of “sky”.

what is a sky, a beyond for someone who only
knows under the canopy?

to an ant, beyond is simply that. the next step.

the horizon is the gargantuan green grass
from their chimney of an anthill.

what is a horizon but simply the edge of what i see?

what can be real, beyond those leaves?

ii.

a god to me is like a star behind city smog:

impossible to believe exists, despite

claims it was there, once.

how can i dream a star up with no words for its sight?

they tell me a bear roams up by the moon; a

hunter; a crab; a bull. i wonder if god is so lonely

he needed to bring life to him, up there.

i wonder if he can breathe, up there.

they tell me our sky is haunted by dead stars,
whose last words are received by me eons after
they have passed.
and i ask: where do stars go, when they die?

they are silent. they have no words for
me. they never do.

how would they even begin?

iii.

what is holy, to me?

holiness to me is sitting in the backseat, leaning
against the open window with my eyes closed,
drinking in the warm sunlight of a briefly
known afternoon.

laying in familiar stillness as the evening
unfolds, the moon beginning its careful waltz with
the ring of trees edging my yard.

breathing in the scent of the sea salt breeze
as it ruffles my hair like an older brother, it's crash
calling me home as it exclaims,

where in the world have you been, little sister?

iv.

i find god at the bottom of a pool. it is dark. it is
silent. only me, quiet, believing the sun will
rise and the earth will turn while i am here, in
flux.

that i still exist, in this little pocket of
nothingness.

maybe, that's what god is. reminders of what
living is, reminding us to remember

the words to our existence.

maybe god is just the hair tickling my ear, reaching in to
whisper,

look at all you can be.

On drowning

Faith Montagnino

I sit in the waiting room
until my counselor comes out

to collect me;
I tell her being there feels like losing

my identity.
Each time the bathwater rises and starts to fill my
 nostrils, my mind pulls

the plug; I feel sensation drain as I beg myself
to drown. Soap burns my eyes and nestles

in the curls of my hair.
Audre Lorde said, “I feel, therefore

I can be free,” and I
envy her.

Ce Qui Ne Se Dit Pas

Gabriella Palmer

My mom studied literature, and my father philosophy. I was always surrounded by the smell of old books, and the sounds of a great debate about what Hemingway meant in *The Sun Also Rises* or *A Farewell to Arms*. My parents were deeply in love and endlessly curious. When it came time for me to take a language in middle school, the question became a hot debate between my parents: French, the language of the poets, or German, the language of the philosophers. My father, like most philosophy professors worth their salt, had lived in Zurich for an extended period of time, and hoped to bring me along. I wanted to take Spanish, but that wasn't exactly an option, so I picked French. Both of my parents were terrified that without their language, I could never truly understand their discipline, and by extension, them. Perhaps I never did. Now I think I do.

*In French, the first thing they teach
you is how to say your own name.
The word for "my name is" in
French is Je m'appelle.
It means "I am called."*

I am the daughter of two brilliant people, everyone used to tell me. Of course, I lived an odd existence because my parents were intellectuals. My first grade book-mobile had a motor, and I could recite Shakespeare by heart by eighth grade. However, the moment to take the cake was the second grade selfie project. I had to bring in something that represented myself. Other first graders brought in a soccer ball or a photo of them and their family. I brought in an empty container, because that was what my father suggested, because Sartre said we were all empty vessels. My teacher scheduled a meeting with my

brilliant parents that day. On the drive home, my dad sheepishly apologized. I told him I'd rather have the empty container. And I wasn't the worst, Caleb brought in a dead fish.

*In French, the word for "intelligent" is intelligent(e).
It means "having the ability to understand, reason, and think deeply."*

As I grew, I got quite good at French, but I never really knew what I wanted to do. I spent so much time around books, debates, and lectures that I thought I would be a scholar. My parents encouraged me, after all, they had found thousands of ways of living in their literature and their philosophy. I didn't know much of what I wanted, but they encouraged me in every way: planetarium visits on the weekends, the theater, long talks of economics with the older business professor who lived two doors down. I did know, when I graduated from eighth grade, that I wanted to see Paris. So my mom and I spoke our way through France, my dad happily snapping photos of us and everything. His joy was infectious, and I wish more people appreciated such happiness in existence. But maybe, even then, he knew something I didn't, which slowly taught me how to be.

*In French, the word "to be" is être.
It means "to exist, to live, to take form in the world."*

My paint-covered hands are thanks to my father. One night, he sat me in front of a projection of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*. He was writing about it for a paper, but I was entranced. He didn't explain it at first, just let me look. A man stood with his back to us, staring into something endless, something unknowable. "This," my father said finally, "is what it feels like to think." He told me the Germans believed art was not decoration, but

confrontation, that to look at something beautiful was also to face how small you are inside it. I didn't fully understand him then, but I remember the feeling. That the world could be vast and silent and still ask something of me. After that, I started doing art, painting, sketching not what I saw, but what I felt standing at the edge of it.

*In French, the word for "to think" is
penser.*

*It means "to question, to doubt, to
try to understand something just out
of reach."*

Then, my father got sick. I was by his side each day at the hospital, and then at home. I would rush home from high school to sit by his bed. We read Kant and Nietzsche, and sometimes the essays my mother left on his desk. We talked about ethics, mortality, and the lives we imagined for ourselves. I had hope.

*The word for "hope" in French is
espoir.*

*It means "the belief that even in the
darkest times, something good may
yet arrive."*

And then he died.

*The word for "sad" in French is
triste.*

It means "feeling sorrow or grief."

In French class, they don't teach you the word for "death," or "dying," or "I'll never be okay again". So when my French teacher asked, I only ever really found the words for "sad" and "shit." But that isn't right. My education is failing me, and my words are failing me. How I wish I could find the words, in any language, to describe my grief. But

they are all lost to me, insufficient in translation and sentiment. I do not know how to take this pit in my stomach and say “he is gone.”

*In German, the word for “rebirth” is
Wiedergeburt.*

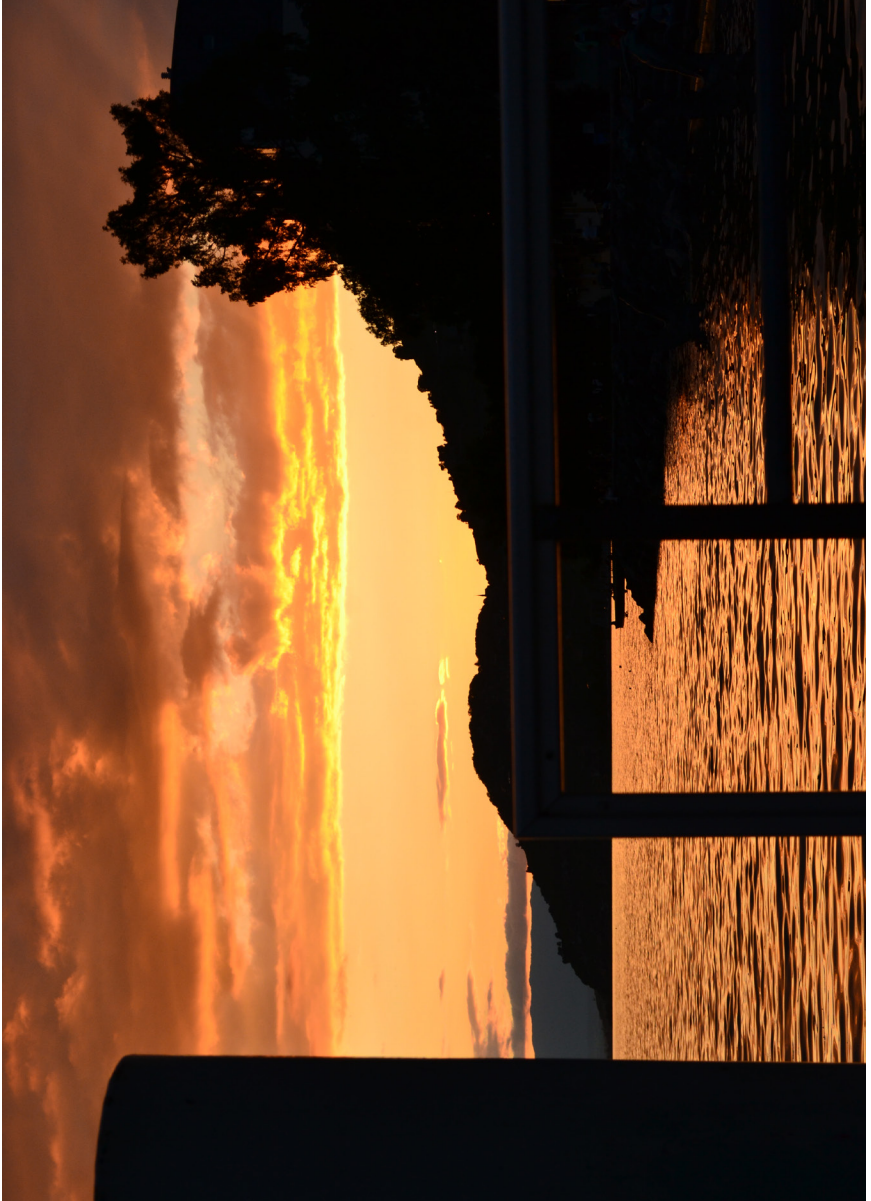
*It means “to begin again, to grow
after loss.”*

So now we're talking

Christina Andreopoulos

I keep thinking that I'm 18.
I keep almost saying it.
The number lies on my tongue like the carcass of a bug
that I swallowed
and coughed back up.

I lost 19 in a sea of empty.
I blinked and it was june.
I blinked again and it was december.
The weights that have been keeping me under
have started crumbling up into foamy clay, floating to
the top of the lap pool.
I have begun to float to the top too
Slowly. I am glad.
My birthday candles won't light under all this wet.



Lake Geneva - *Damson Chisholm*

When You Leave

Meghan Wong

I'll kiss that forehead of yours
goodbye. Feathered skin of your eyelid
glistens in pale light.
I'll pack this in my wound
to stop the bleeding later. When you leave,

I'll let you silently, like the lull after a flood. Joke's on
you;
I put up that dam before we started. I'll exist
in harmonic motion, the languid beats of a swaying
boat,
the repetition of finality. When you leave,

I won't watch—this scene is hackneyed. Dust off the
polaroids,
these snapshots are the same. I'll deny
the memory of your baritone words, granite hands,
your two-lipped tells, wetland lullabies. I'll sleep,
half-wake in eclipsed light, blinded by the shadow
of you in recoil. Sorry, I pulled my punches before the
fight.
Sorry, my fist is already bruised.

Harmonic, I love you.
Hushed after the lull, I love you.
Develop the fucking polaroid, or let it collect soot, I
love you.
When you leave,

I'll shut off all the lights. I'll let you walk off in
exploding
nebula, with your head held high. And I won't need
to tell you, *I told you so.*

My prayer cards reify the morning as skin settles into

Faith Montagnino

kitchen light, the pane next to the sink
sown with morning beams,

smooth. Smell of spring, yes, that floral, gentle
air that holds me in its middle. Through the backyard
tree, divine intervention: the breeze

caresses wooden arms. I forget to remember the rain
fall. Dropping the dishes, I rush to the screen door

below the stained glass, refracted rouge.

Amen,

it is well with my soul. In the wake of weather, small
ponds in the dirt,

I follow my feet beneath the willow. Palming the
catkins, embraced, I

finally take
root.



Home - *Alek Panchik*

All my best poems

Christina Andreopoulos

I'm practicing mindfulness in the bubble of an unsent text message. All my breakthroughs are speckled with pieces of glass from the age when I was an American Teenager on bleachers that were too big for me. I leaned on friends that lived a block away. And now all those friends are old. And now all my old friends are gone, gone to live in South Carolina or five minutes from our old high school. I'm taking steps but everything stays the same size. I'm walking forward but the scene doesn't move. Breathwork looks like the yellow end of a cigarette. Breathwork looks like getting laid down. I got everything I've prayed for, and I'm waiting for the day when I can be back again, sneaking back again. I am a shadow, sneaking through time and space to be fifteen again, sneaking to the pool again, at night again, loving rock and roll again—records I only know because I dated someone in high school. There's a sacred place in all of this darkness. There is a room filled with magazines and fidget toys. It's a waiting room, and the doctor might pass you a lighter. There is a sacred place. A place where squirrels can get fat and a place where I can go to South Carolina. A bubble, a breakthrough, and an Ethel Cain song. There's a there. And I'm almost there. A perpetual waiting room, but the room has warm lighting, great for photos. Up-close photos of all the ways you've broken out (of your shell). I'm walking forward but nothing moves. I'm asking the doctor for a cigarette.

Mama caught me talking to the moon

Nya Rowe

Mama caught me talking to the Moon.
She hissed at me and snatched my doll away.
But the Moon is kind.
The Moon cocooned me a new doll from the clouds
and stars.

She hissed at me and snatched my doll away.
Mama's weathered hand left a singed mark on my skin.
The Moon cocooned me a new doll from the clouds
and stars.
The Moon cares for little girls like me.

Mama's weathered hand left a singed mark on my skin.
But the Moon is kind.
The Moon cares for little girls like me.
Mama caught me talking to the Moon.

In media res

Meghan Wong

It's after prom, and before
I know how to process it.
First, I peel off the dress that my father had to approve.
Second,
I clench my sticky skin, morph
it like clay until
it's not mine. Finally,
I get to ignore the stranger in the mirror.

It's prom, and I can still taste the acid in my mouth.
I remember: a hodge podge of lukewarm bodies and
too much
glitter. Over the dinner plate, my hand lingers above my
Adam's
apple. I hope it vanishes when they dim
the lights. Someone calls me "manly," and I pretend
it's an insult. I pretend
to identify with this corset that's opposing—
my lungs. And I hope to die, so I can finally be
nameless.

It's after prom, and I think about everything,
and the nothingness in between. I am stretched taut by
continuum,
free without freedom. I press into the vein that runs
along my leg. I try to picture
where it ends, as if I'm sure
of where it begins.

It's before prom, and there's too much body in this
dress, and not enough
of me. Not enough words to say or pronouns
I know. I stare at this mirror, to return to this
foreign land, to make sure
it's real.



A Fawn in the Woods - *Gianna Familetti*

Apples, Pomegranates, Curiosity and Other Forbidden Fruit For This New Woman, Unafraid

Gabriella Palmer

I cannot help but wonder
how it felt
for that woman

standing there
with the fruit heavy
in her hand,

too curious,
too good,
too willing.

Fingers stained but
too brave to leave it untouched.

No villainous temptation required,
just the unbearable weight
of possibility.

One bite—
and everything after
becomes consequence.

and still,
think it was worth it,
I must think it worth it

Because my heroes never stay
do what they are told.

They do more than sit in the sun.
They fall,
 out of gardens,
 down rabbit holes,
 out of eternity
 into deep caves
 And sleep that looks like death
 and I love them for it.

How brilliant it is
to choose the thing
that changes you.

I trust the ones
who choose
anyway.
I think I understand Her.
I would rather take the bite,
feel the world split open,
create something
greater

than never have picked
the fruit at all.

I would rather fall
with my mouth full of sweet knowing
than remain,
afraid.

Confessions (after “Confessions” by Qurat Dar)

Faith Montagnino

- As a kid, I stole a small teddy bear from the ShopRite checkout line because it had “September” with a rainbow-colored birthday cake embroidered on its chest; things like diaries and Justice t-shirts never had my first initial, and that felt close enough.
- When I was ten, I tore open a box delivered to my front door after my grandma told me not to; I couldn’t take not knowing what was hidden. When she woke up and found the empty box, she was angry, but said nothing. I have never felt more ashamed.
- Even when I tell friends I don’t care about my birthday, I hope they do.
- In college, I realized something was wrong with me, and that no amount of effort will expunge it. That thing is my own mind. Though my therapist would say, *there is no right and wrong, only real and not real.*
- The breath that exterminates the flames atop my birthday candles has always been laced with “I want to be happy.” Alongside that, “I want to be loved.” Synthesizing them: “I want this to last.”
- I want you to tear me open, but I don’t want you to hurt me.

Negative Space in Motion

Callie Gorman

The treadmill hums louder than it should
For 6 a.m.
Or maybe 10 p.m.
The numbers don't change fast enough,
My feet won't negotiate pace.
I am motionless.
I arrive nowhere, faster.
Don't. Stop. Running.

And I am twelve
at the dinner table
and he's scolding me not to eat
"To lose weight,
you have to BURN
more than you eat."
I stare at my plate
Like it might confess something to me.

Halfway through
I hear someone,
and she's
screaming.

The belt moves faster,
my feet pound louder
than my heartbeat.
Something burns
not deep
enough to push through

Don't. Stop. Running.

My feet keep landing
Half a second too late.
I grasp at the rails,
Skin drags, the belt moves faster,
Burning. Scraping. Erasing.
And for a second, I'm smiling
For a second, I'm weightless.

The hum stops,
I don't remember stepping off.
And there's a darkness
the screaming grows louder
Until it's the only thing I hear.

BatshitPT

Christina Andreopoulos

Here's what we've got: A research paper on [redacted]

Can you make this sound more human?

Got it! I've made some revisions.

Let me know if you'd like me to make it more formal.

It needs to sound like a person wrote it.

Of course. How does this sound?

Make it more human. Make it sound human.

Got it! Thinking...

Let's take this essay, and make it fall in love with someone who is wonderful at painting.

They will get married, and fill their home with love and art.

Now let's take it all away. Let this essay grieve.

We can give the essay a best friend and have them build a treehouse together out of leftover pieces of lumber from dad's garage. Have them grow up together. Have them drift away in college.

Take the essay and teach it how to skateboard, let it fall and scrape its knee.

Let the essay pet a dog, smile at a baby, say goodbye to its mother for the very last time.

Have the essay lay on its back, on a woven blanket under the stars, and admit all of its fears to a highschool boyfriend. Have it ponder life after death.

Give this essay a name. Give it faith. Give it grit. Give it hope.
Enlist it in the military. Make it a CEO. Make it a therapist. Make it a
friend.

Make it fail. Make it try. Make it mourn. Make it laugh.
After all this, will it sound human?

Yeah whatever that's fine.



Morning - *Alek Panchik*

Let's Stop With The Metaphors

Meghan Wong

That night, I asked you to teach me physics. *Sure*, you said, flat. You kept saying, *matter is always conserved*. That night, I asked if every person I've lost is truly gone, and if the love I gave will come back, and if I'll ever wield it again. I stumbled over my words before I said them, like the preemptive reeling of a fishline. You sighed, *I don't know, M. You and your metaphors*.

Then I learned an electron is both a wave and a particle, apparently, and I think that's bullshit. You replied, *two things can be true at the same time*, but I still can't understand why I'm stuck in both the past and the future, why I cast the line just to reel it in, how an absolute science contradicts itself.

That night, I told you that I am numb, that my mind is just an entanglement of nonsense arithmetic, motionless direction. You questioned, *why do you feel like that?* I say that I don't know. You're asking me to reach into empty matter and pull out truth. *It's simple*, you say, and I wish that I could fill in this blank with the answer to an equation. You spewed *resistor* and *transistor*, but I don't know how to conduct my electricity or limit its flow. You caution that our magnets repel, but just listen to my hypothesis. I see the electron as a wave, you see it as a particle, but both can be true at the same time.

So, just stay.

We met at this time and place, so don't reduce it to probability. I will listen to the melody of your mathematics and find this missing variable. I may never solve this confusion, but what is science if not the desperate attempt? So please. Teach it to me again. I'll try your way, and you try mine.

Lady J.

Gabriella Palmer

AT RISE: The dark Headmaster's office at St. Thomas More Academy, an elite boarding school, late 1980s. The room is grand and imposing, with wide windows stretching along the back wall, their glass black with night. A massive dark mahogany desk sits center stage, covered in paperwork. Two rigid wooden chairs sit in front of it. Behind the desk is a painting that is half-covered by a tarp, but it reveals an older gentleman's face. Large, towering library shelves line the walls, filled with impressive book collections. To one side of the room, a tall cabinet stands slightly ajar. HEADMASTER MORRIS THOMPSON, a man in his late thirties, wears a new, brown suit and pours a half-full glass of bourbon into two glasses. Six photographs are taped across the board: four male teens, the former headmaster, and one teenage girl. Beneath each is a letter written in chalk, 'U, S, T, I, C, E, I, S.' DETECTIVE DANIELLE FURENTE, a woman in her mid-thirties dressed in a navy blue suit and heels examines another teen boy's picture that is on HEADMASTER's desk. DETECTIVE returns to looking at the board, puzzled. A head shake, a sigh. She paces.

HEADMASTER: Bourbon? I always drink when there are whispers

of the supernatural about.

DETECTIVE: (*Breaking from her thoughts.*) No, thank you. I need a clear head, Headmaster Thompston.

HEADMASTER: Morris, please. You know I had my doubts, forgive me for that. I must say, you are incredibly...capable. (*HEADMASTER crosses over to DETECTIVE and massages her shoulders. DETECTIVE flinches, almost imperceptibly.*) I'm quite in awe of you to be honest, Danielle, and given the nine dead bodies on our hands, I feel quite lucky to have you on the case with me.

DETECTIVE: (*Crossing back to desk.*) We have eight dead bodies. For now.

HEADMASTER: Do you think there are...more?

DETECTIVE: We found the J after a week. On second thought, I want that bourbon. (*She pours her bourbon into a cup, then fiddles with the bottle. A beat as she turns around, cheerily.*) Top you off?

HEADMASTER: Yes, please.

DETECTIVE: (*DETECTIVE pours the bourbon, then sits at the desk chairs.*) I have a theory.

HEADMASTER: Can you clue me in? It wasn't Bryant, and he showed great promise as a suspect. And now...this? I don't even know what to make of that. I'm not much of a prayer, but in times like these...

DETECTIVE: Terrible thing to confess as the principal of a private school.

HEADMASTER: Faith and law are not so dissimilar. They're higher

deals instituted by man that ultimately fail us. (*Long sip of bourbon.*) But they're comforting to have.

DETECTIVE: I'm not much of a believer.

HEADMASTER: So what do you think it is?

DETECTIVE: I have thoughts, but that's why I want to speak with the girl.

HEADMASTER: (*Crossing back to his desk*) Mrs. Caldwell is sending her down from the dormitory. (*A beat.*) Go easy on this one.

DETECTIVE: She was...(*checks the board*) Luke's girlfriend. The quarterback.

HEADMASTER: Allison is...delicate. I had her in class before my sudden...promotion. She is bright. But, her sister, well, a few years ago there was a...tragic sort of accident.

DETECTIVE: (*Slowly*) Ac-cident?

HEADMASTER: Our last principal worked quite hard to keep it out of the press.

DETECTIVE: He did a good job.

HEADMASTER: Miss...the former Miss Cassandra Hardgrave set a dormitory on fire, which was quickly put out, and then jumped from the north tower.

DETECTIVE: Where Sebastian O'Neil was pushed from?

HEADMASTER: Yes...I should close that area to students. She—Cassandra—was never really...um...there were some mental concerns.

(Drums his fingers on the desk.) Quite the mad woman in the attic trope.

DETECTIVE: Really?

HEADMASTER: Yeah. *(Fetching cigarettes from his desk drawer. He pokes around for a lighter while talking before finally locating it in a bottom drawer. He crosses around to sit across from her.)* She, um, claimed a group of boys had...in any case, it was determined that she was lying or had given consent but was simply drunk. I'd only just started teaching here that year.

DETECTIVE: Did people believe her?

HEADMASTER: *(Holding out a cigarette as an offering. DETECTIVE takes the cigarette.)* Not when the coroner's report said she was pregnant.

DETECTIVE: Jesus. *(HEADMASTER crosses around the desk and sits at one of the two chairs to light DETECTIVE's cigarette. She lights his cigarette in turn.)* So she's what, scarred for life?

HEADMASTER: Something like that. *(HEADMASTER taps the detective's thigh in what seems like a "comforting gesture," but easily reads as lust. DETECTIVE looks at him intently, she should say 'get your hand off of me,' but she doesn't. She goes to say something but again doesn't. A knock breaks the intensity.)* Just be gentle with her. *(He opens the door, revealing ALLIE, a short, blind, girl of about sixteen, carrying a walking stick. She wears a rumpled school uniform, clearly thrown on in haste. She seems tiny and sweet, but she carries herself with an undeniable confidence. DETECTIVE shoots a look at the HEADMASTER as he helps ALLIE sit.)* Allison, how are you this evening?

ALLIE: I'm good. Is that the detective? I smell peppermint oil and cheap cigarettes...something else today, though? Sweet?

DETECTIVE: New perfume.

ALLIE: Right. Mrs. Caldwell said you wanted to speak with me. I thought it must be important.

DETECTIVE: So sorry to call on you so late. (*Crossing to the board.*) I know you've been through a lot lately, but we need to ask you some questions.

ALLIE: If you're using the board, I can't see it. (*Sweetly.*) Apologies.

HEADMASTER: Detective Furente wasn't thinking. She has some questions for you.

ALLIE: Can I ask you a question first? Why did you become a detective?

DETECTIVE: The usual shit. Sorry, Morris...stuff.

ALLIE: Nancy Drew? Murder in the family?

DETECTIVE: Something like that. And I suppose it's important, chasing down criminals.

ALLIE: But that's not how it works, really.

DETECTIVE: In what way?

ALLIE: I meant catching people is easy, trying them is harder, right? (*A beat.*) That's what my teacher, (*To HEADMASTER*) Mr. Shen, says. I'm in a government course right now. It's pretty riveting.

DETECTIVE: The St. Thomas Academy education in action, huh?

HEADMASTER: That's what we believe. And Miss Hardgrave is one

of our brightest students, pre-law in fact. (*Aside to DETECTIVE.*)
Even with the y'know.

ALLIE: So...what, um, did you want to see me about?

DETECTIVE: Well, the strangest thing happened.

ALLIE: Oh?

HEADMASTER: The boys who have all turned up dead in the past few weeks, and Miss Erickson, the Headmaster Thomas—

DETECTIVE: We found another body.

ALLIE: What?

(ALLIE accidentally knocks over her cane. She struggles to find it. HEADMASTER goes to retrieve it from the floor, but receives an elbow from ALLIE to his head as he tries to straighten up.)

HEADMASTER: Oof. (*A beat.*) Here, Miss Hardgrave. (*To DETECTIVE*) We accept students of all abilities here.

DETECTIVE: I'm not a prospective student.

ALLIE: I'm so sorry, who...what...another student is dead?

DETECTIVE: An older one when they searched the grounds. Maybe from a year or two ago. It was thought he had left the country, so no one was looking for him.

ALLIE: Okay...

HEADMASTER: Do you remember Connor Lees?

ALLIE: No, should I?

HEADMASTER: He was one of the men. (*A beat, ALLIE raises an eyebrow, a challenge.*) You know.

ALLIE: One of the men who raped my sister?

HEADMASTER: (*A swallow*) Let's not use that language.

ALLIE: I think we should. After all, what are all those debate team practices for if not to learn how to speak, principal? I'm using my education.

HEADMASTER: That is quite enough.

DETECTIVE: Well, this one was beaten badly and arranged, but once again no DNA.

ALLIE: How badly?

DETECTIVE: Bad. And he would have suffered because it looks like the killer tried to snap his neck, but wasn't strong enough to kill him, and he bled out slowly.

ALLIE: I see. (*Emotionless.*) That's terrible.

HEADMASTER: Truly, terrible.

DETECTIVE: You seem awfully indifferent.

ALLIE: I believe Cass.

HEADMASTER: Your sister—

DETECTIVE: That is quite admirable.

ALLIE: You must have a sister.

DETECTIVE: She's my sister from another mother. I'd do anything for her.

HEADMASTER: To put it lightly, we wanted to know if you knew anything.

ALLIE: About my sister?

HEADMASTER: About the murder!

ALLIE: I would have told you immediately! That sicko murdered Luke! I loved him. (*Demanding.*) Tell me what's going on.

HEADMASTER: The reason we called you here is because Sebastian isn't dead.

ALLIE: What?

DETECTIVE: The boy is paralyzed for the rest of his life, but not dead. He woke up today and said your sister pushed him from the tower.

ALLIE: (*Frightened.*) No. That's not possible. It wasn't her. We buried her. She has a grave. It's been three years. He must have hallucinated. A demon, maybe?

DETECTIVE: I don't believe in them, at least not being from that side of the dirt, hon. But we have found a rather...disturbing connection.

HEADMASTER: Every man, the former headmaster, and even Miss Erickson, have a reputation for harassing, assaulting or bullying other students.

ALLIE: Not Luke.

DETECTIVE: Tell me, did Luke...did he hurt you ever?

ALLIE: What do you mean?

(ALLIE “looks between” DETECTIVE and HEADMASTER)

DETECTIVE: You didn't feel like maybe he did and you told, I don't know, a friend? Maybe? Or said something and your friend took it out of context?

ALLIE: He didn't hurt me. I told you! I didn't think he would hurt anyone.

HEADMASTER: But did you know he was one of the men who vouched for the other guys who...hurt—

ALLIE: What? No.

HEADMASTER: It's in the paperwork.

DETECTIVE: So we think there could be a connection.

ALLIE: So, what, you think my sister is like a ghost running around and murdering the men who were responsible? That is crazy. This is a Catholic school, *(To HEADMASTER)* you can't believe this.

DETECTIVE: I don't. Which is why I'm curious. Where were you on the night of the murder?

ALLIE: Which one?

(HEADMASTER coughs.)

HEADMASTER: Flu season.

DETECTIVE: (*A beat.*) The murders. Where were you?

ALLIE: Uhhh...all of them? I mean the last one I was asleep with a cold? My roommate Jamie can attest to it. And my dorm is far from the north tower.

HEADMASTER: She couldn't have climbed it anyway, the tower was built when the school was founded 50 years ago.

DETECTIVE: How did you know it was the tower? That's not public information.

ALLIE: Because of where the body was found—underneath the tower—word gets around. We aren't stupid.

DETECTIVE: Did you hear about the bodies?

ALLIE: What specifically?

HEADMASTER: There are letters carved into each body.

ALLIE: The press said it's some kind of a message?

HEADMASTER: Yes.

(HEADMASTER coughs dryly.)

ALLIE: Bless you.

HEADMASTER: Thanks.

DETECTIVE: At first we thought we were missing pieces, that it was an anagram: usticeis. But then we found the next body. It's cruder, Connor Lees suffered less, but he was killed more violently, likely a crime of passion. Based on decomposition, the J looks like it was added post-mortem.

HEADMASTER: The killer went back and added the J to the first body.

ALLIE: (*Muttering to herself*) Justicesis? (*Turns toward HEADMASTER*,) If it's Latin, I don't know it.

DETECTIVE: Justice is.

ALLIE: Is what?

DETECTIVE: You tell me.

ALLIE: I don't know.

DETECTIVE: No, tell me how it ends.

ALLIE: Excuse me?

DETECTIVE: You did it. You know, don't you?

HEADMASTER: Detective, that is pretty ridiculous! Look.

(HEADMASTER grabs a pen and chucks it at ALLIE's head.)

ALLIE: Oh my god! That hurt!

HEADMASTER: See? I told you she was quite...

(HEADMASTER coughs again, violently. He crosses to grab water, but sways and collapses.)

ALLIE: Headmaster Thompston?! Headmaster?! Oh my god!

HEADMASTER: The cigarettes! (*He looks at ALLIE*)—did you do this? You did this!

(*ALLIE looks at DETECTIVE with tears in her eyes*)

ALLIE: What? I didn't—

(*HEADMASTER begins to choke violently.*)

ALLIE: (*To DETECTIVE*) Do something!

DETECTIVE: Do you really want me to do that? You were going to kill him after all. If he put the pieces together?

ALLIE: No—What the hell?

DETECTIVE: Save the drama club technique.

HEADMASTER: Please...(*HEADMASTER stills.*)

ALLIE: I didn't do this.

DETECTIVE: It's my work. (*DETECTIVE crosses to the cabinet where the bourbon sits and pours the remainder of the bourbon on the floor.*) A little cyanide in the bourbon. The sweetness you smelled. That, my dear, is why you always pour.

ALLIE: What do you want? (*Eyes the pistol.*) Are you going to turn me in?

DETECTIVE: I haven't decided.

ALLIE: I'm not a bad person.

DETECTIVE: I've heard that one before. (*A beat.*) He's not dead. I have an antidote that will work, but only in a certain window of time. (*Takes out her gun, points it at ALLIE, as she sits in the chair.*) So talk fast.

ALLIE: How did you figure it out?

DETECTIVE: The boy thought it was you because I'm sure with your hair dyed you look a lot like your sister—so I'm thinking brown wig? Make it look like a vengeful ghost was doing all this?

ALLIE: Ink. Black ink will do the trick. Sebastian never got a good look. I meant for it to be quick, as much as I wanted him to suffer, I did not...

DETECTIVE: You don't think I've seen shit? I know how it feels, hell, I've wanted to kill some of them myself. So I don't need the why, I'm interested in how.

ALLIE: I don't know where to start. I was so young when it happened, but Cass told what had happened and that she'd hold them accountable. The headmaster swept it under the rug, while sleeping with a fifteen-year-old student himself. It was too much for Cass... when I got old enough, I took matters into my own hands, one by one.

DETECTIVE: You could climb the tower.

ALLIE: After Cassandra died I used to go up there to cry. Everyone assumed I couldn't make the stairs...so no one ever followed me. The infirmary is close by.

DETECTIVE: And the teens?

ALLIE: They were the boys from that night. The ones who said she was drunk and it was a misunderstanding.

DETECTIVE: Lees, Jamison, Strous, Reeves, Perez, Foster—

ALLIE: And O'Brien.

DETECTIVE: And Lillis Erickson?

ALLIE: She bullied Gigi, a sophomore, until she killed herself last year. Everyone said it was an accident, but I know it wasn't.

DETECTIVE: So you hunted them.

ALLIE: I invited them places. Debate tutoring. Alumni drinks. A walk across the grounds. They never expect the blind girl to be dangerous.

DETECTIVE: The letters?

ALLIE: No one listened to me, so I thought, if I'm rewriting the story, why not leave a fitting message?

DETECTIVE: So what were you going to finish carving? Justice is blind? Little on the nose.

ALLIE: Justice is dead.

DETECTIVE: What about Luke?

ALLIE: I didn't know until I...talked with Lees. He said Luke told the former headmaster that Cassandra was lying, that he'd seen her before and that she wasn't very drunk at all, that she wanted it. I asked him about it and he lied like it was nothing, but I knew he was lying. So...I took matters into my own hands.

DETECTIVE: The pills.

ALLIE: It was...quick. (*A beat.*) I thought he deserved that.

DETECTIVE: So, you finished what a court wouldn't.

ALLIE: I did what it refused to do. That is justice, in a way

DETECTIVE: Goddamn Nancy Drew. (*A beat.*) There are four letters left, and you're out of people who hurt your sister.

ALLIE: That's why I've been balancing the scales for people like Gigi. I have a code. I only plan on killing those who get away with crimes. She's blind after all.

DETECTIVE: I should turn you in.

(DETECTIVE crosses over to the board, erases the letters and writes, "Justice is.")

ALLIE: That's not an answer.

DETECTIVE: It is. Now, go.

ALLIE: What?

DETECTIVE: You can do what I can't. Go!

(ALLIE walks towards the door. She looks back, but then steps through. DETECTIVE returns to the board. A few beats as she looks at her watch and then looks up. HEADMASTER is still breathing.)

I think you will find, Morris, that I am quite capable.

(DETECTIVE takes the cigarettes from the desk, and lighter from HEADMASTER's pocket, and lights the cigarette. She walks towards the door, taking a long drag of the cigarette. A smile as she stops by the door.)

Justice is...

(A smile as she proceeds to fling the lit cigarette into the room. A pop of blinding lights. Blackout. End of Play.)



Adaptation - *Zoe Keenan*

Confessions of a Drowner

Meghan Wong

- I. The piano sings its muddled, sorrow tune: the rustic sound of hoaxed love, of a seashelled game of telephone. I wish these weren't metaphors.
- II. I used to swim with a muted heart, feel as my lungs expectorated out the last of my air—until I heard this song. She had a way of stringing words to hooks, then sinking them into my jaw, to see how it tasted. My admission is that I loved it.
- III. I hear her soft voice, the way it taunted like silk. And she's accepted something, not her pain or past, but the sirens as they've dunked my head into the bottomless water.
- IV. I would love to not make this a metaphor, but there's nothing here otherwise. A sunken ship, a payphone left off the hook. The light refracts in water, against her, and I can't see the eyes that stare at me.
- V. I wish I had broken the surface sooner. To know what I know now, and to hum my own, ever-so-diluted tune.



Evening - Alek Panchik

Let Them Eat, Cake

Gabriella Palmer

When I was thirteen you told me
I couldn't eat the cake
because I wouldn't fit into the dress
for the eighth grade social.

So I didn't.

I experienced the shrinking,
the starving,
the success.

Not all at once,
but in rotations.
like seasons misbehaving.

I learned how to fold hunger
into something quiet.
something almost elegant.

how to say no
before anyone asked.

I found shrinking
but also the growing
of something else.

A discipline that tightened
around my ribs
a voice that sounded like yours

but lived in my mouth,
my head.

The body keeps score in inches,
in glances,
in the way a zipper hesitates.

I became fluent
in less.

Now, I stare at the cake
on what should be a beautiful day.
You made it—pink, white, chocolate coated,
a small celebration of love.

Eat, you tell me.
as if appetite were reversible.

I want to say
It is too late.
I don't want sweetness.
because I am still
fitting myself into something
that no longer exists.

I want to tell you
You made me so good at hunger.

I don't know how to stop.



Eastern Bluebird - *Gianna Familetti*

Sylvia Plath calls her daddy “bastard,” but

Adelle Confer

whether I call mine
“Dad,” “Father,” or “George” depends
on the regard in which I hold him.

Every morning I receive a text: “Good morning Adelle”
with two
heart emojis, and at night I receive another text: “Good
night Adelle, I love you” with two
heart emojis. I respond to both with an echoed
message:

“good morning dad!” or
“good night dad, I love you!” both
with two heart emojis. Sometimes

that’s all we say for a few days, just
a long text thread of morning and night greetings.
Small blue and grey blips alternate on either side

of my phone screen.
That is when he is “Dad.”

He is “Father” when I’m angry at him, when he asks
me what I think about what’s happening
in Minneapolis and I respond that I am

enraged/horrified/terrified and
he says, “Really? You’re such
a rule-follower. I would’ve thought

you'd agree."

He is "George" when I'm talking about him
with my friends *and* I'm angry
at him. I would tell them something

like, "George and his girlfriend went into my closet
without
my permission to pick out dresses for her daughter's
prom.

I only know because he sent me

photos of dresses, the dresses that my Mom
bought me, to ask what size it is and how tall I am.
I've been the same

height since I was twelve.

He doesn't even know that I hate seafood." How could
you
not know your daughter

has always hated seafood?

He is still "Dad" when he screams
at me for throwing

a towel on the floor even when
it actually just fell
off the hook on the bathroom door.

the controversy in the Catholic Church over homosexuality

Anne Ryan

i am the blade which severs ties

i am the nail hammered and buried with the coffin
my hidden face pelted by daggering graveside tears,
wilted rose in hand

i am grass stains on lily pulitzer dresses and sinking
stones in backyard brooks
the secret threatening our sunday afternoon with

i am the clipper of butterfly wings
capturing some poor creature who chose the wrong
flower
all the same i am the butterfly burning under prism
sunlight

i am the love that dare not speak its name
the case in every textbook: the heart's deadliest, grid
locking lifestyle (choice)
don't look, don't touch, but tell us every time

i am scared, always

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Esprit **Submission Information**
Deadline for Fall 2026: October 30th @ 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.

By submitting to *Esprit*, you acknowledge that your work is original and your own.

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.

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Year in school and enrollment status (full-time or part-time)

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Medium of each work submitted (photography, painting, charcoal, etc.)

If submitting OneDrive files please add both espritsubmissions@scranton.edu and melissa.eckenrode@scranton.edu to file permissions.

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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 Meghan Wong (meghan.wong@scranton.edu).



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