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Complete Edition, Studio One 2019

Studio1 Literary Club

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STUDIO ONE

Volume 44

From the Editors

Studio One is a literary and visual arts magazine published each spring by the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University. Its mission is to give new and/or established writers a forum in which to present their works. The magazine's focus is poetry, short fiction, essays, and all forms of reproducible visual art works. Submissions are open to all students on either St. John's or St. Benedict's campuses and to the general public regardless of regional, national, or international location.

In 1976, a student named Clare Rossini had the foresight to create a new magazine for publishing the artistic works of authors and artists living in the surrounding area. As Rossini wrote, "Art is the life current of the community. It is a source of pleasure and pride for us; it unites us with our human predecessors and successors. Art is no luxury; it is a vital human activity. By publishing *Studio One*, we wish to support the members of our Minnesota community dedicated to that activity and to make their art available to those for whom it was made." While *Studio One's* reach has extended greatly since its founding in 1976, the current Editors-in-Chief have striven to publish a selection that still supports the mission written by Clare 44 years ago. Without Clare's efforts, we would not be presenting the 2019 edition of *Studio One*.

Studio One would also like to give thanks to our staff advisors, Matt Callahan and Rachel Marston, along with all the faculty of the CSB/SJU English Departments, Mark Conway of the Literary Arts Institute, Greg Harren and Sentinel Printing, all our contributors, and all those who submitted their work.

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Blue Door in Listowel *Kathleen Gunton*

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Poetry and Artwork

The Thing that Keeps Me

My earliest memory is of crawling to the edge of a cliff
and seeing nothing but pink and blue clouds beneath me
spreading so thick and solid they looked capable of holding me.
My mother said she almost lost me that first camping trip
in the Grand Canyon, she says she thought I was asleep
and she turned her back for just a moment, just a moment
and I was almost gone. She says this is why
I'm so afraid of heights now, that my frantic parents' reaction
to my explorations of that cliff edge
must have scarred me for life.

But in these memories of myself
crawling quickly and purposefully toward my certain death
I am full of giddy, infantile delight, and I don't remember
the terror of my parents' disapproval, the panicked screaming
and understandable overreacting
which surely must have ruined the rest of that morning.
Even now, when my stomach lurches when I step
too close to a railing, or stop at some scenic overlook
there's a small part of me that's convinced that
instead of falling, I am meant to fly
and the steady, adult reasoning that keeps me from testing this theory
from hurtling over the edge and into the air
is tenuous at best.

Holly Day
Minneapolis, MN



Cliffs
Holly Ossanna
St. Joseph, MN

We Have Our Work Cut Out

I hear those words that have been repeated until they're see-thru, tracing paper thin, and I see a child with scissors in her hand turning and turning a sheet of construction paper to cut out a perfectly-shaped heart, hand drawn, to paste onto another colored sheet of construction paper, twice folded, with printed letters, large in her tiny hand, that will be recognized undeniably as hers by others and herself over years to come--her Mother's Day card of first or third grade that will be put up on the fridge for weeks, then taken down--tucked away in a box of childhood memorabilia for forty years. I think of her words on her handmade card and the cutting out of her red paper heart and I know she's gifting her perfected love.

Chet Corey
Bloomington, MN



Sailboats
Anna Garrison
Champlin, MN

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CARNIVAL PRINCESS

Working the Pop-Em booth, Ariel can't stop watching the Kamikaze ride
that swings its caged couples high, then dives
straight for the earth, then back
to the clouds again. They survive. They always do.
Dreamers, they are,
like her, a sixth-grade girl just waiting for something to rise, or crash.

Mornings her mother shakes her awake at 8 a.m. in their
aqua and silver aluminum trailer
that never quite gleams in the sun. She wakes
to the taste of deep fried cheese curds. The taste disappears
soon enough, like everything else. She's from a family of
magicians. Her father did a vanishing act, quick and
seamless as any Harry Blackstone.
After that, her mother covered her face with fake veils the color of
happiness.
Every day Ariel volunteers her skinny eleven-year-old body
for The Amazing Child Sawed in Half trick,
and each time she still comes out whole, almost. She always does.

Only four more weeks until school,
four weeks to con the strollers to toss darts at balloons
for a chintzy fluffy toy that squeaks.
Next summer she'll be hawking
this wood cage again. Break
one balloon and you win a keychain. Two
gets you the second row: a sad set of unicorns, out of air,
strangled at the neck.
Pop three and you get the top row.
Whatever the prize, she knows, you lose.

All afternoon tattooed teen boys in tank tops impress their girls
with their sharp aim. The girls, mouths smeared with pink giggles,
don't know what hit them, little darts deep in their chests.
They play and play for the grand prize of stuffed pandas and ponies.
She hates to tell them there's only sawdust inside.

Near closing time, the strings of firefly lights flicker, blink and flicker.
Hey, people, three for a dollar, she calls to stragglers,
flips a dart to demonstrate,
the balloon exploding
with a gasp, a direct hit. She never
misses, not after years of practice, the red shred hanging
like a deflated heart. She knows that's how easy
it is. Pop a balloon, pop a dream.
Across the muddy midway, the Kamikaze swings
one last set of screamers
straight toward the ground. Somehow
they survive. They always do.

An excerpt from *The Mapmaker's Dream*

Bill Meissner
St. Cloud, MN

RECOGNIZED

He stood there,
staring back at me,
odd expression upon his face,
smiling after I did
from the other side
of a huge pane window
on the newly renovated office building,
appearing a bit more disheveled
than I remembered.

More wrinkles
supported his grimace
and receding hairline,
acknowledging me
when I nodded hello.

I use to know him well,
athletic, sculpted, artistic,
a well defined physique,
but his apparent paunch
negated any recent activity.

This window man
I thought I knew,
musician, writer, runner, dreamer,
now feasted off the stale menu
of advancing age,
aches, excuses, laziness,
failing eyesight and an appetite
for attained rights
decades seem to imply.

Yet I accepted him,
embraced him for who he was,
aware that he would be the lone soul
to accompany me

toward the tunnel's light
when all others have drawn the blinds.
"Walk with me," I say.
He stays close.

Michael Keshingian
Londonberry, NH

THIS PLACE

No one owns it, except
an immense darkness.

Who else is lonely here
except myself?

Stay with me,
ask me questions
I cannot answer.

There are ghosts here,
my ancestors.

Take me to some other place,
where I can breathe.

I cannot find
my voice here.

Take me to some place
where I can breathe
the clean desert air.

I hope to rediscover my voice
in the shining grains of sand

Bibhu Padhi
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India



Misty Mountains
Holly Ossanna
St. Joseph, MN

The Heritage I Dreamt

One of my parents was a flame, the other a rope.
one was a blanket, the other a dial tone.
In the night I would wrap myself
in the comfort of the cotton,
the gentle scents of cinnamon,
and my loneliness.

One of my parents prayed for Winter, the other hid till Spring.
one was an eyelash, the other a smirk.
How they amused each other.
In the revolving door of my becoming,
one pushed outside,
the other never left.

One of my parents was made from Fire, the other from Ice.
that crooked, insincere handwriting
tattooed on my lower back.
a constant reminder that words
are more permanent than people.

One of my parents was a star, burning through the night.
the other, a cup I held hesitantly with two hands,
convinced It was too fragile.
one of my parents drank, the other I dreamt.
the cold press of comforting hands rocking me to sleep
while the other burning their memory in my mind.

One was a candle, the other a bird.
I was ashamed of burning,
frightened I'd never learn to fly.
I was a girl, lost across an open sea,
missing someone not missing.

Sydney Robinson
Las Vegas, NV

My name is human

My name is human, and I live in a garden
on the first day of the world. My God makes me flowers
and animals, and good things to eat, but I am lonely.
I will make another, God says, just like you. Now go to sleep.
I close my eyes.

My name is hominid, and I live
somewhere in the middle of Africa.
Sometimes I am kind,
and sometimes I am cruel, and I've never wondered
which was right before.
My God makes me trees, hung
ripe with fruit, so I pick up an apple
and take a bite.

My name is Noah,
and I live on the bank of a river.
My people are afraid of drowning,
and around our campfires, we tell
the story of The Greatest Flood
There Ever Was.
My God tells me to make a boat, filled
tight with animals,
so I pack up my family and wait for the rain.

My name is child, and I live
on the brink of nuclear war. I have played
at sword-fights with my siblings before,
but this is different,
this is real,

and I am afraid. We watch the storm clouds roll in,
and I ask my parents to make it stop, ask my God to make it stop,
but the clouds
are still coming.
I take shelter and wait for the blast.

My name is human, and I live on the Earth.
My God has made
7.5 billion people, and still, I am lonely.
I look to the skies, and wish for a people
not like me. Please, I pray to God,
please send me another savior.
Please, I pray,
please save me from myself.

Genevive Brakob
St. Joseph, MN

Poem

A man runs for office and wins
He carries real weight on his shoulders, the burden is heavy
Later, on his deathbed, he looks to me and asks,
“Why am I unhappy?”

A woman, married to a fine gentleman, has born four sons
She raises these boys into men, and comforts her busy husband
People say the kindest things about her, (with a twinge of sympathy)
One day they find her with her wrists slit open in the bathtub

A man runs away from home
He is a child but also a man, he knows so little
A family going for a hike finds the boy's starved body
His sole possession (a journal) reads, “I didn't know the trees were so beautiful”.

A woman spends most days at home, reading
She is old and her time is short
One day, she thinks about all of the things she never did
The list is long and she laughs

Henry Ricker
Collegeville, MN



Doggo
Anna Garrison
Champlin, MN

C
L
I
M
B
I
N
G

the front porch stairs

Is difficult when Mom and Dad are gone.
The turn of the handle means you wont
See their beaming faces or hear their voices.
Flicking the lights on no longer lets you see
Leftover pasta waiting on the island shelf.
But, this is the only place
That holds their memories.
I cannot leave.
I must wait until their faces fade,
Until their voices no longer echo in my ears,
Until their memory escapes,
Like the ringing of a distant doorbell.

Mike Reilly
Collegeville, MN

Something to Do

I followed my father
around the garage
until he shouted,
“Find something to do!”

So I scuffed the unmowed
grass with the toes
of my bare feet
across the bright backyard
that summer noon,
skipped down the ruts
of the lot car path,
jostled my meandering way
through the prickler patch
into the woods where
the deer flies circled
my head, and then I
waded into the clearing
where the lingering dew
steamed in the shin-deep moss.
There, surrounded by the safety
of sugar maples and scotch pines,
I stripped in the dusty heat
of the spot-light sun,
while the chickadees
applauded from huckleberry
bush to bush. I got
down and sank into
the damp moss bed.

All around me the breeze
waved ferns big as fans.
I explored the clouds
that floated like
helium-filled mountain
ranges cut off neatly
just above their snowy
timber lines until a
lonely crow called
me back to earth

Steven M. Smith
North Syracuse, NY

A STORY OF FATHERS AND CARS

When I was sixteen you thought of my life
as a horn that wouldn't sound, a brake that didn't
grab, a red light you hoped was about to change,
a car always sliding toward a ditch.

You never trusted me behind the
wheel, my shirt pocket stuffed
with all the tickets you never got.

All through childhood, I had that recurring nightmare:
Sitting in the back seat of our '48 Plymouth, I'd panic,
seeing that the car was speeding down a hill, no one driving.

One morning you accused me, claiming you knew how fast
I drove your Chrysler
by the length of the bug streaks on the windshield.

Enough, Dad, enough.
I admit I turned sloppy
corners, tainted the interior with smoke and splattered beer,
split the upholstery with a radio turned up too loud.
Though sometimes I felt your hands
tight on the wheel, steadying it, I admit
I aimed for insects, loved
the illusion of speed, because it left you so far behind.

Last night I woke again in the back seat
see darkness, like oil, coating the windows,
see that lost and nervous wheel
jittering left, then right.

Father, I'm sorry. Older now, I drive
without grace in unwaxed cars,
dust blurring the windshield.

But Jesus, Dad, how long can you polish that Chrysler,
fenders rusting beneath your touch?

And how long can I idle here at the stoplight,
toe balanced on the accelerator,
no one to rescue me,
my eyes seeing neither red nor green,
my fingers following the map until they blister?

An excerpt from *The Mapmaker's Dream*
Bill Meissner
St. Cloud, MN



A Farmers Welcome
Cormac Quinn
Collegetown, MN

Only Much Later

I hadn't heard a word like love
until much later.

I broke its silence tough.

Only much later

I tried to be a good son.

Only after I had run,

Tried to comfort you, mother

All I could do then was send flowers.

And to visit your soul

Only much late.

Listen to the wind and a cemetery owl.

Only much later

Did I come to visit you, father.

I wanted to be like you, stronger.

You died from work and war

Only much later.

Only much later,

But the wars had no honor,

Wars of choice and empire.

Only much later

It grew and flowed into a pile.

Only much later.

Mark Biskeborn
Stockton, CA

Parents, from Middle Age

When we were small, they never grew:
Our hormones raced and ran amok
to stretch our frames and features to
what we've become, while theirs seemed stuck.

A little older, I would pass
a summer or a term away,
then note my mother in a glass
suspecting subtle grains of gray.

Now when I see her, or my best
friend's dad, it feels like I have grown
again! Oh, how I would arrest
this trend—though how, remains unknown.

As time grows longer, earth grows nearer:
Parents—smaller, slower, dearer.

James B. Nicola
New York, NY

Just Because, Bad Heart

Just because I am old
do not tumble me dry.
Toss me away with those unused
Wheat pennies, Buffalo nickels, and Mercury dimes
in those pickle jars in the basement.
Do not bleach my dark memories
Salvation Army my clothes
to the poor because I died.
Do not retire me leave me a factory pension
in dust to history alone.
Save my unfinished poems refuse to toss them
into the unpolished alleyways of exile rusty trash barrows
just outside my window, just because I am old.
Do not create more spare images, adverbs
or adjectives than you need to bury me with.
Do not stand over my grave, weep,
pouring a bottle of Old Crow
bourbon whiskey without asking permission
if it can go through your kidney's first.
When under stone sod I shall rise and go out
in my soft slippers in cold rain
dread no danger, pick yellow daffodils,
learn to spit up echoes of words
bow fiddle me up a northern Spring storm.
Do you bad heart, see in pine box of wood,
just because I got old.

Michael Lee Johnson
Itasca, Ill



Senior Walking Forest - Stock
Michael Lee Johnson
Itasca, Ill.

Old Men Walk Funny (V2)

Old men walk funny with shadows and time eating at their heels.
Pediatric walkers, prostate exams, bend over, then most die.
They grow poor, leave their grocery list at home,
and forget their social security checks bank account numbers,
dwell on whether they wear dentures, uppers or lowers;
did they put their underwear on?
They can't remember where they put down their glasses,
did they drop them on memory lane U.S. Route 66?
Was it watermelon wine or drive in movies they forgot their virginity in?
Hammered late evenings alone bottle up Mogen David wine madness
mixed with diet 7-Up, all moving parts squeak and crack in unison.
At night, they scream in silent dreams no one else hears,
they are flapping jaws sexual exchange with monarch butterfly wings.
Old men walk funny to the barbershop with gray hair, no hair;
sagging pants to physical therapy.
They pray for sunflowers above their graves,
a plot that bears their name with a poem.
They purchase their burial plots, pennies in a jar for years,
beggar's price for a deceased wife.
Proverb: in this end, everything that was long at one time is now passive,
or cut short. Ignore us old moonshiners, or poets that walk funny,
"they aren't hurting anyone anymore."

Michael Lee Johnson
Itasca, Ill

Kaleidoscope

There you are as I turn the kaleidoscope,
as the mirrors shift,
and burst into a thousand pieces

I hardly recognize you
translated into stained glass,
one red, one violet, one blue

Yet nothing in my power
can stop the momentum,
the clockwise turn

to witness again when
fractured images align,
and interlock their rigid contours

When everything falls into place,
circulating in frames of color,
as in this moment now.

Leng Moua
Columbia Heights, MN



Rivers End
Anna Garrison
Champlin, MN

NODDING ASSENT

I lean down on my stretched out hand
To get a closer look at the tuft
That was whispering softly as if it knew
My love had extended full length, too,
And was taking all of nature in
Because of my waves of love for you.
It took this grass nodding in the wind
Of a summer day so I could lie down
And look back up at the arching sky
Just to imagine Heaven was looking on
And maybe even giving things a push.

Millard C. Davis
Dunnellon, FL



Winter Sun
Anna Garrison
Champlin, MN

Untitled 2

How many times! this doorbell

smelling your sweat must know

nothing's changed and the dry sleep

through the night –the button

has forgotten how, curls up

with someone who isn't there

though this all-at-once-familiar nudge

can't keep you away, outside

it's still rain and darkness

always some touch pressing down

a somewhere note, half embraced

half pounded, by itself heads into

the constant fear it's her name

that falls from the night sky

with no help in remembering

—for years! you don't first knock

sure this door will bring it down

leave only the earthquake and walls.

Simon Perchik
East Hampton, NY

Untitled 3

It's a short step from winter and the bed

yet you can't hear its sheet narrow, become

the stream pouring from each stone fountain

and graveyard, can't touch her breasts

now that every handful turns to powder

smoothed over the way a motionless cloud

is tracked drop by drop –you count

backwards though every room in this place

is taking on water –what you hear

is the last drop falling through her arm

as a single word –Mickie! louder, louder

and you hold hands, go on drowning.

Simon Perchik
East Hampton, NY

Untitled 5

Before this door had a chance

your eyes crushed it though the thud

infected only one lid, staggers across

as if its fever was enough to burn down

your forehead trying to stay open

for the fire with nothing in it

and lift you from beneath

—it's a small place, a few walls

a mountain hanging from a sheet

stained by snow, by corners

each day colder, a valley deeper

cleared for whoever the bed

can carry –your legs pitted from winds

all day scanning your skull

for its madness, for what's left

where your cheeks opened

for sunlight and melting ice –a nothing bed

the kind you find only with X-rays

when the film dries, shows one side

left in darkness, the other

infected with despair and falling.

Simon Perchik
East Hampton, NY



Immense as the Expanse of Pleasure
Bill Wolak
Bogota, NJ

Destiny

Only pits hang
from leafless peach
tree limbs, too buggy
to pick when ripe,
flesh turned soft
and brown, a slow
rot into dry
brittle crusts that
fell away and left
their kernel of hope
to hang against
winter's cold fury,
a brief pause
before they finally
fall into a new
possibility.

Richard Dinges Jr.
Walton, NE



Psychocomp
Jherian Mitchell-Jones
St. Joseph, MN

Cloudy Offering

Sky twists, wrings
water from dish rag
clouds, spatters
dust into dirt-filled
whispers across
dry, cracked clods
of earth. I try
to capture a drop
on my tongue
to taste an electric
tang carried from
mile-high thunder,
a hope from childhood
I still harbor
in long dry memory.

Richard Dinges Jr.
Walton, NE



No Rain in Quebec City
Bill Meissner
St. Cloud, MN

GULAG

He potters in his garden
in torn undershirt
and a pair of
ragged red trousers.

His flowers are
as wilted as he is,
his care for them
as fitful as how he

tends to his own needs.
But, having lived what would
have been his best years
under hammer and sickle,

he treats freedom warily,
as more like something
he could contract
rather than embrace.

The beetles devour his roses.
His petunias won't open
as if they fear
to show their colors.

Once, he was imprisoned
by the state.
Now, little by little,
his mind makes

a gulag of everything,
even plants, the soil,
and little scraps of beauty.
The day is dark and empty

except for his rake,
his clipping shears.
In truth, he's no gardener.
And his world is still no garden.

John Grey
Johnston, RI

A Parking Lot at Night

It is the humiliating glow of
the dim streetlights
The cast of shame
A cruel mockery of my fear as a
Distant car alarm causes my rigid body to
Tremor and my cheeks to turn
pale white

It is the glance over my shoulder
The shattering of my independence
The need for a companion to shelter me
From the possibilities of this
empty parking lot

It is the dread that sinks
deep in my stomach as
The sound of crunching gravel echoes
Off nearby buildings and doubles
the footsteps

It is my shaking hands
as I fumble
With my car keys
Scratching the paint
when the metal misses
The slot

It is the glance into the backseat
The locking of doors
The rush to start the car
The final loss of any facade of
autonomy I had built up

It is the punchline of an always familiar joke
“A woman walks alone at night”

Amber Cigelske
Avon, MN



Tuck and Spin
Kathleen Gunton
Orange, CA

The Riveted

Anglepoise reinforcement

Zeniths a macaroon

On blue-tin skateboard.

The undertones – exhaustive, fribbling.

We short-hop into beanbags.

Incense room-creeps.

Our guru's lips trench:

“Peel off your nature.

Foresight is a manacle.

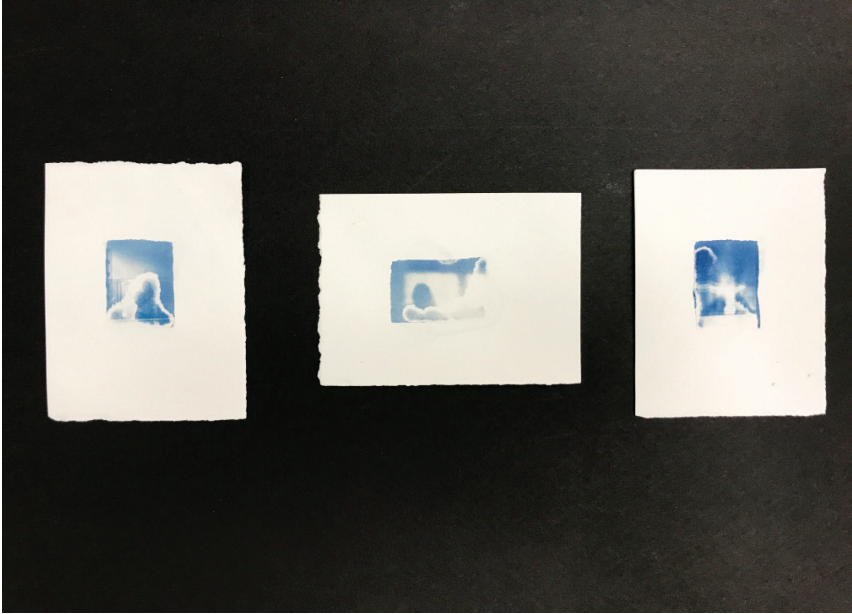
Numbskullery engages knocked-sill love”.

Christopher Barnes
Jesmond, Newcastle, UK

Between

The animal caged
inside the caged animal
knows by the sound and rhythm of footsteps,
who approaches, their intent, their mood,
hears the sound between steps
the same way a musician
hears music in the space between notes,
the same way a poet writes between the lines,
the same way a lover reads the silence between
I love you.

Larry Schug
Avon, MN



Figures
Alexus Jungles
St. Joseph, MN

Exorcism

Truth is, I've lost my motivation to do anything but motivationally speak to myself silently in my head & that's why I'm meeting with Gray at a cafe later to work on outlines for short films we'll never shoot & that's ok because the sun has filled my cup of coffee with bad ideas I won't act upon & that's the useless scroll I call the timeline of my life— truth is, I recall the night last July we nearly killed ourselves playing Ouija downing a bottle of Absinthe & even the wormwood couldn't compose phantasms in our minds though we tried— knees rocking in dark candlelight, hands clasped in prayer, a cat named Spirit haunting the hallowed grounds— we had the ghosts if we wanted them. Now we want them out.

James Croal Jackson
New Franklin, OH



Lakefront
Cormac Quinn
Collegetown, MN



Sunrise
Cormac Quinn
Collegeville, MN

Uranium 235

My feelings are as explosive as a molecular fission
Which sends a shockwave through my entire body.

As I blurt out the words so violently
My head becomes a large red tomato.
My goal is to split my toxic thoughts
And radiate my warmth.

It seems that no matter what I start
There is always a chain reaction to follow.

But I guess that is still better
Than having no energy at all.

While I have no ill intentions for you
I just can't control my explosions very well.

However, I'm not sure if I am prepared to deal
With the fall out that I know is coming.

I hope that when the dust settles
You won't be blinded by the light.
That maybe the best kind of love
Starts with a single atom splitting.

Anna Norris
Anoka, MN

The Wagner-Berger Prize for Excellence in Creative Writing

In 1987, Patricia and Leonard Porcello endowed this prize to honor Patricia's parents, Louis and Mary Wagner-Berger, and to support college women who are interested in writing short stories and novels. It is designed to encourage and reward excellence in creative writing at the College of Saint Benedict.

The Wagner-Berger Prize for fiction is the first scholarship of its kind at the College of Saint Benedict. It is a scholarship awarded annually to the CSB student who submits the most original, previously unpublished short story. All submissions are judged by a committee of English Department members, and the winner receives an award of \$1,000. Studio One is honored to publish this year's winner CSB Student Amber Cigelske.

Something in the Dark Swallows

Bruiser was not an enigma. In fact, he knew a lot of things about himself, and being an enigma, as his teacher described him, was not one of them. He liked the color blue, the glasses his mother wore when she read, and liked the way wearing a bow tie out to the store made him feel. None of those things were enigmatic. Well, not that he knew what that meant anyways.

“Eh-Nig-Mah-Tic.” He rolled the word around on his tongue and bared his teeth on the T.

“What did you say Bruce?” Mama was in one of her good moods. She was leaning back in her recliner with Bruiser sitting at her feet and staring out the living room window.

“Nothin’ mama...What does enigmatic mean?”

“I don’t know, sounds like it has to do with math or something. Matic you know?” He didn’t know. She was looking down at him now with her head tilted to the side.

“Bruce?”

“Yes mama?”

“Do you like that teacher of yours better than me? Do you think she’d be a better mama to you?” Bruiser thought about the sandwiches Ms. Watson brought him for lunch so that he wouldn’t have to sit hungry. There were certain things that a kid could say to a parent, this was not one of them.

“No mama, I don’t.”

“Good.” She smiled and patted the side of his face before turning her attention back to the TV. He stared at her for a bit, watching her head bob and settle as she breathed. Eventually he stood and walked out of the room and into the hall, his mother’s eyes never leaving the screen.

He dragged his hand along the wall of the hallway, his fingers skipping over a couple of picture frames and that hole that’s been there since last December. He reached for the light switch on the wall, just barely illuminated by the light coming from the TV. He flicked it up and the hallway flooded with a dim yellow glow. He felt a bit like God.

Flick.

“Let there be light!” He snickered to himself. He rose his hands dramatically as if lifting something up, and pretended the stained green carpet was turning into lush greenery.

“Let there be jungle!” He imagined that was something God would say. Instantly, the stained carpet grew up into thick foliage and towering trees that burst through the ceiling. The hallway light became the sun, glowing dimly above. He grinned wickedly at the power his small hands possessed. Then suddenly, the light bulb popped and the jungle flooded with darkness.

Bruiser lowered his arms and blinked rapidly trying to get his eyes to adjust to the abrupt change in lighting. Startled, he began to grow eerily aware of the way the darkness filled the space around him. From the far corner of the hallway, he heard a sound that resembled dry hands rubbing together.

Sshh Sshh

In front of him, something like a shadow moved in the darkness. Bruiser had forgotten that when creating a jungle, you

also create the beasts that live in it. His small hand smacked the wall looking for the light switch. When his fingers found it, he flicked the switch up and down, and up and down trying to get the sun to turn back on. The lights stayed out. Something behind him made a sound like air being let out of a tire.

Sssssss

Bruiser jolted forward, his hand skimmed the wall searching for a door handle. A moment later, his wrist struck something cold and hard and he reached down to turn the metal handle. Bruiser flung the door open and threw himself inside, slamming the door behind him and flicking the lights on. Breathing heavily, he leaned his head back against the door frame and looked around, rubbing his throbbing wrist. There was his bed, his dresser, his coat hung on the closet door. No jungle, no beasts, and no green carpet. He stood, his breaths coming in short gasps. He listened for the sound of something moving behind the door. He pressed his ear to the door and when he heard nothing, his curious mind reached his shaking hands down for the doorknob,

turned it, and opened the door a crack. The light from his room pooled out onto the hallway floor. He opened it a bit more and found himself staring at green carpet, a couple of picture frames, and that hole that's been there since last December. In the distance, he could hear the tv playing softly and his mother's light snores. He slowly shut the door again.

Bruiser giggled softly, rocking nervously on his feet. Maybe making things should be left to God. He sat down on his bed and rubbed his wrist. A bruise was starting to form where he had hit the doorknob. Back in second grade, he'd gone to school with a bruise like this. The teacher noticed and pulled him out of class. Asked him if everything at home was alright. When he didn't answer, she called his Mama to come to school. When the meeting was over, his mama pulled him by the hand to her car in the school parking lot. From now on if somebody asks you about them bruises on your arm, you tell them you're just clumsy. Ok? He nodded and she smiled at him. It was one of her good days.

After that day, the kids changed his name to Bruiser. The teacher pulled him aside when she heard them shouting the new name during recess. Does it hurt your feelings when they call you that? He said he didn't mind the name, he was clumsy. What an unfortunate nickname for someone so soft and kind, she'd said.

He laid back on his bed staring at the fake stars stuck to his ceiling. He imagined that the plastic shapes were real stars, far out in space. Too far to touch, but just close enough to see glimmer and shake. He closed his eyes and imagined the smell of a campfire, like the one on the camping trip Dad took him on a couple years ago. His bed was the lightly padded surface of a sleeping bag resting on the ground and the round light cover on his ceiling was the moon. When he opened his eyes, he was no longer in his room. Instead of walls, trees surrounded him on all sides and the ceiling had given way to the mass of the night sky. He was there, suddenly seven years old again, watching his dad stoke the campfire. Bruiser had a whole three days with just Dad and him that weekend. That was the trip his Dad took

him on when Bruiser's Great Aunt died. His Mama had left to help arrange the funeral service. Watch out for those nasty frogs, she'd said. They live in the woods and they like to bite mean boys like you. Dad described the trip as "father-son bonding time" or something like that. Not that a lot of bonding got done. Neither of them talked very much.

Bruiser turned his head towards his dad who was still stoking the fire, playing back the memory of the first night of the trip. He hadn't noticed before, but his Dad's wrists were covered in the same bruises he was named for.

"Dad?" He said it out loud just like he had the first time.

Yah bud?

"Do frogs have teeth?"

No, I don't think so.

Bruiser nodded and turned his head to look up at the plastic stars that were now just tiny dots in a galaxy far away. He heard the rustling of his dad entering the tent while he stayed outside, laying under the stars. He wondered what his Mama was doing back then,

arranging a funeral for a Great Aunt he'd never met. He wondered what she was doing right now. Was she still sleeping in front of the tv? Smoking a cigarette out on the porch? In the distance, he heard what sounded like sandpaper rubbing together, interrupting his thoughts.

Sshhh Sshhh

Bruiser sat up quick. He listened again and heard what sounded like air being let out of a tire.

Sssssssss

It was coming from his right. Something moved between the trees.

“Mama!” He ran from the sleeping bag and the campfire. He ran out into the hallway, past the green carpet, the hanging pictures, and that hole that's been there since last December.

“Mama!” There she was, standing at the end of the hallway. He threw himself into her arms and she let out an Oof. “Mama, there's a beast in my room!”

“Get the hell off me, there isn't any beast in your room!” She

pushed him by the shoulders, and he stumbled back.

“Just come see! I heard it in the closet! Please come see!” He put his hands in a praying position as he said it, tears welling in his eyes.

“Quit crying. There isn’t anything in your room. You imagined it, stop telling lies.” She sneered at Bruiser and walked back into the living room, settling into the recliner and turning the TV volume up. Bruiser stood quietly, watching her flick through channels. She was no longer in one of her good moods.

He sniffled, looking back down the hall to where light shone through his open bedroom door. He glanced one last time at his Mama before walking back towards the woods. Approaching the room, Bruiser peaked cautiously through the doorway. Inside was his bed, his dresser, and his coat hanging on the closet door. No trees, or tents, or campfires. He stepped inside and crept towards the closet doors. He flung them open and flinched, squeezing his eyes shut. When nothing grabbed him, Bruiser opened his eyes a bit and peeked through his

eyelashes, checking for beasts. He held his breath for a minute, but nothing jumped out. No beast hiding in the dark. He shut the closet doors and backed up, staring at them for a bit. He was suddenly aware that his pants were wet, he'd been so scared he hadn't noticed he'd wet himself. He eyed his closet wearily, but when still nothing happened, he grabbed a change of pants from his dresser and left his room, walking into the bathroom down the hall.

Bruiser turned one of the metal knobs on the sink so that the cold water would come rushing out. Splashing some of it on his face, he looked up into the mirror. He was flushed and his hair was wild, sticking out on all ends. He looked like a beast himself. When he reached up to fix it, his elbow smacked the jewelry tray on the counter, spilling its contents into the sink. He scrambled to pick his mother's necklaces and rings out of the basin before they went down the drain, suddenly feel nauseous thinking about what would happen if he lost his mother's jewelry. He grabbed the necklaces and most of the rings and set them back on the tray, reaching back down near the open drain

to grab the last ring teetering dangerously close to the edge. It was the one piece of jewelry his mother wore daily, aside from her wedding ring. It was a gold, thick banded ring she always wore on her right hand. Coiled around the band were two snakes entwined together. He set that one back on the tray, his stomach turning. He quickly changed and left the bathroom.

Later that evening, his father returned home from work. Bruiser was lying awake on his bed with the lights out. He'd been awake for hours just lying there in the dark.

“I told you if you were going to come home this late to not bother coming back at all!” He heard his mother shouting when the door opened. His Dad's heavy footsteps could be heard across the house.

“Got off work late.” Bruiser heard his Dad say this a lot.

“You know I could've had any man I wanted, but you had to get me pregnant. Now I'm stuck with you and that fucking kid! The least you could do is show up early enough to feed it!” Bruiser heard

Mama say this a lot.

Bruiser listened to her stomp out of the house, probably going out to smoke. A few minutes later, his dad knocked on his bedroom door and opened it a crack. Bruiser lifted his head up and his Dad stepped inside, shutting the door quietly behind him.

“Hey bud.”

“Hi.” His dad walked over and sat on the side of his bed, gently brushing Bruiser’s hair out of his eyes.

“You been awake long?” Bruiser didn’t answer. Instead, they both sat in knowing silence.

“Dad?”

“Yah bud?”

“What does enigmatic mean?”

“I think it means full of mystery or something that’s hard to understand.”

“Ok. Do you think I’m enigmatic?” His dad paused, thinking of an answer. When Bruiser’s Dad pauses, his whole body pauses too.

“I think you worry too much.” Bruiser nodded at this.

His Dad kissed his forehead and wished him good night, shutting the door quietly on his way out.

Bruiser thought of the way his teacher had used the word enigmatic. She said it with sad eyes. You know Bruce, you’re very enigmatic. I can’t quite get what’s going on inside your head. I think that’s a whole world that belongs to just you.

He thought of what his dad said about the word. Full of mystery and hard to understand. Bruiser was not hard to understand. He knew a lot of things about himself. He liked watching birds from his bedroom window, how Ms. Watson cut the crust off peanut butter sandwiches, and the way the stars looked in the summertime. None of these things were very hard to understand.

“I am not an enigma.” He whispered the words into the dark. “I know me. I’m not very hard to understand. Right?”

He waited for an answer, but the dark just swallowed his words.

Submission Guidelines

Submission Address

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