Studio One
Volume 48
From the Editors

Studio One is a literary and visual arts journal published each spring by the College of Saint Benedict/St. John's University students. Our mission is to give new and/or established writers a forum in which they can present their works. The magazine focuses on poetry, short fiction, essays, and other reproducible visual artworks. Submissions are open to all students attending CSB+SJU 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 our beginning in 1976, the current Editor-in-Chief has striven to publish a selection that still supports the mission written by Clare 46 years ago. Without Clare’s efforts, we would not be presenting the 2024 edition of Studio One.

Studio One would also like to thank our staff advisors, Matt Callahan and Rachel Marston, along with all the faculty of the CSB+SJU English Department, Catherine Rupp of the Literary Arts Institute, Patty Tholen, and all our contributors, as well as all those who submitted their work.

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## Table of Contents

### Cover Art
Lady Chastity Ernest Wilfert

### Poetry
- *She lived* Anna Lesnik 8
- *I Age* Michael Lee Johnson 9
- *Casket of Love* Michael Lee Johnson 10
- *step three: bargaining* Teresa Kopecky 11
- *Obsess* Anna Lesnik 12
- *ENDLESS LIGHT* Michael M. Keshigian 13
- *California Summer* Michael Lee Johnson 14
- *TUGBOAT* Ray Greenblatt 15
- *OFF THE COVE* Michael M. Keshigian 17
- *Eyes Were Signals* Anna Lesnik 18
- *Other things about Ireland* Diarmuid ó Maolalaí 20
- *An Irish Morning* Julie A. Ferraro 22
- *Hope Is Precisely What It Is* Russell Rowland 23
- *The Experience* Julie A. Ferraro 25
- *Old School* Catherine McGuire 26
- *SUNDAY SNOW* Ray Greenblatt 28

### Short Stories
- *Dueling Pianists* Julie A. Ferraro 44
- *Flagstaff Ave* Morgan Ebel 48

### The Wagner-Berger Prize for Excellence in Creative Writing
- *Itching* Taylor Samuelson 52

### Artworks
- *untitled* Richard Hanus 54
- *Consider Thy Love* Ernest Wilfert

Concrete ice cream, ITALIANS DO IT BETTER concrete sculpture, Ukrainian ice cream concrete sculpture Mario Loprete
She lived

Bundles on bundles
of life reserved
in her world
where she dances on raindrops
and dodges strawberry seeds
in hopes of being queen

I love you I love you
a constant hum
held in cupped little hands
A little something
hoped for
now, that is chased
Coveted joy
in tulips and wet grass
in CDs and blueberry scones
in marbles rolling on linoleum
and fresh mulch in the rain
She wants to earn that back,
her world left behind
in diaries and fuzzy pictures

I Age

Arthritis and aging make it hard,
I walk gingerly, with a cane, and walk
slow, bent forward, fear threats,
falls, fear denouement
I turn pages, my family albums
become a task.
But I can still bake and shake,
sugar cookies, sweet potato,
lemon meringue pies.
Alone, most of my time,
but never on Sundays,
friends and communion,
United Church of Canada.
I chug a few down,
love my Blonde Canadian Pale Ale,
Copenhagen long cut a pinch of snuff.
I can still dance the Boogie-woogie,
Lindy Hop in my living room,
with my nursing care home partner.
Aging has left me with youthful dimples,
but few long-term promises.

Anna Lesnik

Michael Lee Johnson
Casket of Love

This moon, clinging to a cloudless sky, offers the light by which we love.
In this park, grass knees high, tickling bare feet, offers the place we pass pleasant smiles.
Sir Winston Churchill would have saluted the stately manner this fog lifts, marching in time across this pond layering its ghostly body over us cuddled by the water’s edge, as if we are burdened by this sealed casket called love.
Frogs in the marsh, crickets beneath the crocuses trumpet the last farewell.
A flock of Canadian geese flies overhead in military V formation.
Yet how lively your lips tremble against my skin in a manner no sane soldier dare deny.

step three: bargaining

The what ifs plague my life.
What could I have done differently?
If I had been less anxious, less clingy would you have stayed?
If I had loved you a little less, would you have loved me more?
If I had chosen a closer college, could we have made long distance work?
I would have done anything to make it work. But you were done trying. Done loving me. And I’ll never understand why.

Teresa Kopecky

Michael Lee Johnson
Obsess

Wake up, still dark
Bed warm, outside bad
Step one, brush teeth
Clear mind, caffeine need
Don’t forget requirements of neon orange bottle.
Electric toothbrush, white noise
It’s awake, world’s asleep
It demands, strength depletes
Forgiveness comes
when counting
in twos

ENDLESS LIGHT

He was caught in an endless day,
persistent sunshine, no darkness,
a day that curdled
green leaves falling,
rotting upon dried lawn
spotted with insects desiccated,
fragile carcasses littered
beneath the lessening shade of trees.
He walked between sagging sycamores,
crossing the street,
asphalt which singed his soles,
his face aglow,
burnt to a crimson hue,
on his way to the river
where others must be waiting.
Soon he will swim under the soundless sun,
water easing his burns,
submerged in the cascading current
in order to survive this day without end,
dressed in a white shirt and shorts,
a luminosity that mimicked the sun
as he approached the shoreline
where the crowd swam,
he whispering (whispered) how the sun
became a threat,
that all will suffer then dry,
so we must sing
before our remnant ashes disperse,
that an earnest song
will bear us wings to embark
on our journey from earth,
for due to our negligence,
the rules have changed
and our bodies can only go so far.

Anna Lesnik

Michael M. Keshigian
California Summer

Coastal warm breeze
off Santa Monica, California
the sun turns salt
shaker upside down
and it rains white smog, a humid mist.
No thunder, no lightening,
nothing else to do
even for sashay
forward into liquid
and swim
into eternal days
like this.

TUGBOAT

Toss the bowline
beyond the breakwater
yawping of the sea lions
stink of brine
flounder-salmon-sturgeon
eagle-osprey-cormorant
river pilot—bar pilot
every piling
holds a history
past cargo ships
their hulls iron walls
through the trusses of a bridge
burning orange ball
of setting sun
eyelid of moon winks
through the mist
currents running eternally.

Michael Lee Johnson

Ray Greenblatt
Those nights illuminated by the moon whose white dagger severed the wet surface, highlighted the stalks upon Gypsy Glen which stretched off the shoal into the crooked air and the lake wore a tarnished chink upon its silver armor. The tall pines, stilled by the sheen, waited till their presence faded back to distorted disfigurements to acknowledge the breeze. The cold air was always crisp and smelled of wild roses that circled the shoreline, exposed as the moon’s silver eye adjusted its stare toward the brush and patches of mulch, gingerly caressing the lapping lake. On nights such as these, he would gaze at the cottages, nesting beachside, their lights flickering in night’s magnificent isolation. Little did he suspect that this moment of adoration, the opportunity to commune, would become a longing that would follow him.

Michael M. Keshigian
Eyes Were Signals

Cerulean is sea
It’s vast sky, a canvas
painted and scattered with
chrysanthehum clouds, sugar dusted
It’s cresting waves that froth in songs of
Salt, tangy with harmonious faithful calm
So why is it now
when I imagine your pools,
all I see are warning signals
begging for reprieve?
once was blind, but
now I’m blue

Anna Lesnik

Mario Loprete
Other things about Ireland

a dry evening finally, perfect
for bars with a patio.
it's the wettest july
on record apparently
as far as I'm concerned
or can be bothered to look up
and pavements are wisping
the last of their water
like oil from a pan
on an induction
stovetop. fallon's in town now
for the next two weekends.
has been sharing out greek
cigarettes. they come (a nice touch)
with these little certificates
promising quality
in much bigger font
than the obligate warnings
of cancer. he has always been
generous, and now his job's also
quite good – based in brussels
with travel. and jack's doing summer
work drafting out architecture
in an office halfway
between my place and the place
where he's staying.
we each have four pints
and a couple of hamburgers
and the rhythm of things
becomes quickly the same
as it was.

jack goes about 9
and we have one more last one
and another of the greek cigarettes.
says he loves it in europe, though
he misses the guinness, and a few
other things about ireland.
the pub's full of dogs – terriers, labradors,
a beagle and several whippets.

Diarmuid ó Maolalaí
An Irish Morning

Heavy clouds
embrace the mountain's peak,
while pockets of early snow
paint the incline with their white brush.
Two horses graze on the stretch below,
while a stream trickles beneath a bridge,
hidden within dense undergrowth.
Geometrically imperfect clumps of moss
cling to sections of stone fence,
beside the curved gravel drive.
Flowers soon to transform into
vegetables
occupy rich black soil
beside a rough-hewn shed.
In the midst of this remoteness,
stand.
Soak in the layers of peace,
so distant from the crush of the city.
Paraphrase the psalm:
“A day in the Irish countryside
is better than a thousand elsewhere.”
Heaven.

Hope Is Precisely What It Is

Early September, but one of our old maples
beyond the drive—already
it’s showing a yellow slash against the green.
Apt correspondence
to that streak of grey in the hair of several
persons of interest we could name.
Just when we think it is invidious of a tree
always to feel spring at its back—
renewal and such—
our wise elders assure us of much the same,
if we own it; if
we live in the hope of the apple-blossom.
Hope is precisely what it is,
that no one whose obituary yet appeared
could return to substantiate—
while every tree except the sprig
just planted and watered, braced with cords,
has seen it all before.

Julie A. Ferraro

Russell Rowland
The Experience

Snow shin-high,
no path visible,
tramping past misshapen pines.
A crispness to the air,
gloves barely protecting fingers,
jackets zipped to the chin.
Saw in hand,
the quest for a perfect representation
of society's traditions.
The squad of five,
more suited to a college campus,
but for one.
Pausing,
gazing across the mountain crest,
a valley shrouded in white.
Left alone,
no wind rustles branches,
absolute stillness.
Peace,
tranquility,
perfect silence.
A fleeting second
of total communion
with creation.

Julie A. Ferraro
Old School

Windows so tall a pole was used
to tug down the top, open
the paned glass for fresh air.
The yellowed linen shades snapped up
in one long snarl-pop! to let sun flood in.

No A/C, no window guards;
Flies visited each spring.
The brick school had chalkboards,
green linoleum floors, pale wood cupboards
and that window-wall of glass
overlooking the road
where we played at recess.

One day the nuns closed the shades
all the way down: a revolt
was marching by – public high school kids
parading, shouting, angry
about Vietnam. Nuns blocked our sight
but single-paned glass couldn't block
the calls: "What we want? Peace!
When do we want it? Now!"
Didn't sound peaceful.
Nuns said it was sin.

I listened as I stared straight ahead,
pretending like the others to ignore
what we barely understood;
mostly envious – those kids had the courage
to defy, to demand. Those kids
had a day off.

Nuns saw but could not stop
what would blow through
our little town and the country –
linen shades no defense; textbooks
no guide. It took their habits,
chalkboards, eventually
replaced books with computers,
this new world – snarl-pop! –
flooding in.

Catherine McGuire
SUNDAY SNOW

As we walked for the news
the world was changing,
no contending winds
the snow had full attention.
Each living thing was
donning its own decoration,
the hydrangea reborn
in white fluffy balls.
Coo of a dove served
complement to the falling.
We bought the last paper
another unforeseen blessing,
now home to earthly oatmeal
tea and fireplace.
We could just discern
our going footsteps
the boot treads unique,
our orbit complete.

Ray Greenblatt

FEIGNING LANCELOT

Life loomed large in childhood,
an acre, easily a mile,
the apple tree,
a spectacle of gigantic dimensions,
germinating fruit the size of melons
amid grass and wildflowers
higher than a house
and alive with as much mystery
as the imagination allowed,
infested with long legged creatures
and flying predators,
confronted by a brave soldier,
possessing stout heartiness,
armed with broken branch sword,
trash lid shield and brown bagged helmet gear
precisely slit for covert surveillance
against an enemy constantly plotting
to overthrow the king, to rule the kingdom,
were it not for the worthy defender
daily engaging danger to insure security
and safe passage for those nesting
within the domain,
though the threat diminished
with passing years
as did the proportions
to a mediocre backyard,
displaying a frail fruit tree
in grass no taller than ankle height,
now visible reminders of intense conflicts.
The enemy had disappeared,
deployed, no doubt, to younger battlefields,
accompanied by the imagination
now desperately clinging to creative output
to preserve a degree of youthful enthusiasm
for an aging warrior.

Michael M. Keshigian
the same mathematic
of european
haiku. like trying to kill
flies with your fists.

Diarmuid ó Maolalai

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Sense of Belonging

One old woods road I followed
simply petered out among oaks and birches.
At that point, enterprise had turned around.
I was about to do the same: backtrack
to pavement—but I got the vague sense
you have when you’re about
to let somebody down, or fail an exam.
A breeze was playing with the foliage
of birch trees, like a little child.
The sun crocheted patterns on the moss
anyone could admire.
Little scamperings implied home-life.
I imagined trees waiting for me to realize,
juncos for me to sing,
timber wolves for me to howl aloud—
how I belonged there among all of them.
Still—especially the wolves:
I had to wonder what they’d want me for.

Russell Rowland
The Hidden City

I should tell you where Bunchberry is hiding, away beyond the switchbacks? Who appointed me Your Handy Guide to the Hardwoods? In much detail you described to me where you saw bears today. Will I rush up there tomorrow? They’ll be gone, you spooked them. Let’s try another trail, this time jointly. Look for that hidden city some say came down from the sky, a haven of consensus. Hawks must know where it is. Finding it ourselves, we’d have cause to wonder why the village needs a police force. We might not hike much together after that. We’d return to our diverse interests—me Bunchberry, you black bears. We would watch our own news, vote our own candidates—but if we chanced to meet downtown, you would smile, and I would smile.
**step four: depression**

I feel blue from my fingers to my toes.
I stare at my clasped hands as I pray,
and they look the same shade to me
but my insides are a stormy hue.
Your silence screams at me,
my fingers hovering over the keyboard,
desperate to break down this wall between us.
Desperate to make you see me,
and desperate to finally see you.
My mind is too loud, and my heart too still.
I am in love with someone who does not love me,
and I will never be able to fall again.
For how could I ever recover from this loss?
How could I ever kiss anyone else
when it’s your lips I desire for the rest of my life?
So here I’ll lay, hopelessly and utterly blue.
Forever consumed by your absence.

**HOLD LADDERS**

There are those who climb ladders;
those who hold ladders.
Sometimes I dream of shoving
the ladder to the ground
and listening for “help,”
but do those who climb ladders
ask for help or expect those
who hold ladders to always
hold ladders?

*Diane Webster*

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*Teresa Kopecky*
The rabbit

I place two knives side
by side, edge
facing outward. see,
for a second, a jack-
rabbit’s ears on the table. See

a jackrabbit – pointing
alertness and raggedy lordish.
the serrated edge of the blade.
fiona is talking to chrysty
about issues with family – I’m looking

at knives. there’s some gravy
on one and that adds to it.
the pine of the table
adds also; a sand dunish colour
and texture. could I go get
a teaspoon? make a head
for the rabbit? no – no caricature; it’s a rabbit

already, anxious, alert; all stillness
and speed of a moment. a wind
through the burnt orange grass
next to the sea north of sligo –

rosses point. yes – I remember.
I was seven. they were everywhere.
I’d never seen them wild.

Diarmuid ó Maolalai

HER PURR RISE

The dying cat lies
beside the ditch,
watches, listens
to the water flowing.

Flowing like
when inside
his momma
floating,
dreaming,
not dreaming.

Dreaming surrounded
by the womb of water
he closes his eyes
and listens
to her purr
rise louder.

Diane Webster
step one: denial

My body has left that small red car,
Left the driveway, left the street, left the city.
But my heart is still lingering there,
shattered on the dark concrete
with only the light of the streetlamp to prove its existence.
“This isn’t real,” I repeat over and over again.
He can’t be gone. We can’t be done. It’s us.
The days drag on as if I am simply in slow motion,
stuck in this loop of refusal,
refusal to accept the absence of my favorite person in this world.
I am merely existing; a body without a heart,
a mind without a soul.
I left my heart on the sidewalk that night,
and it’s been missing ever since.

Teresa Kopecky
CUSTOMERS WAIT

In front of the door
they sit on the step.
Cigarette smoke
commingles
as they exhale,
and body heat warms
their touching halves.
Up and down the street
they stare
for the keeper of the keys.

Diane Webster
Short Stories
What had gone so wrong?

Barry Innes and Steve Glodowski grew up together, next door neighbors in an exclusive Arlington, Virginia, subdivision. Their fathers both worked in Washington, DC: Barry's at the British Embassy; Steve's in the State Department. The two boys - and Steve's younger sister, Amy - attended the same grade school. Both mothers insisted their children learn piano, carpooling them to the music conservatory once each week for lessons.

While the boys were skinny for their ten years of age, their bodies differed considerably. Barry had a large bone structure. Steve resembled a twig. Barry had a thick head of dark hair; Steve's unruly sand-colored curls hated the comb.

Yet, their relationship ran deeper than most brothers.

Until...

Amy made a random, joking observation in the back seat of Mrs. Innes' BMW on the way to the conservatory that May afternoon.

"How can Barry learn piano?" she quipped in her irritating eight-year-old soprano. "He has fat fingers."

Not exactly hurt, Barry studied his hands intently the rest of the drive. Indeed, his digits were thicker than Steve's spindly sticks, but they were just as long, just as nimble.

The boys could hear each other practice the requisite hour a day, their homes mirror images of each other, so their living rooms were only separated by about four yards of grass. Steve, however, liked to duck out on his duties in favor of sports, so he paid Amy half his allowance to play in his stead, while their mother occupied herself cooking dinner.

That's how the duel got started.

Amy improvised a combination of scales and trills, just for fun - being far more adept than her brother or his friend. Through the window, Barry heard and mimicked her. Amy grew more and more elaborate with the impromptu melodies and bass lines, but Barry kept up.

When she finished covering for Steve, she retired to her room, preferring books to outdoor play, Barry left wondering where his mate had vanished.

By his junior year of high school, Barry had composed the Sonata in E minor for Fat Fingers, proving his skill on the keyboard.

Steve, for his part, produced what he titled Sonata in G for the Perfect Pianist, unwilling to let his compatriot outshine his own talents.

At the school's spring concert, these pieces were included on the program, and merited acclaim from teachers, parents and students.

Within two weeks, letters arrived in Barry and Steve's respective mailboxes, offering each an audition at Juilliard in New York.

The journey via train was arranged, and accommodations reserved for the boys, their mothers and Amy, since her father was traveling abroad on business and Mrs. Glodowski refused to let the 16-year-old stay home alone.

Steve and Barry were, rightfully, nervous on what might be the most important day of their lives - except that Steve had scored two try-outs for the track teams at prestigious eastern universities, as well. He debated deliberately botching his performance, while not wishing to disappoint his traveling companions.

Fate intervened, nonetheless. While piling into a taxi for the drive from the hotel to the school, the cabby too eagerly closed the mini-van's sliding door, catching Steve's right hand in the gap. Within minutes, three of his fingers were swollen, probably broken.
Rather than upset his mother, he hid the injury behind a stack of music he carried, pulling Amy aside as they waited for the elevator on the ground floor of the lauded performing arts institution.

“You’ve got to play for me,” Steve whispered.

“I... can’t do that.”

“I saw the layout yesterday when we came over for our interviews. There’s a grand piano in the hall, with another backstage. I’ll pretend to play, and you can do it from behind the curtain.”

“That’s...”

“Cheating? Sure. But I don’t want Mom to be embarrassed in front of these big shots. I’ll tell them privately after...”

“Promise?” she pressed.

He crossed his heart.

“Okay.”

Barry executed his composition flawlessly. When Steve approached the piano bench, his mother noticed he continued to hide his fingers. Glancing at the dozen instructors present, no one else seemed concerned.

From the angle of her seat, Mrs. Glodowski recognized her son’s fingers never touched the ivory keys, though bass arpeggios accenting a mid-range theme filled the chamber with intricate precision. She said nothing in front of these strangers, but would have the truth...

The audition concluded, Steve rose and made a perfunctory bow, moving toward the steps. The music, however, restarted.

Amy’s unrehearsed meanderings.

Barry, from his seat, grasped the truth. He rose and hopped on stage, repeating Amy’s phrasing on the Steinway with glee.

After less than three minutes, the duel ended with spontaneous applause. Amy emerged from behind thick maroon curtains, grinning mischievously.

Steve, incensed, stormed from the auditorium. Pursued by his mother, he submitted to her demand he see a doctor about his crushed fingers - three of which were severely fractured.

Denied a scholarship without being allowed to present his explanation, he shunned pianos after that. Barry accepted his windfall, graduating from Juilliard with highest honors. Amy, too, was offered admittance, heading for New York the day after she graduated high school.

Touring together with a repertoire of serious and comedic music, the Dueling Pianists eventually married.

Steve visibly absent from their nuptials - busy with his career as a college track coach, according to rumors - he never spoke to either of them again.

Julie A. Ferraro
Flagstaff Ave

Summer. Approximately 8:30 pm. Sunset. Orange, pink, yellow, blue, purple sky. Rolling, deep green corn fields as far as the eye can see. Warm, sticky air kissing my sunburnt skin. Windows down. Hair whipping from the wind, disrupting my view of the road. Music blasting. Absolutely not respecting the speed limit. A herd of peaceful cows not batting an eye at my recklessness. Flying down Flagstaff Ave.

Flagstaff Ave is the road that leads to Farmington High School. It is the road that connects Farmington to Lakeville. It is the road with Donnelly Farm and the four palomino ponies I named Billy, Bob, Joe, and Junior when I was five years old. It is the road where I first drove by myself on when I passed my driver’s test. It is the road where a deer ran out from the ditch and hit my passenger side door, totaling my car – yes, the deer hit me. It is the road where I got pulled over for first time driving home after winning our section championship game. It is the road that has a little dip in it right before the entrance to the high school that makes my stomach drop. It is the road with slow-moving tractors that I got stuck behind, but only when I was already late to school. It is the road where stampedes of cows breaking free required the road to close twice a year. It is the road where my car almost slid into the ditch when I hit black ice for the first time. It is the road where I cried – happy, sad, frustrated tears – on my way home from basketball practices. It is the road where I was driving listening to the calming and romantic rhythms of Frank Ocean songs, when I first told Alex, “I love you.”

So, when it is summer around 8:30 p.m. and the sun is setting, the sky painted orange, pink, yellow, blue, and purple. Rolling, deep green corn fields surround me as far as the eye can see. The windows are down, my tangled hair whips in the wind. The song Red Dirt Road blasting on repeat as I speed past the palominos; they stop grazing and nod at the car as I pass by. I think of all the things that Flagstaff Ave means to me: peace, beauty, freedom, love. And I keep driving on this road full of memories, not a damn tractor in sight.

Morgan Ebel
The Wagner-Berger Prize for Excellence in Creative Writing

In 1978, Patricia and Leonard Percello 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 CSB winner Taylor Samuelson.
Itching

Mom said I could stay at Greta’s until supper which means I need to leave in six minutes. Mom says I should never stay for supper unless I’m invited, otherwise, it's rude and I have to go home and eat noodles and canned mandarin oranges that taste like rusted metal. I like Greta’s mom, she always makes something different for supper, like grilled cheese and tomato soup or tacos. I’m a fourth grader and Greta’s a third grader, but we are the same age since she got held back in first. I like to walk to her house after school because it's closer than mine. Today we are playing the game we always play: the one where Greta fights a mythical creature and saves me. I adjust my Spiderman cereal box watch and hope Greta's mom will ask me if I'm hungry.

Right now, I’m a princess and Greta’s a knight. My ears sting from the cold so I cup my hands over them, but I can still hear Greta around the side of the house grunting in her grand effort to defeat the dragon who has kept me chained to this tree-tower my whole life. It’s almost too cold to not wear a jacket but Mom hasn’t unpacked our winter clothes since we moved here in March and couldn't find the box. By the time she found it, it was “damn near summer anyways.” Maybe Greta will offer me her cape. I like this game and the way Greta tells me what she sees and warns me when the dragon is about to chase me. When I’m running from the dragon, I feel scared but not the way some kids feel when they are home alone. I feel brave-scared, like I could turn around and if the dragon looked into my eyes, he would turn to dust just like God says we all will soon. Greta barely makes it past the dragon and doesn’t have much time, she cuts me loose from the tree-tower with her stick-sword and I sigh with relief. Soon she’s blocking the dragon’s fiery breath with her garbage can lid-shield. I start running around the corner of the house-castle. Greta shrieks to duck because the dragon is spitting fire at me. I bear crawl until she says to stop. I’m running by a river, and there’s a cliff—no, a waterfall, right in front of me. I have to give up or—

“JUUUMP!” Greta bellows and I do. For a second, I’m flying, soaring through the mist, then my knees hit the grit of the road and my arms slam down, already a little bruised. Greta skids to a stop on the curb behind me and tells me it’s okay, he’s gone. Extending a scarred hand, she helps me up and commends my performance as “one for the ages.” I look down at my torn-up knees and cereal box watch, 5:55. Too late, Mom will be back from work in five minutes.

“I’ve gotta go, my mom likes me back before 6,” I say.
“Oh, alright,” Greta says, taking her arm from around my shoulders. “Would you maybe want to have a sleepover this weekend? I was going to ask my mom if you could stay tomorrow night since it’s Friday.”
“That would be really fun,” I say, glancing at my watch again.
“Okay cool. I’ll ask her tonight,” Greta says as she jogs back to the house.
“Cool.” I take off running down the block and my knees don't bother me as much as they should.

The garage door is closing when I make it to the driveway. Panting, I check the mailbox, stick the newspaper under my armpit, and grab the emptied garbage can. When I enter the kitchen, I kick my shoes into the laundry room and head to where we keep the pots, leaving the paper by the keys. “Anna?” Mom says from her stool at the kitchen counter. She is sitting with her head in her hands and a blue-tinted wineglass at her elbow, part of a wedding gift she bought in a set last year but kept after deciding the bride was stuck up and stayed home. “Yeah?” I say, stopping in front of her with a pot in my hands.
“Did you start the water yet?” Mom asks without looking up. “I am right now,” I say, turning toward the sink. “I’m going to shower. Pick some fruit from the pantry,” she says. She pushes her palms against her thighs to stand, grunting in the process.

I’ve seen pantries in movies, ones with double folding doors with slats and their own lights. Ones with shelves lined with cans of peaches and pears, spices, different-shaped pastas, and jars of preserves. Our ‘pantry’ is more like a dungeon and is by far my least favorite place in this house. I creep down the stairs searching for the light switch with my left hand while keeping my eyes fixed on the shifting darkness before me. Flip. The pantry-dungeon flickers with a dim light, but the grimy gray walls and shadowy corners don’t look all that different when the light is on. A chill runs down my spine as I notice the cobwebs swaying to a mysterious breeze in the corner. I tiptoe forward, keeping quiet just in case the monster that lives down here is sleeping. I’d be lucky if he was sleeping. Scanning the mostly empty shelves for fruit, I turn a few cans of green beans around before spotting one of mandarin oranges on the second-highest shelf. I balance on one leg and use my left arm to stable myself.
My weight shifts and I feel the shelf tip, sending a can of green beans crashing to the ground, cracking open. The bean juice slowly seeps onto the concrete and the hairs on my neck raise. I'm a goner. The monster's awake, I know it. The light coming in from the small brick glass window shifts and suddenly the shadows swallow my feet in darkness. Holding back a scream, I turn and shoot back up the stairs, leaving the fallen green beans as a sacrifice. Frantic, I miss the light switch with my right hand, but I don't slow down. My feet pound the stairs, echoing into the dungeon. There's no point in being quiet now. When I reach the top, I slam the door behind me and press my back to it, listening for monster footsteps and clutching the can of mandarin oranges to my chest with both hands.

I set the opened can on the table as Mom is finishing up her prayer, making the Sign of the Cross as she reaches for her wineglass. I pour myself a glass of milk and sit down next to her at the table. The TV wobbles at the other end as she scoots her chair forward, reaching for the remote. "What'd you do today?" she asks. "Nothing. School was good, Mrs. Detrek showed us how to draw a dog without lifting our pencils and we got to read about the Greek gods. Oh, and Greta said she was going to ask her mom if I could sleep over at her house tomorrow night. Could I? If she says yes?" "Sure, that's fine," she says blankly, flipping through channels until she finds the local news. I like this channel, the man who talks about the weather always tells stories about how his son loves the rain and once he went outside in his pajamas and came back an hour later drenched with frogs tucked into his shirt like a kangaroo pouch. "I got a call from the school," Mom says, scooping sauce from the jar onto her plate, "they are having a lice check tomorrow, one of your classmates got sent home today with it. Aaron? Something like that," she sets the spoon on the flipped lid.

I shovel oranges into my mouth, trying to remember who I sat next to at lunch. It wasn't Greta because she had a dentist appointment during lunch today so it might have been Aaron. He seemed antsy in class, but I don't think he was particularly scratchy. I don't think my head is itchy. I scratch at my scalp and examine the dandruff under my nails for any signs of life. I got lice once last year and it was the worst three days ever. Mom couldn't miss work, so I stayed home alone. We didn't have cable then, so I spent most my time running around the house.

The house we lived in then had a long hallway that ran from the garage door all the way to my room. It was a straight shot so I spent my time seeing how fast I could run back and forth between the two walls, keeping track of my times using the microwave timer. I washed my bed sheets four times and showered three times a day, praying the lice would fall off and drown. The shampoo the nurse gave me smelt like expired milk and it made my hair reek for a week or two after. I bet that bottle is somewhere in the bathroom closet, I'll use it tonight just in case. My head cannot be itchy.

They decided to check our hair at the end of the day so our parents wouldn't have to take work off to come get us. Standing in line, I count what I can see to keep my brain busy. The hallway floor is five tiles across and the wall is eight blocks high and Greta is two people behind me. Three kids have left the nurse's grasp with hairnets on. My head is not itchy. I'm next in line, the girl in front of me has thick red hair cut into a straight bob with bangs. Her hair moves like a helmet, only swaying when she giggles. I imagine little white bugs on her head pulling strands of hair and controlling her actions like the rat from Ratatouille. I imagine them wriggling into her brain and slowly taking over her life, turning her into a zombie. She scratches. If she has lice I probably have lice now too. Mom says lice can jump from one head to another like that. I scratch. Hair-helmet girl gets called forward.

Five tiles, eight blocks which swap colors. Blue-white-blue-white—I hear Greta laughing behind me about how if she has lice she'll stay home and watch TV all day until all the little bugs die. I squeak my shoes on the tile. If I have lice I'll be home but probably won't get to do anything anyways. My head is not itchy. Squeak—back and forth. My head is not itchy. The blonde boy behind me pulls on my hair, stiff and smelly from all the shampoo I showered with in preparation for the combing. "Go Anna," he pushes, surely excited to see me fail the test and be sent home so he never has to see my face again. Squeak. Four tiles forward. I crane my neck all the way back, counting the ceiling tiles. The nurse smells like bubblegum and the dentist's office.

"Okay, other side." I flip, fixing my eyes on her blue sneakers. My hair falls into my face and I gag on the stench. "Stay still please," she mutters, her nails scratching into my scalp, dividing my hair into singular strands.
“You’re all good,” the nurse says and gives me a slight push away from the line. Sweet relief. Stretching my neck, I head to my locker and then to Greta’s so we can walk to her house together. I packed my toothbrush and pajamas in my backpack today so we could go straight there. I watch Greta go through the line and offer her head for inspection. She bends her neck backward and the nurse, smiling as if she finds this fun, peers at her hairline. But then the nurse leans forward, concentrating on Greta’s crooked part, and her smile drops. She gives Greta a tap on the shoulder and reaches toward the shelf behind her. Greta straightens, rolling her shoulders, and when the nurse gives her a white bottle of expired milk-shampoo and a hairnet, I know it’s over. Greta will have to stay home all weekend, alone. Which means I’ll have to stay home all weekend, alone again. Mom has been complaining about her job at the hospital and our lease is almost up, so I don’t know how many more weekends I’ll be here for. Greta is the closest I’ve ever gotten to making a friend and soon her brain will be infested with tiny bugs dictating her every move and turning her into the living dead and we will never have a sleepover. Unphased, Greta approaches me with a smile on her face and I retreat a little.

“Ready to go?” she asks. “Yeah,” I say, and we walk home with me on the sidewalk and her balancing on the curb like a tightrope. She says she knew she had lice, that her head was itchy yesterday, and not dry-itchy but itchy-itchy. When we get to her house I don’t know what to do but I don’t leave. We stop at the mailbox and face each other. Greta’s arms swing at her sides and she glances around, but no dragons are chasing us this time. “Maybe we could still play outside?” I say, knowing that we shouldn’t. Just then, as if summoned to crush my barely-there hopes, Greta’s mom opens the screen door and tells Greta not to get too close. She got a call from the school and knows about the lice.

“So, I guess this is goodbye,” Greta says, admiring her own dramatics. “I guess,” I say kicking at the road rubble. Greta takes a step back and salutes me before rushing in. I wait in front of the house a bit longer, listening to Greta’s mom explain their plan of attack. I check the time on my cereal box watch, wrap my hoodie tighter around my body and start walking home.

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**Submission Guidelines**

**Submission Email**

Email: studio1@csbsju.edu

Submissions by email are **strongly** preferred.

Deadline: January 31st for spring publication. Reading and judging period is between late September and February. Results will be sent by May.

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