

The Stone Circle

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Aden Esparza

Monochrome's Departure

McLennan Community College
Journal of Literary and Visual Art

The Stone Circle is a semiannual literary and visual art journal published every fall and spring by McLennan Community College (MCC) in Waco, Texas. Visit www.mclennan.edu/stone-circle/ to read previous issues of our magazine, contact an editor, and find information about submission guidelines, writing contests, and events.

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Table of Contents

Prose

Michelle Saucedo, "Childlike Snow" (First Prize - Prose)	3
Kailyn Tidrick, "Working at a Prison" (Second Prize - Prose)	6
Shyanne Needler, "A Not So Classic Love Story" (First Prize - Prose, Fall 24.1 Issue)	21

Poetry

Amara Burghard, "Song of Sunset" (First Prize - Poetry)	8
Martiza Hernandez, "Whispers of My Favorite Lullaby" (Second Prize - Poetry)	10
Landon Cox, "Lost Sponge" (Third Prize - Poetry)	11
Maritza Hernandez, "Nubes descoloridas" (First Prize - Poetry in Spanish)	12
Maritza Hernandez, "Knew, New, and You"	15
Maritza Hernandez, "Serenata Rota"	19
K.P. Patterson, "Oklahoma" (First Prize - Poetry, Fall 24.1 Issue)	25

Visual Art

Aden Esparza, "Monochrome's Departure" (First Prize - Visual Art)	(Front Cover)
Yuto Goto, "Deep Sea Creatures" (Second Prize - Visual Art)	13
Hannah Finley, "Fractured" (Third Prize - Visual Art)	14
Yuto Goto, "Vital Connections"	16
Landon Cox, "Blue Hydrator"	17
Niya Salinas, "Girl with Mirror Eyes"	18
Hernan Romero, "Esperanza in the Dark"	20
Yuto Goto, "Misty Morning over Lotus Roots"	23
Amara Burghard, "From a Birdwatcher's Eye"	24
Hernan Romero, "Marigold"	25
Mel Duran Gomez, "Catching the Sunset"	26
Elizabeth Duhon, "Girl Underwater"	26
Elizabeth Duhon, "Girl at a Desk"	27
Amara Burghard, "Caught Snowflake"	27
Aden Esparza, "Nightshift"	28
Aden Esparza, "Autumn's Interlude"	29
Phillip Trice, "Storm Clouds Rolling In"	30
Hannah Finley, "Rebirth"	(Back Cover)

Childlike Snow

by Michelle Saucedo

First Prize - Prose

Virginia, 2011

If peace were to ever express itself as anything, it would be snow.

My family and I were traveling to my Dad's hometown in Virginia, the first and last time we visited. It was December, so the once green state was now covered in brown. The mountains in the background were so different from the plains in Texas. The air felt thinner than I am used to, which must be due to the change in elevation.

I woke up the day after our arrival to find the entire front and back lawns covered in white, fluffy snow. The day was so bright, and the snow reflected every sun ray in my direction. Since it was the first time I had seen snow, I immediately wanted to run out and feel it.

My mom, knowing better than seven year-old me, stopped me at the door.

"Hold on. You need to put your jacket on. It is way too cold outside for all that," she said smiling at me.

She helped me slide into my jacket, and I pulled away, bouncing on my toes.

"Hold on!" she said, laughing, "You need your gloves too, crazy!"

She tried her best to put gloves on my wiggling hands. I looked to her for confirmation, then zoomed to the door. I didn't even notice that my little brother, Joe, was at my heels, thinking he could beat me to the snow. Of course, I won. He was only five, and I was seven. I scooped up a huge pile of snow and buried my face in it.

Then a snowball hit my back, and I heard my brother laugh. I turned around and saw him and my dad looking at me with fresh snow on their gloves. I laughed at them and formed the biggest snowball anyone had ever seen! It was so big, and it fit perfectly in my hands. I threw it at my brother, and it hit him straight in the chest. We laughed back and forth, not caring how long we stayed out there.

It was peaceful.

After we finished building our very first snowman, I realized I couldn't feel the snow anymore. My gloves were on, but I didn't feel the snow in my hands. I went to my mom, and she told me we needed to warm my hands up. I was upset that I had to leave, but I wanted to feel the snow again.

In my grandmother's house the smell of wood burning filled my nose. It was smokey and warm. My mom led me to a bright red and orange fire. I took off my gloves with some difficulty since I couldn't feel my hands and stuck them near the

fire. Almost immediately, the frigid chill of winter melted away. Feeling rushed back through my fingertips, working itself to the palm of my hand. Life returned to my numb hands.

I wiggled my fingers to check that they were normal. Once I saw they were, I went straight back into the falling snow. It was like nothing in Texas. The thick snow muffled everything around me. Time stopped. All I heard were the sounds of my brother laughing at our wonky snowman and the clicking of the camera as my dad watched.

The intricate details of every falling flake told me there was purpose in everything. The snow might cause problems in the morning, but then it brought me nothing but joy. My hands could have fallen off, and I still would look back on that day fondly. My first day in the snow. My first snowman, and my first snow angel.

I loved the snow, and leaving it was not easy. But I knew I would return to it someday and welcome it with the same childlike excitement.

Texas, 2025

The snow fell slowly all around me.

It was at the mercy of the wind that carried it every which way, without a care as to where it might end up. Seeing it reminded me of how much I love snow. As a kid, snow days meant a beautiful time filled with the laughter of my brother. It meant nothing more than the perfect opportunity to relax in awe of God's creation.

At that moment, it was my solace with everything moving around me. It felt as if the frigid snow slowed the hands of time. My anxiety receded in the presence of snow. I was free.

I smelled the grass and leaves as the wind picked them up, making me sneeze. The snow was beautiful, but the wind was biting. It made my eyes sting and water as I walked against it to class. Even still, I felt awe at the dancing flurries around me. It was a rare sight, and I wanted to enjoy every second. Campus was covered in a moody gray. The street lamps looked as if an artist took his time placing them to create an ambiance on the canvas. I'd never seen campus look so pretty.

A smile spread across my face. I couldn't believe snow could be so beautiful, and this wasn't even real snow! The flurries floated down, dancing in rhythm, like longtime partners. I'd never danced before, but the snow flurries made it look easy.

As I walked, the snow flurries kissed my cheeks, burning them with cold. The snowflakes didn't mean anything by it of course, and I felt grateful for their visit. They shared with me the stories of snowmen and snow angels, and how the cold can be just as comforting as warmth. As I reminisced with them, I wanted so badly to tell my childhood self to live in slow motion, to live just as the snow does; don't worry about what the next steps are, just go where the wind takes you. While snow might slow down time, it doesn't take me back.

The snow fell softly everywhere, but left no trace. It existed only in the hands of the wind. That's what growing up is like. You are in the moment for only a second, and then it's a memory. Everyone lives in the moment. Our lives exist in the hands of the wind.

Looking at the snow showed me how delicate time was. I know Texas, and in twenty minutes it will seem as if there was no snow at all. If you didn't see it, you wouldn't believe it. But I did. I can look back and remember how the snow made me feel, the same way I remember the way my brother laughed when I was throwing tiny snowballs at him.

The snow does not last forever, just as we do not get to be kids forever. My memories remind me that I should be grateful. At that moment, I got to be a kid again, and I was.

The next time it snows, it will be different snow on a different day. I might even be in a different place. However, I will always remember how the snow makes me feel, and that feeling will always remind me to take life slowly.

Working at a Prison

by Kailyn Tidrick

Second Prize - Prose

Two fences line the perimeter, one topped with triple-razor wire, the other electrified; six perimeter pickets have deadly weapons, and numerous inner pickets house less lethal options: bodycams, chemical agents, tasers. These are the distinguishing features of a maximum-security prison like the Alfred D. Hughes unit. "Maximum security" means that the unit houses restricted housing and closed custody inmates, though Hughes is a mixed-custody, so it also houses the lowest custody level inmates as well.

The Hughes unit sits on 390 acres, a mile away from the highway and completely isolated from the other prisons and jails in Gatesville, Texas. From 10 Building Medical to 18 and 19 Dorms, it is a half mile walk there and back. Further out sit the automotive and vocational buildings where inmates can learn different trades. The garment factory where inmates work to produce clothing for other inmates and officers is also there.

As I walk up to the first checkpoint, I grab an awaiting bucket. *Thunk* goes my water bottle as I drop it in, and *plink, plink, plink* as my pens fall into the bucket. I open the door to a cacophony of sounds, officers speaking over each other, a phone ringing, the buzz of the sally-port door as the night-shift officers leave. *Thud*, I hear, as I drop my bucket onto the x-ray conveyor belt, pausing to untie my shoes, slip them off, and drop them onto the conveyor belt. I step through the metal detector and stop as a female officer pat searches me. Gloved hands run over every spot covered by my clothing, checking my bra, my waistband and my feet, before clearing me. I step to the right, take my bucket off the table, and put my stuff back in my bag. The chaos has yet to quiet, and putting on my shoes while standing is a talent I have mastered, though I never thought it would truly matter.

Past the checkpoint, I head towards the next one in another building. After that, I head to the inmate housing and main buildings. Outside that checkpoint, I see a sea of inmates, all dressed in white, tall and short, walking single file on the edge of the walkway. I hold my head high, watching the inmates that surround me as I make my way towards the medical building. Most inmates say, "Good morning," and I say it back, but a few make other comments. Those are the ones I watch out for, the ones I shoot a glare at, and keep walking.

I have learned that the inmates know when you're scared of them, and they prey on that. I developed eyes in the back of my head, a necessary evolution in a place like this. My neck is a Lazy Susan, my head rotating from side to side, constantly checking my surroundings. Even in "regular" places, I continuously check my surroundings, watching everything and everyone around me.

I also learned that being an empath while working in a prison is very difficult. The inmates are not always fed well. The buildings on the Hughes unit do not

have heat or A/C, and inmates have only one thin jacket during winter and no blanket to keep them warm. Texas winters are mild, though I am sure these inmates would disagree. It's not easy to remember why they are there, and often, I must remind myself of that.

Before I came to work at the Hughes unit, I loved the true crime genre, whether it was podcasts, books, and or TV shows. A few months after I started, I was watching *Snapped: Killer Couples*. Nothing seemed particularly special about the episode. The format was the same, like all the other episodes. Even after it ended, I didn't think much of it. The story in the episode happened in Texas, but a few hours' drive away. The next morning at work, though, I looked at my Telehealth schedule and got a strange feeling. I wracked my brain to figure out why this inmate's name sounded familiar. Had I seen him before in Telehealth, or maybe processed his medical records at some point?

When he walked into the Telehealth room, though, I knew exactly what it was. Standing in front of me was the man featured in the *Snapped* episode that I watched the previous night. My eyes widened, and I tried to turn away, but he noticed my expression and sighed. Then, he asked if I had seen the *Snapped* episode. I nodded, feeling guilty. He paused, and I turned to look at him. Guilt and shame radiated off him. He wouldn't look me in the eyes anymore, and he didn't speak to me, even after his appointment ended. After this interaction, my interest in those stories slowed, like sand in an hourglass, until it ran out.

Much later, this inmate told me that he felt horrible about what he had done and was paying the price for it. He would spend the rest of his life in prison with a debilitating, degenerative disease that would kill him. This experience changed me. I stopped wanting to know why inmates were in prison, and I almost completely stopped consuming true crime media. Every time I tried to listen to a podcast or watch a show, I thought about the person behind the perpetrator. It wasn't a lesson I expected to learn, but it was vital nonetheless.

Song of Sunset

by Amara Burghard

First Prize - Poetry

Drifting through the evening air
Leaves falling o' so fair.
The gentle breeze,
That no one sees.
Golden light of
Dusk delight.
Stones surrounding sing,
spider webs the strings.
Warm rays of the sun,
Summer almost done.
Woods around me so alive.
This is where I will thrive.
Heartbeat of songbird wings,
Babbling of the brook & stream.
Crystal air of mountain chill
make the planet feel so still.
The Gold on the horizon,
The sky, it once brightened.
It all slowly fades away
from sun-soaked day,
engulfed in indigo night
until it's out of sight.

A new song forms
with fresh, untouched chords.
The crickets now crescendo
where they hide in grass and meadow.
The croak of frogs echo.
Night is their libretto.
Beat of owl wings
through the leaves, softly ring.

The songs of daylight
differ from the cadence of night.
Both songs will remain
in tandem they will reign,
over time, as it goes on
through every dusk and dawn.
Here is where I thrive,
Where the songs of the land are alive.

Whispers of My Favorite Lullaby

by Martiza Hernandez

Second Prize - Poetry

Please keep singing this deadly lullaby.
Fill me up with sweet lies.
Keep telling me
I'm the lady of your dreams.
Don't ever call someone else
Miss Unique—that name belongs
To no one but me.
Show me some mercy.
Be a little gracious.
Wrap me in words that feel like home.
Promise me I'm yours, and yours alone.
Please sing this lullaby to me.
Devote yourself to this fragile heart.
Tell me you'll stay, never depart.
Please sing this lullaby to me,
And only me, even if it's the last
Thing I ever hear.

Lost Sponge

by Landon Cox

Third Prize - Poetry

A sponge is compressed
Between two violent hands,
Then left alone to rest
And dry on hot sands.

It doesn't belong there,
Only visits from the living.
Nothing dwells, nothing cares,
Nothing receives, nothing's given.

It inches aimless, inconsistent.
It feels empty and full.
The noise of life in the distance—
Is it pushed, or is it pulled?

Behind it, a winding line
The silent winds soon erase,
But there's not enough to realign.
There's no leaving this place.

Nubes descoloridas

by Maritza Hernandez

First Prize - Poetry in Spanish

Aún te extraño,
pero ya no es para tanto.
Aún te sueño,
aunque ya no seas la causa de mis desvelos.

Aún pienso en ti,
pero hoy puedo ser feliz.
Ya me encontré a mí,
he reído más a diario,
y aprecio
las pequeñas cosas del mundo,
lo simple y lo ordinario.

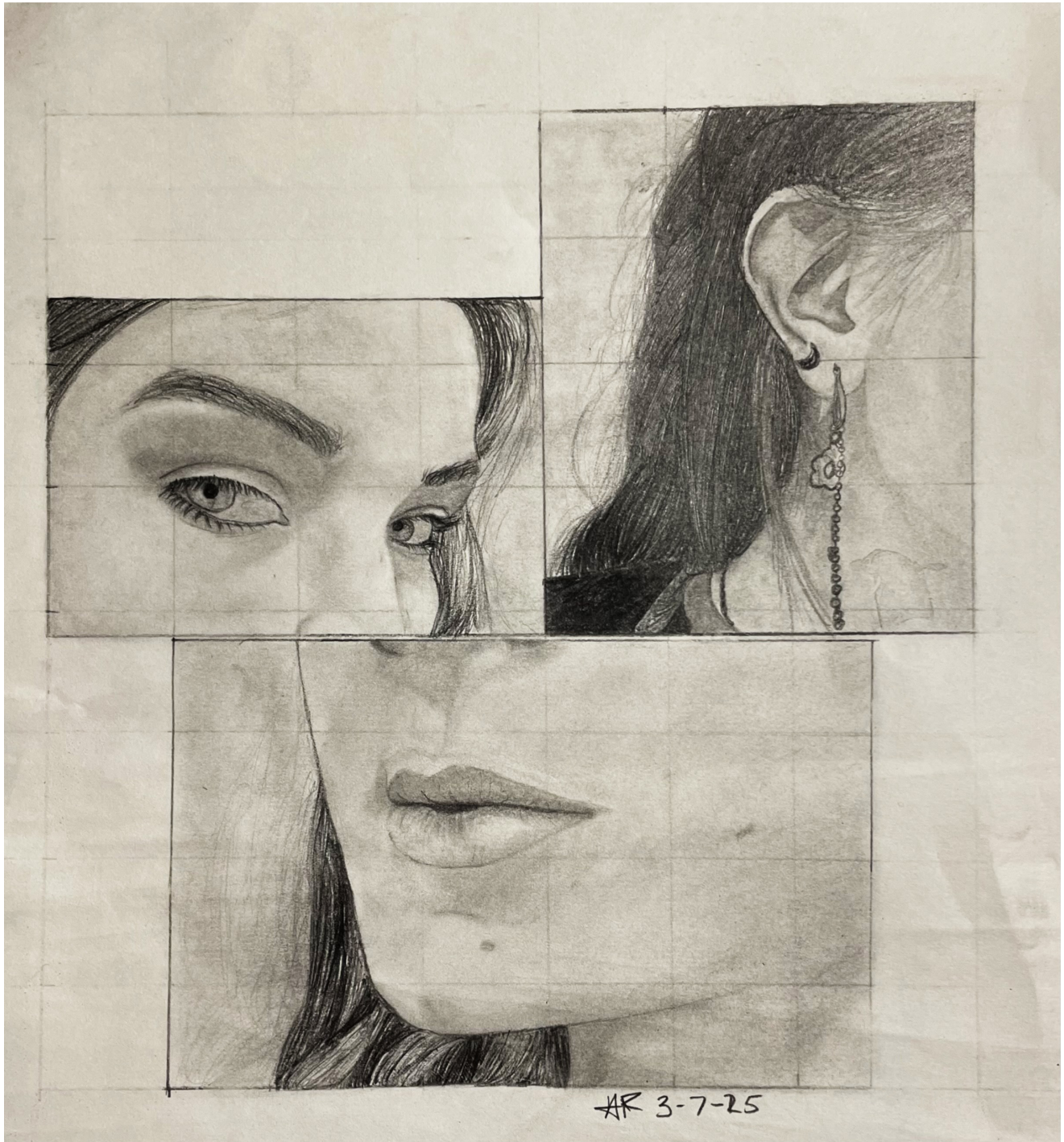
Me volví a enamorar
de la vida,
y hasta de los días grises,
que ahora son parte de mi historia,
cada uno un trazo en mi memoria.

Aún te extraño,
pero ya no pesa como antes,
y en cada rayo de sol,
encuentro nuevos instantes.



Yuto Goto
Second Prize - Visual Art

Deep Sea Creatures



Hannah Finley
Third Prize - Visual Art

Fractured

Knew, New, & You

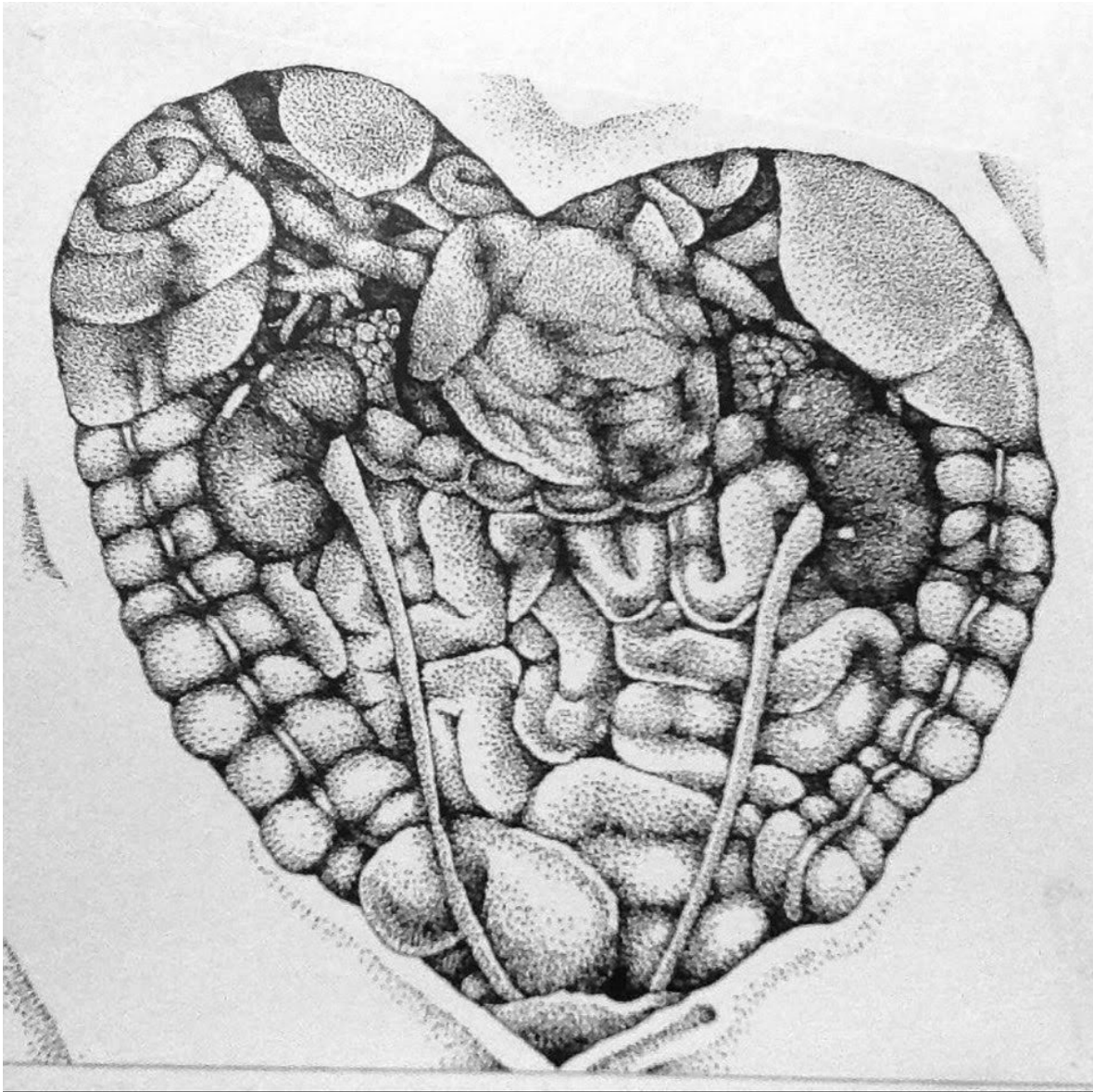
by Maritza Hernandez

If you only knew
How badly I wanted to be you.
If you only you knew
I tried to be somebody good
For you, too.

If only doubts wouldn't be the death of me,
You would see who was the real me.
If you stay, I promise to never walk away.

Be the moon that guides my night.
Be the light that shines so bright.
Be the reason I don't believe in treason.
Please, don't leave by next season.

I can't escape any of this—
I rather die by a deadly kiss
Of yours, but only if you knew
How badly I wanted to be you.



Yuto Goto

Vital Connections



Landon Cox

Blue Hydrator



Niya Salinas

Girl with Mirror Eyes

Serenata Rota

by Maritza Hernandez

My godmother was right.
I can't be alone with my thoughts tonight.
I'm frightened by the dawn,
Expecting only the worst to come.
but would you be the one?
Would you make the decision,
To take it all on,
To carry this weight alone?
I can't outgrow it,
I can't let go.
And yet I want us
For once and for all...
Would you be the answer to my prayers?
Would that dissolve every single layer?
Don't be shy—let's try.
Why would we waste
Any more time?
Let me be in your embrace.
Let's make it worthwhile
For the rest of the night...
Let's pretend time dies
With us tonight,
And we're the only ones alive,
Caught in this fleeting light.



Hernan Romero

Esperanza in the Dark

A Not So Classic Love Story

by Shyanne Needler

First Prize - Prose (Fall 24.1 Issue)

I'm the most powerful super villain in the City of Starlight. No Superhero can defeat me...well, except one. Firebird. When I think about it, I laugh. Who would've thought the most powerful supervillain would fall in love with a second-rate hero? I tried to get over my feelings, but every time I see her suit that looks as if flames are exploding from her very essence, my stone cold heart starts to beat.

Right now, I'm getting arrested for the billionth time. Are cuffs even necessary? All I'm gonna do is escape. The cuffs are a nuisance for me, and the cops know what I'll do. I let out an exasperated sigh, and the cops do their thing. I look over my shoulder to Firebird, who is helping clean up our most recent battle. I watch that frizzy red hair bounce as she walks. Those jade eyes sweep towards me as I sit in the back of a cop car.

I remember the first time we ever fought, when her name was Hera instead of Firebird. It's just as clear to me as that café window I destroyed with a fire hydrant. Hmm. I don't think I hit anyone that time. Lucky them.

I was a terror; destroying buildings, collapsing bridges, hospitalizing heroes. I don't even remember why I was mad. Oh wait, now I remember. I wasn't mad. I was...bored.

A powerful team of heroes, the Olympians, was sent after me. I heard the news from a police scanner I had stolen. I admit that I knew that I would be taken in when they defeated me. The Olympians are too strong, even for me, at least if I'm alone. I fled as fast as I could, and they drove me deeper into the towering city.

I flew past a hotel, so close that the windows shattered. Hera was hot on my tail. I was sure the new recruit of the Olympians would catch me. I heard a scream of pure terror. I turned to look over my shoulder, without stopping my flight, to see that a little girl had fallen out of a broken window. It was a twenty-story drop to rock-hard concrete. Then I saw that Hera wasn't there.

The screaming stopped, and I hovered so many feet in the air. My eyes darted back and forth, searching for that little girl. What I saw changed my life, and I still can't explain why. Hera caught the girl in midair. She chose to save an innocent life rather than get the villain. I know many heroes who would opt to get the villain rather than save innocent lives. I watched as Hera carried the girl back to the window and handed her over to her sobbing mother. Hera saved them both from an agonizing death.

I watched for a second longer before the rest of the Olympians came around the corner. I high-tailed it out of there before they could catch up to me. I escaped, obviously, since I'm here now instead of in the Super-Max. What Hera did

stuck with me. No matter how hard I tried to shake it, it wouldn't leave my hectic mind.

The police car heads to the station. I wait until we pass a laundromat to escape. Unlocking my cuffs and the car door, I open the door while it's still moving and jump out before the officers react.

Lucky me, there's a thick mist in the air, concealing my movements and whereabouts. My escape is always easy, especially from the cops on my payroll. I fly to the laundromat and enter, scanning the place. Seeing no patrons, I continue but then stop to look out into the mist, so thick I can't see the building across the street. Something was off, but I couldn't place it. With a shrug, I walked to the back to the small bathroom that not many know is there.

My bag is still stuffed in the corner of the cabinet. I open it and take out my civilian clothes: my favorite Slipknot hoodie and some black cargo pants. I place my suit and mask into the bag, zipping it up. I sling it over my shoulder and walk out of the quaint laundromat. I don't worry about cameras because there aren't any.

I go on foot to my destination, running my fingers through my short, wavy hair. Most mistake it for brunette, but it's actually a very dirty blonde. I try to dislodge the dirt stuck in it. I'm definitely taking a shower when I get home.

My destination is blocked off by police caution tape. It takes me a few minutes to actually get to it. When I get there, I sigh. The street is destroyed from the recent battle between my alter ego, The Wraith, and Firebird. I look from the street to the crowd of police and find Firebird answering the usual questions and debriefing them about what happened. I wait at the edge of the crowd of onlookers who probably have somewhere better to be. I flip the hood of my black hoodie over my head. Uncomfortable with all the police around, I stuff my hands into the pockets and tap my foot. I may be a bit impatient, too.

After several more minutes, most of the onlookers have left and Firebird finally is done with the police. She scans the crowd, looking for someone. When she finds that person, she practically glows with happiness. Firebird prances over to the caution tape and stops right in front of me. Holding her hand out to me with a smile, I took it without hesitation, unaffected by the gasps of fans around me.

"I didn't mean to tear up the road, Keren," I say, and her smile is contagious. I smile too. "I was trying to make it look legit," I say the last part quietly, not wanting anyone to hear.

"Clio," Firebird, AKA Keren Stern, says in a soft voice, "I'm not mad."

She pulls off my hood and leans over the caution tape to kiss me. I return the gesture.

Yes, that's right Firebird is dating me, Cliona Kaelgore, and is publicly an enemy to my alter ego, The Wraith. A secret we've managed to keep these past three years. It only took a year to woo her into a date, otherwise it would be four years but like...whatever, I'm happy.

This may not be the easiest relationship I've ever had, but it's the first one worth fighting for. She is worth fighting for. I'd burn the world for this Firebird, and she'd pull me out of the ashes.



Yuto Goto

Misty Morning Over Lotus Roots



Amara Burghard

From a Birdwatcher's Eye

Oklahoma

by K.P. Patterson

First Prize - Poetry (Fall 24.1 Issue)

Cigarettes and the smell of grease,
Hot summer days spent by the creek,
Honeysuckle garden beneath the pecan tree,
Childhood innocence in full swing.

I wish someone had told me,
that summer turns to fall,
that time is never-ending and never slows at all,
to listen to the wind, and the songs the blue jay sings,
to cherish every moment, and the joy that each one brings.



Hernan Romero

Marigold



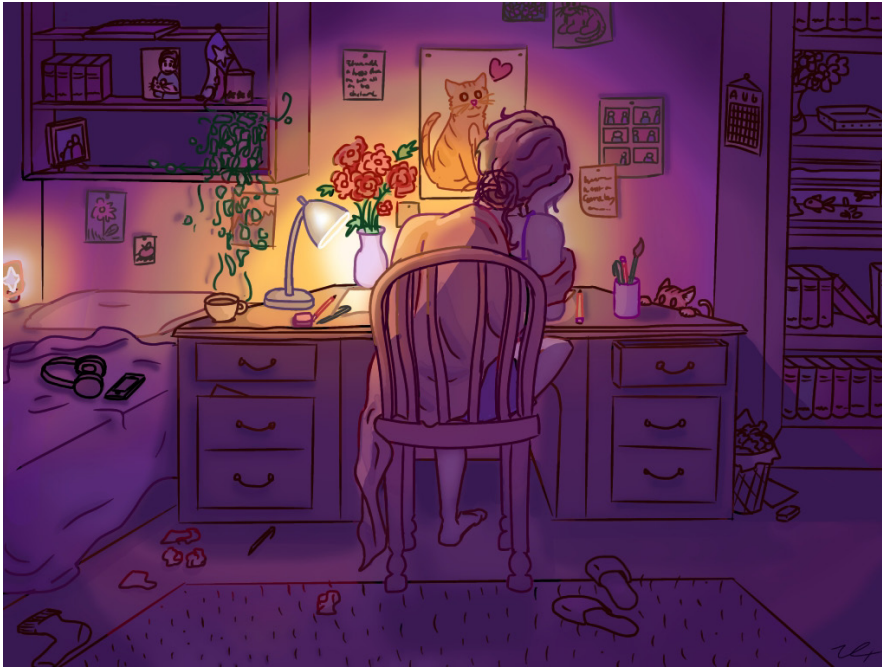
Mel Duran Gomez

Catching the Sunset



Elizabeth Duhon

Girl Underwater



Elizabeth Duhon

Girl at a Desk



Amara Burghard

Caught Snowflake



Aden Esparza

Nightshift

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Aden Esparza

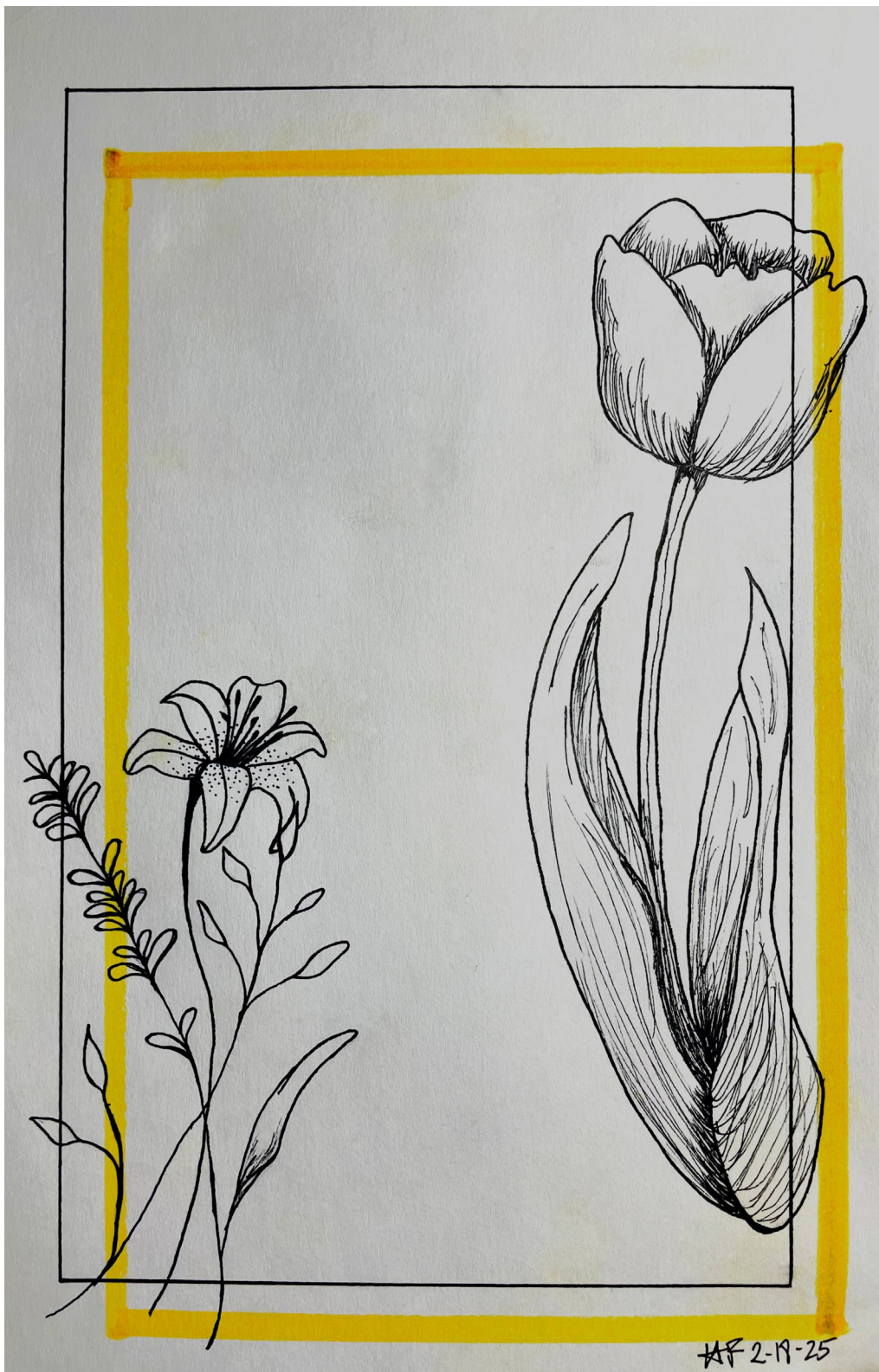
Autumn's Interlude



Phillip Trice

Storm Clouds Rolling In

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for Volume 25, Issue 1 of
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Oct. 17th, 2025



Hannah Finley

Rebirth