

The Stone Circle

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Arath Herrera

A Mother's Story

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. Students interested in creative writing, journalism, and publishing are encouraged to join the editorial committee. 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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He Never Looked So Small

by Rayne Trahan

First Prize - Prose

Mom was asleep on the couch when she heard it. A rush through the door and a scream starting up in one of her twins' voices made her jump. Mom's eyes darted to the single boy, all alone, like he never was. Mom eyed her shoes and the door that was held open and the news on the TV that reported sad story after sad story. Everything was apparent now. Mom noticed everything. The picture of the four of them that hung crooked, and the paint peeling on the door frame, and the terror in her son's eyes. The room never felt so cold, and the lights never seemed so fluorescent. No room ever seemed so small. Mom saw the sprayed water spots on her son's Barney t-shirt and the puddles leading from the pool and her son's pained face and the cuts on his hands from climbing the fence.

And she knew they looked crazy dashing through a backyard of overgrown grass on a strip of wet concrete. The yard was too overgrown, and there were too many rocks and too little skin, and the jagged pieces bloodied her feet. There was a trail of red and water on the concrete, cutting through the grass. Mom could barely hear the news over the sound of her heartbeat, the sound of her running, the sound of her breath, and the sound of her son's tears. Mom had so much breath and so little time, and her feet were torn and the grass was far too tall. They approached the gate, and Mom's heartbeat was audible to everyone and everything was wrong. The gate wasn't open because the boys couldn't reach the lock since they were so small, but they were big enough to climb. It was supposed to be tall enough to keep them out.

Mom flung open the gate, and she saw his head bobbing, and the world had never looked so gray. He was blue when she got there, his lips cold, his heart quiet. His brother tried to run fast enough, but his legs were so small, his hands so numb, and his brain so silent. Mom could see it now: every push of labor, every scraped knee nursed and treated, every newly learned thing all wiped away in an instant. And everything was gray, and Mom was screaming, and her boy wasn't breathing, and the world seemed to shrink. His breath was gone. Mom didn't try to pump him full of her air, didn't push against the wet of his shirt because it was useless. Mom just pulled him close until she was wet, too. He was gone. And he never looked so small.

Familiar

by Ithzel Rubio

First Prize - Poetry

That twinkle in your eyes
When you hum my name;
In some other life,
I knew you.

Your hand is perfect in mine.
Love, your voice is so melodic.
Surely, once upon a time
I knew you.

When you gave yourself to me,
My heart finally felt complete.
I was so certain that
I knew you.

Blissfully lost in your aura,
Even after all this time
My greatest joy in life
Is to know you.

The String of Seclusion

by Rhayne Trahan

Second Prize - Poetry

A simple sunset descends
on another string of similar days.
Another marker in a series
of jaded things.

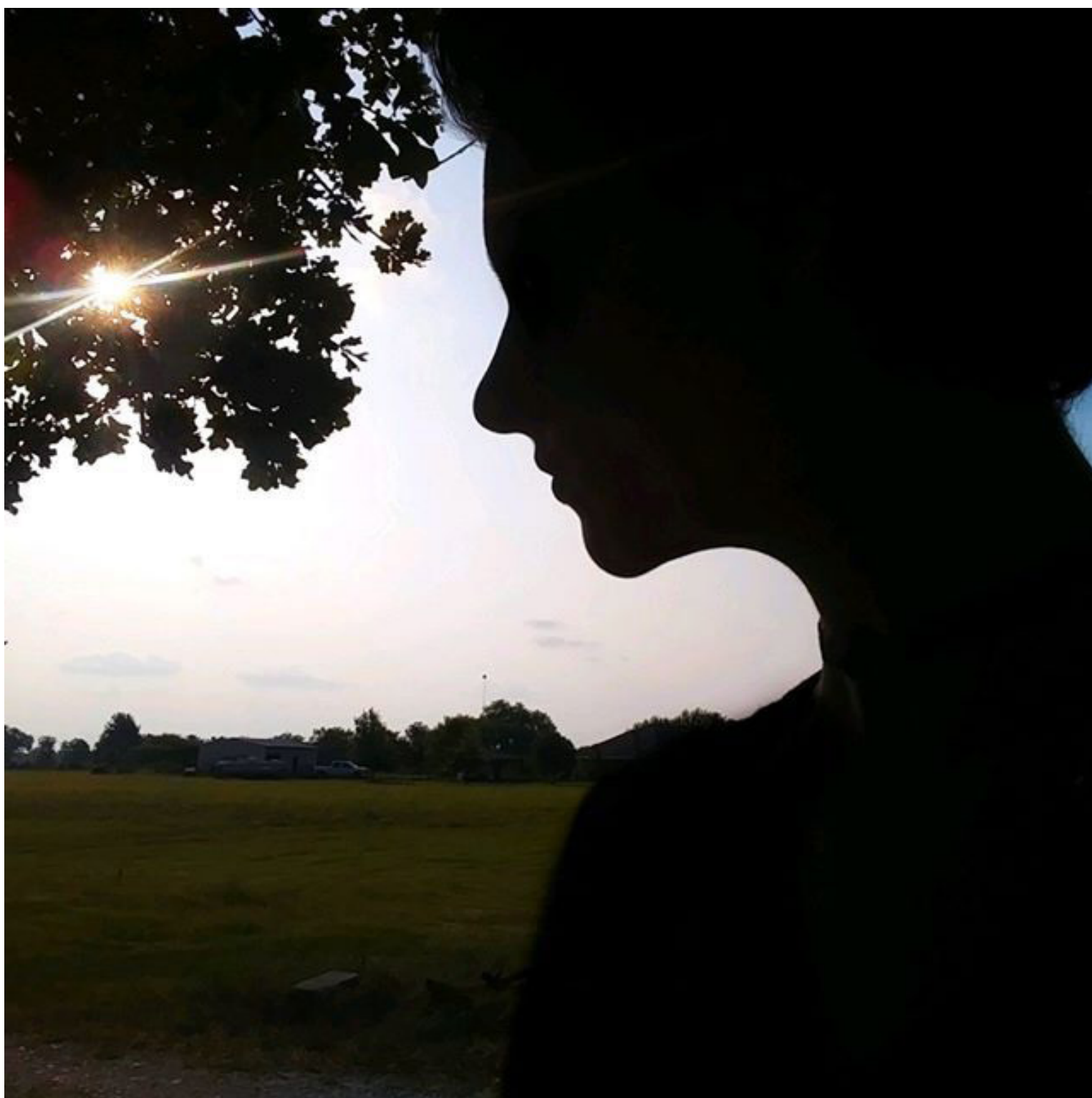
*the scarceness of need.
the drowning of want.*

Still, how lucky to see a golden sky
crowning the hills of *nothing* and *no one*,
seeing miles and miles left maskless.

A pasture marked by *gates*,
and a second marked by a *tick*,
and if this were different we'd be
watching this sun go down everywhere,
but nowhere sounds better now.

*And if this were different
we'd be better now.*

The sunset behind a hill
Not promising to return.



Kirwin Foster

Insight

A Piece of Glass

by Madison Lindell

Third Prize - Poetry

From across the room,
I see my enemy:
A piece of glass showing the image of me
One that doesn't make me happy
My most hated object
"You know I hate you, right?"
But I can't get enough
Of the piece of glass that controls my life,
Mocking me,
Hair out of place
"Will you quit mocking me?"
Yet it continues
Pointing out the dips in my hips,
As if it was a little kid driving past a neon sign
"Okay, I get it. I'm not good enough."
I walk closer
And stare
Wanting to break the piece of glass
That I've let define me
The piece of glass pressed against my skin
"Why don't you love me? " I ask.
Though the piece of glass is not who I'm talking to.



Kirwin Foster

Mirror

Reflection

by Ithzel Rubio

The mirror was a welcome sight,
After weeks of dreary walls,
A relief from sunken, bloodshot eyes,
Or days with nothing at all.

...Or days with all the wrong things, rather,
When I loathed my every breath,
Days of vices that stained me scarlet,
And sleepless nights I still regret.

But when I gazed into my reflection,
(I'll admit, it had been a while),
I could see I needed to amend,
And heal for my survival.

I greet her more often now,
My dearest in the mirror,
"I love this, and I love you,
I'm so glad you're still here."

Grape Juice

by Drew Riley

Second Prize - Prose

In the beginning, well, a little after the beginning, there was grape juice. One day, my husband, Calvin, and I were taking a stroll in the beautiful garden that God had given us, breathing in the sweet scent of the gardenias and frolicking in the soft, bright green grass. Calvin and I had been tending the garden for as long as we could remember, and we loved every second of it. This morning, like every morning, we woke up next to each other from a deep rest, greeted by the warm, life-giving rays of the sun as they peeked over the tree line. We lay together and watched the sunrise, soaking in the beauty of the new day, then rose, thanked God for each plant, and began our stroll by greeting each plant with tender hands and water, if the plant so desired. Everything grew effortlessly brighter and more beautiful each day. When the sun peaked at noon, we went over to our favorite spot at the edge of the garden to eat and have our lunchtime chat with God.

The garden was surrounded by bright green hedges, which we groomed every so often, and big, vibrant trees that provided shade whenever we needed it, no matter the time of day. There were also grapevines among the trees, but God told us not to eat their grapes, lest we know evil and die. God wanted us to flourish like the garden He gave us. There was also a single distinct tree in the garden, called the Tree of Life, but we never ate from it.

We made our way to our favorite spot at a gap between two trees and sat down to look out at the crystal-clear rivers and deep, lively valleys down the slope outside the hedges. Butterflies danced through the air, birds sang to the rhythm of the running, and the cool breeze whistled past our warm faces; thus was the Song of Life. My stomach growled, catching the attention of a snake on the other side of the hedges, and well, you know the rest. The snake tried to get me to eat the grapes, telling me how good they tasted, but I didn't let him get me that easy! I reasoned that if I squeezed the juice from the grapes and drank it, nothing would happen. God never said we couldn't drink the grapes.

I took a cluster of grapes in my hand, tilted my head back, and held the grapes above my open mouth; then I squeezed them between my hands until the juice dripped down onto my tongue. My eyes widened and my tastebuds danced. I turned to Calvin, mouth gaping, and held the grapes out to him with my juice-covered hands.

I said, "You have to try this."

His brow creased, and then he snatched the grapes out of my hands without a word and savagely juiced them. This began a frenzy of passing the grapes back and forth, squeezing as much juice out of them as possible before God came out for our lunchtime walk and talk. We couldn't stop. Juice missed our faces and dripped from our lips, and some foamed out the sides of our mouths.

As juice hit the grass, the air began to lose its sweetness. At one point, I'm not sure when, the signature scent of the gardenias vanished, and as more air passed through my nostrils, I smelled something completely foreign. It was as if all warmth and sweetness had been sucked out of the air until it vanished. Now, I would describe the scent as cold and bitter. I turned to Calvin and he to me. We stared at each other, wide-eyed and guilty. The grapes fell from Calvin's hands and we simultaneously cried,

"Oh no!" Calvin's hands went to the back of his head and mine to my hips and we nervously paced back and forth.

I yelled, "What do we do? Why did we do that?"

"We? Stephanie, you started it!"

"And you didn't say anything!"

"Whatever!" he paused, "Babe, let's put this back on the tree."

We frantically ripped away vines, searching for one stringy enough to tie the crushed grapes back onto the vine.

"I got one!" I ran frantically to the spot where the now crushed grapes had once been, and Calvin scrambled to pick them up.

I yelled at him, "Hurry!"

"Stephanie, Calvin?"

It was God. Calvin fumbled the grapes again and we stared at each other, frozen. Then our eyes darted all around us, looking for somewhere to hide. We turned to the hedges and dove hastily into the small space between them. Calvin's grapes got pricked by a twig on the way and he let out a repressed squeal. We lay in wait in the newfound cold and bitterness, trembling and squeezing our eyes shut as God came looking for us. In no time at all, God stood in front the bushes. He just watched, waiting a minute before calling again.

"Stephanie? Calvin?" He paused, "can you come out?"

We opened our eyes and looked at each other, then peeked out with big, round eyes, cowering when we saw Him. We crawled out and Calvin said nervously, "Uhm, we were scared." He winced abruptly and looked down, then exclaimed, "Oh! And naked!" Our bloodstained hands shot out

to cover ourselves and nurse our wounds.

God asked, "Did you have the grapes?"

Calvin hastily replied, "Well, technically we drank it! And Stephanie did it first!"

God turned to me, brow raised and eyes fallen, and asked in the same miserable voice, "What have you done?"

I told God about the snake, so He cursed the snake and foretold his eventual destruction.

He turned back to me and said, to my surprise, "I will not kill you," he paused, "Humanity will not cease, but you will continue in pain and conflict."

He turned to Calvin and said, "You too turned away from me. You will continue to tend the earth, but not this garden. The land will not grow beautiful and fruitful like this, and your work will not be easy like it was here, but hard. It will be like this until you die."

Then God took an animal and killed it, rather than us, and made its skin into clothing. He gave us the skins to cover ourselves and said, "Now you know the stench of evil and death. If you eat the fruit of the Tree of Life now, then—" God closed His eyes and winced. "You must go. Quickly." So God led us out of the garden, down a path we could not remember. "You can't go back. Not yet." Those were His last words before turning up the path and the garden's growth sealed itself shut.

We looked around at our new world. Everything was different down here. Now, the river appeared cloudy, and the valley dry. The flow of the water was no longer rhythmic, but chaotic. The birds still sang, but not like they used to, and the air was no longer warm and sweet, but all too familiar. It's painful to think about that we will never again view this land from our favorite spot in the garden. I turned to Calvin with desperate eyes and a sunken face, and asked, "Now what?"

Did the Poems Lie?

by Madison Lindell

The clock has ticked.
Its hands have tocked
Countless times,
But my heart stops when you're around.

Did the poems lie
When they described what love feels like?
They didn't say what to do
When touching it felt like nothing.
I missed something at that moment,
but I don't remember blinking.
I don't remember when I agreed to belong to you
the way you imagine yourself belonging to me.

Did the poems lie about sparks and magic?
I expected rabbits pulled out of hats,
Not a pit in my stomach.

The clock has ticked
Its hands have tocked
Countless times.
I regret wanting my heart to skip past time you.
Now I know
The poems are true.



Kirwin Foster
Second Prize (Visual Art)

Glitch



Grace Trice
Third Prize (Visual Art)

Rocky Mountain Milky Way

Perhaps

by Kirwin Foster

Perhaps I'm not the only one thinking,
Dreaming
Of a better life that's not sinking.
Meaning
We could stay afloat,
Have a hope,
Rest our throat from
All the years our soul has been screaming.

Spirit of Freedom

by Grace Trice

Hate fills the air,
Signs fill the skies,
Along with messages of hate and demise.
Blood against blood,
Friend against friend.
We live in the home of the free and the brave, they said.
Then why in the land
Of the brave and the free,
Is the bondage of hate our way?
Perhaps there is
Another day
To be truly brave and free

Gone

by Victor Martinez-Gil

I killed a man for you,
And now that man is gone.
Gone forever I think,
Or at least it feels that way.

I killed a man for you.
I did it for love
Or for ignorance,
I am not sure which.

I killed a man for you.
I don't remember how,
Or when,
But I remember who.

I killed a man for you.
His family misses him.
His friends miss him;
He misses himself, too.

I killed a man for you.
The police never showed up.
People look at me strangely
Because they know what I have done.

I killed a man for you,
And I still keep the weapon.
Where else would it be?
It is my weapon.

I killed a man for you,
Something that I should have never done.
I do regret it,
But now he is gone.

I killed myself for you.
And now I am gone.
Gone forever I think,
Or at least it feels that way.

Dreams

by Drew Riley

The Depths

Life is but a dream,
And I am lost at sea.
Not in a boat, but down in the depths
With no humans to be seen.

I paddle and paddle and paddle on,
Waiting for a pinch to prove me wrong,
But nothing comes, no wind or sun,
And down I stay in the dark and pong.

I swim and swim and swim,
Trying to pretend that I have fins
I swim and swim and YANK!
I cannot go, and my hope is turned to grim.

I look back, and behold, a chain.
I cease to swim because it offers none to gain,
So I sink and sink and sink,
And at the bottom I see my problem: an anchor lain in grain.

I must get this weight off my neck, but how?
If I put it to a pen then I can write it down,
And wake myself up from the deepest sleep
Before I cease to dream, and drown.

Life is but a dream,
And never is what it seems.
We wade in sin and darkness grim
Infatuated with fins, yet blind to the sea.

Land

Light shone bright and creatures flew,
Gliding like stingrays in the sky.
Children chirped in branches bloomed,
Breathing songs of a foreign life.

I think I know what it feels like to breath now.
I'd never heard anything so sweet, so sound.
I'd never seen anything with wings, or ground.
I never knew anything outside of the ocean.

'Twas but a dream.
I can't stop dreaming about things I've never seen,
Or swimming with creatures I'll never be,
But when I close my eyes, I seem to have the most clarity.

Life is not what it seems down in the depths
Where I swim with sharks and am cursed to breath.
But honestly, I kind of like the sea.
There is nothing to occupy my thoughts, but only me.

There is no chirping, no light.
I can wade, and wade, and wade
Thoughtless.
Because there is no vision in sight.

These things I dream, can they really be?
Things I haven't seen,
But seem to be
Reality.

Mirror

Water evaporates,
Then people flood the streets.
Fires scorched the earth to increase its yield,
Until humans plundered its field.

I closed my eyes, wincing at the sight,
Then opened wide
And woke up, down in the depths
Where I only see myself.

This is life down in the depths.
Where eyes only look in,
Glued to a mirror,
Blind to the cracks that are really yourself.

"Oh, what a dream it was!"
An excuse that dismisses reality.
An excuse that looks into a mirror and sees tragedy,
But forgets what a mirror does.

My eyes are glued to the mirror and can't look away from myself.
I need to step away and think about myself less,
But I'm still talking to myself,
I'm helpless.

These thoughts were weighing me down,
Down in the depths.

Reality

There was too much pressure on my mind;
I had to be drowning.
Hallucinations showed me sharks
With seaweed crownings.

I was blind to the graves in the depths around me.
Sand cemented my eyes and held me, drowning.
But I was already dead,
Tied to a stone in the depths below.

A life preserver could not help me.
I needed a Lifeguard to loose my chains
And breathe life into my bones.
His yoke was light, and head was thorny.

I was dead in the water
Dreaming of things that shouldn't be, but really are.
They condemned me to death inside the sea.
But now I see, and write it down.

If these words are true, they can't be mine.
If there is blood in this pen, I pray it's divine.
I pray the paper is bread
And blood is the wine.

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Arath Herrera

Life's a Glitch

Rocks Still Crumble

by Kirwin Foster

Independent, put-together
Face of stone, never surrender
To emotions, clawing for attention.
Mighty warrior, nerves of steel,
But sometimes she can't help but feel
What chokes her, a pain she does not mention.

Mountains cave, and we all stumble.
What if I told you
Rocks still crumble?

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Thanks also to all the faculty and staff whose donations to the MCC Foundation make this magazine possible. Without your support, we would not be able to fund our prizes and recognize our students' exceptional talents.

After the End

by Ithzel Rubio

Years of trial and triumph,
But the end is finally in sight.
The end of all our small-town problems,
The end of grade-school drama and fights,

But what is next?
Besides paperwork and looming maternity?
And who is next?
To be snatched up in this whirlwind of eternity?

Time's arrow marches forward,
Infinitely close to the end.
Helpless, I sit and watch and wait
For the rest of life to begin.

The Human Mind

by Madison Lindell

The human mind
Is a dangerous tool.
An example of reasoning
Blamed as the defense of the heart's
Foolishness,
As if the mind isn't responsible for both.

The heart pumps blood
For you to live and move
But it's the poster child of love.
We tell the evil they don't have one.
We fight our own mind's doubts and negative prescriptions,
But we forget
Our hearts cannot love
Without following our mind's command.



Arath Herrera

Sold