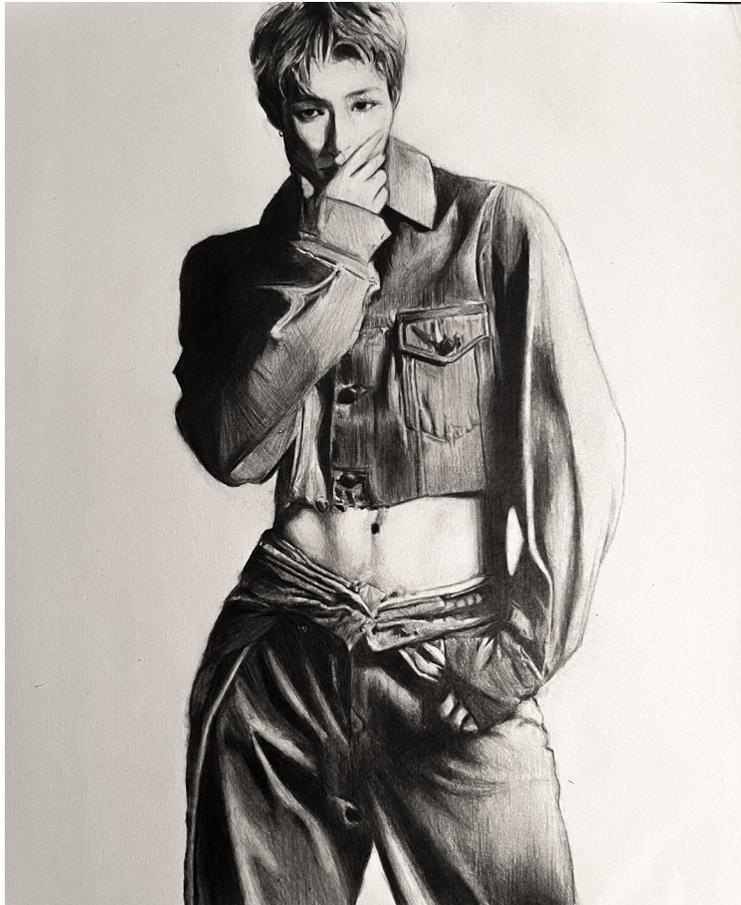


The Stone Circle

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Arianna Zinz

Mingi Ateez

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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Walking towards a Purpose

by Jonah Key

First Prize - Prose

He awakes. ¿What am I? Access: iMan Experimental Model Ja, Subset Division K. Brain grown in pod on way to planet Sator, super-stainless stellanium skeleton, total matter-energy conversion reactor, faux-organs serving no purpose but to...fool. A spy. Pseudo-flesh, oculars, some other parts as yet transparent or not grown, as for now unnecessary. ¿How will Unit JaK know?

<¿Oh, Space! ¿Do you want help, stranger?>

Secondary sensors indicated the being's approach and tallied all information along with that of the surroundings—now JaK switches conscious focus to being. Processing language assimilated from mind... This creature—local aLukanfa colonist, individual of which future pinging indicates harvest will be vital to mission success. Serve Boskone.

JaK dutifully opens himself and devours-processes-converts-becomes the seeming pattern of lights, thinks about Boskone in his new form with new memories. Serve Boskone. The Boskone Corporation, a highly successful iteration of the ultimate will: survive as long as possible, using any means to do so. 63 universe-types permanently occupied, 10.942 universal harvests for spare parts and/or to undermine or eliminate rivals ongoing, 10.000.957 accomplished, leaving no significant matter. JaK was built by local faction that offered to become Boskone subsidiary in exchange for survival—semi-logical, as this minor reality cannot resist Boskone, but Boskone's records suggest they are unlikely to be spared.

As for this individual...A member of a race from a distant galaxy whose megaculture isolates from the local war, but allows members to join the conflict at will. Rather foolish. This being chose to serve the "United Galaxies," specifically the portion that broke away from the Idealist conspiracy and created it for their own purposes. He believed the Glorious War of Survival to be a 3-way conflict between ideologies, rather than Us and Them. All who believe that will not survive.

I am walking in sunshine, along a path the aLukanfa thought was beautiful. He considered his enjoyment of beauty something the Corporation could not copy, something that would always be his. Data says it is not Boskone's corporate strategy to do so, but that is irrelevant: we can mimic external signs of it, as when a soldier returns from a walk. Additional data: This world is under a shield, projected from its core, so the soldiers in the encampment do not expect enemies. However, Boskone Central authorized the expense of using an existential swap device for one second, swapping a portion of shield 1 meter across with an inferior counterpart vulnerable to teleportation. The natives noticed nothing.

I am walking up to the local military base, from which sensors indicate the locals project a shield around the local sun-star. It is intended to defend it from the Idealists, that native sub-faction known to alter starlight so it alters thoughts. The base is not as secure as it might be, because it is one of several projecting such shields simultaneously. I am not stopped—relatively few locals can see an aLukanfa of this type under bright lights, and other aLukanfa at this base trust him immensely.

Halls. Pondering. Data suggests a temporal pinging device was used to determine the right series of events to gain the outcome... some outcome.

Nearing the central controls. My movements have been discerned as disturbing, and psychics have discovered part of my nature. Their defenses activate, as do mine. They are slaughtered, and I am damaged.

At the controls, I meet a woman as young as I appear to be, attempting to destroy them. She notices me, sits up straight in her wheelchair, and says that Boskone cannot win, that the Corporation is more afraid of everyone else than anyone is of them.

She remains straight. I destroy the controls. I am fatally shot in the back.

The station commander points a cannon at me and talks about how this doesn't matter because of all the other stations. The woman looks sad and starts praying for people to escape or to die rightly, for something to stop this happening again. She suspects, of course, that strikes on the other stations have happened. I'm on what's left of my back, and I notice that by firing at me the commander made a hole in the ceiling through which I see the sun. I realize my purpose.

Some minutes later, the commander stops talking. He's choking on his words, then screaming. The sun is crumbling.

Eating time for the Boskone.

I am a weapon. I am a product. I was born to make a star go out.

Down with the Ship

by Harlie Hargraves

Second Prize - Prose

The stars are out on this gloomy night, perhaps to comfort the poor souls tied to the ship's railing. The moon illuminates their shaking forms perfectly as it slips from the cloud barrier. Nothing will ease their troubled minds. Not the pirate captain swatting his curved blade before their pale faces. His laughter at their harsh flinching chills my bones. I see his sinister grin from my perch on the massive rock that juts from the green ocean.

I tilt my head to study his face. A thick, cream-colored scar adorns his entire left cheek. I gulp to keep my guts from spilling out. His menacing gray eyes pierce my heart.

The scream of a man interrupts my thoughts. My hands fly to my mouth to contain my torment. I cannot bear to watch these men walk the plank into shark-infested waters, yet there are far worse creatures.

"Do ya realize what ya did here on this night?" the captain growls into the man's face. He grips the prisoner's soiled tunic so tight his knuckles might pop.

"I-It was an accident. I swears on me mother's grave."

The captain howls, and the other men squirm against their ropes. The crew smirk like this is any other day.

How awful this sight is! With one flap of my deep blue scaled tail, I'm off the rock and halfway to their broken ship. My black hair floats in the churning water as I peer up at the plank. Barnacles line the underside. It's a miracle it supports their weight as they walk to their deaths. The captain tosses the man like a sack of kelp. I bite my bottom lip, try not to call out in fright. I shouldn't be watching this.

"I catch ya in me treasure chest, and you says it's an accident? Boy, am I just a dandy?!" he bellows. His breath becomes fog as it leaves his lips. A shudder hits my spine like a bolt of sea lightning.

It won't be long. They will walk the plank for defying the captain, for attempting to steal his gold, rubies, and diamonds, which he stole from others. How ironic!

How can I sit and watch this happen? Sure, they are not innocent, but murder is not the answer, not even for crooks and thieves. I will not abide it.

The captain grabs the man and tugs him onto the plank. My breaths quicken and my eyes widen as the pirate tosses the man over the side. He couldn't fight for his life.

Before he swallows the brutally cold water, I dive deep, snatch him with webbed fingers, and pull him up. I hold him to my chest with all my strength and grunt at his weight. Though I won't let him go, I'm too late for the others. They've sunk too deep for me to reach them. This man in my hold is the lucky one.

The captain yells orders to sail away. I breathe into this man's mouth to keep him alive long enough to let the ship pass. After five minutes, I rush him to the same rock where I watched his fate. With all my strength, I hoist him up onto the wet surface. He doesn't fall off the other side.

The clouds scatter, and the moon glows, its bright blue light gleaming on his face. I gasp at the large gash on his cheek.

As it moves away, the ship shatters under the force of a monstrous wave. Harsh rain pelts down on us. A wicked smile twists my lips as the crew and prisoners howl. The sheer force of the water shakes the ship as if it weighs less than a sand dollar, yet I don't catch wind of the captain following them into the sea.

I glance at the man I saved before swimming ahead. The pirate captain stands at the quarterdeck with his rough black hat in his hands. His sharp gaze watches saltwater cover the main deck and destroy everything in sight. No sympathy arises in me at this tragic event. I hate this pirate with all my being.

"And so, Captain Finn goes down with his ship," I say. I don't linger to watch his boat sink into the choppy, green water I call home.

I gather the unconscious human man in my arms and drag him below the surface. The need to bring him somewhere safe, away from all this death, fills my heart. His life rests in my hands, for better or worse.

The Truth

by Kaitlyn Bailey

First Prize - Poetry

The truth is always,
On the tip of your tongue,
Caught like snowflakes,
In the morning sun.

Refreshing, yet biting.

The truth can be simple, pretty, and clear.
Like standing atop the mountains,
where it snows all year.

The truth can be complex, ugly, and muddy.
Like water deep in the sewers,
Beneath the broken city.

Trust me:
Secrets are best left to the wind and trees,
For on human lips they beg to be free.

Harden Not Your Heart

by Justin Kennedy

Second Prize - Poetry

Harden not your hearts; instead, still your blades.
Do not react from anger, rage, or any emotion that quickly fades.
Decisions born of malice are those we most regret.
Likewise, they are the ones that bring us the greatest fret.

Learn to calm yourself, to let your fury subside.
Realize there is more to life than preserving your pride.
Learn there is no shame in accepting an apology.
Instead of unleashing the sin of wrath, discover the grace of clemency.



Yuto Goto

Blue Serenity

The One

by Perla Reynoso

Third Prize - Poetry

I have always been the one before.
You know the one—
The one who he doesn't think is worth changing for.
The one who shows him how to treat a girl.
The one who begged for the bare minimum.
The one who tried to see his perspective, to change her ways.
The one who cried herself to sleep because he put everyone else first.
The one who shows boundless love but accepts minimal love in return?
The one who is terrified to trust again, but does it to be disappointed,
I have always been the one.

I have always been the one who is made to feel like I'm crazy.
You know the one—
The one who was told she is just a friend.
The one whose gut feeling is right but hears that she is overreacting.
The one who kept quiet so she could keep you.
The one who thought he would never do that and endured worse.

I have always been the one who has had a big heart.
I have always been the one with pure intentions.
I have always been the one who was betrayed in the end.
I have always been the one, but never the right one.



Emma Jaques

Stars

Las flores en el campo

by Angel Aquino-Pineda

First Prize - Poetry in Spanish

Somos los que fuimos,
Y lo que pudimos ser.
Somos de este momento
Así como lo que no podemos ver.

Somos criaturas del pasado cautivo
así como el futuro inexistente y masivo,
Somos criaturas de la oscuridad amada
y de la luz que se filtra bajo la nada.

Somos hijos de este sol muerto
y de la bruja que vive en el huerto,
Somos parte del frío asfalto
y las horas que no detienen su asalto.

Somos hijos de esta tierra madre,
Y por enemigo el padre.

Fuimos lo complejo en lo sencillo, lo divino,
Éramos lo personal de un cuchillo, y lo efímero.

Somos las estaciones, el brillo y las canciones,
Entre el olvido y lo vivido, los sermones.
Así las mañanas, las hazañas y enseñanzas,
Y los antecesores los colores, los olores y sabores.

De la cueva al lienzo, seremos lo eterno,
De la tinta en el trazo,
Y en nuestro tramo,
Semillas y marchitas, las flores en el campo.

A quien corresponda

by Maritza Hernandez

Second Prize - Poetry in Spanish

Quiero aprender a perderte
Así como aprendí a conocerte
Quiero aprender a olvidarte
Así como aprendí a amarte...

Quemaré los recuerdos de lo que algún día fuimos
Que pudimos pero no debimos

O tal vez ya no quisimos
En hacernos más daño
a nosotros mismos.

Qué ironía en terminar
Algo que jamás pudo comenzar
En fin fue bueno ahogar
Algo que sabíamos que no iba a funcionar

Pues aun sigues en mi mente
como rentero ausente

Como último deseo te pido
Que me bendigas con tu olvido
cariño mio prefiero ser tu enemigo
Pues me causa martirio

En solo poder decirte amigo
Pues tú bien sabes
Que no me merezco este castigo.



Judith Nuñez
Second Prize - Visual Art

Rooster Running



Justin Pryor
Third Prize - Visual Art

Album Cover

Night and Day

by Justin Kennedy

Some places have day, and others have night.
Some have the sun, and others the moon in their sight.
Sometimes the moon shines like the sun, ever so bright,
And sometimes even the moon reveals no light.

Distorted Expectations

by Amara Burghard

Dull hair, dull eyes
Young girl, here lies.
A smile on her face
To herself, a disgrace.

Pale skin, pale clothes
Real self, none knows
Confidence in her step
In secret, she just wept

Is she on death's decisive door?
Or already resting evermore?

People praise, people blame
To her, it's shame
Achievements overflow
Failure in reflection

Chores left, chores right
In her, no fight,
Always helping others
No complaint uttered

Do people really love that girl?
Or just sing those praises for that churl?

Her view of herself
Is not what others see
A body with nothing else
Intellect, beauty, nor personality.

Every breath, step, thought,
A disappointment, a stain, a failure.
Saw everything as her fault
With her perceived, distasteful behavior

Family, friends, peers, and professors
Saw prowess, skill, knowledge, kindness
Perceived expectations became stressors
Anxiety disguised by politeness

Weak, stupid, ugly, plain
Deserving of any and all pain
"Should've never been born"
Is what the girl had sworn

When people looked at her,
They did not see a saboteur
Instead, something pure
In need of no cure.

Reflection in the mirror
Could not be clearer
Not a child or a daughter
Just an imposter.



Justin Pryor

Cologne Advertisement



Arianna Zinz

Seulgi RV

It's Me

by Harlie Hargraves

It's a nice day to gaze upon the blue sky.
To sit peacefully and watch the moving clouds.
I haven't a clue as to why I'm here.
Perhaps to observe the life around me.
And yet I can't seem to enjoy any of it.
But why is that?
For that answer, I must tell you.

I fell a long way down to the bottom.
A swift breeze tickled all sides of me.
It was easy for me to let go of my home.
I knew deep down within me to let go.
There was no fear to swell in me,
So I flew with the winds,
Though my flight was never meant to last.

I soon landed with a gentle thud.
Completely still I was,
Until a small four-legged beast came.
I was more than startled.
The force of this red and white creature stirred me.
I had been lifted in the air like I was air.
But I enjoyed soaring over the brown.

Given the chance to see the many green.
They were once my brothers and sisters.
Now that I have been chosen to fall, I'm me.
Alone on the bottom, surrounded by everything.
Their time will come soon enough.
I think I shall be waiting for others.
Our destiny awaits our churning arrival.

Its Unrelenting Hold

by Amara Burghard

Fleeing through unforgiving forest
Sharp rocks slicing bare feet
Brambles rip pale skin
The young woman wants to scream

Breaths come in short, rapid, bursts
Heartbeats echo in thunderous booms
Footfalls heavy and quick
Branches unceremoniously snap
Shattering the quietness.

She dares not look back
What she left, now in the past
No desire to return
To the miserable life that was hers
Now freedom she has earned

It's not yet in her grasp
They—it wants her back
So this chase ensues
It doesn't like to lose

The woman suffered at its hands
Until the torment, no longer she could stand.
She endured what she could
Then planned her escape
That place of torture and hate

That place, those "people"
Made her what she is
A creature, a monster,
A being unnatural, a sin

Vowed to herself
No longer would she be a weapon.
Instead live for herself and
those who she claims, her children

With determination,
She continues to flee
Through a fatal forest.
Sharp stones still slice
Sore, bare feet.
Brambles persist in ripping
Raw flesh and tangling in hair.
The maiden weeps and the desire
to scream remains trapped there

The battered, bruised,
And blood-stained body
Keeps trudging on
before all hope is gone

The silver eyes look up
And reflect the sunset sky
She knows in her heart
That the future will
One day brighten.

Time Goes On

by Justin Kennedy

Time goes on.
Every day has a new dawn.
If you're awake, then you will see
The beauty of the new day and how quick it is to flee.

Time goes on if you are ready or not.
Its speed is a constant and steady trot.
Stop for a moment, and you're left behind.
Time is many things, but it is rarely kind.

Time goes on; it pauses for none.
It is like the rising and setting of the sun.
Try not to spend it in the past.
You never know how long it will last.

Passerby Intimacy

by Lin Guo

First Prize - Prose (Fall 23.1 Issue)

"Hello, there. Please excuse me."

Startled, I turned and stepped to the side, then said with a nod, "Ah, good afternoon."

The man took my spot and opened a tin box, pinching a cigarette from it. From the corner of my vision, I saw a big, golden dog panting, its tongue and tail wagging. They must have finished their walk. The man brought the cigarette to his mouth, held his hand around it, and lit it.

He takes a deep inhale and a long exhale.

"You must be an observant girl. I've never felt so watched on a casual walk," He commented.

"I'm sorry," I said while looking away. "It's just something I tend to do."

He countered, "Don't apologize, I wasn't trying to call you out. I don't do so well when smoking with others in silence. I like small talk, if you don't mind."

It was rare to come by someone who enjoys small talk, and even rarer for someone to start small talk with me.

"Did you just come from a walk with your dog?" I inquired. "Can I pet him?"

Small talk can be good. I hadn't talked much to anyone recently.

He tugged the leash with one hand to bring his dog closer. I crouched down to its level to scratch behind its ears. It was easy to comb through its fluffy and slick fur, which smelled a little bit like laundry dried out in the sun.

The man took a drag, "Yup. Now that the weather is getting cooler, he likes to get out more. I have no other choice but to follow the real owner," he joked.

Giving his dog another ruffle, I stood and stepped closer to hear him better.

He added, "Do you come to the park often?"

"I do," I answered after a puff, "I get off work around this time and stop here on my way home. I haven't while the autumn market is in town, though."

He was silent for a second, then added, "Is that why there's a lot of traffic? I forgot. Have you been?"

"Yes, every year since I moved here. It's fun to have something to look forward to when it's deadline after deadline this time of year."

"I agree. Work's a burden this time of year when the world's so festive for the holidays."

He broke our eye contact to glance down, "Do you always hold your cigarette-like that?" He asked, and motioned to my hand.

"Like what?"

“Between the ends of your pointer and middle fingers?”

I looked, and it was resting between the top segments of my index and middle fingers. I bent them twice and turned my wrist over to the back of my hand for an inspection and saw the smoke dissipate as it rose.

I joked, “I guess. Am I holding it wrong?”

His eyes twinkled, “No, I’ve always found it interesting that smokers hold their cigarettes differently, and I wonder why.”

What an amusing guy!

“I think it’s my turn to say what an observant person you are,” I said and blew my smoke away from him, “I guess it does say something, but it’s probably just how they’ve seen others around them hold it. What about you holding yours at the—uh... valley between your pointer and middle fingers? Same fingers but different positions—”

“Maybe we’re actually similar people with slightly different preferences,” he took a puff, “Leading similar lives may be why I’ve seen friends hold their cigarettes the same. But my wife and I hold ours differently. What do you make of that?”

We chatted all afternoon, past when our cigarettes burned out and the street lamps turned on; it was just two idling individuals without somewhere to go. Talking with him was so easy! When I revealed where I worked and my pastimes, he shared his past as a neurologist whose research focused on people’s habits. And between our drags and puffs, he also told me his wife was an artist and laughed at how endearing it was running gallery to gallery together at their old age “with aching knees.” Encounters like this with a stranger are nice—being under the same sky at an incomparable proximity for us to liberally ramble. Before he left—it was his wife’s call that reminded him of the time—he thanked me for my time, but I had to interrupt. The camaraderie and affection in our conversation was palpable.

“Would you like some hand sanitizer?” I asked.

“Sure. Thank you,” He said, and rubbed his hands together, “I had a good time.”

“Yes, it was nice meeting you.”

We went our separate ways, and I heard someone call out ‘Goodnight!’ Falling from my wretched eyes

Yesterday's Today

by Kaitlyn Bailey

So many times, I've heard the phrase,
"Things will be better tomorrow."
But when is tomorrow?
I suppose you could say it's yesterday's today,
Yet that is still today.

I've come to realize that Tomorrow is a dream,
A place filled with wishes, hopes, and imaginings.
A never-ending stream.
The "todays" are only its beginnings.

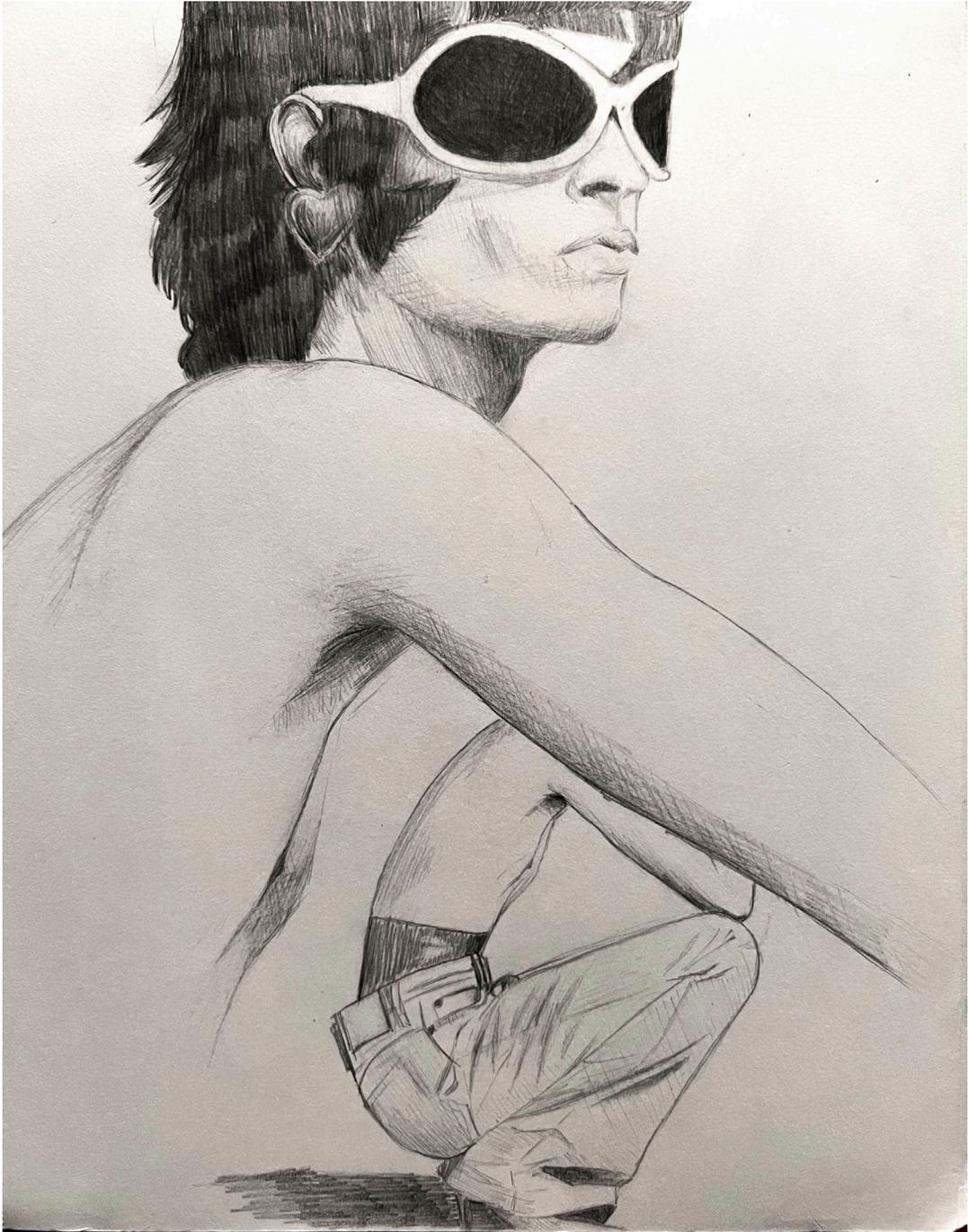
I'd like to think Tomorrow,
Is a land of silver moons and golden dawns,
Of fireflies and little brown fawns.

Perhaps Tomorrow is all in my head,
But for now, I'll dream of it,
From my own little bed.



Harrison Wolf

Dusky Skies of Winter



Arianna Zinz

Lee Hojin

Brutal Truth

by Amara Burghard

First Prize - Poetry (Fall 23.1 Issue)

Falling from my wretched eyes
A crimson river flows.
Ruined is my disguise—
Now everyone here knows.

Often, they misconstrue;
They forced me away,
So I withdrew
To a place I should never stay.

They saw in me a beast,
a deceiver, a pied piper,
Blamed me for the deceased,
Thought I held danger like a fire.

I had never hit, hurt, or harmed.
Not lied, misled, or cheated.
Believe me, I have not charmed,
or of others mistreated.

Yes, I have worn a mask
to keep parts of me from being seen.
Is being treated equally too much to ask?
I suppose so, if I am so obscene.

I gave what I could
and never asked for help.
I tried my hardest to be good,
provided food, clothes, time, and health.

All of that forgotten
When they saw the scene,
Pronounced me fallen,
Dumb to what happened before I intervened.

I protect the weak,
from those who commit evil.
The foreigners had it coming,
when they targeted a child.

I heard the struggle and rushed to see,
a child lifeless and the strangers,
unremorseful, free,
I showed them no mercy,
avenged the innocent,
gave the murderers their sentence.

I used my power,
shattered my mask,
unknowingly seen,
as I performed my task.

Now in exile,
wrapped in thin textile,
I wander alone,
disowned, with no home.

I loathe my "kind",
as I am left with only my mind.
My kind – the foreigners –
those I killed without torture.

Conquering people, they are
who wish to destroy and slaughter.
Now I am faced with the question,
to live my life in this wasteland,

or possibly,
to return to protect the ones
who unjustly blamed me.

Should I remain?
Should I return?
Slowly drive myself insane?
Save them from the burn?

Even if I remain
in this wilderness,
alone and fractured,
I could not ever forgive myself
for betraying the ones
who I once loved,
and swore to protect,
with my whole being.

I must go back!
Defend from this attack!
Even if they blame me,
Even if I hang under the olive tree.

Transition between Seasons

by Kaitlyn Bailey

The smell of spice and faraway rain.
The bare trees in gentle sway.
Fog has gathered here and there,
While I sit comfortably in my chair.

Pathways of fire and golden light,
And the call of owls in the night.
Crows sit on the fence and complain to the field,
And Jack Frost is held captive by a fading shield.

Winter will come soon,
But not yet-
It's still holding its breath.



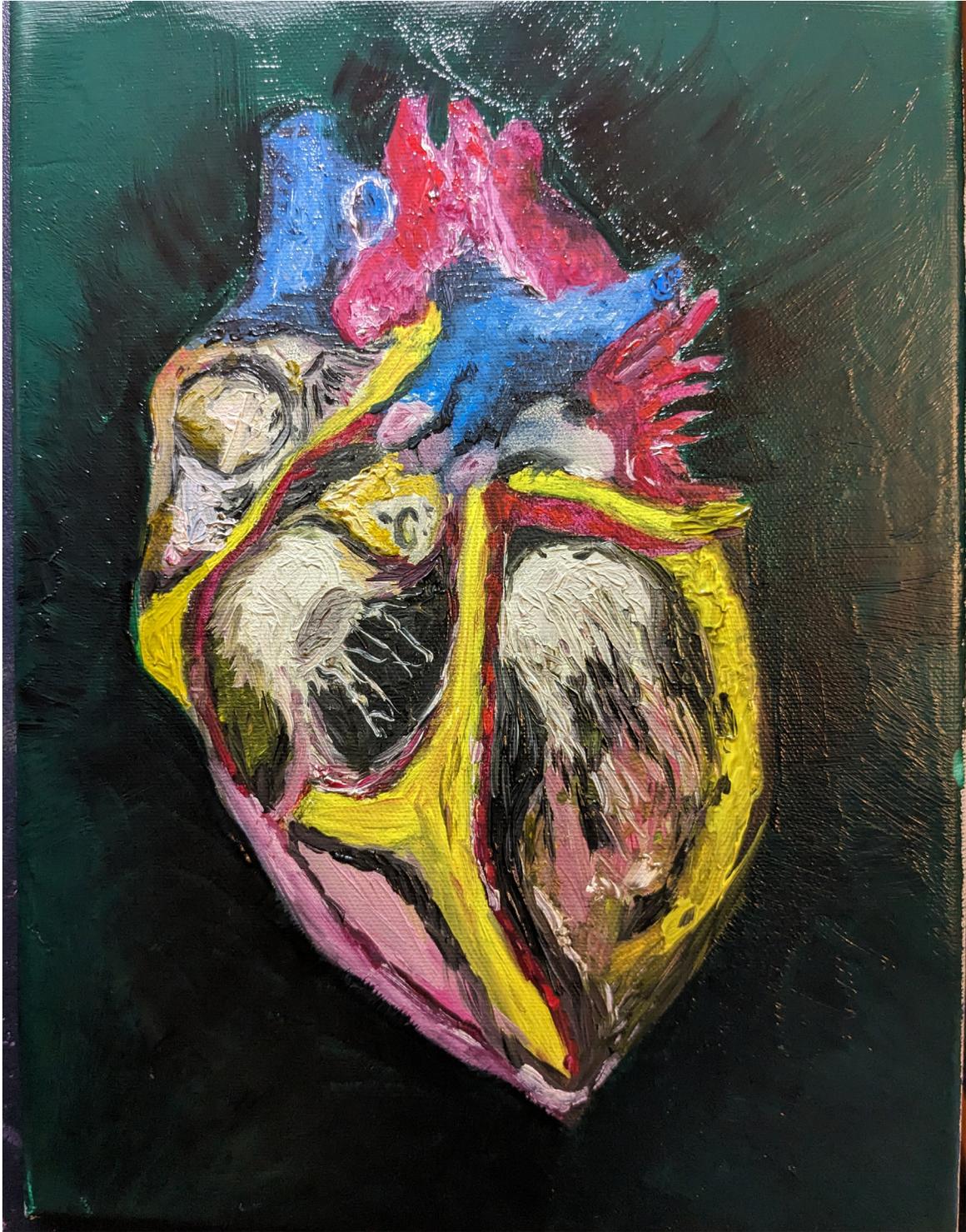
Justin Pryor

Bad Boy Rebellion

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Yuto Goto

Groove Life

I Wish I Could

by Perla Reynoso

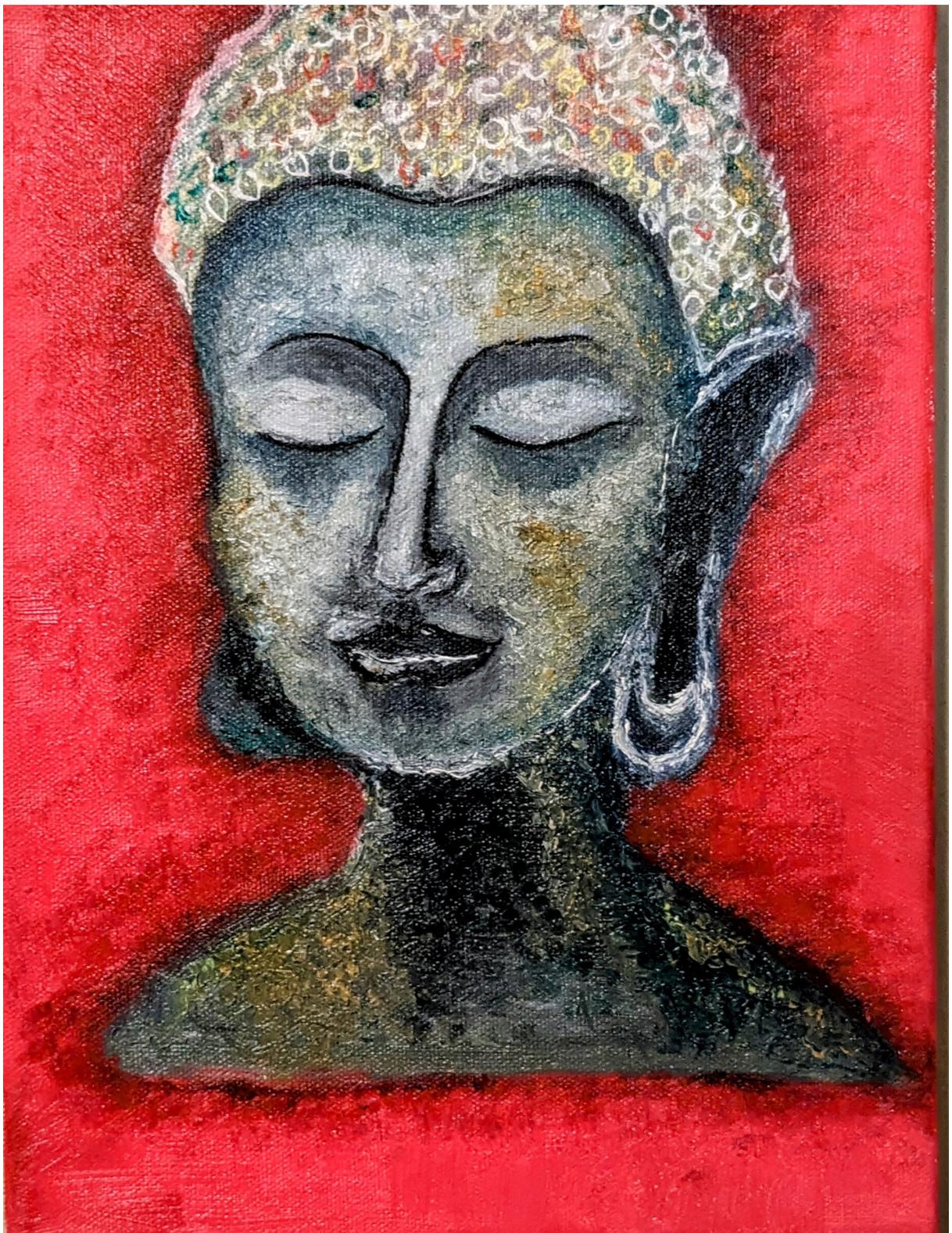
I wish I could forget all the memories we made.
I wish I could forget all our conversations about our future.
I wish I could forget how you laughed, or how your smile formed.
I wish I could forget how safe I felt in your arms.
I wish I could forget the sound of your heart as I lay on your chest.

I wish I could forget how nervous I was when we hung out for the first time.
I wish I could forget the butterflies I felt when you kissed me for the first time.
I wish I could forget that feeling when I saw you for the first time.
I wish I could forget the late-night drives.
I wish I could forget all our inside jokes.

I wish I could forget that night.
I wish I could forget how I knew when I hugged you.
I wish I could forget texting my best friend when I couldn't drive home that night.
I wish I could forget how weak my legs felt walking out of your apartment.
I wish I could forget the screams and tears of pain in her car from that night.
I wish I could forget the ache in my heart from that night, but it lives there still.

I wish I could forget you,
But the truth is,
I'll never forget.
I'll never forget because I still love you, and I always will.

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Yuto Goto

Unveiled