

# The Oakland Review

## VOLUME XLIX

Carnegie Mellon University  
Pittsburgh, PA  
2024

# The Oakland Review

Volume XLIX

*The Oakland Review* was established in 1969 as Carnegie Mellon's literary arts journal. Edited by students, and published in the spring, it serves as a collection of high quality literature and art. Submissions are evaluated anonymously.

For back issue listings, subscriptions, and submissions, please contact:

Editor  
The Oakland Review  
University Center, Box #7  
5000 Forbes Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15232

Find out more at [oakland-review.com](http://oakland-review.com)

Inquiries may also be sent to [oakland.review@gmail.com](mailto:oakland.review@gmail.com)

Copyright © 2024 by *The Oakland Review*

*The Oakland Review* reserves the right to reproduce the works published in these pages in special issues and anthologies. All other rights revert back to authors upon publication.

*The Oakland Review* is funded in part by the Carnegie Mellon student activities fee. The opinions expressed in or by The Oakland Review are not necessarily the views of Carnegie Mellon University.

Cover art by Merlin Enriquez — “Disconnected Lovers Pt. 1”

Cover design by Ellis Jones

Book design by Ellis Jones

## Oakland Review Staff

### *Editors-in-Chief*

Jen Bortner  
Dylan Rossi

### *Editorial Board*

Helen Amon  
Jimmy Baracia  
Kathryn Bell  
Allison Blair  
Sofia Johnson  
Ellis Jones  
Jack Kiggins  
Adrien Marengo  
Elina Lee  
Yuri Lee  
Olivia Reed

### *Designers*

Ellis Jones

### *Managing Editors*

Yui Takahashi  
Leilani Zhang

### *Faculty Advisor*

Lauren Shapiro

# From the Editors

A moment of honesty: I was terrified to put this issue together. In general, there are few things more terrifying than going back to basics, constructing a new foundation— but there is also nothing more refreshing. It has been an absolute pleasure to reconnect with the Carnegie Mellon University student body, both in our own team and in the work we received.

Our editorial board has grown immensely over the past year, and as such the pieces we received were discussed that much more thoroughly. As a result, this collection of work should not just feel like an arbitrarily assembled mass of text, but a representation of the time and consideration of our team at The Oakland Review. Our meetings were anything but procedural, and we only hope that sense of character and distinctness comes through on the page.

Speaking of character, this journal marks our first step beyond CMU as we enter this new local era of The Oakland Review. Getting to know the character of Pittsburgh is something I personally look forward to in our coming issues. Which is to say, this is only the beginning. There are an incalculable number of voices we are yet to hear.

Originally the theme for this issue was going to be “bloom,” an obvious reference to both the Spring semester and our focus on growth as an organization. However, if I may get overly sentimental, I believe this issue is really about identity: countless writers publishing for the first time, the search for personality and style, and our own insistence on being more than a Submittable page, but rather a community with an identity. Finding this identity has been a dream come true. So truly, I hope you enjoy.

Sincerely,  
Dylan Rossi  
Co-Editor-In-Chief

# Contents

Rain .....	7
i lift my lids and all is born again.....	8
Ten Candles .....	9
Firework.....	10
The Cleric .....	12
Notes from the Car Ride .....	13
Uprooted .....	14
El Pastor.....	16
Plum Blossoms .....	17
Pecking.....	18
Feeding .....	19
Disconnected Lovers Pt1 .....	20
Untitled.....	21
I Visit My Childhood Home In My Dreams .....	22
Spectacle .....	24
Steel Wool.....	25
When you speak, I can see only plum blossoms cascading .....	26
Shattered Spell.....	27
Heart of Sand.....	28
Contributors .....	32

*Yuri Xu*

## Rain

Will the raindrops  
of today ever fall  
on me again?

two students bickering,  
drizzles become torrents,  
washing away their troubles

Why are the clouds  
in such a hurry  
to get nowhere?

A raindrop becomes  
distinct from its cloud then blends,  
Into the earth inseparable

Cindy Gao

## i lift my lids and all is born again

*title from Sylvia Plath's "Mad Girl's Love Song"*

After the winter, I burn my hands hatching the honey-thick morning light on my lips like a yolk. I yoke its heat. I let the fog veiling my mind steep in my stale saliva like a placid tea heating to calmness. The raw in my throat fades to low tide. When it returns, I'll let meteor showers ping through me like raindrops as my body flips inside-out in the vacuum of space. I'll burst my head with expanse and sail it off to become Earth's second moon. In the new afterevening, my eyebrows unknit the wool blanket hugging my brain and it itches into the sky. Somewhere below, the sea. Somewhere below, streams tying each other as they race to it. On the wind they kick up, I feel salt crystallize on my fingertips with new clarity on its edges. The horizon liquifies under my touch. I cup mouthfuls, fistfuls, armfuls of the day before me to weigh its eternity and discover it's endlessly blank, like how I used to stare at the world, like how the world unfurls for me now, slamming open like a door. I'll choose it over & over no matter what lies behind all the doors in all the rest of the universe. I've thrown too much behind this one. I, the giant who once died to make it, lying there cold & senseless- my breath wind, my sweat rivers, my body soil- will stay alive for it this time. This time, I throw my arms out and know they'll come back. I feel them close around a nothingness that leans against them quietly, not crying to be filled, but existing in the way a hollow echoes against the inside of a bird's bones as it sings into flight. Like a rustled prayer, like a spring lair, however buried, waiting for a little life to return.

Cindy Gao

## Ten Candles

These things are true. The world is dark. Kitchens are beacons against the dark. You say hearth and mean heart, mean home. Once, we spun our old homes into spools of thread that we tied around our hearts or tore from around our throats or somewhere in between. We scrubbed our stories as best we could into or from the whorls of our fingerprints. We knotted them into our tongues & walked into the labyrinth. We would either be devoured or alchemized into something new and beautiful, which is really not so different. Once, I leaned against a sink eating warm cookies in the company of people unraveling their own threads and felt my heart curl up like a cat in the sunlight. Once, I realized my first home was a home that kept me warmer from a distance than inside it, like a forest fire, like the burning of trees to unfurl seeds of a new one. I am always constructing homes to live in, but this one is not just a reality cobbled from rubble in my head. So, I can no longer change the world with my truths, but I can declare what I have. I have the heart of this labyrinth, this home tugging like a pulse around my wrist. I have a family. And we are alive, alive, alive. And we are alive.

*"Ten Candles" references the mechanics of the tabletop roleplaying game "Ten Candles." There are storytelling segments in the game in which players go around the table, stating "truths." These "truths" cannot cause large changes to the world (magicing enemies out of existence, changing the laws of physics, etc) but can involve smaller changes, like declaring something like "I have a first aid kit." This truthtelling segment starts with the game master's truth of "These things are true. The world is dark." and ends with everyone at the table saying the truth "And we are alive."*

## Firework

The life of a fireworks operator isn't as glamorous as they claimed it was. Yeah, Old Todd said it was cool and all but to be honest I'm pretty bored. I just feel I'm not getting enough out of it. Weird thing to say for a pyromaniac, but it's true.

I'm working for a circus. I don't know if most circuses have fireworks, but mine does. I just travel around and set up the 'works at each new stop on our route. We always set some off on the big shows, the weekend ones, and some odds and ends in between.

Old Todd's retiring soon and leaving me to be the top dog. Or as top doggyish as you can get when you're a fireworks operator at a circus. No street cred on that, I gotta say. I used to be in a gang, used to set fire to buildings on the regular, just to hear the yelling and people running everywhere. Now that was something with spark.

Then they got me for arson and I spent a few years in the slammer cleaning up my act but not my morals.

"Excited we circling back round to your town?" Old Todd asks, passing by me.

I shrug. "Kinda. All my old buddies still locked up, though."

"Still?"

"Yeah, repeat offenders and all that." They didn't duck town like I did. They made other mistakes but that was the first one.

"Parents, though?"

"Yeah, as if they want to see me again. Ha. Had to tell the whole town their son got done for arson."

"They still your parents, boy."

"Don't make no difference there."

Old Todd spits in the dirt. "You gonna skip em, then?"

"Nah. Course I can't skip em. Be seeing them this evening; asked the big boss if I could take off for a bit."

"Good to hear." Old Todd shuffles off and I finish unpacking the firework crates in preparation for the next day's show.

After I'm done with my chores I head into town. When I was younger I'd get pretty excited when the circus rolled up. In earlier years it was cause I loved seeing it. In later years it was cause I could steal pyrotechnic equipment. Damn, those were the days. The excitement was edged in a blurry kind of violence, like the waver in the air above a bonfire.

It's not so exciting now. Should be exciting to head into town to see my parents but honestly I'm kind of dreading it. It's been a year now. We used to be so happy when the circus came to town, me and my parents. They'd laugh as they took me. Don't know where it all went wrong.

The house looks the same when I walk up. Same dusty yard, same peeling paint and oddly placed drainpipe at the edge. The windows are open and I can already smell my mom's pecan pie. Smells like my childhood. My whole life before it sorta all burned down and became the shitty kind of messy. Ashes don't look as good as the fire does, that took me a while to learn.

I know my parents are gonna pressure me to get a better job, do something with my life. Settle down. Always happens that way. It's routine at this point.

One day I bet I'll start to listen to them. Today's probably not it, though. The smoke still attracts me more than the pie. Maybe one day that'll change or maybe that hope's just a fever dream.

I climb up the steps to the porch and knock on the door.

*Alex Yuschik*

## The Cleric

This is the holy city and god, I've missed its ghosts  
factories sifting gravel, trolleys haunting inclines,  
low altitude spitting fog on skyscrapers. Wake up,  
you art deco gargoyles, yellow steel in dead arcs  
ivory facades, pews of dead cars and iron sewage,  
rough hymns of bus maps and clogged traffic.  
This city is a censer swinging smoke and low clouds  
into lewd messages on the dirty buckle of the rust belt  
and I swear, on all your holiness, on all your coal-eyed  
saints and on all your gleaming devils, one day  
it won't be a lie when I say I'm leaving you for good.

*Linnea Leaver*

## Notes from the Car Ride

Hold your breath as you pass by the graveyard,  
That way the ghosts can't get in.  
I know you better than you know yourself.  
That thing in the mirror does not feel love.

Cover your neck when the earthquake comes.  
If the spine is safe, the rest doesn't matter.  
Your life emerged, one day, from mine.  
You tell me, now, who it belongs to.

Flat feet hurt when you strike the water.  
Feel the shuddering of stuck breath.  
The ghosts have been here all along-  
Muffled heartbeat. Rushing of blood.

## Uprooted

*Translated from Bengali by Arunava Sinha*

6.

One Baul's home burns.  
Another is rotting in jail.  
Some cut the Bauls' hair.  
Some make them read the tauba.

They do such peculiar things.  
Who are these who look human  
but never become human?

Some break Lalon's statue.  
Some shut down the music.  
Bauls brought to court  
and put behind bars when  
he should be amongst people  
singing with his dotara.

What is this battle between  
scriptures and songbooks?  
What is this triumph of  
the tilawat over the hand-drum?  
Let them all be, let them all be.  
Together, in their own ways.

Let the Baul sing for people  
and return home at dusk,  
like everyone else, in peace.

7.

Some people want to know—  
where are you from?  
I've come from plains thousands of miles away,  
from the arms of the silt-washed Bay of Bengal.  
I've come from Bangladesh,  
where we have  
a colorful, many-hued Bengali culture.

8.

How much longer must  
I write elegies of my homeland?  
How long will I go on  
writing poetry about my exile?  
I see my neighbor,  
we have never spoken.  
Every morning on the way to work,  
walking his dog.  
We only exchange smiles when we meet.

9.

It's Saturday,  
I don't feel like writing anything.  
Arundhati Roy's new book Azadi  
has arrived by mail from England.  
Let me read this book today instead.  
Let me see  
what Arundhati has written about India  
now under the rule of Hindu fundamentalists.

10.

I buy stamps on ebay.  
I try to find them from my country,  
In the midst of these stamps,  
I try to touch my homeland.  
I have subscribed  
to Bengali TV channels.  
Although I'm too busy  
to watch them.  
Still, I don't cancel  
my subscription,  
I think  
something from my country  
should stay with me.



*Kate Smigie*

## El Pastor



*Macy Walker*

## Plum Blossoms





*Macy Walker*

## Pecking



*Macy Walker*

## Feeding



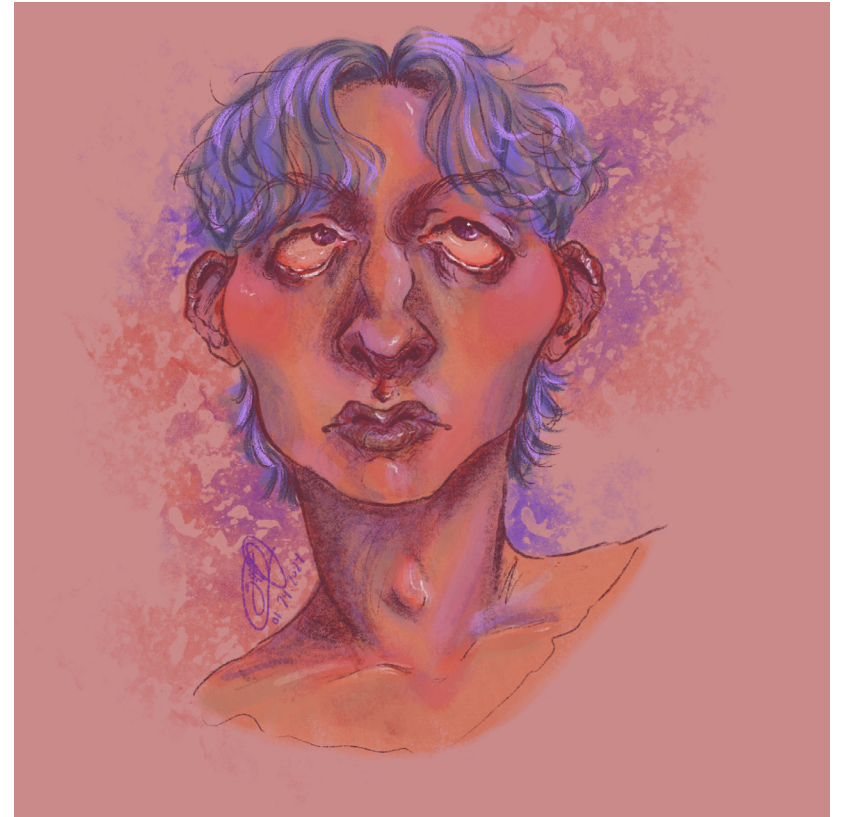
*Merlin Enriquez*

## Disconnected Lovers Pt1



*Gemma Washington*

## Untitled



## I Visit My Childhood Home In My Dreams

I visit my childhood home in my dreams.

I wake up every morning, to my mom prodding my shoulder. The smell of pancakes wafts up the stairs and tickles my nose. My brother and I race to the dining room table, every step so familiar I can run it blindfolded. My bare feet squish against the carpet all the way down the stairs. Then we hit the pearly-white tiles that are always so cold. We sit at the dining room table and eat. Pancakes and bacon and hashbrowns and waffles and cereal and toast and eggs. The sun shines through the glass doors. We talk too loudly. My sister snaps at us to be quiet because she is tired.

I go up the stairs and brush my teeth in the bathroom. Then I change out of my pajamas into clothes. It is a Saturday. Everyday is Saturday in my dreams. We never have to go to school. And my parents never have to go to work. Then my mom takes us to the store, a Target. It is only around the corner from where we live. We ride around in the shopping cart, laughing, as she picks out all the things she needs that week.

She lectures us to be careful with the eggs or else we might crack them.

Then we go home.

Sometimes Spongebob or Scooby Doo is on the television. My brother and I watch it for hours on end. We sit on the brown couch facing the large television. The dogs lay by our feet. My sister sits on her phone on the love seat. The walls are painted green. Other times, we play Mario Kart or Pokemon or Animal Crossing or Paper Mario or Wii Sports or Minecraft. Sometimes I have to ask my dad for help. He always helps me when I need it.

Then we eat lunch. I always have a ham and cheese sandwich. My brother chooses peanut butter and jelly. Sometimes we bring our Nintendo DS down to play on too but my mom told us that we shouldn't play at the table. Mine is pink with a sparkly Princess Peach on the back. It was originally my sisters but she doesn't play games any more. My brother has Mario.

Then my brother and I play outside with my dogs. My sister plays too while my parents watch. We run around the backyard, throwing sticks and kicking balls. We swing so high that I think I might go all the way around. I never

do. We go down the slide which I always thought was more fun right after it snowed. But my dreams are always in late spring, so there was never any. We might bake too. My mom's very special cookies. They are chocolate chip. I love to crack the eggs but I always manage to get a shell in there too.

"Don't worry. It adds texture." My mom says.

Or we go fishing with my dad. He always unhooks the fish for me. I am scared I might hurt it. My mom watches. I only ever catch catfish and my brother black bass.

Then we eat outside after my mom grills. Cheeseburgers and hotdogs. I always eat a cheeseburger with ketchup but my brother never liked it so he just eats a plain hot dog. Our dogs sit beneath us waiting for a piece of food to fall. We laugh and joke and tell stories and say "I love you." Though I find I never said "I love you" enough. I don't think it's possible to.

I visit my childhood home in my dreams every single night.

But it isn't the same.

You can always return to the past, and I do. I really do. But nobody is there anymore.



## Spectacle

The old man sitting across from me at this coffee shop has the same glasses as my sister. We're sitting not quite opposite from each other on identical couches worn in different places, scuffed in similar patterns from similar bodies with similar clothes. There's a story here. I can feel it in the worn pattern of his sweater, in the way that his cane rests in a practiced position next to his leg, the angle perfectly aligned for the next time he gets up to take a leak. He's sunken into the left corner of the couch, crowded against the armrest as if he's used to making room for someone to sit next to him.

He's reading a newspaper, holding and folding it in an exact way that I haven't quite managed to master yet, the thin skin on the backs of his hands displaying the sharp edges of his tendons, mouthing the words as he reads them. (I always bend the edges and drown in the broadsheet.) He kind of looks like Ian McKellen, if I squint a bit. And a little like my grandad. Not that they look anything alike, but Poppy died last year, and I keep seeing him in places that he isn't. (For example, there's a 2-5-1 jazz standard playing over the speakers, and my Pops was a saxophonist. It's a bit on the nose, don't you think?)

I like his polka-dot shirt. I wonder how long it's been since anyone gave him a compliment. I wonder why he doesn't have a ring. I don't think I want to know.

I told him that I liked his sweater, as I was leaving. He didn't hear me the first time, and the repeat lost some of its novelty.

## Steel Wool

Amongst all of the outrageous lies that we offer ourselves,  
I think that concrete is the most absurd.  
Limestone secrets aside, foundations invariably collapse  
As do churches.

Stability. What a banal concept.  
As I lie here, pinned  
Between a dried mess of stone filler  
and the sun, I wonder which will break me first.  
The blue wash staining the backs of my eyelids urges them to close  
I wait for blindness to make my choice for me.

I could bash my hand against this malformed terra until my fingers are  
Broken and my knuckles cry  
"Mercy"  
But I don't.  
Instead, I try to follow my heartbeat to 1000  
And lose track somewhere around nine hundred  
And eighty-seven.

*Wesley Wang*

## When you speak, I can see only plum blossoms cascading

You know, I haven't forgotten  
those nights filled with  
guilt. The worried looks  
and frowns. I know you say life  
strives to live, how I hold  
your bald head like you  
must have for mine as a child, gold  
from birth. What does it mean  
to be yellow and American, America  
devours, even our language falls  
out of our gaping mouths  
white as golf balls. In our language,  
my grandmother asks  
why can't you grow more hair?  
and you say I am happy to just be alive.

*J. Kramer Hare*

## Shattered Spell

These hues bestowed by evening sky—  
violet, gold, incarnadine—  
which grant the day a warm goodbye  
and make the evening hour fine,  
make fine as well my silent mood;  
beneath the spell I gently swoon—  
no longer fret, no longer brood,  
and with the spell-caster commune.  
And tendril-like my silent soul  
extends across the night abodes,  
as violet gives way to coal  
now interspersed with glinting nodes.  
And nary in those pinpoints be  
a trace of I or Mine or Me;  
and scarcely can I now conceive  
myself as other than a weave  
or play of shadow on a screen,  
thrown forth by dancing hands, unseen.  
That spell is shattered and replaced  
as 'cross the sky my Soul is laced.  
Upon the knoll where, in my awe,  
I scan the silent night surrounds,  
that puny self, laid bare and raw,  
gives way to one at last unbound.

## Heart of Sand

In a summer long forgotten, a boy with a glass heart carves a bird from sandstone. He places the bird on a post by the shore beneath the beach house. The moon rises and dips beneath the sea, the house's wood fades and creaks, and the boy grows into a man, but the bird remains.

---

Today, the bird watches the glass man walk with a little girl along the shore. The man's skin is more transparent with each passing sunrise, fracturing the sun's falling light into streaks of fiery bird-of-paradise and forget-me-not blues. The girl shares his wide eyes that reflect the whole sea. She is not made of glass but salt and sand, coarse grains that keep a souvenir from every shell that touches them. He asks her, like he did yesterday, if she'd like to swim. She asks if he can show her how to swim like a dolphin. He pauses every few steps to cough into his fist, and his glass becomes infinitesimally clearer. At each cough, she holds his hand tighter. The two of them have made this walk many times, and her bare, callused feet know the way, but today she clings to the man as if she is the sole anchor tethering him to the shore. She is waiting for him to drift away, sails to the wind, to a place where she cannot follow him.

---

The glass man does not come this way anymore. Sometimes, his voice echoes from the house looking down upon the shore, soft as a memory. The girl is taller now. She's stopped wearing dresses, and she shelters her feet in sandals. The days when she walks down to the beach, she stands on the shore and waits. What for, the bird cannot tell. Some days, she kneels in the sand and presses her face to her knees, shoulders shaking. Others, she asks the sea how to cure a man with sickness splintering his heart. One, she screams until there is no breath left in her.

---

Today, the bird watches the girl carry a vase down to the sea. She wades out into the water, further than she's ever gone alone. Watches the sea around her, flowing ever on.

"Show me how to swim like a dolphin," she whispers. She opens the vase and

pours ashes from it. They swim around her in ripples, in petals, in rays of sun. She waits and watches them swirl away, away, away from her.

---

The girl is almost a woman now, or at least that's what the others in the house say. She's traded her sandals for boots. The bird watches her wander down the path from the house every now and then, her hair long and wild, hugging her arms close to her body. Her sand soul was once soft enough to be molded into castles; now, it is toughening. She tells the bird and the sea that the hand that used to guide her to the shore was too fragile, so she must be stronger. She vows not to let anything atrophy her own heart. She will not let her ashes be surrendered to the sea before her own future children see maturity. She is waiting for the sand in her to transform into rigid and unbreakable stone.

---

The bird only hears the woman's voice at the house above every few months now. The days she is there, she visits the shore rarely. Today, she wades out into the sea. When she returns, her hair is dry, but her eyes are not. She sits on the shore beside the bird's post and stares out at the water.

"I met someone," she says. The bird does not know if she is speaking to it or the sea.

"Storytelling is his first language. He speaks in riddles, in ballads, in epics and haikus."

The waves brush the trips of her shoes. "His heart is mine, but his work keeps him away. I spend my days waiting. His work is important and saps his strength; all he has left to give he spends on me. Just grains, but grains of gold."

She runs a hand over the beach, and sand sticks to her palm.

"Sometimes, I wish he had more to give. But there is no one else for me. No one else could love a girl made of sand. He is of soil and stone. When he touches me, I feel roots grow from the soles of my feet deep into the earth, ancient and indestructible. Here, I am just sand, waiting for the waves to wash me away."

She hugs her knees. There is sand in her hair, on her arms, in her soul. When it catches the light, it twinkles like a pirate's treasure. The bird wants to tell her that sand can shine as bright as gold, bright as the sun. But when the glass man crafted the bird, he did not give it the gift of speech.

The woman remains until nightfall, when the sun slices the water and reveals a sliver of the brilliant treasures beneath its waves.

—

The woman runs down to the beach with tears streaming down her cheeks. She sits with her face against her knees, like she did the last days the glass man's voice sang down from the house.

"My storyteller is leaving," she tells the bird. "He boards a ship across the sea tomorrow. To do something greater, to be someone no one can forget. His work gave him a choice, to go or to stay. I would have told him to do what he must. I would have told him not to let me anchor him here. But he didn't ask me."

She examines her forearm and traces her veins as if touching the sand within.

"I strained and toiled to turn my sand to stone. But it never mattered to him what I was made of, did it? I thought I was the lighthouse guiding him home after days on a stormy sea. But his work always had his heart, his whole heart. There was none left for me. And now I am burning. Enough heat, and sand turns to glass. Perhaps Papa was made of sand, once, before Ma sailed away and broke his heart."

The bird has seen people made of glass, of sand, of stone and soil and cloth and steel. It has seen waves swirl in precise patterns; it has seen seashells wash up on shore with shapes of perfect symmetry. But the bird does not believe there is a reason some people are made of glass and others of sand. It means nothing to the sea, and it means everything to those roaming the shore. Perhaps there is a pattern the bird cannot see, but the bird knows no one can change what they are made of.

She watches the horizon, as if waiting for a ship to return.

—

The woman visits more often now. She's started wearing the coats the other women in the house always ask her to take when she slips out the door. She hugs one to herself now. The bird recognizes it as one the glass man used to wear.

She says, "Papa used to say life was a series of storms. He told me to learn to love the rain, but I can't see the beauty in so much grey. I've waited for so long to find joy. Each time I think I have it, it drips through my fingers. After I while, I started waiting to stop waiting."

She gazes at the sea. Her eyes are not searching for anything; she is merely drinking in the view.

"Maybe it wasn't the storms that Papa thought were beautiful, but the gaps between them. The storms rage, and they rage, but they pass. They always pass. Perhaps only for a fleeting time, but in those moments of blinding sunlight, no truth can hide. The sea is brilliant, brilliant blue, and sand turns to gold."

She lifts her eyes and finds the bird. She follows its gaze out into the great, blinding blue. The clouds part, and a shaft of sun draws streaks of morning glory and lily-of-the-valley on the water.



## Contributors

**James C. Baracia** is a third-year at Carnegie Mellon studying Creative and Professional Writing. This is his first short story submitted for publication; however, he has had several poems published across multiple literary magazines. At this moment, he is working on writing a novel-length manuscript. An avid coffee and tea enthusiast, he cannot write without it.

**Tuhin Das** is a Bangladeshi poet of Generation Zero currently living in Pittsburgh. He is the author of eight poetry books in his native language, Bengali. His life has been deeply impacted by groups who limit freedom of expression. Carnegie Mellon University invited him to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as a visiting scholar, and City of Asylum invited him to join their writer sanctuary program as an ICORN writer-in-residence. He left his home country, Bangladesh, in 2016 and was granted asylum in the U.S. in 2021. Das's work has appeared in *Words Without Borders*, *The Bare Life Review*, *The Offing*, *Epiphany*, and *Immigrant Report*. In April 2022 his US poetry debut *Exile Poems* was published by Pittsburgh-based press Bridge & Tunnel Books.

**Merlin Enriquez (they/she)** is pursuing a BFA at Carnegie Mellon University. They are currently exploring themes of childhood, self-healing and introducing a playfulness taste yet seriousness in their pieces. She is experimenting with creating plushies or child-like toys to create a collection of memorabilia. Every free opportunity she gets, they pursue different interest like poetry and film, always thinking creatively in a variety of forms. Check out what she is doing next @luvlycolors on Instagram.

**Cindy Gao** is a behavioral economics freshman at CMU. They have poems in the *Ice Lolly Review* as well as *the tide rises, the tide falls*, and elsewhere.

**Katarina Garcia** is currently a senior at Carnegie Mellon University pursuing a B.S. in Business Analytics with a minor in Creative Writing, and she has served as president of her university's student playwrighting organization for two years. Her short story, "Play a Memory for Me," won the YALLWEST 2020 Teen Writing Contest. She writes fantasy and murder mystery novels. When she is not writing, she sings in a rock band and attempts to teach herself the ukulele.

**J Kramer Hare** is a native of Pittsburgh, PA where he lives and writes. When not reading or writing he enjoys rock climbing and listening to jazz. His work has appeared in *Uppagus*, *the Ulu Review*, *Jerry Jazz Musician*, *The Road Not Taken*, and *Untenured*. He can be found at [kramerpoetry.com](http://kramerpoetry.com).

**Linnea Leaver** is an undergraduate student at CMU studying political science. She is not yet sure where her career will take her, but hopes there will be time for art along the way.

**Adrien Marengo** is a first-year undergraduate studying Professional Writing at Carnegie Mellon University. He is currently working on developing his short-story portfolio, and hopes to continue writing creatively throughout his college career. He is also a pianist, occasional artist, and has two cats, named Charlie and Henry, who tend to be good backboards for his ideas.

**Olivia Reed** is an undergraduate at CMU pursuing a degree in Creative Writing. She has an interest in fiction and the "what if." She is an avid jewelry maker and if not found in the library checking out a dozen books at a time can be found in various beading stores across Pittsburgh, which, like libraries, she considers to be liminal spaces in which time has no meaning.

**Kate Smigie** is an aspiring muralist who aims to build community and uplift others through her art. Currently, she is an undergraduate at Carnegie Mellon's School of Art. She has created murals in both the US and Europe and has exhibited in several locations across New Jersey. Additionally, she has published her watercolors in two books benefitting an arts education program in Cameroon. She also has auctioned her work the benefit Amanda's Easel, an arts therapy program for children recovering from domestic abuse, and she has created portraits of children for the "Memory Project." When she is not making art she enjoys crocheting, playing guitar, walking on the beach, and playing board games with her family.

**Macy Walker** is a math student at CMU with a passion for art, history, and collecting trinkets. She was born in Ohio and moved to Pittsburgh for school.

*Gemma Washington* is a freshman in the CFA. This drawing is from a series of digital portraits that experiment with color theory and the contrasts between warm and cool colors and their underlying tones. Gemma typically paints with watercolors, but has been experimenting digitally since moving to Pittsburgh.

*Wesley Wang (he/they)* is a Taiwanese American poet who resides on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone people, commonly known as San Francisco. He has previously been published by *Rust + Moth* and Dream Pop Press. He received his BA in English at UC Davis and his MFA from St. Mary's College of California. At St. Mary's, he served as a Teaching Fellow and the Kearny Street Fellow. Most recently, he was the festival coordinator for Kearny Street Workshop's APAture 2022. Find out more at weswangpoet.com.

*Yuri Xu* is a student at Carnegie Mellon University. He is originally from Tennessee and loves going to small towns and forests in his state. Occasionally he writes.

*Alex Yuschik* recently completed a PhD in Mathematics at the University of Pittsburgh. When not writing or teaching, Alex can be found with a cup of coffee in hand either drawing or making travel plans. Alex's short fiction has also appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Escape Pod*, and *Glittership*.