BOUNDARY STREET

Volume II

Carnegie Mellon University

The Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and
Performing Arts
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PREFACE

This chapbook is the result of a collaboration between students in the Advanced Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and Literary Arts majors at The Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA). Throughout the Spring 2001 semester, CMU students and CAPA students exchanged assignments and worked together on poems, meeting both at CMU and CAPA for workshop sessions and discussion. This collection of poems celebrates that collaboration. We all learned from each other, and we’re better writers, and teachers, because of this project. We hope you enjoy reading these poems as much as we enjoyed working together.

Mara Cregan, CAPA
Jim Daniels, CMU
Kristin Kovacic, CAPA
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BOUNDARY STREET
Dan Bang

The Time With Dad After Dinner

CMU

Now the object in the game
badook is houses, my dad explains.
My house is a space
enclosed by stones, impenetrable
by your stones. Who keeps more
houses, wins.

So we play, claim
territory and make houses,
my dad points wise
moves under the lamplight,
and we forget

that we are a house
as we sip hot tea
with honey watching
over another:
laying stones
sharing spaces.
Sarah Nolitz

Fireflies

CAPA

July brought fireflies in the darkness.
Fireflies at dusk, after dark.
Catching them in glass jars,
cupping light in our hands.
Trying to save the night from sun bearers.
The sky should be dark,
split open to the moon and stars.

We wanted natural nightlights
in our rooms
next to our beds.
We wanted glow rings
concocted of smashed firefly juices,
vicious in ripping off the tiny bulbs.

I remember so clearly.
Ten years ago,
only eight years of my own.
Sitting in the grass,
swarms of fireflies tormenting our heads.
I wanted to be an artist.
You wanted to be in the army.
I wanted to paint in Paris.
You wanted to follow your father.

Ten years later,
We giggle at the thought.
Seated in my car in the early morning-late night rain
watching raindrops slide down the windows.
Youre poking at my healed tattoo,
effectively inhaling cancer-causing agents,
mumbling about quitting someday.
Scolding me on my recklessness as youve grown to do.
Listening to mellow indie rock and sappy Brit pop,
we feel the need to be profound.

Its taken eighteen years for an admitted,
“I dont know anything about life.”
“I DONT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT LIFE
and Im okay with that.”
Weve finally stopped lying to ourselves.

I trace wetness,
it slides down the outside of the glass.
Warm shades slowly replace the darkness.
This is eternity
This is eternity
This is eternity
This is eternity and after so many years
weve finally stopped lying to ourselves.
Mercer Bufter

A Railroad Through the Lonesome Valley
CMU

which I plotted out on my arm
with a red pen, left me with a nation
shaped like a forearm; it was just
an isthmus really and not much to moon
over. I compared the plan on my arm
to a wall-sized map of North
America and realized this wasn’t going
to cut it. It being the continent. Still,
when I looked at my forearm, crisscrossed
with veins and rail ties, a short line
at best, it was still a beautiful plan. I walked
to the hardware store with my arm held
high, tingling, to buy rails, wood and a sledgehammer.

Benjamin Czajkowski

Wish Upon a Star
CAPA

It seemed so long ago
the phone call came
you turned red
staying calm as your heart melted
He was your beautiful obsession
I could only feel the power of love
wrapped around me
your warmth becoming mine for a moment

That night under the sky
your head in the cloudless night
watching shooting stars streak the black
wishing for our heart’s desires

Almost drowning ourselves in dew
trudged back,
our cloths soaked with passion, hope
causing your ice-blue eyes to burn like the sun

Part of me stayed
in the field with crickets
hoping for falling stars
in my backyard

We walked a mile
in a sleepless dream
running from our shadows
and fears

I watched the sun rise on your face
Melting what you lived for
Into your heart’s emptiness
When you awoke, he was gone from inside you

Did your wishes
come true
or did they fade
with the night?

Peter Burch

Time on Skin

CMU

10 dollars, me, and a dark pre-teen girl,
a generation or two past
her gypsy blood, but still asking
yous want your fortune read?
still trying to turn hope into a formula.
10 dollars I hand over to her
just to test the validity of her truth
against my future.
10 dollars–two hours
of obtuse back-bending,
painting ceilings,
scabs of paint on my skin–
10 dollars and she tells me
within three minutes
the exact day I will die.
I look hard at the girl
and think how she once
was a day old baby, one
day she will wake up a raisin
old lady. I see myself,
not as clearly as I imagine
she does, on that last day
on earth. On that day, do I
look back on all other days
as one epic emergency
that quietly siren for decades?
Do all days up until that one
look like weighted balloons
falling from the sky?
I look and see time on my skin.

Time. Call it a leper out to eat
your skin, without using a mouth. Call it
paint waiting to chip. Call it 10 dollars.

*Tom Lascow*

**Teddy in Waltz**

*CAPA*

Today Teddy waltzed
With scissors
Through our walk-in closet
He made several serious alterations

I come home
Explosive silence
Still clings to the walls
You know,
The kind that makes you feel
Deaf

Isabelle is in our bedroom
She sits on the silk sofa
She is
Still as a pressure cooker

Her lips pull
Back form her locked jaw
With an effort
Like opening a bear trap

“Today your son
Waltzed into our closet
With scissors
And cut my clothes to-”

She unwinds her fist
Exposing wisps of linen, cashmere and cotton
I inhale
Search the air
For a way to calm her
She adds
“And he got your ties.”

I leave
And the door slams
Behind me
Like a rattrap

I search for Teddy
While price tags flood my eyes
Violence tugs at my veins
I want to snap him in two

The urge
Lands with a crack
My lip hurts
My lip throbs
Like a midnight cathedral bell
Resurrecting the dead

So the past shoots up
Like a vengeful corpse
From a piece of 1960’s pulp fiction
The past stops me
She stares me down
I am five
I tear apart
My stepsister’s Barbie

The inhuman torso’s
Dry rubber band
Snaps

It hits my lip
Draws more blood
Than a dark closet

My stepsister screams
Like an air raid siren
My stepmother’s hand
Descends like a bomb
She does not hit me
She throws me
Like a tiny doll

Against the shelf
My spine hits first
And my heart presses upon it

I flee
Hide under my bed
All my cold hand can do
Is pick wool from the carpet
Feeling deaf

My vision returns
I go to my wife
Who has never broken
A nail

I lie down on my bed
I see like radar sees
The sky
And I see Teddy
Trembling beneath me

Adrienne M. Dybes

the outer spectrum

CMU

black sweater on the guy who lives downstairs
black rings around green eyes
Black Irish he calls himself dark shock of hair and strange
green eyes
the kind of green the grass turns when the sun sets
the green of dying grapevines
gray after they burn and die
crumble to grayer ash and sift through the muddy brown
cracks of the earth
the brown of cold chocolate
lighter than the brown of Guinness
a bartender pours into frosted crystal pint glasses
fogged like the window downstairs
the glow of a red lightbulb inside
the kind of red that bleeds into orange
the red of small weak fires
struggling to keep their crimson flower lit
under the watchful blue of the daytime

the same blue that beckons the neighbors awake
the blue of spring flowers huddled together
because they can't recognize another color
in the garden out front where the guy downstairs waits
hand shading his green eyes from the white light of the sun

Nick Ricketts

Vespertine
CAPA

The chameleon clouds blossom
just above the mountain peaks.
We slither stateside,
the gale bending around the bus.
Me-
distracted inside.
The radiance...
Shouldn’t stare too long
as Apollo lays down to sleep.
Vespertine skies,
in the midst of blue-black, finally
succumb.
Tunnel in.
Tunnel out.

Reveries of you float
about Artemis’ sliver of light-
Reveries, rhapsodies, uncertainties
fester.

Headlights travel in light years
outside my window.
Lethargy weighs down the wheels,
slows the velocity,
as nostalgia tugs at my hair.

I warp doubt
like pressure to clay,
knowing I will walk through
glass or satin, barefoot,
as this journey sets
behind the horizon.

Every time I lean my head back.
I hope somehow it’ll be your temperate chest I’ll rest on.

I stare, glazed and exhausted, as line after white broken line bullets underneath-Guiding me, like breadcrumbs.

I’m coming...

D. Feher

**When I Drink**

CMU

I want to watch you come and fit beside me, to cruise your valenced belly when tide pulls hips crashing the undertow swells in cupped ears.

I feel the sea within you, this almost shore, sipping currents astride broad mahogany piers.

When I drink brine, my dear, do not doubt that I want to
be thirsty.

A. Wennesdae Metil

**ink stitch**

CAPA

dreaming in magenta

june seemed more like a survey

than a surrender

if i had been born in a permanent june

ink would have meant less

what is my skin

the absence of color?

fuchsia-free?

it is stretched across my bones

and i think of pink

in all of the right places

i have found texture
Ritters, Pittsburgh’s Last Stop 24 Hour Diner
CMU

The 2am late-night-bar crowd stumbles in
catching me off guard.
Half drunk, they’ve come
to gorge on greasy pancakes and runny eggs.
As the couples walk by, I smell the
sweat-mixed perfume and
Camels’ “Fine Turkish Tobacco”.

I order coffee and toast,
take a drag and pretend to be indifferent
to the laughter and unspoken innuendoes
that now fill my section.

My reflection stares back at me from the
“Best Restaurant” award on the wall.
Encased in plastic,
yellowed corners let slip its age or mine.
Sinatra is the only one
who keeps me company here.
Angela Dickson
Forbes
CAPA

I blocked out the sound
of buses and car horns.
I walked
through the brown, dead grass
and pretended it was your yard.
A large dinosaur named Dippy
casts its shadow over the sidewalk.
I imagine it’s one of your horses.
The one I saw from your kitchen window.
and I think,
“that’s a huge-ass horse.”
I close my eyes
and the streets don’t have signs.
They’re long winding trails.
I look for you
everywhere.
I imagine every car to be your red truck.
Candy apple red, windows tinted.
I keep walking.
I keep watching for you.
Kevin A. Gonzalez

Music from a Burning Tuba
(La Belle Captive by Rene Magritte)

CMU

Beneath the sky’s orange gaze
my eyes shut to Magritte’s burning tuba:

lonely metal blazing
on a radiant puddle, the dense
melody of smoke drifting
like a skiff into sea. I imagine
Magritte play it, serpent-hands
gliding through flames, damp
embouchure a nurse
to the scorched mouthpiece.
Music condenses to oil,
fills the canvas
like a record. The stocked palette
a world of note and pitch, brush
a dancing flame-

seething the landscape of a tune,
the orange eloquence of sky.
Ben Resnick-Day

Ode to a rock

CAPA

Ingrained, sides irregular
unmathematical
in all but the most subtle ways
unmathematical
unless you know
all the patterns of birds and water
of interaction
then with God’s calculator
you come forth
like a potato chip falling down a chute

You are time as I am space
you strut around your forest floor
and you are moving through epochs
your first baby steps
seconds

I could make a face, pick my nose
do a chicken dance
it might come to you as irregular patterns
from different outings
if you are sharper and more watchful than I
you might pick it up
then you’d giggle, chuckle
moan in distaste or shake your head

Your silence makes me feel foolish
spatial thought and concentration evaporates

Emily M. Green

Opening Shift: Introductions

CMU

My coworker measures a half-pound
of Decaf Kenya. “Coffees are called
for where they’re from” she says. We’re both
from Erie. She shows me to grind
beans, asks “Do you know?” classmates

I’ve forgotten. I nod to names,
empty water from heavy coffee urns.
“And the boy
who killed himself–Blair?” Into an insulated
thermos, she pours half and half, white:

Blair’s face when he bungled
our first kiss in the church rec room.
I opened my mouth to taste
his tongue, cool against the inside
of my cheeks. “No” I give
her my back, push the button to brew
this morning’s dark flavor: Italian Roast.
Behind me a wail

stings the empty air. I turn,
to hold her, in admission of my own loss.
She raises her eyebrows at the wax
of grief on my face “only the cider warmer.
It cries when you fill it.”

I fill a mug of coffee, swallow
so I taste only heat.

Brianna Dunleavy

Improvised Symphonies

CAPA

Your fingers dance wildly
over the ivory keys
with a fervor and life
all their own.
You tightly squeeze me saying,
You are my inspiration,
my sheet music.
You spent two days
trying to figure out what key I was.
C Major was too sugary,
A minor too dark,
and another too red.
You said I was a deep purple,
finally settled on C minor,
and played me a beautiful melody.
There time itself slowed for you
as my head rested
lightly on your shoulder
in the dimly lit room.
I felt I could stay there forever
surrounded by the notes of us.
Purity
and simplicity
itself.

Jonathan Griffin

Silent Treatment
CMU

In the solitude
of a one-bedroom apartment,
I sit in the mocking silence
of my stubborn phone.

Is anyone thinking of me? I ask.
Silence.
After hours of waiting, it speaks to me:
Wrong number.
The dialtone is stifled laughter.

Rose Landesberg

Three Haiku on Technology

Microsoft 95

Page glaring bright white:
This mechanical paper,
blank as if it was real.

Telephone Poles

Massive power lines,
sending electricity
to televisions

Evening Meal in Cellular

We are all sitting
around the dinner table
talking on cell phones.

Jessica D. Hand

The Future Is A Bastard

CMU

Time’s aged sperm yawns
Mother Earth spreads legs
wide every day, spills blood
into morning. Future emerges
fists clench against the scream.

Zachary Harris

Intersection

CAPA

Cars are wild animals, burning
headlights, chasing prey across asphalt
savanna. I dodge between the vehicles,
feeling like a young gazelle
or elephant.

This is unfortunately
the time of the mega-intersection,
seven roads feeding into one space,
seven veins leading into the heart
of the city. They run by, piston legs moving faster than they should, leaving clouds of dry dust and oily air.

She steps into the street; I bet she was a waitress once, before the call of the bright orange sheath, the blossom wrapped around her hips. There’s a way she moves that reminds me of balancing a tray, or balancing a jug of water on her wet head. It’s raining; the water just rolls off of her slick skin. Although it’s four, the headlights illuminate her like a firefly in the dusk, a beacon, a flashing sign.

I wonder if she ever worries that the cars won’t stop for her. I look at her face, and see she’s set it as she walks out along the thin white line, a tightrope stretched above the asphalt savanna, and I realize it would take a crane to move her from that spot, fold
her arms back into her chest, tell
a tree a thousand years old
to move for a highway.

Cars are wild animals, burning
headlights, chasing prey. She steps
into the street; the motion of legs
and wheels slows to a dull roar. Fur
bristles, and engines growl, but she
stands, an orange wall, an orange
tangle of vines. The cars have to stop
for her, and they do, and resign themselves
to licking their eyes with long
black tongues.

jeongchan kim

half

CMU

I never heard her come in with the morning
but noticed traces of sharp toenails and grapefruit. I need
to get out more but my knee caps were shot
with zeal. I try to roll a blunt - for the first time
- cuz Orlando or India always did - the sides
busted and guts splayed like Mexico earth.

If only
she could sing to me. Last night I bought

a gallon of grapefruit juice. My senses question
if this is an act of longing. She fed me grapefruit

with her closest limbs. I thought I could define happiness.

I never had grapefruit juice.

-

This heart beats unlike jazz,
unlike life. I try - again and again busted

and frustrated - too little saliva, too much saliva, too much or not enough pull.

my grip too tight or too loose. I lose my focus
before patience.

If only you could sing to me.
Maybe if I smoke a whole cigarette in one drag

things will change. I search my pockets for a sign
of hope and find a dime with a hole through the center.
A sneeze trickles at my nose. I look at the sun.
Yellow god. I’m grateful the day is half over.

Claire Schoyer

Their Bodies

CAPA

When I was younger
walking around the
playground I made
a decision.
For this one day
I would carry myself differently.
I stiffened my back lifted my shoulders
and walked awkwardly as an adult.
People at some point begin to believe they know
everything.
You might have knowledge but show me someone in the
middle of life
with wisdom.
You can’t know everything you must be open to learning.
After this day I loosened.
I learned that one needs to be free.
We sit on swings and
know so many things before
we ever went to enter school.
In T’ai Chi, Release is Everything

An hour of rooting naked feet
to the hard gym floor, tailbone
situated just so
nervous energy
cleansed, my body
limp with cool air

only to be confronted with this
little Asian boy, a year too old
to be in the women’s dressing room.
Stomach stretched across a wood bench,
arms and legs floating. His mother calls
from the shower in Chinese.

I don’t know how to say, Little boy
go find your mother,
play Superman somewhere else.
I only know:
Ba Gua Zhang
Xing I Quan
and the other contortions
that have left my limbs empty.
On and on, my tongue bungles,
stopples,  
starts again.

He barely turns his head  
but offers:  
Nobody does it like Sara Lee.  
Keeps right on flying up  
up and away.  
I take a deep  
cleansing breath  
stand just so  
and release my clothing  
onto the floor.

Millie Gregor

Ode to Lemonade (Stands)  
CAPA

Turning around on yourself  
inside the pitcher,  
like the ocean trapped  
in a puddle.  
I mix and stir you,  
the tangy crystals of taste  
rapidly disintegrating  
Even now,
laughter is what pours into the tin cup as I tilt the pitcher to its side and I remember laying on the floor, the air dense and our legs, sticky. Louisiana and the child beside me is my sister, our mother gone, for the night. We lay on cold linen sheets, previously placed inside the refrigerator, now spread for our comfort. My sister cries out frustration and you, my friend, are the sole satisfaction for her sweaty brow. She fell asleep that night to the quiet hum of You are my sunshine...
Patrick Misiti

Silence With an Amish Girl

CMU

We were acrobats once,
Grandpa’s barn.
We lived
to be bales
dropped one full story.

I know you were there
in the rush of falling bodies,
in the cracks
and snaps of loose hay.

The smell of barn still hangs on you,
as if you’ve spent an entire life
waiting on itchy stalks
to jump
and tuck into a mountain;
a volcano of dust!

There’s no room for love on a Greyhound
but I translate your eyes
and smile
and see you want
to fall with me,

watch the ceiling’s peak grow and
old rafters shrink.

You need to strip off all wool
and roll with me,
risk rusty nails
and broken hearts.

laugh with me and enjoy the sting
of a hot shower.

Do you know a shower after hay?
The way it hurts like all good things.
A joke that makes your lungs burn.
A face you’ll never see again.

_Lori Horowitz_

**Arrogance**

_CAPA_

held high in the eyes of authority
i please the spirit of acknowledgement
and respond with admiration
white doilies on moss-encrusted lily pads
floating in my pool
i whip around to confront the mirror
collapsing in awe at
the creation held in it’s frame
drunk on my own spit
i am the defenition of beautiful

the essence of time
springs from a water heater
rusted and tainted
implanted
in the concrete of my basement floor
where the holes
are from drilling
where poison
was spilling
and those rats
weren’t willing
to surrender their home
to evacuate

RUN! SAVE YOURSELVES!

a rough and jagged rock
drifts out with the rumbling tide
to return to the wet sand
polished refined
...i climb the hypothetical situation
you display to me
i dissect
and resect
finally breaking away
from the pressing establishment of society
as we know it
knowing that we know it
way
too

well

reactions usually aren’t expected
to spill over the brim
of your perfectly poured glass of milk
a washcloth has a purpose
stones drift sometimes
and without care
people slip
Clinton Field

Summer Gig #8

CMU

Halt. High sun, high summer
smack-dab in the middle of the street.
Flags hang limp without wind,
without the constant insect sting cadence
of the snares to move their kilted bearers.
Children fidget.

We’re saluting the oldest living resident
of the tiny town of Omro, Wisconsin.
He is one hundred years old.

I wonder if the Shriners behind us, in little
cars, mind the delay.

Behind the old man, behind his folding throne,
set back on the immaculate cool green of the lawn,
is his white, three-story house,
wide and deep and straight lined.

In the unseen depths of the house I can almost hear time:
a quintet of contrabassoons rehearsing,
the sound old and coiled and wooden
as the instruments themselves.
How old are the depths of that house?
I suspect
cramped Byzantine filigree
on tight coiled stairs,
baroque boudoirs filled
with dressing screens,
glass jars,
glass cases, filled
with antique
medical equipment,
stainless steel, iron,
next to dark leather tables.

Elise Goldstein

Glass

CAPA

The post-teen college trash that pointed
at us yesterday...
“that’s two girls, isn’t it?”
they had a party last night and
a piece of a shattered
beer bottle slipped
into my sandal
while we were walking.
It buried itself in my foot,
disturbed a once-silent
volcano to erupt
and spew
red.

I didn’t stop to take it out.

Your words were more important
than the glass hiding in my heel.

Eric Spaulding

Growing Wings

CMU

Halfway home, hands cartwheel—a horizon on my watch dial.
Nobody but truckers and my Mustang,
the dull static of darkness.

God threw me a life jacket once.
I watched as other sank,
choking on water and psalms.

I’ve made it to Reading,
where the preacher on the radio
squeezes his words into a rag
to wash my feet.

How many hosts, how much wine,
how many hymns
to get past St. Peter? My lips are cracked.

A neon halo hums
above an all-night church,
where the twice-born sin
and genuflect on the dust of old hymnals.

Pittsburgh is a promise fallen
on water logged ears, muffled,
like the thump
when head meets pillow.

I’m heading down this road,
and I hear your voice,
calling me by my name,
telling me it’s time
to come home.
Sally Stewart

Case #207 Ring Neck Pheasant, Female, Hit by Car

CMU

Black clawed feet kick, grab my leather-sheathed hand while I pin its back to the exam table,

cover the iridescent fury of the blue-green head and neck, the raging red eyes with a towel.

The rehab supervisor snaps on latex gloves, begins to probe: swollen eye, dried blood on its beak reparable damage from the collision, but its shattered shoulder draws the death sentence.

Supervisor asks if I’m okay with this. I nod yes. Part of the job, I should get used to it. She plucks a few wing feathers, exposes a thin vein. The needle tunnels, pale blue liquid plunges in. Seconds later the feet go limp, the hooded head slumps.

I remove my leather gloves,
stroke the bird’s cooling chest.

An opalescent feather loosed,
arc gently to the floor.

Francesca DeAngelis

Bashful or Beauty

CAPA

Asking if I could play,
wasn’t hard.
The hard part was
the playing.
They told me I was strong for a girl.
I wasn’t sure
if that was a compliment.
I knew that playing with the boys was a bad thing to do,
they had
dirty clothes
and
dirty minds.
Running and screaming, I felt free.
No one tackled me
they knew I would cry.
I was just the little girl from next door.
I was too fragile to handle.
I was too delicate.
My mother told me,
I would some day be able to beat the boys in their own games.
I never knew what she meant,
until I learned boys had feelings and hearts of their own.
My games would be cruel and harsh.
While the games they played when I was young were just fun and something to do.

Danielle Storm

Subway Series
CMU

Crisp air swirls in the streets mingling with the burning scent from the hot dog carts and that odor that can only be described as city.

We watch the game in the warm safety of your apartment far from the drunken crowds of the bars or the cold wind of the stadium. You reach over, put my Yankees cap on my head, almost ashamed that I could have forgotten.

You whisper.
“After the win we’ll leave.”
Go out and celebrate."
You are so sure. I laugh
as you pull me into your lap,
holding me there.

We take off our caps before
walking out into the night.
We’re happy,
but this city is divided in spirit.

Hostility sparks in the chill
of the night, so close to excitement.
On the subway we are quiet
as a man in a dirty brown coat screams
about the game,

waves his hands in the air,
“the Mets were robbed...
robbed!” Others rise from their
seats, joining the argument
on both sides.

You hold me close,
next to you
on the blue plastic bench.
Linnea Robison

Sweet Merlot

CAPA

I could drink
a thousand and one
vials of liquid bumble-bees
and it would be tedious
compared to you.
Your rhythm is
syncopated
your blood grenadine
Saliva sugary like
peach juice.
You creep ivy
up my spine.
You are terrible soft, ripe
red wine
fermenting in silence
waiting
for morning.
Eric Story

Winter Fruit
CMU

These past few days,
I’ve been walking real slow
and eating clementines
to pass the time.

I peel the skins carefully
and keep them in my pocket.

Later, when I am feeling lonely,
or when I run out of fruit,
I can reach inside my jacket,
pull out old peels,
smell the stickiness on my fingers
and think of summer.

I walk through the slush and dirty snow,
stepping hard on the clumps-
send the wetness flying
in star patterns from my shoes.

I stand a long time
above a sewer grate,
listening to the water and sludge
groping around down there.  
The noise has a hollowness to it, 
as though it were looking for something fresh 
to remind it of better days.

I peel another clementine; 
let the skins fall through the grate.

Tony Rodgers

Rain

CAPA

Water slides off the roof  
Dripping  
Water  
Tripping  
And stumbling  
Over it’s own gravity

Her mouth, open  
Enjoying every  
Plagued  
Bacteria filled  
Moss covered  
Drop

She’s pagan
Believes that she is swallowing
God
Standing on God
Breathing
God

Sabrina Small

If I Am Ever An Invalid
CMU

My children sit quietly in the back of K-mart
while their grandmother pees her pants, stinging urine
stains her lilac slacks. Thick near the crotch
stemming off as it nears the knee. It is hard to pretend
she is someone else’s grandma. Eventually my eldest
daughter
approaches the old woman, hunches in order to embrace
her
and carries her down the cleaning supplies aisle
to where I am.

My vagina feels wet.
This out loud in a K-mart
makes me drop a can of Ajax to the floor,
its cracked seams spill out blue crystals and a sharp scent.
I take the old woman to the bathroom
wipe her off, hold her damp leg near the air-dryer

without calling her mother. The sound of urine squishes in her shoe and I start to cry. If I am ever an invalid
Make sure to cut my life short,
she said this when she was still able to drive a blue Toyota Celica and make conversation.

The bathroom at K-mart is full of mothers changing diapers.
I see a red rash on my mother’s inner thigh
and I have to ask for baby powder

I am trying to concentrate on what this must be like for her. I am not thinking this could be me.

My children enter the bathroom with newly purchased pants.
They weren’t sure if she was a size 16 or 18.
I am not sure either. I turn to ask my mother but her eyes are closed with the peace of a sleeping child

*It doesn’t matter*, I say.
Nick Hall

**Stages**

CAPA

I am leaning against the sandstone pillars at the entrance to Frick Park, my black coat curling around my shins. I should be smoking, looking up and down the avenue with long pupils. A new Saturn is rumbling across the street, my girl tapping the wheel, warm inside.

He comes diagonal across the street, shadows loosely wrapped in an Ecko hoodie. The handshake has three stages to it and the last one throws me off. I leave my hand limp for it, let him guide me through his movements. “Yo, could we dip into the car?” “Yeah. You want a ride back somewhere?”

He leans on the molded plastic handle, the overhead lamp illuminates his pale face, then silvers his hair when he brushes back the hood and squints at his hands on the blue plate of his sagged pants. He tells her where to turn and we make small talk, I ask him about school, he says “I don’t know, man. Turn left.”
Tyler Lewis

**Half-Smile**

CMU

“I, at one time, loved my color
it opened small doors of tokenism & acceptance.”
Haki Madhubuti “The Self-Hatred of Don L. Lee”

Some kid I tutored called me
a sellout,
said I talked funny.
I kinda smiled, I’d heard it before.
Many times. He was only 10.
I didn’t know what to say.

I used to love my color.
Perhaps for the tokenism? Perhaps not?
That little validation protected me:
from the white hoods
from the broken glass bottles
thrown at heads.

I was twelve when I saw someone
shot walking to the 7-Eleven.
Bullet grazed my ear.
Nigga on the ground. Momma decided
to ship me off to a better place.
That is too vague a reason,

you know?
Once there, I began to love the me
that didn’t court trouble. The me
that made them more comfortable.
I cried my eyes
out every time
I didn’t defend myself.

I remember the streets of my youth.
It is not enough to say I’ve gotten out.
Life only seems good.
I sit by a window. The kid next to me.
I could have told him all this.
But I sit there, and kinda smile. He knew.

Shalita Gray

Reentering a Blurred Dream

Silent vapors echo in the air
and our hands virbrate and slither
on each other like snakes.
Time swirls
a mix of eternity
while slow music trickles
through my delicate
ears.
Reentering a blurred
dream,
but at the same time
tyring to forget that your face is above me.
Balls of fear are entangled
in my intestines
while
drums pound on the inside of my forehead,
and i lie on my back
accepting you with shame.