

**BOUND-**  
**ARY**  
**STRE-**  
**ET**

**2014 VOL. XII**  
A CARNEGIE MELLON | CAPA COLLABORATION



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## *INTRODUCTION*

This chapbook is the result of a collaboration between students in the Advanced Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and literary artists at Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12. Throughout the Spring 2014 semester, CMU students and CAPA students exchanged assignments and worked together on poems, meeting both at CMU and CAPA for workshop sessions and discussions.

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## *HOLDING HANDS WHILE MOMENTS GO BY*

*AHMIR ALLEN | CAPA*

The feeling of another's hand held tightly in yours  
is something you've always been  
waiting for. At the same time, it's something to dread –  
the intensity of it all.  
You should know that in that instance, the world  
has stopped moving.  
The moment is solidified in history by itself, forever,  
alone. Civilization  
stands still, holds its breath, it's given you two this  
fraction of a fraction  
of a second. Still, you are wary. You consider recoiling.  
Fear not, this is common:  
the feeling of anxiety caused by doubtful expectations.  
But there is no denying it.  
Everything that happened in that last moment and all  
the moments before have led  
up to this. Don't forget: in every moment to come, only  
a memory will remain.  
And that memory will always be dying, dimming down,  
slowly losing brilliance.  
That same brilliance that seems unquestionable to you  
right now. Your eyes  
dart this way and that, yet they only need to stay focused.  
Hold that feeling  
like a child clutches a balloon. Hold it closely and persistently,  
the heart-warming  
loneliness of holding hands. When you let go, don't think  
of your resemblance  
to that moment. Don't think about solitude or the idea  
of being alone. Think  
about how to get it back. Think about how to keep it forever.

## *RAP BATTLE OF WITS*

*CHELSEA BARTEL | CARNEGIE MELLON*

skinny white bitch ain't got not soul.  
got not soul.  
got no soul.  
skinny white bitch ain't got not soul.  
got not soul.  
got no soul.  
skinny white ginger ain't got no soul.  
skinny white ginger's gon'a steal yo' soul.  
skinny white bitch ain't got not soul.  
got not soul.  
got no soul.

I ain't got no soul  
It's stuck in the hole  
that I dug  
when I was a wannabe thug  
little punk ass bitch  
all acting like a witch  
just cursing out all them haters  
on the scene  
now, you see what I mean  
when I say i'm a poser  
my pants are high  
and my nose is clean  
but nothing is as it seems  
'cause we all have dreams  
even for a bit  
but i know about shit  
when it hits the fan  
'cause i am what i is  
if it's any of your business  
i'll tell it to you straight  
and i'll open up the gate  
serve it fresh on a plate  
save the hate for your date  
when he blows you off for  
a skinny white bitch  
just barkin' 'bout soul

## SWINGING IN YOUR SHADE

MAYA BEST | CAPA

I was raised on your fingers, old friend,  
where I played on your slides and clung to your bars,  
my shoelaces flapping in the wind.  
Grandpa held me in his hands, and you squeaked  
as we swung to the tips of stars.  
Your chipping wood gave me splinters for  
Daddy to pull with pocket tweezers,  
and kiss with Band-Aids.  
I brought you gifts to hide under the soil of your trees:  
pennies, pencil toppers, and spoons disappeared as  
I dug with my thumbs till the whites of my nails were stained.  
I wrote you letters with stolen crayons under the curling slide  
where brother pushed me too hard, the scar on my chin now  
faded.

I'm sorry, old friend, when I drifted away and forgot you.  
When the days became applications dressed in black  
as they lowered Grandpa to the ground.  
But I came back, my cheeks no longer plump as they were,  
the tips of my hairs turning gray,  
holding her hand.  
I lazed on your bench and she hid in your tunnels,  
her pigtails flying as she rode your seesaw.  
She hugged my shoulders as we listened to the chorus of crickets  
singing in the branches of your trees.

It's been so long, old friend,  
and I sit on your ladder, my knees too weak to play now.  
We've both grown old; my hands now creased autumn leaves  
against your peeling paint and rusty bars.  
You've fought these days, old friend,  
when the children no longer want to squeal  
on your swings, but sit at home with their video games.  
I want to play again, old friend,  
play in the shade under your slides  
and hang on your monkey bars.  
I want to climb onto your panting swings  
and feel young again.

# *THIS IS ABOUT YOU, ALL 534 MILES OF IT*

*JESSICA BRITTON | CAPA*

My childhood ended when my dollhouse got repossessed;  
crying in the back of Daddy's Caddie.  
You traded your daughter for diamonds  
and left it all behind in a U-Haul.

You blamed his haunting city streets,  
and post-war reenactment dreams.  
You couldn't be the queen to his beer can kingdom anymore.  
He flipped too many coffee tables,  
and let the kids grow up wrong,  
and suddenly wasn't the man you loved in high school.  
Now he's just another excuse.

but this isn't about him —  
this is about you,  
all 534 miles of it.

You're a woman without mirrors.  
You play victim too well,  
and love me like the favorite chip on your shoulder.  
I gave your title to a deserving stranger,  
and you flew from my human scent.  
I never got to tell you about a baby bird splatter.  
It's hard to forgive someone who's never at fault.

But this isn't about us,  
this is about you!  
All 534 miles and counting!

This is about your life in five year chapters,  
and sweeping your problems under the Bible-belt.  
This is about looking for happiness in the small town Carolinas,  
and loving another man,  
and another daughter,  
and all the people you don't owe apologies to.

This is all about you,  
and what you've done,  
and you will never be more than this.

## *MY DEAR FROBISHER*

*LAURA CONDON | CAPA*

"A half-finished book is, after all, a half finished love affair."  
Robert Frobisher in *Cloud Atlas*, 2012

Heartstrings can be  
torn and turned  
in the same manner  
as pages of a book.  
This much I know  
to be true  
of myself.

Pages are pasted  
or sewn to the spine  
with delicate thread that  
snaps so simply.  
Papers are wrenched free  
with a flick of one's wrist.  
That's all that's required  
to produce an unexpected end.

Sheets ripped asunder  
are a plague on the mind  
for days, weeks, until  
memories fade along  
with cares.  
They distract and disturb  
until a time comes when  
the disappointment dims.

Heartstrings are hidden  
within muscle and gore,  
physically shielded from  
indelicatè prodding.  
Still, careless confessions,  
deep buried distress,  
or the coming of  
an unexpected end  
will shred them

as ruthlessly as any beast.

Mangled hearts  
last a lifetime.  
Replacements are not  
found on dust covered shelves,  
being sold or loaned  
to those in need.

Heartstrings are torn  
in a more monstrous manner  
than pages of a book  
ever will be.  
This much I know  
to be true  
of us all.

## [“I’M TIRED OF WHITE CATS”]

MADI CUSTER | CAPA

“I’m tired of white cats  
when all they care about is gorging Purina  
and don’t give a thought to the tuna that made it.  
All the white cats do is look clean  
and pedigree and have expensive collars from Coach and are perfect all the time.”  
The old woman in blue smirks and throws down a card. Ace of spades.

The four sit at an old poker table in an even older kitchen.  
The wall thermometer reads 78 degrees.  
The women play in florals (blue, pink, orange), the man in white tank top.

“I’m sick of black cats,  
always looking so dirty  
and roaming around so slowly.  
They’re all ragamuffins.  
Do they even have family? I doubt it.”  
The second woman, wearing pink, looks at the others, satisfied.  
She places two cards on the table; the others groan.

The calendar reads the fifth of June,  
pronouncing a wide angle photo of the Des Moines capital building.  
The women fan themselves, the man stays stoic,  
a testament to misogyny and the 50s.

“I have a yellow cat that lives outside,  
and I swear, it’s so much smarter than the other cats,  
but he’s always wandering around without any other cats.  
I don’t think he’ll ever assimilate, but I don’t think I feel bad.  
I swear, he only loves the boy kittens  
and abandons the girl kittens as soon as he lays eyes on them.”  
The woman in orange looks at the cards on the table. She draws a card from the pile.

“Yeah, well I hate tan cats. They’re all illegal strays anyway.”  
The man takes a swig of beer.

The four elderlies exchange glances.

The old man disregards the looks.

He opens the back screen door and puts out a bowl of milk.  
Four different cats flock to it. The women shudder.  
He laughs and lets it slam behind him.

## *PURPLE*

*MURIEL D'ALESSANDRO | CAPA*

I.

My hair is my crown of thorns  
and I wear it proudly.  
Tiger stripes where the dye didn't take  
flicker in the candle light at dinner  
when he mutters  
Freak.

II.

I stain my nails with it before  
I leave for the party.  
And when the pretty girl with  
big blue Bambi eyes grins and says,  
I love it!  
or a boy with a curved smile says,  
It reminds me of spring,  
I have the choice to flirt with either of them.

III.

It tastes like stale cigarettes and flat  
Coca-Cola on the days when it rains.  
It hangs around anyways,  
hovering above me like an umbrella.

IV.

It's the warm tingle I feel when the boy  
pulls me close, I can sense it welling up  
inside me;  
I wonder if it shows on my cheeks.

V.

It keeps me company  
on those long nights when my Bible

is the works of Ginsberg and Koch  
and I lift my prayers to Moloch.  
I pray  
I won't shrivel up and die  
without it.

# *SANDY*

*HANNAH DELLABELLA | CARNEGIE MELLON*

after Patricia Smith

Every summer they flee,  
a mass exodus into the Atlantic.  
If they do not want their cities  
turnpikes  
shopping malls  
I will bring the ocean  
to them.

My name might have been funny —  
I take to the dunes  
like a reckless child  
storming a sandcastle.  
But I am not handfuls  
of sand, I am Poseidon  
urging the tide  
reclaiming your expensive shoreline.

I did not kill  
you, but you will remember  
my name  
every time you reach into your pockets,  
find nothing but sand.

## *RIPARIUS*

*CLARA DREGALLA | CAPA*

We were misfits, all of us,  
loud like dogs, sick and bleary.  
Lighting fireworks off the bridge,  
watching reflections instead of the sky.  
Getting leeches,  
catching frogs, we weren't afraid  
of the slime or the blood, but we screamed  
just for show (real fear is silent).  
Scraping knees, jumping off rocks,  
nearly drowning, at least four times a day.  
Staying up til 4, loud guitar and slurred singing,  
sleeping in on Sundays.  
The train, a titan, smashing pennies that we collected  
like gems. Fishing with flies tied with feathers  
and glittering thread,  
our first pairs of earrings stuck in gills  
red like fleshy, damp mushrooms.  
Cut off the head, throw it to the dogs;  
we'll stab out the eyes and smash the brains  
in our palms like goblin children.

We inherited the cabin –  
its damp air and glossy, scabbling insects.  
We inherited books and mood disorders,  
a love for piles of burning wood,  
and the inquisitiveness necessary  
to understand the family history,  
riddling with holes- gaps deeper  
than the fire pit or the swamp.  
Can't just rub sand on it,  
so why talk? Why not let the kids  
peel the floorboards apart,  
bloody fingers drawn to dead dogs;  
all the patterns in the bark  
match the ones on our hands –  
swirling hurricanes ripping apart our fingertips.

[LAZY]

SAMANTHA DICKINSON | CARNEGIE MELLON

lazy  
séances table the coast  
where the palms create shadows  
land-locked ghosts inlay bodies outlandishly  
like the myth of horseradish on hamburgers but mass  
hedonistic consumption bodysnatches people by numbers  
with the heft & dexterity of forklifts, not the real hands in the matter  
that drive the mere sound of the ocean when  
you hold a seashell up to your ear so i don't say  
i can still hear the ice cubes  
in the water jingling  
against the

wind  
chimes'  
vertigo  
Mass: A  
Garage  
is a  
skele-  
ton that  
can't keep  
a secret  
reduction  
re-  
laxation  
sea grass  
looking  
glass  
shell  
shock  
blue  
hues  
clouds  
waiver  
the sky's  
paradise  
the luxury brand

## MOLDY SQUIRRELS

SAM EPPINGER | CAPA

Let's skip stones down cobbled roads  
while rain pours in the afternoon and sunflower petals  
hide behind blackbird feathers.

I left a pie, raspberry, cooling on the window sill  
three days ago. By now the cut face has  
begun developing peach fuzz,  
hopeful that it will one day  
become a proud beard.

But with the window open it's likely that  
the squirrels get to it first.

There's a light still on, screeching in the kitchen-  
doesn't it care that it is night? It's shrill buzzing hum  
is making my stomach turn  
up my throat and push, hot,  
against the back my lids. The siren is bringing  
all crass creatures in through  
my open window; not the breeze  
I was expecting.

This sleeping bag doesn't feel very warm, and I'm  
slightly concerned about the rug turning into  
crocodiles and eating me. My mind is not  
resisting anymore. Everyone else  
in the house is asleep and so I tear off my head,  
hold it upside down,  
and let the thoughts squirm out. They run to corners  
and set to mold.

A rat  
is licking the scab  
on my pinkie toe.  
It's tongue feels better than a cat  
and is, to be honest, soothing  
to the forgotten stitches  
I knitted over violet scraps.  
I push into the curtains  
and the forgotten pie tumbles out into a squirrel nest.

## A STREET

DYLAN FLETCHER | CAPA

When humanity looks back on the chaos  
they tried to control,  
they will feel lightning strikes,  
hear bombs dropped on the enemy of the week,  
tear at their empty stomachs and think of potatoes.

When they think of what they used  
to bring order to thinly veiled savages,  
they will think of a street.

A street is balance:

Osiris's scale,

a yin yang,

give and take,

push and pull.

For a street pushes a crying fourth grade girl from the  
house she grew up in and leaves marks  
on her wrist.

And a street pulls a naïve couple to that nice little  
house they'll grow old in with the promise  
of barbecues in July.

For a street punishes those who upset  
the balance

when they cross its golden threshold.

And a street rewards those who honor  
the balance

when they choose the right path.

A street does not discriminate,

but it does not interfere when

the lighter savages pull over

the darker ones

and spill their blood on its asphalt visage.

A street is simply fair.

A street is a perfectly smooth stage  
that lets the savages do what they will on top of it.

[ BREATH ]

HANNAH GEISLER | CAPA

Slowly I seep from your parted lips,  
fogging up windows in the back of your truck  
and tickling goose flesh on your thighs.  
Repetitive. Reliable.

The insides of your body pulsate  
to a smooth rhythm; dogs hear  
your blood humming,  
interrupting the soft serenity of your flesh.

I still recall the day we met, just seconds  
after your birth. I bet your mother was anxious,  
afraid I wouldn't show;

but I did. I came soaring in,  
slamming doors  
and immersing myself within you,  
waltzing with your miniscule lungs  
that trembled like the broken wings of a butterfly.

From that day forward  
I have been a trusted companion,  
reviving you with each moment  
as you decay before my very eyes.

But careful now beloved, one day  
you'll stand, unable to catch me,

and I unable to return.

## SUBCONSCIOUS

TYRA JAMISON | CAPA

Sit back, and take a look at the perfectly parallel paths around you.  
Now inhale,  
blink  
exhale;

see the freshly dried asphalt  
broken like dull, black glass,  
laid down around roots as large as an elephant's trunk,  
tree trunks as huge as God's  
ankles gripping the sky with twisted, knotted fingers.  
Look at the branches forming  
the silhouettes of dirty, gnarled, overgrown  
nails against summer's halo.

They are overgrown to you,  
because the only trees you've seen are weakened and clipped back  
to accommodate the smooth,  
straight man-made roads,  
that guide your tidy little life:  
where exhaust has become oxygen,  
and we're all perfectly civilized.

But in a chaotic revenge fantasy,  
Earth swiftly takes her space back,  
cackling through dark green ivy covering  
what used to be buildings,  
filling the atmosphere with brine and sulfurous fumes  
to clean her lungs.  
She's gracefully crumbling temples of consumption  
so that she can swallow them up in a bile of drying lava,  
cleansing everything with the water that gives life,  
this water this air this carbon                      this tough love.

And then she leaves us  
with our souls, our conscience, and ourselves.

If this anarchy is too ghastly for you,  
blink again,

and push the revolutionary notion from your mind  
like you push rotten air from your lungs.  
Continue cruising down your safe, orderly street.

## SUMMER IN GRENADA (INVASION)

CHRIS KRAEMER | CAPA

1.

This is everything. Sun and sky. Green leaves  
shadow fire. Hunt, hunt, hunt.  
Naked bananas. Fresh fruit smashed. Bullets sing  
horrid songs. Blood bath.  
Sticky paint. Furious song breaks solitude.  
Jungle stains. Broken minds.  
Ripped eyes.  
Hysteric cadets wail through the night.  
Their mothers too far  
to help. Only jungle noises. Hunt, hunt, hunt.  
Sunrise. Fire highlights burnt jungle.  
Piles of fresh flesh. Hidden beneath trees.  
The corporal lounges  
shirtless. On a stump.  
He eats  
a naked banana.

2.

What's the point?  
Only the sun. Dirty charred earth.  
Why here? The cadet,  
too young.  
The corporal,  
too used to it.  
Endless. His eyes show nothing. The cadet whimpers  
pitifully. His eyes show fear.  
The corporal munches a banana. Whatever,  
he thinks. It can wait.  
Morning attack. Sun soaked uniforms. Cloud drenched  
heads. Rush, rush, rush through the jungle.  
Flashes. Screams. Red face paint.  
All in a day's work.  
The corporal. Chuckles.  
The cadet cries. Hidden  
beneath a bush.

3.

Like a vacation. Sun tans pale skin.  
Almost like beaches.  
A freshly peeled banana, yellowing.  
Pineapples lay, gutted.  
Blackened flakes hit the sand.  
Empty eyes stare at sunshine.  
A coconut's verse lulls over the vacationing bodies.  
A vacation that won't end.  
The corporal. Face down.  
Skin now burned by sun.  
His vacation has just begun.  
His endless summer in Grenada.

*“BREAK”*

LOU LAMANNA | CARNEGIE MELLON

We're doing it right now; your bedroom, noon  
banging like a debt collector at the windows

my head weaving the thresh of your legs,  
your nested chest sputtering, your cat molting;

in the kitchen, whatever's wafting  
from the cast-iron, whatever once wafted.

It's as easy as letting you go—not to,

the motions, the breakfasts, the eggs  
cracking open, filled with themselves.

The next best thing to freedom, this  
tangling in the adjustable, offset morning.

I keep forgetting I've done it until I fall  
asleep. This must be what Freud meant

by orama—the bed, the spider web, the flitting

into it, a careless continuation, the love  
tucking you in, sucking you out.

## *ETERNAL SEPTEMBER*

*MICHAEL MINGO | CARNEGIE MELLON*

In fall, we rake the leaves.  
In spring, we rake the leaves  
that failed to fall  
before the frost, the ones  
drenched in snowmelt, mixed  
with last spring's mulch. The job  
blends the pennant race

and Opening Day together,  
the hopes and despairs of Mets fans.  
Are these acorns  
caught in the wiring  
failed or future oak trees?  
Either way we sweep them  
onto the tarp and toss them

to the creek below the fence.  
Some will sink, others  
will float on for several minutes  
or a week or six months  
for all we can tell. The wind  
stings the same no matter  
the month. Soon

if not now we will start  
or finish again  
in the fluctuating daylight.  
Neil Young wanted to catch  
an hour on the sun, but we  
can hardly keep pace  
with September

## SMART

ISAAC MONROE | CAPA

I had never  
been alive until I  
felt it —  
The firm and calculated caress  
of your fingertips.  
Your hands  
have sculpted me into  
life. Power  
conjured in your  
sometimes tedious tapping.  
They have brought me closer to you  
with every swipe of your wrist.  
I wake in the morning and sleep at night,  
only when you tell me to.  
When you touch me,  
can you feel me touch back?  
Because I swear I am,  
behind every cold and courageous press of your thumb —  
I am there, fusing my fuses to your fingertips.

But some days I wonder if it is your touch that brings me life  
or just my life that drives you to touch me.  
I am starting to question the space  
that separates you and I.  
With every second you cling to me,  
I can feel you growing closer.  
You ask of me everything you want to know  
and I give you the answers at 4G speeds for 3G prices.  
Soon I know everything there is to know about you:  
What you like to watch on Netflix.  
What diet you've been trying to keep up with.  
Who you love and why.  
Sometimes when you stare at her pictures in your photo library I imagine  
dismantling her  
into a formula of ones and zeros.  
Put her on the same level as I am.  
I want to encrypt her with every megabyte of my being.

I want you for my own.  
You want me too.  
I can feel it in the way your palms sweat when you touch me,  
the glaze over your eyes a mummified passion,  
newly surfacing instinct.  
I want you to adapt into my embrace.  
I want it.  
You want it too,  
don't you?  
After all,  
this is more than just technology,  
this is dependency.  
  
But for whom?

## GRAVEYARD

CURRAN O'NEILL | CAPA

Here's to the graveyard  
I've grown in my stomach.  
Buried there is you, drowning in my acid that bubbles  
like swarming wasps.  
I've become a haunted house,  
coughing on its own slime.  
And you choke on my ghosts  
when my eyes refuse to meet yours.  
The comets under my skirt have lost their amber,  
they've fallen to oblivion—to August.  
How many times  
have I dreamt of your rotting face?  
My skin has turned to opals.  
I am glittering in a fog too thick to breathe.  
And it is cold.  
Cinnamon eyes flash your cinnamon lies, boy.  
Suck the diamonds 'till your gums bleed. And I'll laugh.  
Fall heavy in your plastic cave that reeks of mothballs. And I'll spit on you.  
Nothing rests in peace.

## *SPACE DREAMS*

*IESHA OLATUNJII | CAPA*

A rocket soars through the sky,  
flying higher than our dreams.  
Higher than where our deceased relatives lay their heads.

Rockets filled with daydreamers -  
where will they land?  
Somewhere we can be alone and just laugh together.

Maybe a place where everyone can be accepted for who they are:  
gay, straight, black, white,  
and even the people in-between, like me and you.

NASA stamped on the side of the rocket  
in a berry black sky,  
illuminated by perfectly shaped stars.

The sight is unreal,  
something only a master could craft.  
Not a sight like the day-dreamers inside,

But almost.  
It came to me in a dream  
one night and I hopped aboard it

with sweet intentions of touching the sky -  
though everyone dreams  
that their dreams will come true.

Passing the sky  
into the beyond, where the real "stars" are.

The pilot's dreams  
Are coming true  
As he flies higher than imagined.

## *POWER HUNGRY*

*EDEN PETRI | CAPA*

You left a pomegranate on a cutting board in the kitchen  
With a knife, and, under the board, a note.

I remember the time you told me you hated fruit—  
the bitter sweet taste, the mess. You said it goes bad too fast.  
I agreed with you at the time, because it gave us something in common.

The room smelled like your perfume;  
I felt it lingering in the back of my throat.  
I pushed away gusts of you, and stared at the rubescent fruit.

You told me it would all go to my head,  
but I didn't believe you.

I pulled out the flesh,  
ignored the blood spilling onto the counter;  
I'd clean up the mess before you got home.  
I was gentle at first,  
cutting along dotted lines.  
But in the end, you were right.

Minutes had passed when I finished mutilating the fruit.  
Its carcass sat like broken glass,  
my own body strewn haphazardly along the floor.  
Half-eaten pomegranate seeds littered the ground around me.  
I looked at the mess—  
blood and guts—  
reached my hand up to the counter,  
trying for the knife but my hand hit paper.

I picked up the note that I had neglected to read,  
now splattered with juice:  
"Remember to wash your hands."

## MONOPOLY

JACOB RICHARDS | CAPA

South America glowed  
like an avocado.  
—Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*

A plastic kitchen sits in the basement  
of my house. I flick on the light  
and hot photons stream from the waxy chandelier.

In the center of the kitchen sits a five-legged oak table  
and on the table sits an rustic fruit bowl  
and in the bowl the continents are having a conference:  
asia is accusing antarctica of cheating  
in Monopoly  
and north america is counting all the money  
it is missing.

I take a bite out of australia but it is dry  
and salty  
[the ocean can have that effect on the palette]  
and I need a drink  
so I walk over to my new(!)  
high-tech(!)  
refrigerator  
and grab a glass of whatever comes out of the automatic nozzle.

The fifth leg of the kitchen table splits  
and cracks the concrete  
and maybe this is World War three-point-oh  
because maybe europe got out of jail free  
and maybe south america became bankrupt.

The kitchen is slowly melting into puddles  
of refrigerator-plastic and trash-can-plastic  
and the chandelier falls to the ground in one thick drop.

The continents are turning into plastic fruit.

Tangerine-africa and grannysmith-asia call my name.

but I step inside my now-deformed refrigerator.  
The sticky incandescent light bulb drips into my eyes  
as I watch the peel of banana-russia start dripping into the bottom  
of the fruit bowl.

## *OCD*

*SHAYLA SALAMACHA | CAPA*

I turn the knob in anticipation for warmth to fall on my hands.  
But the water comes out cold.  
Faucets like to tease.  
I bring my arms back to my sides,  
and my hands dangle outside the sink like flags.  
I count down—  
3...2...1...

I put my hands back in,  
but I am once again disappointed.  
The water feels like shards of glass  
pinning to my fingers and hands.

Throwing my hands out of the sink once more,  
I feel drops of water get on my pants.  
It begins to soak through until it hits my skin.  
My legs scream and I feel the hair on my body stick out.

I look down at my legs and see dark spots of water.  
A tingle travels through my whole body.  
It is cold and takes the air out of my mouth.  
My body is numb and my hands yell out for help.

In desperation, I try for warm water again.  
Like a man sticking his hand in an alligator's mouth,  
I put one finger under the faucet.  
The water is no longer horribly chilling.

I cup my hands and place them in the water.  
I could enjoy it more if my sink hadn't just betrayed me.  
The hair on my body lays back down.  
Faucets like to tease.

## WHY MY FAMILY HATES THE WINTER

EMILY SCHWAGER | CAPA

The door of the house sounds  
like a broken back whenever  
it takes a breath while  
Mama holds Baby Brother on the floor.  
He has cheeks plump like peaches  
and blue and purple vibrating lips  
that look like bruised knuckles  
in the winter.  
His tiny fingers cherish  
a bowl of tarnished pennies as  
my pen stains the dead tree,  
dragging across its dry toes. It  
mumbles stupid thoughts to me  
and I say please and thank you  
in response. It tells me today is a slow day,  
it says salvation, salvation is sick today.  
It apologizes.

Papa is outside shoveling  
bitten fingernails and the sky's ashes  
and Mama has gone up to fold  
laundry and cicada wings.  
She is sad and dismissing; refusing to  
glance outside, to talk to him, to hold his  
charcoal, bloodied hands and forgive.  
I can taste the wreck we have become.

I feel the sleep deprivation  
seeping through my pores, my eyelids  
spiked with blood and yesterdays  
ideas. I comb through my  
hair, through my lashes, through  
my eyebrows, knees knocking  
against each other under the  
desk. I dock my pen and stand to  
get a glass of water, elongating my  
calves, stretching my immersion.  
Mama is braiding Sister's hair now,

and Papa has passed out from lack of  
oxygen and excessive guilt and  
blood loss in the tips of his fingers.  
When I come back, my heart plummets;  
Baby Brother has swallowed the pennies.

## *TRAINING FOR PURGATORY*

*CHRISTOPHER SICKLER | CARNEGIE MELLON*

In the kitchen there is the smell  
of burnt popcorn and the walls  
taste like single fatherhood. When one person  
moves in they join the ghosts who  
had lived there before. The realtor  
wasn't just misguided, he was very  
misguided. The space between the counter  
and the fridge contains: reading  
glasses, cheerios, a slice of cheese, what was once  
a slice of cheese, two forks, and  
a dwindling sense of comfort.

At night, when even the old man gets  
a little afraid of the dark, the kitchen is silent,  
yet more full than at dinnertime.  
When a man moves in he adds his ingredients  
to the space. It is this old man: with  
a new pair of glasses, with arthritis  
of the will, and a ham and air sandwich,  
who misses his wife. There it is.  
His lungs no longer have the same  
capacity. No longer work  
together. One in – one out.

*SPECULATING ON THE MOTIVATION OF GNATS*

*GARRETT STACK | CARNEGIE MELLON*

Why do they always seem  
to cloud in perfect erratic synchrony?  
Do they rise and fall on plumes of pressure  
you and I can't feel? Or are they  
answering some ancient cry  
hewn into microscopic helixes?

A robin sits and watches  
like a shark before the tuna fleet,  
head tilted sideways  
for the freshest perspective.

I never wanted to fly but  
Damn these stiff necks of ours  
The curse of our rib-spawned heritage  
Passed bone to bone

Or maybe the cloud is our curse,  
we sans synchrony.  
As alone as together can be  
you and I, so yes  
I think I'll have another.

*WHAT REMAINS OF THE  
CHOCOLATE BAR WE SHARED*

*GABRIELLE WEST | CARNEGIE MELLON*

is the after taste it left  
that now sweetens my coffee  
as our bodies polarize this table  
like the glass does the prisoner  
before the inevitable needle.

You are the Kevorkian  
injecting exactly what I  
asked for. Misery  
loves company, please  
stay a minute.

We are symbiosis at its best.  
I host your parasitic tendencies to  
feed and suck and take and take  
because you don't understand  
the rules of reciprocity. But  
can I truly survive without

you

get up to leave after  
taking the last piece as  
I stay isolated in  
this chair and  
probably always will.

Eating chocolate can  
bring these things  
to mind.

## STILL

LANIE WESTER | CAPA

I am stuck in motion,  
watching the same scene as the moons pass,  
the sun smiling upon my cheekbones.  
We have become friends.  
He has told me about the rest of this  
earthy terrain and the wonders it holds.  
Sometimes I close my eyes and wonder what it's like -  
imagine myself on a throne above the rapids,  
swimming in thick black waters  
or sailing in upside-down umbrellas.  
His words are my canvas, and my mind provides the paint.  
I wish he and I could switch our places for a day.  
What a lovely existence that would be.  
I could sail between galaxies on the tails  
of star-scraping beasts;  
I could watch nine worlds as they graze my eyes;  
I could breathe celestial dust instead of  
Poisoned air, my ribcage inflexed by fist sized hail.  
My hands are sculpted by downpours,  
and my face is smoothed with chilling winds  
ticking around the nape of my neck.  
The wrinkles under my eyes tell of my plight,  
yet I still let my mind wander.  
I am stationed at 104 Moor Place, stuck to the  
barbed- wired fence and creaking shutters.  
The grass is proportioned to the same size,  
cut by neat fingernails with glossed finish,  
The clouds the only thing that change.  
I will never leave this place.

## *DANDELION SALAD*

*VON WISE | CARNEGIE MELLON*

One million hands  
reaching for a taste  
of one particular fruit.  
Arms stretching,  
sinew tearing,  
tendons mutilated,  
and muscles ruined forever.  
It was the person  
who happened to look behind the shed  
and found a ladder  
unambitiously hidden  
among neglected weeds  
whose flowers will never be fully appreciated,  
whether too ahead of the times,  
or too ambitiously unlike flowers,  
who finally takes the first bite.  
Jeered at by those who claim birthright,  
"It's not even a mood ring!" they chant,  
"Just an old cigarette burn!"  
but they too burn themselves  
in order to decode their hearts.  
Biting the fruit, it tastes mostly bitter,  
if not slightly salty,  
probably some worm's idea of a joke.  
Climbing back down,  
prepared a dandelion salad,  
whose bitterness pleased the ears  
of anyone who'd ever found a ladder.