This chapbook is the result of a collaboration between students of the Advanced Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University and literary artists at Pittsburgh CAPA. Throughout the spring of 2016, they crossed Boundary Street to exchange assignments and poems.

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“Waiting Between the Trees” (The name of the 2nd chapter of the fourth section, of The Joy Luck Club, a novel by Amy Tan) is the idea upon which this poem is FOUND.

There are symbols that center this forest of trees. One: a complex interest of various novels. Two: a myriad, but diverse set of metals. Three: ancient antiques some, being created before our fore ancestors, some by our fore ancestor, and the others by their seeds. These are ideas, but they deeply were born as symbols. There is truth, behind their expression being vague. The feedings, and milking are the symbols of this forest. The symbols have woven it’s way into a undefined core, feeding on our barren land, milking the foundation, allowing various tree roots of a forest to blossom. I express our home, and these symbols so vague, because your home is an abstract garden. Only we can experience, and then express the question of … what our home is?
Some might say he is crazy,
some might say he has just lost his mind.
What are kids these days thinking?
Is it those cell phones?

Picture this.
James Austin Hancock reaches in his bag.
He grabs out a gun, not a pencil or a lunch.

Some of these young men are mentally ill.
Don’t you have to be to murder someone?
Or is that just a common belief in civilized society?

Violence is spreading across America.
Gun violence is spreading across America.
Adolescent Caucasian boys shooting up the school are spreading across
America.

Before these adolescents pull the trigger
they should think about what they’re doing.
Pulling a string of families apart.

An apple on the lunch tray is oxidizing.
As it turns brown, it feels left out.
It wants to be like the others but can’t be any longer.

A slice of turkey is shot down on your tray.
You look gloomy, just staring at it with no intent to eat.
You plead not guilty to ordering the turkey because there was nothing else.

School cafeteria, filled with kids.
Young pieces of grass to sunflowers.
Just grazing their lunches with their innocent fingers.
That summer, I spent up in a red & black room. And while the sun gushed in from the windows at dawn, we slept to the sound of ice cream melting under her bed. Sometimes, when daybreak was untouched, I would watch the fan cut through sunlight & dust for hours. Her face was new on the pillows each morn- ing. Cheeks flushed with summer, she chuckled in her sleep to prelude to the laughing in & out of the days to come.

On a summer day just like any other, we had a lemonade stand in the hot downpour. When the torrential rain flooded our feet & ran down our sleeves. I believe that is when I realized that those were the days I would never get back.
That summer we met
in raw heat, under a shrill ceiling fan
and in her I found
soapy bubbles, sleek with sunshine
in the middle of torrential rain.

Your winters were blueberries and broken bone,
summers constructed of strawberries and burnt skin.

The rays of darkness and thick petals that swayed your elbows.
Monotone days morphed into freckles and seeds.

Thorny lips bursting with poppy juice from the branch.
Clear skin blended into fruit, a dark dribble gleams in the snow.

Your nose always looked like it was whole.
Now it is roughly sore with memories of humid winters.

Your mother left her crimson dress,
paired nicely with stained sweet pouted lips.

Bleeding patches and pricks remind you of dusty summers.
That dress hangs in the closet where she abandoned it – and left you.
**What If?**

*Isabella Victoria, CAPA*

My parents laugh when I say the first thing that comes to my mind. In the car yesterday I wondered out loud and their chuckles tickled my ears. I joined in, the laughs bounced off each other to the tunes of “90s on 9” radio. But, as songs started and ended, one after another, thoughts continued to itch my brain.

“What ifs?” always pile up inside my head and my mouth moves slowly. It is weighed down by all my questions. They are simple, but they matter to me. I don’t know why I wonder about things like this, things that don’t truly matter. They crawl through my head and squirm out of my mouth. I’m glad they’re there, but what if they weren’t?

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**Death by the Bedside Table**

*Olivia Benning, CAPA*

1. Miles wide and thin
   I can see through and into your veiny skin, all the pretty blues
   associated with the pink skies you once knew and you breathed healthy, when you drank healthy, when you lived healthy you were well and you were full of that life that I loved that I wanted and even though we were both there I know I felt elsewhere

2. Elsewhere with a pear in hand, smile on face and my mind at ease when you smiled and we all talked and I wondered how you got to where you were since I thought that I hated pears when you loved them The texture, the shape, but I pulled it off the tree and gave it my all and I loved it Things change, I know but I cried when the tree was cut down
3.

I no longer loved it
and the garden that used to be
abundant with vegetables were gone and so was your
garden and after you
were your cars
Then the bed and your clothes
and my Aunt
No understanding...
there was none and I couldn’t,
I couldn’t cry, I couldn’t
believe
how something could do that to you
and if you then anyone
and this
is how I’ve come to learn
even the most indifferent can feel

Thoraxes
Will Thayer, CAPA

Ceaselessly swallowed
turned to doubly ghosts in their stomach.
It wasn’t the lottery of
maps & leaves & bugs
that started boiling up their throat,
or the way there was nothing but
lying as they hopped into their car,
their crude smile like a silverfish.
It was the insects
that made them wish that somewhere,
they were standing there just like that.
9. I always have to bite my tongue when talking to certain people.

10. Sometimes I’m ashamed of being black, I would never tell my dad that.

11. Sometimes I’m ashamed of being white, I would never tell my mom that.

12. Sometimes I don’t practice what I preach, I wish I’m always someone else.

13. I like when I get reminded that I’m not good enough, that there’s someone better for you.

Psalm Trees
Joshua Brown, CMU

Suburbia has never known power-shortage
She cobbles stone walls out of sugar cubes, watches you dissolve them with envy-drool, then it’s all luncheon warlord & pie-smile conquest

White-picket-fencers waltz in single-malt stupors, dance the salsa onto their chips, tango with tang go to where the elephants are, take snapshots of the ivory tower farmland

Your ancestors didn’t know Jesus until we carved psalms into our palms, until we took their cheeks in our hands and let the erasure sink in, let it trickle down their necks & puddle by their toes

How about we restring your vocal cords and tie the tongue, scrawl illegible silence in the school books, force the photographs to forget the terror, scribbled in goosebump-Braille, force-forget the origin of the dust speckling your bones.
Two-channels: a sort of Parentage
Kevin Brophy, CMU


The most with dads.
Sing.
Too much attention.

Ten years again, almost different, also dads, we guess. At 8:06, contacted the happiest person in the room.

Timely sucks in bands.
Look.
Twenty-something by.

Now, some sort of attention-seeking personality disorder. For heat. Just mix it with our hair. We beat too busy with self. Create a scene. That atmospheric pressure. To hold our tongue. Suck on it. Draw up softest voice ever. Hold tongue with no smirks and notice attention.

Cigar Box Secrets
Ciara Sing, CAPA

1. I didn’t ask my mom the first time I shaved.

2. I learned the books of the bible before I learned how to be grammatically correct.

3. My dad taught me the social structure of a home before I even learned the word authority.

4. He taught me to keep things inside, to never let people know what I’m thinking.

5. I can’t ever accept a compliment, but sometimes I wish you’d say more sweet things to me.

6. I feel like some days I receive more affection from a man on a bus than you.

7. Sometimes I feel that I shouldn’t speak on black issues.

8. I feel bad for loving black beans and rice, it only causes more pain.
7.
At nineteen,
I learned to code.
I wrote my first program
to say I love you.
It was full of bugs.

At eighteen,
I fell in love.
He was full of them, too.

8.
I am never on time.
There is a whole world
of unpunctual places
calling my name.

There is always dirt
under my fingernails.
The manicurist always winces.
I don’t even know how it happens.

I am inky skinned,
dirt bred, and my whole
world hums.

9.
I think my grandfather
was a burying beetle.
He laid his eggs
before he died.

We hatched underground.

That is how we learned to be dirty.
That is how we became brown.
That is how we befriended slimy places.

That is how we learned to hide
from what might hurt us.

BIGFEET
Weston Custer, CAPA

I’ve been retreating
back into a forest
of my own design.
I’ve been avoiding
people’s eyes.
When I said I was giving up,
you asked me what I wanted.
I guess I just want to be ignored.
I’m not real.
Soak
Noor El-Dehaibi, CAPA

Water drips out of the spicket,
thick with rust and dirt
and impurities, fills
bathtubs with carved ivory
tanned from age and candlelight.
Dried millipedes intertwine
on its clawed feet, sentries
laying siege to an oasis
they will never reach.
Dip in a toe,
a foot,
both arms and face
submerged under
the clouded surface of luxury.
In the future,
wars will not be fought for oil,
but for water.
A full bath is enough wealth
to drown in.

4.
I was born
in a white brick
war zone. My mother jokes
when the doctor hit me
on the back in the hospital
I didn’t even cry.

I was born silent
to a family
of howling wolves.

5.
When my sister
ate candy, chocolate
covered strawberries,
90's craze jawbreakers,
food that sweetened
her tongue for life,

I was sucking lemons.
I was already turning sour.

6.
I was raised
Gossipy women. Cooked
by taste women. Held whole
homes on their backs with
shopping bags in tow
women. They told me this:

It’s not the end of the world
until the world ends.
Histories
Charu Sharma, CMU

1. My grandfather was an entomologist.
   That means he studied bugs.
   He died in a motorcycle accident
   before I was even born.

   I wish he had been a cockroach.
   Those things live forever.

2. Since I was young,
   I sucked lemons.
   My dentist hated me
   for it. Why would you
   chip the veneer?
   He’s ask. Why would you
   ruin a perfectly good smile?

   He didn’t know it was
   the only way I could
   get my lips pursed.

3. I tried very hard once
   to become a ballerina
   and a gymnast.

   Since age 6,
   I have been a walking
   barely talking
   balancing act,
   on my tip toes
   so no one can hear me
   except
   when I mean for them to.

Pittsburgh
Maya Frizzell, CAPA

You don’t like the way
   graffiti marks her
   dark skin.
   Gold against flesh,
   she’s alive and thriving.
   From her scalp flow
   dirt-brown rivers.

   She is a woman.
   She walks cool and talks cool,
   a gown of black and gold
   swings around her hips,
   but it’s torn at the hem,
   left ragged and rough.
She's a liar
and a thief
and a murderess,
please
don't tell her you love her,
love is for fools
who stand in the cold for hours,
who scream rash battle cries to their foes.

She's beautiful,
but only to a certain eye. She's
prouder than anyone else would
like her to be.
She speaks in tongues,
asking you questions you don't

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Why I Worship the Rain
Hope Schall, CAPA

I worship the rain
because the rain doesn't pretend to love you.
Apathetic, it trudges down filthy sidewalks at dawn,
the lonely worker,
not because it expects praise for its menial work
but because someone has to do it.

After the gray numbness of winter
It melts away the soggy blanket of the last snow
and revives the tenderness of the world
under its tentative footstep.

It is content to be ignored or trod upon
when it is tired by other exhausted souls
who either flinch
or (like myself)
are jerked back into sensation by its caress

But it forces its existence upon you
at the height of its fury.
In yellow rubber-bullet drops
it collides, crashes,
comically sprawls on the ground.

It does not ask to be worshipped,
but anyone who stands in its presence
can feel the air thick like molasses with power.
Inside the Butterfly Drawer
Taylor Poulos, CMU

Being pinned like this is humiliating — but only in the way it is humiliating to be beautiful. Maybe starlets have it worse — or maybe on Mount Calvary we’re all sisters.

Today, I will sun myself until I disintegrate — ingratiate myself for your viewing pleasure — even take pleasure in my trip down — passed out on a bed of cotton balls — killing fluid raking my lungs understand.

Who are you?
Why do you find yourself with me?
Where is your home?
You are home, Pittsburgh.

You are home and you are unwanted.
You are left abandoned by the children you raised, by the kids with no pride left in this dusty city.
We are walking away
from a landmark eating
chocolate, feeling shy
at the sounds of our heels
on the sidewalk. a lugubrious
trumpet. a pattern of falling
seashells. a note coming
from the back of a Tupperware
container. drinking
coffee, staining our lips, watching
oceans in our ears. watching
sandstorms from yellowed
teeth, which crack. every
night we feel them. quilting
stitches into the pavement. wearing
a quilt because it’s all we know
how to sing. laughing because goats
eyes are upon us. a spirit makes
me want to sing. open sourcing
for a cumulous cloud. waiting
for the sky a stone’s throw
away. throwing away
a song, bleeding pennies, scraping
our knees like toddlers
when we look at the ground.
Black Top Pavement
Chyna McClendon, CAPA

I lay on the black top pavement spread out
with my wild curly hair fanned around me.
I roll up my pant and shirtsleeves
so I can feel the sun burn my skin.
My eyes wander
and squint when I reach the sky.
I turn my head and place my ear on the burning pavement.
I can hear the black top sizzle and crack in the blistering heat.
Steam rises from the ground and I can almost imagine
my shoes melting into a puddle by my feet.
A wave of satisfaction runs through me.
It is 8:30pm and the sun
has gone down.
The neighborhood kids and their dripping popsicles have long
trudged inside.
The wind picks up and I inhale.
It smells of gasoline, oak, and cicadas coming out of the ground.
The winds hands crawl against my skin cooling and smoothing.
My mom tells me to come inside.
I reply “just five more minutes”.
The screen door slowly creaks shut
and I groan,
throwing my hands up in defeat.
The black top is now cold and hard under
my calves and its uncomfortable.
A deep frown creases my forehead.

New Orleans, 1874
Suhail Gharibeh, CAPA

In midsummer, Marie Laveaux tucks peacock feathers
in the folds of her skin.
Her eyes become round
with the waxing moon.

I run my hands over the coarse ground.
Enjoying the way the rough pebbles
feel on my hands.
I sit up on my elbows and slowly rise.
I drag my feet up,
connecting with my brain to make them walk.
My mother opens the screen door,
placing her hands on her hips.
I drift in with the smell of food tempting,
my nose.
I place one foot un front of the other,
walking into the alluring warmth of home.
Redemption
Veronika Gillespie, CAPA

That's the way it is here.
You have the grains of truth, lies, and wish-it-had-beens.

You may also have
someone who's more than man,
an element of fantasy
almost magic.
I saw one thing: neglect,
a cotton I didn't dare touch.

pretty things—
men don't even seem to miss them.
Carefully polished

little sparkles of iron pyrites

flecks of gold.
So heavy, fine.

Hours and hours of
chipping and endless polishing

brute persistence.

Previous Abandonment
Pilar Lojacono, CAPA

You…are ragged. Ragged and stretched out, and way too tall, with large doe-eyes and sneakers now held together with tape. The shoes are fragile, but you have spent your whole life holding things together. When you meet him, you remember that your throat is dry. Your bangs stick to your forehead; beads of sweat run down the nervous muscles of your neck. You've never stopped to think too much of yourself. Why should you, what have you ever done? And yes, that's as defensive as it sounds. If you're honest, you don't like the attention. So when you meet him, the golden boy with the tired eyes and a grin as wide as the arms he opens up to you, you wait for your fears to be real. Teeth on chapped lips, you expect this boy to be disappointing. You feel hollow. And you tell yourself you don't care what he says, what he thinks, if he smiles at you or not. But when he wraps strong arms around your flimsy neck and laughs, you let yourself crack.
The party boy stopped dancing, frazzled by the same tune. Removing himself from the club of promise.

Her saddened bones threatened to slow down but they never did.

2004 is still relevant. Daddy had to go on a permanent business venture.

She was sent into an never ending whirlwind of blue and black crabs snapping at her inner sun.

Until she started to move her feet. There is purpose in it, slowly plucking the crabs off of her dimmed light.

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The Cleanse
Dominique Green, CAPA

He was never innocent. He had a condescending sneer On his face since the age of two. He was neither a son. Nor a bother. Not a friend. He was target practice.

Pinned his heart to his sleeve. He knows what it’s like to be used So he wears his armor everyday. Breastplate first, to shoulders, to arms, to his hands On his head, is the position that has been beaten into his mind.

That makes sense. He was never a son. The only role model he probably ever had was a gun. That’s almost sad enough to cry about!

If that wasn’t the story every urban black kid is told about. Maybe Uncle Sam will pity us. If we fall to our knees and reach out, beg loud enough. Maybe he’ll shed a tear. Cleanse us of our dirty skin and move us off the streets. You teach our children that white is neat. White is perfection.

Well then black is bold, Sturdy as the post you whipped my ancestors on. So when you look at us think about where we came from. The child slave was more worried about his mama’s face being a vague image in his head, His last memory is of her being sold to the highest bidder.
My ancestors never had money to pass down
For their successors.
Barely a penny to their name.
Work three jobs so you can
Just
Get
By.
Sense we are separate but equal.

So we made our own ways to get money.
We wanted the path to equality.
You wanted the path to the jail cells.
To the ak-47, to the glock.
You’re teaching us to hate you as much as you hate us.
So maybe white isn’t perfection.
Maybe white is human, black is human.
Maybe we all just need to be cleansed.

Climbing Out of Darkness
Chelsea Lewis, CAPA

Her feet pounding
pavement with every
push of the leg.

A crimson blob catches
her blurred attention as
she is brought back to old days.

The trio used to dash
around the house,
draped in firefighter gear.

Her hands wrapped up by her
party boy and her book junkie,
both ye high causing her chin to tilt.

Her eyes focused back
and in front of her sits
a brown stained bench.

She was resting until
a blaring group of hyenas
ceased her peace.

The book junkie was no longer
a member of this Earth, victim
to unhappiness and she couldn’t handle it.

Dark shame seeping in, her
legs are machines, speeding
so you could barely see them.

In her haste, she spotted
a water fountain and it
dripped memories into her head.
Down Open Drive
Jessica Kunkel, CAPA

Wind is flinging hair into my eyes and mouth and I neglect to stop it.

He is strong next to me. One hand on the wheel, his smile is infectious.

We are juicy. Driving down open roads to nowhere, stop wherever on the way. There was a diner in Chicago and a ball of twine in Kansas, a bridge in San Francisco and a bowling alley in New Orleans.

I don't care where we go, just that I'm with him.

I am holding his free hand and the music is so loud I can't hear it.

It beats through my anatomy, every cell pulsating with the beat of the drum and guitar strum.

I can see his mouth moving and I can tell he is melodic off-key, too monotone to leave on sheet music. His hair is sticking up in the back unclipped,

he complains that it's too long as I idle my fingers through and show him it looks fine.

He is vast.

He's telling me I'm beautiful and I weary my head.

He asks me to trust him and I don't.

Undertow
Michael Hitchcock, CMU

Everything's going
She says and cups my cheeks
With cold fingers, too small and
Quaking dreamscapes
Close to the vest,
A millstone in gold,
My darkest moments, and I
Would hope to hear
Her voice like the sea
Pulling me home
I've been meaning to ask:  
Jennifer Huang, CMU

He wants me to hose off his dog. In the middle of winter? He ignores me. Earlier today, my therapist nodded off during our session, his eyes and neck dipped to the ground. Am I just boring or manic? Later, I put on my pepper knitted socks and slipped on ice. I shouldn’t have been running. But I’ve been meaning to. The door to my apartment is stuck, old wood displaced from old construction. And he wants me to hose off his dog. In the middle of winter and my voice echoes in the long hall topped with a chandelier. The Labrador sits by my side and my fingers are frigid. The man finally looks at me. I’m not sure what it means. Then he asks What do you mean?

self-portrait  
Pay Kish, CAPA

spending another year tearing shreds of my paper body.
I am glittery. my sister is the craft box.
Searching for more glitter. talk to me while she glues my face.
a few months pass & I am standing in front of the bathroom mirror. here. scratching it all off.
the specks are falling snowflakes they coagulate around. trying
to think about the critters. one day of funds are drugs. slice across my cheek.

next week I’ll be in Titusville.
tying the stolen lace around my neck.