



Boundary Street

A CAPA | Carnegie Mellon Collaboration
Volume 15, Spring 2017

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Acknowledgments

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Contents

- Annie Ruzanic, *Words Shine Brighter*, 8
- Destiny Perkins, *Southern Lily*, 10
- Julie Heming, *Une version améliorée de la tristesse*, 12
- Jimmy Coblin, *Disasterpiece*, 13
- Chie Wach, *Voice Majors...*, 14
- Xander Yates, *Empty Reality*, 16
- Emma McIntosh, *Post-Mortem*, 17
- Julianne Jacques, *Ballet Slippers // Fake Flowers*, 18
- Sarah Ho, *10 ways to avoid heartbreaks*, 19
- Tess Buchanan, *Sunset After Coronation*, 21
- Naomi Sternstein, *An Address to the Walls, Which Once Held a Mother and her Items*, 22
- Jenna Moretti, *Between the Trees*, 23
- Roosha Mandal, *The anual Banana Van Vacation*, 24
- Giordana Verrengia, *Stomachs Growl, Minds Wander*, 26
- Chris Bopp, *Butterflies in December*, 28
- Simone Stachelski, *A Particularly Sleepless Evening In Which Not Much Happens*, 29
- Lillian Hosken, *Shoulders of a Bewildered Father*, 31
- Jora Hritz, *Veined Hands*, 32
- Carrie Qiu, *Limerence*, 33
- Delta Landis, *Stardust and Love*, 35

- Katarina Mondor, *4 Seasons*, 38
- Sinead Foley, *Vocab notes of a Polish American*, 41
- Miranda Gilbert, *Kitchen*, 44
- Madeline Bain, *Birds*, 45
- Jesse Leung, *The Golden Bird*, 46
- Hazel Shanks, *A Couple Wondering*, 47
- Steve Jurcsek, *Fever Dreams*, 48
- Brianna Kline Costa, *Definitions*, 49
- Radley Tidrick, *Plastic Lei*, 50
- Yaramo Dione, *Issaga Was*, 51
- Kyla Parker, *Sonder*, 52
- David Beinhart, *Thalia, Odessa, & Wherever Else the Grass is Green*, 54
- Mohammed Laswad, *North Yemen // South Yemen*, 56
- Julián Gabriel Nelson, *What the Eyes Can't See*, 58
- Isabella Johnson, *Sense // Untitled*, 61
- Summer Leavitt, *FROM THE RECEIVING END OF A PROMISE*, 63

Introduction

This chapbook is the result of a collaboration between students in the Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and literary artists at Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12. Throughout the Spring 2017 semester, CMU students and CAPA students exchanged assignments and worked together on poems, meeting both at CMU and CAPA for workshop sessions and discussions. This collection of poems celebrates this collaboration. We all learned from each other, and we are all 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

Alison Taverna, CAPA

Annie Ruzanic, CAPA

Words Shine Brighter

“down in the forest” — Twenty One Pilots

When the melancholy piano wails,
the world screams. The words fly off the keys.
They shine brightly in the dark, crowded room.
The words outshine the moon.

The tempo makes me uneasy.
Fast paced, rushing, overthinking.
The words pull on the violin strings
located in my chest, overpowering any other
sense I have. The lyrics are something I must hear.
I sync the words to my breathing.
My strings pull and tug.

The thumping of the kick drum matches
the beat of the metronome that keeps me alive.
My love for the drummer is unlike any “real love”
that I’ve had before in my life.
I hold it close to my ticking metronome.

When the words pick up, they grow bright
like the lights that wake me up every morning.
They will burn brighter than the sun
that keeps the world alive.

Salt runs from my eyes.
It will leave a small stain because of the mascara
I put on. The people surrounding me in the dark
and crowded room, choked up and stuffy, have streaks too.
In the moment, everything makes sense for once because
everything I’ve done isn’t what I planned, but I realize
it’s okay.

My plans that have failed make me who I am.
Even if it makes me
T-E-R-R-I-F-I-E-D.

Destiny Perkins, CAPA

Southern Lily

Tell me something sweet, Miss Holiday,
I see you licking your red lips in a veil of cigar smoke.
Miss Holiday, you lure drunken men to your feet
with a heavy ring finger.
You ain't like those other flapper girls, Miss Holiday.
The bar is crawling with those girls in cheap gold dresses,
dancing all about for a chance to get close enough to your dollar.
Those girls, they all got lock boxes without nothing to tell.

Tell me something sweet, Miss Holiday,
that smile got a secret to hide.
I see that little glint in your eye, girl, won't you stop teasing?
The club is filled with slurred variations of your name,
swallowing the soulful cry of the trumpet and the deep moan of the bass.

Won't you dance for them, Miss Holiday?
Ain't none of these men come here for your song.
No, Miss Holiday, they all came for a chance to pluck
that lily right from behind your ear, steal you from this smoke choked
dark.

Miss Holiday, don't you know you too soft on the eyes to be lingering
in these fields, singing your silver dipped words.
Miss Holiday, don't you know they only listening for your man to come
on home?

Tell me something sweet, Miss Holiday,
tell me what you got to say.
Watch you inhale as the band stops playing,
shaking their heads as the little lily seems to wrinkle in the wind.
Those men continue to holler, pushing their flapper girls aside.
You lick you lips, viciously, and lean into the microphone,
I'll catch you if you fall, baby, a man hollers from near the stage.

The club hoots and hollers as you finally open your mouth to sing,

the naked poplar trees groaning as they bend a little closer to the earth.
Hoots arise as fantasies of your own strange fruit manifest in drunken
minds.

You bow your head as the harsh southern breeze burns your skin,
open your mouth wide as mangled black bodies come tumbling out.

The club falls silent.

Miss Holiday, how far did you have to go to see these strange fruits?
How did your pretty dark eyes come to see these forbidden crops?

The club seems to be filled with the corpses, as no one dares to even
breathe
even after you finish. Your bitter fruit has broken the veil
of drunken ignorance, diverged the gaze of the money hungry flapper
girls.

You bow down in the thick silence and blow your silent audience a kiss
before you disappear backstage, leaving the club sinking slowly
under the inescapable weight of melanin.

Julie Heming, CMU

Une version améliorée de la tristesse

The needle scratches gently like a dog against the door
saying, *Come on, let me in out of the cold*

I can't resist that soft insistence
When the music starts,
I leave this dim old room
and set foot in Paris
where light drips from the lamps
like egg yolks
before pooling on the pavements

The notes send ripples through the puddles
and shivers down my spine
I follow the sound,
see the tip of a shiny, pointed black shoe
nosing its way out of the alley shadows,
and fingers alight on the gleaming brass keys
that unlock my soul

I can't see his face,
it's swaddled in shadow,
but I picture his lips around the reed
They're wet like mine,
mine that taste like twin salt streams,
and I'm carried away
in the surging tide,
while the stars careening
in the velvet night cry too,
trailing their tears in comet tails
before falling
down to earth.

Jimmy Coblin, CAPA

Disasterpiece

Dear Disaster,

The world threw me away today,
and I hope for something to come next.

You attacked with no warning, no reason,
sending your shambling servants up from the ground
to slaughter more of us into joining your sick games.

You made our bodies merciless monsters, doomed to an endless roaming.
How can a whole world, so beautiful, be destroyed in an instant?

What a waste of a perfectly good day.

When all systems break down there is nothing left to do.

I run into the forest, leaves scraping my skin, an overwhelming buzzing
pounding in my ears. The wind calls me by name.

Fall asleep, it whispers through the trees. My tired legs beg me to listen,
but the nearby patter of dead feet says otherwise. There is a dull
groaning

from the base of something's throat. I go cold, knowing it comes to kill
me.

Dear Zombie,

As I race through the forest I hear your tattered feet stumbling after.
I smell rot and decay, something deeper than the flesh
coming out from under your skin.

I haven't brought myself to confront you,

but even in the corner of my vision I can tell that you are fresh. Your skin
is pale

and blood is seeping out from under your eyes.

I taste metal and ash as I feel a cold hand reaching at my neck.

I turn around to shove you off and for the first time look into your face.

I know you.

Why could I never see it was my friend coming after me?

Well what's left of my friend, anyway.

Why did I never look into your eyes?

At least I'll die looking at a familiar face.

Dear Dead Friend,
I should have told you
I was always the disaster.
When I see your face I miss you more than in your absence.
I never even knew they got you.
When you died did you think of me?
Is anyone else we knew still alive, or am I the last one?
You could have been a ghost that haunted my sleep,
but instead appears a more tangible kind of suffering.
I feel the teeth that used to be your bite down into my back,
I fall to earth as I let your gnarled hands rip my flesh apart.
I know if there is a piece of you left, it's screaming at your limbs to stop.
It's okay.
I forgive you.
Maybe it's better this way.

Dear Death,
You smell like cold water in brutal wind.
We all live waiting for your visit.
As I fade away, I can faintly feel gnawing on my disassociated body.
My vision is blurring and the world has lost all sound.
I might as well be the last person left in the universe.
I suppose I'll become one of them,
I suppose it's good I won't be buried.
I can't imagine a tombstone out somewhere with my name on it.
R.I.P. me.
I breathe my last gasp of air and everything stops.
All senses have gone numb, but somehow I feel you standing before me.
Even in death I can't clean the blood off my clothes.
You slowly take my hand
leading me to my last parade.
My friends are lined up, carrying bouquets of roses, red, white, and
black.
A sense of calm fills me as I feel the whispers on my skin.

Chie Wach, CMU

Voice Majors...

Bushes squat stolidly around
My baby-blue picnic table and me
The branches interlace themselves around us,
Thick and protective,
While the ticklish, feathery leaves
Giggle in the breeze
At the shrill gossip of cicadas
And flirtatious twitter of sparrows.

We are interrupted by the most dignified tree,
(A tall, drooping thing with weeping fingers)
Who bursts into a song
Thick with vibrato.
It vibrates the sunlight,
Startling flowers,
Sending crickets into an embarrassed silence.

I peer through the flora
That rustles thickly with music
And secrecy
To see a single leg
Swing contentedly back
And forth
In time with the music.

The birds and insects and I listen together,
Wide-eyed,
To the pompous Italian confidence of opera,
Warbling from branch to branch,
Twining itself around tree-trunks,
Slipping over leaves
And catching the breeze
For another dance
around me
And my baby-blue picnic table.

Xander Yates, CAPA

Empty Reality

It's distant, like an ocean of empty thoughts.
My mind runs into wild places,
down back streets and alleys.
You speak in my face, but I hear nothing.
I am in my own little reality.
The world has escaped my consciousness and I have nothing left,
but the crowds surrounding me.
Of course I go unnoticed,
I'm like a blank canvas,
there is no imagination behind my eyes,
there is no thought. But an empty reality.

I try to fill it with people,
and things and tasks to make my mind wander off
make it so I can get my mind off my own worry
the insecurity that I truly am nothing
that in the grand and infinite universe I am insignificant.
Isn't that what we all do?
Keep moving ourselves along,
trying to move along and not ponder on that ever-present thought,
until by the time we realize it and try to come to terms with it,
we're already on our own deathbed?
Fake fears to hide the true fear that maybe we all fear.

Then I see it.
A light on the horizon
the one I've been warned to stay away from my whole life.
I hear voices trying to lure me beyond,
and again I'm full of that fear from before
yet the glow calls out to me
like a insect to the lantern
and a hand reaches out
not like mine, yet still comforting.
Soon I am on my way to leave it all behind,
everything I ever feared in that empty reality.

Emma McIntosh, CMU

Post-Mortem

The taste of the bitter wind,
Crisp on my tongue, biting at my cheeks,
Turning them a saccharine shade of pink.

Aching legs drag me across the pavement,
Each step scraping into the smoky sidewalk
That seems to shift beneath my feet as if I were standing on ice.

Dizzy from the crisp chill of the air,
I still force my tired lungs to drink the icy oxygen
And I continue to gradually trudge home.

Trails of salt that stick frozen to my face
Tattoo my features with the persistent grief of missing you.
The wind and the cold could never hurt as much.

My shoulders are heavier than the box in my arms,
Filled to the brim with my memories of you.
It seems as though gravity is stronger today.

I cradle these artifacts like a child against my chest,
But I still have an appetite for quality time,
And for your sage advice which I chewed but never swallowed.

I keep pushing against the frost and the clean scent of snow,
Wishing for the warmth of your too-tight hugs
And your stale cigarette breath.

I think back to my fingertips grazing your headstone
While my tongue craved your sweet cranberry bread
And the thick-lensed glasses you wouldn't let me wear.

I like to imagine you're still out there, inhaling and exhaling
But with more ease this time around.
Lungs are meant to keep you going, not to hold you back.

Julianne Jacques, CAPA

Ballet Slippers

Marvel in my eyes.
Something dirty, but the kind of dirty I feel proud of.
You are never kind,
but sometimes you pick me up
and make me leap.
I never stop moving.
My arm going this way,
my head facing towards my fingers,
my hand slowly flipping downwards.
You burn pain in my sides, feet, legs.
The kind you feel
spreading over your body like ivy.

Fake Flowers

An obsession with fake flowers
is like an obsession with death scenes in movies.
That sinister scene everyone anticipates,
but always looks away when it comes.
Frozen in time
forever.
Their petals like plastic foliage
make me want to wash my hands
after rubbing my fingers across them.
I complain about them,
yet I have them all around me —
confetti stuck in my hair.

10 ways to avoid heartbreaks

1. Write your name at the top of a list, as the only item on your list.
Title it “People I Care About.”
You don’t need a dress rehearsal to know how to
caress your own soul, to feel throbs of your heart
beating for no one but your own.
2. Wrap your heart like a Christmas present, lodge it on a high shelf.
Keep it where people
could see but could never reach, never touch, never open.
3. Buy yourself color brushes and a 3D printer.
Paint your own dreams in the colors of your imagination,
in the sunshine of your own strength.
Print them out, make them come true.
4. Work out, ferociously.
Train the muscles of your shoulders so they could rear up
the weight of the world’s disappointment,
without flinching.
5. Move like tree roots breaking through concrete.
Branch, arch, grow through the relentless towers of disappointments
in your life.
6. Practice your poker face until it becomes real.
If you show your emotions to people, you give them power:
they would swing your heart high into the air just to listen to the
sound of
breaking glass, moments later.
7. Signs of affections are signs of weakness; Don’t ever show them, and
reject any shown to you.
“I love you”
is the waves crashing out to the sea,
breaking the reef and

thundering the tide.

8. Wear shades.

To battle the encroaching darkness of heartbreak, you shall never
experience

the warmth of light.

Also, if you don't look at people, you don't have to believe in them.

9. Don't let yourself be vulnerable.

10. *Ever.*

Heartbreaks. Vulnerability. Love.

When I toss them out of my life, I feel

Invincible.

I sleep in a bed that is my own, lying on a pillow that
smells of only my hair, nothing but the thudding of

my heart fills the

silence of my house.

But then this future

towers up ahead of me, a succession of

empty days, each more

daunting and hopeless

than the one before.

That's when I realize that I have been wrong

all along.

No matter how far the wave of your heart has travelled, how many
times it has

sneaked off to new adventures and gotten bruised on the reef,

it always ends up in the embrace of

the shoreline.

This is what love is like, the feeling of coming home.

This is what life should be, broken, full and beautiful.

Tess Buchanan, CAPA

Sunset After Coronation

The sky is my kingdom, yard my palace by birthright.
Wind chimes toll like temple bells above my brow.
Striped sheets billow on clotheslines
above grass carpets carrying the crest of my realm,
old ropes, banners hanging from tree branches.

White paint chips off my morning glory
lined fence, lowering like a drawbridge under the weight
of regal flowers. From tree trunks I pluck cicada shells,
chained with daisy weed and white clover into a crown,
breastplate made from bark on my family tree.

My pond is encircled with bouquets of mint leaves,
cattails dripping with honey. Magnolia branches watch
reflections of monarch butterflies over the water,
blooms waving at goldfish guiding petal boats.
Spring wind flirts with tree limbs,
carrying smells of sweet magnolia syrup to my lap.
A nest is tucked in the turret of my tree,
carries a young starling, a sword to ward from danger,
older sisters, mothers calling for dinnertime.
I trace the hose-snake slithering through grass.

Grapevines coil around the dulled fingertips
of rose-bush thorns, seeded grapes
flowering amongst blood-red flowers.
Chives for lunch, cherry tomatoes for dinner,
my sandbox garden filled with granulated sugar.
I feast on pea-pods and dandelion tea, listening
to old screws shift in my splintered picnic-table throne.

Tomato skin splits between my teeth like skin
on my feet but I pay no attention, because doves
coo and send the sun bowing over the horizon,
to invite the coming royal blue night.

Naomi Sternstein, CMU

An Address to the Walls, Which Once Held a Mother and Her Items

I've left the men upstairs
to their boxes and their brooms. They are diligent,
more like an influx of ants than
of dreamy wood rats, they trail weightless
along your limbs, climb over and between
broken lamps that bloom and blockade
before them.

Our lady's used lipstick tubes, piles of
polyester neckties, quotes written out
in blocked print taped to mirrors,
the sturdy walnut bedframe that birthed them
into old age, all dismembered
and sucked out from the head first.
You are steady bone, but I am
flesh collapsing against
the retreating space.

I've taken the television that kept talking,
even as it lost its audience, for myself.
I used to think walls were blind. I used to think
the child-made drawings and misspelled letters
in valuable frames were what watched her
in that room, settle into her green arm chair
by the loud television, sleep silently when the sun fell.

But now I think you are like a deep-sea scallop,
with a hundred tiny eyes,
and I've lost my landmarks, swim sightless
circles around you, see the men out at the end
of our day.

Jenna Moretti, CAPA

Between the Trees

Treetops cover the sky
like a blanket wrapping around the forest.
Dew drops drip on wild mushrooms
shielding mossy tree trunks.
Termites hike up a dead tree
in military fashion.

The visitors speak a foreign tongue,
like redwoods in pine territory.
They wander in the growing weeds
searching for a forgotten friend.
No ideas of where, they keep walking.
Listening to their own footsteps.

They step over fallen branches,
glancing over their shoulders.
They won't stop until it's in the palms of their hands.
Their brimmed hats are umbrellas, flicking away water.
Mud clings to their sinking rubber boots,
and they stick out in grossly green-colored camo pants.

Only a few sunrays peek through the blanket of leaves.
Birds whistle from miles apart talking
about the incoming weather of heavy rain
and a possible storm. Other animals start to wake
in the morning air, loud and quiet,
causing the visitors to hold up cameras, ready to snap.

A bright blue parrot emerges from the trees.
A shiny metal bracelet hugs its ankle.
The bird coos at its visitors, as if it's been waiting
for their return since last season.
Cameras raise and click. The bird bobs his head
before his wings spread to take him away.

The annual Banana Van Vacation

On the morning of the summer solstice
two sets of siblings bound out of bed, downstairs to the kitchen
for fluffy pancakes, powdered and syrup-ed with goofy grins.

Eight arms scout out the playroom and locate
coloring books, a yo-yo, a dollar-general bucket and pail, essentials for
the once-a-year beach trip with the cousins,
the aunties and mommies, and no men, in the banana van.

Picnic basket and pool floaties in arm,
a rugged family of eight piles into a minivan
and the under-13s fill up the backseat that
reeks of bananas and road-trip daydreams,
pulling out notepads to tally the cows and horses
that will fly by the stickered windows on the Turnpike,
just leaving their small town and headed to heaven
of the seashell, an escape from the headaches
heartaches of the dads and uncles that left.

Midday into the summer solstice,
9-year old whines cloud over the 80's radio station
when mom drives past the last rest area for 25 miles.
The preteens brainstorm bathroom substitutes:
a plastic grocery bag and gatorade bottle until aunt
rolls her eyes and uses the GPS navigates to a McDonalds.

Half-an-hour later, four kids scuff their sneakers on the curb
emerged from the Large M with vanilla cones and empty bladders,
ice cream dripping down chins. Sticky fingers point out cartoon clouds
while aunt distributes PB&J. After the women sort out the driving lineup,
they shuffle back into the banana van,
collecting apple cores and fruit peels in a trash bag for mom and aunt
because for the love of the lord, this car is not a pig pen.

On the evening of the summer solstice,
the banana van reaches the seashell motel

and cramped arms and legs climb out of the passenger seats
to strip off shoes and sink toes into the pebbled sand.

Giordana Verrengia, CAPA

Stomachs Growl, Minds Wander

The car ride has left a smooth
crevice on my leg, stretching
from my ankle to skirt's hem.

When I stretch out,
my stomach sighs like
it can tell our exact location.

My steps are airy and delicate
as I move across the gravel lot,
each closer to an overdue meal.

I am not angry at my spine
for easing into a hunch
when my food comes to the table,

a toasty baguette nesting
cuts of lean meat, garnished
with herbs, partnered with potatoes.

It's likely my head never lifted
from the plate, but had I paid the others
any mind, I'm sure they did the same.

After we pay, I pace
myself to the door, carrying
the extra baggage of a full belly.

When I reach the gray vehicle
I arrived in, it's humming
the solemn tune of a stalling engine.

It does not open its doors
when we ask nicely,
loose fingers wrapped in the handles.

All I can do is watch,
and look for the most comfy
spot to sit on the curb.

Chris Bopp, CAPA

Butterflies in December

Blurred flashes of light pass by the fogged car window.
I shiver and shake bundled in my coat like a child wrapped
in a blanket, translucent fog escaping my lips every time I breathe.
There are Christmas lights strung anywhere they'll hang,
glittering in the barren trees and illuminating the telephone poles.
The tree made of glowing Christmas ornaments stands tall
as we approach the restaurant and I swear my skeleton starts
to shake. It's cold and the sky is midnight blue above my head.
Flakes of snow dance to the ground and add extra sparkle among the
stars.

I am shivering but my face is warm like a summer's day, I feel
flushed and dizzy. Then I see him, only recognizing his purple
beanie and his mother's booming voice. I drag my feet
and try to keep my bones still in my skin. We embrace for a moment,
his cool cheek resting on my head, then we take shelter from the cold.
When we return again to the outdoors the sky is darker
and snow is falling. We shiver and our teeth chatter, speaking
in morse code. A cold December gust shifts my hair as we
embrace and he leans down to me, as I am already
on my tiptoes reaching toward him. Our lips meet for an instant,
they're chapped yet soft and taste of the mint gum he's been chewing
anxiously,
and warm, like a comforting hug, and I get butterflies
as we part. His deep honey eyes stare into mine.

Simone Stachelski, CMU

A Particularly Sleepless Evening In Which Not Much Happens

I suck down on peppermint-laced tablets
As the melatonin contained within them creeps into my mind
Like a creature from the depths of my childhood closet.

By the time I start to feel drowsy,
Summer, wet and hot, has worked its way
Around the corner and through my window,
A wet dog thrashing about, dancing itself dry on my sheets.

Mother always told me, rather hypocritically, that reading is important,
that
Words are important.
“It’s good for the brain,” she’d say.
And now, here I am, waiting,
Counting the cracks on one of the walls (the number always changes),
As all those words Mom told me about, important words, words I’ve
read,
And words I haven’t, words I’ve made up, and words friends have made
up,
And words I didn’t even know existed,
All words, every word,
Crowd into a nebula inside my mind, besieging me with their
connections, dots on maps, stars
pulling each other together by sheer force. Oh, how it bores me.
It all bores me.

Now
I do not even read the words on the cereal box
I see every morning as I consume my breakfast

Now
My friend asks me for help on his crossword puzzles. I know the answers
but I do not give them to him

Now

I sit in silence, praying for someone to drag this Achilles heel of mine
down into the depths,
taking the rest of me along with it.

I cannot bring myself to see the beauty of the sea, or the sky, or the
earth.

I cannot bring myself to understand the glint in a lover's eye
Or even just the warmth emanating from between my own lips.

All I can think about is the immediate. All I can think about
Is what to do next.

If it's my dream to be a poet, it's time for me to wake up.

Lillian Hosken, CAPA

Shoulders of a Bewildered Father

Our sweet baby boy
sits at the computer, his skin milky
and ashen, his unwashed hair the color
of dust. My son would have sun
in his face and a glow in his eyes,
but this fourteen-year-old
hasn't changed clothes in weeks.
He smells like drying sweat and hair grease.
He's heard the word "no"
so little times, he's forgotten
to learn what it means.
I've tried to tell him no, to grow
him until he sprouts and blossoms,
to ease the sunshine into his skin.
But you'd always scold me and snatch
him away like a dragon with a ruby,
refusing to subject him to anyone's love
less gentle than your own. You
always forget that he's my baby too.
Now he's skinny and clutches
at toys in the grocery aisle, widening his eyes
and sticking out his lip. Now, he wants you
to come pour him a glass of milk. You grumble
and slide out of bed. And I wish
you'd admit you're ready
for our sweet baby boy to grow up.

Jora Hritz, CAPA

Veined Hands

I grew up with my grandmother
in the kitchen, kneading dough
with the fragile palms of her hands,
veins gliding underneath translucent skin.
Flour and sugar beat into her bones,
hot pan burning off fingerprints,
guiding my hands through each movement.
When spending nights with her I'd wake up
to pancakes and dollar store trips.
On the shuttle, my quiet eagerness
melting into the rough seats.

She played cards until her fingers cracked.
No written instructions or Google
to clarify what she already knows.
She wins, never brags, laughing,
“Watch, you’ll beat me next time missy.”

Her words are warmed milk on fingertips,
telling stories of a large family in a small house.
Seven children, twenty grandkids, fourteen great-grandkids later,
still sane. She tells of her late husband
with only a smile. She grew up with no father,
in a poor family of twelve siblings, an Italian mother,
through the Great Depression.
She has no sad stories to tell.
Her stories become my memories,
spiraling through my body, gripping tight.

Carrie Qui, CMU

Limerence

I.

Years ago, I saw him from an angle
of the pair of thin-wired glasses
and lanky torso, every so often
emerging through the smoke
to crack a cynical joke.

He seldom let light expose him,
though he swiveled around in the desk chair,
never escaping the dim glow
reflecting off of unyielding eyes that
only saw digits and video games.

When he did succumb to human contact,
The boys would go about their boyish chitchats,
while I stood aside on thin ice
with careful optimism that he might
keep my curiosity afloat.

II.

Yesterday, I saw him under the influence,
and the dim bar and buzzed conversations
loosened his mind, and I touched a heart
that was afraid, but beat faster than mine.

Without the thin-wired glasses,
the pair of fierce sapphire eyes
disturbed a countenance
that only my mind sought to see.

I yet again stand on thin ice
Uncertain whether to advance or retreat
But I edged forward a few feet
To hear another cynical joke.

III.

My primal instincts tell me to not look
into those gems, for over the precipice,
I will lose my reins on
my coveted egoism.

Cosmic collisions from a brush upon the elbow –
Did he mean to get so close?
Dangling over my head like a crib mobile,
I wait for an inanimate prize to come alive.

I throw tirades at him, then apologize.
My reins are taut and thinned,
Abrasive against the stony, sober, slender, slick, and silent
Shadow that I knew years ago.

IV.

If I say happiness is simple,
then I am naïve.
If I say happiness is complex,
he says he wishes it were simple.

I take what is given,
And learn to not ask for too much.
This is the new way to love,
When Limerence leaves its mark.

Delta Landis, CAPA

Stardust and Love

*“A purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved.” — Kurt Vonnegut, *The Sirens of Titan**

I

On the day that could've been her last,
she lay back,
leaving her body bared,
swaddled in midday sun,
and soft grass.
One arm a pillow, the other a sleep mask.

She fell into a half sleep,
dreaming as though
tomorrow was certain.
And that tomorrow would be as lovely as today.
Every birthday, kiss, crowning moment,
narrated by the tenderness
of her best friend's voice
and relived
through a halcyon filter.

II

She lay like this,
washing her pain away
in sweetness
that held the illusion of immortality.
Until a voice called,
familiar,
belonging to Tenderness.

Tenderness and her feet rustled
through the grass,
every moment a footstep closer.

Tenderness knelt,

taking the other into mellifluous arms
made with milk and honey.

Tears ran down her eyes,
down the eyes of Tenderness as well.
Tenderness had tears of silver,
while she,
tears of gold.
A heavenly chemical reaction.
The moon and the sun
shared a finale.

The moon and sun began,
a juxtaposed swan song
so similar yet so different,
a divine denouement,
two halved of a whole dance.

Euphoria couldn't begin to describe
the dance that two
earthbound celestial bodies,
bound by each other's gravity,
create.

But of course,
orbits change.
The unexpected happens.
The moon and the sun
crash into each other.
A least their death was beautiful.

III
All things are made of stardust,

so scientists say.
Matter cannot be created.
Matter cannot be destroyed.

And if so,
Adoration's echo will be
all that's left someday.
Of us.
Of humans.
Of life.

Perhaps that means,
life is meant to be spent
in such a way.
To be immortalized
by love.

As, though destruction is inevitable,
all things collapse,
and all good things come to an end,
stardust is immortal.

This life, and passion we share
Right Now,
is being immortalized
in astral echoes.

Katarina Mondor, CAPA

4 Seasons

1.

He rolls out of bed,
combs his hair,
puts on a cup of coffee
for one.

He glances outside,
frozen and gray.
The cold is an old friend.

He rubs his eyes bleakly,
slips into a coat,
then trudges into the flurry.

I know only a few people
who like the cold.
He is not one of them.

2.

The beauty of now
cannot be captured
by a single song,
he whistles,
admiring the flowers.

He hands me a fresh bouquet—
Tulips,
Roses,
Marigolds,
he recites.

He tells me,
I could find no flower
blue enough to match

your eyes,
so the sky will have to do.

We gaze up together.
Rainclouds gather in the distance.

3.
Yesterday,
the sun never came out.
All day the clouds hung low,
dumping water from above.

She told me
if it rained again today,
she was moving to the Bahamas.
At least it's not here.

Rain is only temporary,
I promised her,
but the storm wouldn't break.

At least it's still warm,
I consoled,
combing my fingers
through my humidity-frizzed hair,
as the raindrops
raced down the car windows.

4.
Four days ago,
the first leaf fell.

Its unresponsive figure slipped
carelessly out of the tree's hand,

and wandered to the earth.
It was not missed.

Every year, the tree
behind my house
refuses to lose its leaves
until the first snowfall.
It seems to be stuck in a
permanent October.

Sinead Foley, CMU

Vocab Notes of a Polish American

i. *uszka*

Pronounced: oosh-ka

Meaning: little ears

A soft whoosh of air, smelling of soap
and dough,
tingling like a cracked egg on my scalp,
deftly kneaded through strands of hair
by gentle fingers, joints swollen to tulip bulbs
by arthritis
and years of manual labor, when they were qualified
to command courtrooms.

I hear the word, and
my whole body
relaxes.

It's the first Polish word I knew
though I didn't know
the meaning
for another ten years.

I still don't know why
my Babcia calls me
"little ears."

ii. *lody*

Pronounced: lo-de

Meaning: ice cream

Blue sky
Yellow raincoats
White cream
My sister and I run shrieking
through the Warsaw streets,

screaming *lody, lody, lody!*
knowing the great uncle
 we met last week
will buy it for us
when he catches up.

We're learning.
In a week in Warsaw we've learned
 to say *mleko* for milk
 at the breakfast table,
 and *chleb* for the bread, dark and seedy,
 that our jaws are getting strong enough to chew.
We've learned some of our cousins' names
 and how to pretend we know the others.
We've learned not to ask questions
 when great uncle Michał
 plays Soviet marches
 so loud the neighbors can hear
 but Babcia pretends she can't.

iii. *Zbigniew*

Pronounced: zuh-big-nee-ef

Meaning: Name, meaning 'to dispel anger'

To the bellman, the Census Bureau,
and the neighbors, he's Ziggy.
But within the borders
of his apartment's parquet floor,
and in conversations in rapid fire Polish that make my head spin,
he's Zbigniew.

For me, he was Pop.
Just Pop, in that time before I knew
parents and grandparents have other names

and histories, memories of other parquet floors
hacked apart by revolutionary axes
used to keep the fire burning against
winter's Stalinist grey.

I've heard of Zbigniew,
who jumped off the back of a prison cart headed to Siberia,
and threw parties till daybreak,
my mom stepping over fashionable forms
on her way to breakfast.

The men I know are Ziggy
who pronounces *incredible* like *incredulous*,
and spends New Years in a suit jacket and pajama pants
skyping friends in Poland,

And Pop,
who tells me he turned sixteen

holding his breath, head underwater, lungs like ice,
praying the searchlights wouldn't find him
as he smuggled baking powder under the Iron Curtain,
and that he's proud I turned sixteen
being woken up by my parents singing Happy Birthday
as they have for 16 years.

And whose response when I say,
I want to move to Poland when I'm older, is just, *No*.

Miranda Gilbert, CAPA

Kitchen

Palms coated in flour,
Ma stands in the kitchen.
Her aching feet cry with every shift,
but she fries her bread until it sings.

Palms coated in potato skins,
Ma stands in the kitchen.
Her aching hands cry with every shift,
but she fries her latkes until they sing.

Palms coated in afterbirth,
Ma stands in the kitchen.
Her aching hands tremble as she cradles her granddaughter,
singing her to sleep.

Madeline Bain, CAPA

Birds

An ivy covered house
stands in the south of France.
Moss seeps from its mortar.
Crowngrass brushes the panes.
A single, ebony crow
rests on the chimney.

An ivy covered house
stands in the South of France.
Frost pounds down the door.
Weeds arrest the garden.
Four horned owls
circle the remains.

An ivy covered house
lingers in the south of France.
It kisses its last goodbyes.
Remnants fertilize the ground.
A small, delicate wren
chirps atop the freshly laid soil.

Jesse Leung, CMU

The Golden Bird

Alight on a branch,
A bird wrapped in gold.
Singing for lovers,
Showing his feathers like a prince beneath the sky.

Alight on a hand,
A bird wrapped in gold.
Singing for sesame,
Showing his feathers for the last beneath the sky.

A light on a wire,
A bird wrapped in gold.
Singing brightly through the filament,
Showing sunshine to the night.

Hazel Shanks, CAPA

A Couple Wondering

I see constellations
in your freckles like they
are part of the night sky.

*Paint traces spirals down
your forearms like the sea
traces lines in the sand.*

My fingertips trail through
the dusty surfaces
of your old dresser drawers

*There are still two boxes
of heels left in my room
just waiting to be worn.*

I am still following
your trail of starry sky.

*I am still wondering
when you are coming home.*

Steve Jurcsek, CMU

Fever Dreams

Sheets. Bed. Recently fluffed pillow.
I lay my head down, drift into a

Filing cabinet, papers everywhere, palms sweaty as
I scramble for Mr Smith's tax reports deep in the hole
They call a drawer, but of course it's not nestled in its home

Blanket casts tentacles around my
Legs and all I can do is scream
Nothing while my jaw locks up and

The centipede — well, more like megapede, it's colossal
Slithers from the far corner of my room, only to rear
Its jaws at me and drool at the fresh meat held in fear by

A chemical reaction that
Cut the power cords from my brain
To my muscle. My instincts don't
Matter, all they can do is ring
The alarm bell but no one hears.

Brighter ever brighter my lamp
Glow as I cling to my sheets
Soaked in slime laced with Tylenol.

Brianna Kline Costa, CAPA

Definitions

We have written ourselves over again and again. We are not for you to
define.

Our bones are laced with grape vines. Our hands are warm from sun.
Our roots do not incriminate us. Our skin is not a crime.

Our chest drips with blood. Our hands drip with wine.
Latino children are born riddled with bullet holes. We shy away from
guns.

We have written ourselves over again and again. We are not for you to
define.

Our mothers crawled here on hands and knees for us. We cannot afford
to waste a lifetime.

Our roots do not incriminate us. Our skin is not a crime.

We bred rivers under our tongue. We built homes along our spine.
My grandmother sews herself together each morning. Each day the
stitches come undone.

We have written ourselves over again and again. We are not for you to
define.

Our roots do not incriminate us. Our skin is not a crime.

Radley Tidrick, CAPA

Plastic Lei

Pink light cascades over him,
he rocks in a sea full of people.
A plastic lei around his neck
and peace in his brain.
His arms are in the air and he closes his eyes.
He breathes in
and smells the sweat in the air,
hears the passion of the music,
feels the moment.
He rolled his sleeves up
what feels like forever ago.
He cannot tell
how long he has been swaying,
how long he has been here.
All he knows
is that it feels like community.
It feels like home.

Yaramo Dione, CMU

Issaga Wars

She's perfected the duck lips
resting on her face
tightening the skin around her bony jaw
where weeks of pain lay.
If you peer closely
into her deep brown looking glass
you'll find long nights of agony
and early morning smiles.

Resting on her chest
is a necklace that I'd held.
Did she feel my love through the pendant
nestled in its golden heart
surrounded by sunset gems?
Or, was six years of absence too long for her to recognize my touch?

On her shoulders was a mustard scarf
cascading down gently
hiding
too thin arms,
hiding
too thin shoulders,
screaming
a thinning life.

Her skin's the clearest I've ever seen it.
A sun kissed brown cocoa envies,
framed by the perfect jaw line of starvation.
Her eyes, crystal clear, gleamed with anticipation.
She was flawless—looking to me as if to say,
“I'm ready; I'm happy to go.”
God has a way of preparing his angels.

Kyla Parker, CAPA

Sonder

6:32 a.m.

"*Eleven, Fineview,*" the electronic voice pours from the overhead speaker. The bus is empty as I step on, leaving the petrichor outside.

6:36 a.m.

A woman with vermillion hair is three rows back, her freckled face like that of a robot, utterly emotionless.

6:42 a.m.

The bus fills up.
People pack in like ocean waves, one after another. Each one different, but still making an impact.

6:45 a.m.

A woman sits in the front with two rambunctious toddlers leaping around. The handicap area is their stage.

6:49 a.m.

To my left, a suited couple, who haven't loosened their grip on each other's hands since they arrived, holding throughout the bus' meandering path.

6:51 a.m.

A teenage boy, arms full of books; a regular bibliomaniac. He drops one:
The Abyss Beyond Dreams.

6:59 a.m.

Standing at the head of the bus, a nurse. The look in her eyes is one I can't quite read. Maybe she's just melancholic.

7:02 a.m.

The ineffable stench of cigarette smoke
wafts from the man beside me.
I hold my breath, waiting for him to depart.

7:04 a.m.

I try to nap,
but am awakened by a girl
with a mania for loud music.

7:07 a.m.

I pull the faded yellow cord to signify a stop.
I step off, walk to school,
and hope for serendipity.

David Beinhart, CMU

Thalia, Odessa, & Wherever Else the Grass is Green

The small football
team is romanticized
in the hearts
 &
in the stories
of the towns

As much about football
as trying
 &
(failing) to fit in

tales canonizing
rivalries, comebacks
 &
the coming of age upon
summer's searing hot
gridiron.

Despite the gamut being wrung out of
blood stained,
sweat soaked,
dare I venture,
tear seasoned jerseys

the ballplayers are allowed but one emotion,
 &
one emotion only:

ENTHUSIASM!

which rules all,
for anything else indicts:
indicating lack of heart
&
commitment to the team

But below the protection of pads
&
beyond the structure of plays
churns without label:
desire for violence, lust of copulation, fear of shame
&
pride in hustle.

Timeless themes
suspended pages at a time
by the likes of
Larry McMurtry, Elwood Reid
&
Buzz Bissinger

As they describe small towns
real, far & all in-between
gripped in Friday night's frenzy
as them boys come out & the band goes on.

Mohammed Laswad, CAPA

North Yemen

You, the South, belong to us forever;
twenty-seven years ago, we united;
your state then vanished from the map.
History does not go back but forward;
no longer do the two Yemens exist.
Unification is our eternal fate
to which thousands of lives
and two wars
were tremendous sacrifices.
One Yemen to live.
Our unity is a divine gift;
no one dares to reject.
When you, Southerners, did dare,
we, Northerners, taught you the lesson.
Huthi, Saleh, Muslim Brothers, Iran are one;
let Saudi Arabia and its coalition interfere
to save you from our wrath
and its borders from Iranian danger.
Unification is our holy fate;
whoever is against it,
is against Islam.

South Yemen

Who gave you the right
to call Southerners disbelievers?
Who gave you the right
to determine our future?
Our 1990 unity was a marriage
that failed on the very first day,
leading to disasters upon disasters.
Your greed could not get along

with our honesty;
your tribes could not go along
with our law and order;
your barbarism could not get along
with our civilization;
your extremism could not get along
with our moderation.

You invaded
our South with tanks and rockets
to save your “holy unity.”
In the name of Islam, you invaded our land.
In the name of Islam, you annexed it to your North.
In the name of Islam, you killed our people.
In the name of Islam, you robbed our oil,
our land and natural resources,
our strategic location and Bab-el-Mandeb.
Independence is what we demand;
freedom is what we hope,
not only in the name of Islam,
but in the name of our kin.

Julián Gabriel Nelson, CMU

What the Eyes Can't See

I stare at myself in the mirror
and this is what I see:

Khaki cargo shorts

- Everyone says they are out of style, but I say I like wearing them.
- I have had the same pair since high school.
- I like the flapping sound of all the pockets as I walk.
- They are semi-rough to the touch.
- They let the passing air brush across the bare part of my legs.
- I LOVE the feeling of concealing/carrying in one of my many pockets.

White Deep V-Neck

- They say it makes me look like a jerk, I say I might be one.
- I just got a whole bunch this year.
- They don't rub my chest hairs when I walk, which is nice.
- They rest easily on my shoulders.
- They are soft in accordance to how many times they have been washed.
- They make me feel attractive. :)

Mid-Calf Length Athletic Socks

- They ask sarcastically: Are you an athlete or something?, I say *cierra tu boca*.
- They conceal my tiny ankles and bring attention to my decent sized calves.
- I got them back in high school from doing football.
- They are rough from rubbing on callouses and my callousness (no fabric softener).
- Black and white like me...aning like my shoes.
- Under Armour like the shield around my heart.

High Top Thick-Base Jordan's

- Jordan glided over the basketball court...these go clunk.
- They make me feel two inches taller.

- I washed them once...I have not done so since.
- They smell of nasty foot smell from overuse.
- They feel like nostalgia.
- They have ankle supports that make me feel cool.
- I frequently scrape accumulated mud off of the bottom of them.

Oversized Steelers Jacket

- I tucked in the collar, sleeves, and bottom to hide how skinny it makes me look.
- I took it from my Dad's closet when he was dead...tired one day.
- The inside reeks of bright yellow.
- The leather exterior feels leathery (Hooray! Cliché).
- It reminds me of all the hugs he gave me, and all the ones he never will.
- I secretly hope that I never grow into it.

Puma Glasses

- I wear them so often I almost missed them.
- They are almost as much a part of me as the next two items.
- They are a symbol of intelligence.
- I have them because I broke my other two pairs going to parties.
- They are only 1,000,000% easier to put on than contacts.
- They cause me slight pain on the top of my right ear when put on or removed.
- They hide scars on the corners of both of my eyes.
- They hide the bags under my eyes from late nights.
- They don't hide my bloodshot eyes from lack of sleep.

Curly Hair

- It catches light and shines bright by holding it inside.
- It is soft to the touch, softer than lamb's wool.
- If I pick it out, it appears as cotton.
- If I don't, it appears as the gnarled roots of the world's oldest tree.
- It's both.
- It is a little dry, but I don't mind. I'll moisturize it tomorrow.

- I secretly love it when people run their fingers through it.

Black Skin

- Because I see it so seldom since I got to Pittsburgh.
- Because despite 20 years of having it, it still catches my eye.
- Because it comes with story, told in exclusive circles and hushed tones.
- Because it is the first thing anyone sees when they look at me.
- Because it is a part of me.

Isabella Johnson, CAPA

Sense

I will become the President,
not today, but someday.
But why am I so stupid?
Why did this make sense?
My brain is made of stupid remarks
and questions.

To be clear, sometimes
I fall asleep with my eyes open.

At the end of the day all I want is home and chocolate.

Here I was, shoving my face with chocolate.
What's this? My dad calls me in the middle of my (zen) moment.
Of course I continue to shove my face, why not?

This describes my life:
"Bella, why are you eating cake?"
Because I want cake.

When I was a little kid,
I swallowed cherry seeds.
I'd always wonder if a cherry tree would
branch out of my stomach.

Laying in bed,
11:30 PM.
11:35 PM.
What is there left to say?

Why can't the beginning start
with "The End?"

Untitled

Why can't the begining start
with "The End?"

When do you get to speak your mind?

Exactly.

But what's this?
Oh yes, sometimes it's not all fun and games.

What is there left to say?

Summer Leavitt, CMU

FROM THE RECEIVING END OF A PROMISE

If my mind was a house
my strength fell
somewhere
behind the couch.

In the morning,
when I rise,
I decide
how will I resist today?

I made progress.
I baked it into a pie
with tofu kielbasa and
purple cabbage.

Over and over
to myself, I repeat
wedding vows
for a ceremony
that probably will
never happen.
We are gathered here
today
to celebrate-

I woke myself up
from laughing at a dream
and whispered my vows
as I fell back asleep.
I now pronounce you
wife and wife

Every night

the lights are on
extra long
in the synagogue
across the street.
I wonder
what they're up to.

My mother sends me notes,
shares her hate without hope
from when
her family was forced,
fled from Poland.

Live slow
and die old
is my new motto.

I stopped,
sat on a couch
someone had put out
on their front lawn
on my walk home
to grieve,
breathe.

I bought 3 large bottles of water
and thought
I am stocking up for the apocalypse.

