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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 2019 Spring semester, CMU students and CAPA students exchanged assignments and worked together on poems. And ate pizza.

This collection 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
Allison Taverna, CAPA
I. Man
Isolated atop a tall hill, behind him, grey clouds may as well be the ocean—a figure stands with a spindly crook for herding, not walking.

I have yet to meet his cane. I am on a swim.

My habitat: not a bowl.
My habitat: water can fill any container.

II. Crook
Some days, he spends all his time, a dramatic silhouette, leaving no mark beyond his existence, his sharp eyebrows, sickly patches of crumpled grass, his shape, the shape of his crook, the object of a shepherd's life. He can only imagine a crowd of grain eating animals to prod.

I am an animal. I am alone, and slimy, contented gulping meat past my toothless gums. I've started carrying around a knife.

Of all the fish in the sea, creature, traumatized by harpoons of hunters, doing, I am a hunter.

III. Domestication
Has he, the shepherd, ever tried to domesticate a swordfish? His crook would glide through the water much like my pointed bill, a threat. Hooked staff that it is, it was made for keeping herbivores.

I am provocative always provoke and eat, eat things that eat.
My prey: puckered, scaled.
My prey: very much breathing.
Mackerel for example have gills and octopuses have intelligence, and I eat both.
Still, there is a comfort in never pursuing what is bigger than me.

IV. Lifestyle Choices
He and I don't normally meet in close quarters that way: eating.
He does not shepherd carnivores.
The extension of his arm: the human way, in which he is in control.

I never keep others, am no kidnapper guard no holding cell.
See me, and you may very well die.
My weapon: a long narrow bill, made for few purposes.
My weapon: crashes into ship decks and beings.
and did you know other fish bleed?

V. Shepherd
If he strikes his crook at the top of the hill, there will be no lightning.
Each time I kill, I am not in control.
There are days when I nudge many fish out from their lives, guide them into the underworld, and there he stands under sunless days, containing creatures, feeding them unbloodied grass.

One strand of hair doesn't listen to the comb, or the hairspray, or my prayers. No matter what I do, no matter how many times I brush, it coils like smoke. I go to work, I pretend I don't notice the knot continuing to grow on my head.

A newspaper stand on the corner is selling headlines that report my bad hair day. I stare at cars stuck in the red molasses of the light, rather than the stand worker, waving my shame at my face, trying to get me to pay for it.

I can see myself in the window of the car in front of me. My hairs form catacombs, twisted snags of legislature form the Squirrel Hill Synagogue, form Stoneman Douglas, form the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival.

Another stand is selling hats. I jam one on my head, a bandage on a bullet-wound, The knots tighten like nooses,
At the Scene of Crime

The briny adrenaline of the sea diffuses into my veins as I kneel into a wave and inhale the crustacean flecked foam. Insistent wind caresses my ears, whispering of lives on jeweled shores away from home. I wonder if it’s this wind that drew you into the grey. Or perhaps it’s the round, seductive smoothness of the pebbles underfoot before they sprout fangs. Lacking evidence for implication, I take three steps forward, then ten. No jagged brown razors, just the grey water separating my soles from the scents of the shore. The cries of fishermen and flamingos recede, aftertastes of familiar meals.

My arms cut trails of false clarity, frantic incisions filled with red herrings, toxic waste and sticky seaweed. The howl of the sea whips me into beige oblivion as barnacles and beads of perspiration cling to me like dreams without dreamers. I think I see you near the horizon, a black speck shrinking the faster I swim.

Parched, I lap at the ocean as salt marbles rattle down my sooty throat,
then fill the pink sacks
of my lungs like bricks.

I beg the wind to whisper
me home but it's silent.

Mother, Mother

The bulbous moon, strewn stars,
clutches onto wet grass, smells
of melting blood orange clouds. I put
my hands out in the sky, realigning
constellations, just like you did. I think
of the memory card as I twirl it around
my crackled fingers. Of tugging onto my
mother's plaid shirt. Of brining sunlight,
and bleary video tapes on the Bolsey
C-22 camera, I only have this keepsake.

Why do you weep as if you've heard
the sweet essence of our home? You aren't
there anymore. Why let it rain when you can
swim? Mother, Mother. All I see are clouds
with stars and sun holding the moon
like Mother holding her daughter.

Remember how the pulse of transparent
waves tackled the walloping winds, serenading
us through black-eyed Susans and waltzing
marigolds? Mother, Mother. The moon cries.
Flowers aren’t dancing anymore with only
a keepsake, a commemoration. Who’s to say
the moon won’t fall asleep without the stars
listening to your usual lullabies or old stories
to me? Or seeing us intertwine our fingers
the way we used to at home on the beach.
10 Shots of a Pig

I.
Chewing slowly
and without much fanfare.
Pan down to the shit beneath the surface.

II.
Pig skin
is the color of wet caulk. On film it turns out pink.

III.
I letapigeat
from the palm of my hand. His tongue was glassy,
his eyes: supple.

IV.
There are only a handful of movies about pigs.
Of those movies, only one is also about the yakuza.

V.
Placing your camera below the subject
creates a sense of visual authority.
But no matter how low the angle,
you can only feel so much respect for the average pig.

VI.
You think it’s a front,
the yakuza raising pigs,
but as the film progresses the chemistry between man
and hog becomes undeniable.

VII.
For example:
when he swallowed the food I gave him
I felt overcome with tenderness.

VIII.
Some pigs grow too big to eat.

IX.
At the end of the movie
an ex-yakuza releases all the pigs into the middle of the street.
The pigs are shot from above.

X.
As he stares back up at me,
I’m uncertain if the feeling’s mutual.
The Abandoned Lot on 18th

4/19
4,238 rocks, still here.
The rain couldn't take anyone today.
Or did the rocks barricade the rain?

4/20
The sound of a weed whacker hitting rock,
rancid chalk squealing on chalkboard
splatters against the wall,
the whirring has rotted away.

4/21
There is an address here,
but what does it house?
The bricks that make the two walls
that make up the lot, maybe.

4/22
A paltry blue bird is hopping around.
It stops and stands on the tip of the fence,
waiting sometimes.
I walk past the fence to it.
It stares at me.
I don’t want it here.
It wants it here.

4/23
The sun doesn’t touch the rocks for long.
It could hit the rocks
if it simply swung around the concave of the roof.
Not very thoughtful.

4/24
A newly cut foot path,
could tell the story of a rushed morning,
or a fearful night. The treads, and story,
are engraved into the dirt, only spoken of in their whispers.

4/25
Sometimes the wind would,
with the leaves held in its small hands,
dance around the lot,
fling the leaves about.
Lately, I have not seen
the wind’s childish hands.

4/26
What is this lot without a building,
what are the buildings around it if not a lot?

4/27
Around here, after it rains,
it still feels like it’s raining.
The air lathers water on your skin,
and still smells as if the rain is only feet away
from falling again.

4/28
Sometimes I wonder how it would feel,
to have never looked into the lot,
counted its stones, or traced my foot
through the decomposed leaves.
To be a passing person, with eyes locked forward.
Trauma Muses

I. Mneme

Fangs nipping, tails whipping, hungry hounds
slash, claws carving into my skin the shape
of a memory: crushing sensation erupting
like blood, the past once captured in sinew
set free to run in rivulets down rent flesh,
unconscious recollection putrid and pulsing
as it pools into a new pond of panic.
Menacing maws of mongrels snap behind me,
deceitful depths of recollection dance before me.
Which way do I fall? I take a breath.

II. Melete

Be mindful.

The pond flows into a stream.
Be mindful.

Fishing line dangles like a heartstring looking for love.
Be mindful.

Every tug at the line like a heartbeat is a reminder.
Be mindful.

Three fish palpitate on the line, hooked.
Be mindful.

Their rigid mouths beg for peace.
Be mindful.

I feed the iron free.
Be mindful.

They bite again.
Be mindful.

III. Aoide

A songbird flutters from the sky
to rest upon my fist, feathers fluffing
gently out, body tense with joy.
Her song begins from one bare note--
a seed amidst the dirt-- and invites in
a piping tune-- a forest springing forth.
Along this wood I wander now, enchanted
by the notes: some short and sharp like bitten
bark. Some curling high like new-born leaves.
Some ending low and strong as roots.

The fish are still, the hounds asleep,
al lulled by rustling boughs to dream.
My fight is done, the struggle won,
with foes that slumber by my feet.
We settle down, the bird and I,
heads pillowed on the hounds--
I blink, I sleep, and then I wake.
I kiss the fish, the hounds, the bird,
for without one, there are but none.
**Urban Decay**

Humans rot as theme parks do,  
dead wood bones, iron slide veins

clothed with ivy climb  
funhouse window panes.

I am a scavenger, a moth  
captivated by a light bulb’s

last breath. One day, pond scum  
will smother my stomach lining,

a coaster cart heart rusted still  
in my chest. Morbid curiosity

fills me, like larvae feeding on  
postmortem park food leftovers.

I stare at static Ferris wheel eyes,  
track tibias constricted by vines.

This body farm fair draws me in,  
decaying carousels like lost lives,

forsaken by foliage. I can’t break  
my gaze from those humanly remains.

**Portrait of My Father**

Strong man, tough man. Man with a voice  
louger than a ship’s bullhorn. Man who knows all  
the rules of football. Man who leaves the cooking  
to the women. Man who talks gun control  
and SNL at the dinner table. Penny-pinching man.  
Man who saves plastic bags, napkins,  
ketchup packets. Giving man. Man who fought  
his way into America to raise his family.  
Man who paid college tuition for eight years.  
Rock solid man. Man who insists on joining  
any soccer game he sees. Man who makes his daughters  
sit up straight. Man who will only ever cry

at his mother’s funeral. Man who plays  
life like a game of bridge. Young man,  
old man. Man who took his daughter  
to the park every Sunday. Man who watched  
er her bike for hours. Man who still  
holds her hand crossing the road. Drawn man.  
Man who calls every Friday. Man who wants  
to be proud. Man who wanted sons.  
Man who never showed it.
**Starting to End**

Wake up.
Slap snooze, lay back down.
Wake up, R.E.M’s filling
your skull, singing day’s end.
Wake up, can you not see the red streets
filling with acid, corroding
those who didn’t wake up to society’s
imminent collapse. Wake up, the truth
is that you’re now late. Escape from bed,
begin your day. This is all to make it on time.
Wake up and flee the building’s
imminent fall. Keep on getting ready,
toothpaste smeared on bristles, work it in.
Wake up, this place is stumbling
on its last legs, declining. It’s been neglected
far too long, how are you not prepared yet?
Wake up, you need to escape, the truth is, you’re late.
The horizon burns, streets erode.
Wake up, the day starts, leaves you behind.
Prepare reserves, knot your laces. You are late.
Wake up again, your head nods off,
falls down, down. Hurry, you need
to wake up again. To sirens wailing
outside, the world falls, wastes away.
Wake up.

**Walking into the Pawn Shop on 7th Ave**

Knick-knacks and thingamabobs
Collaged across tables
Lining the walls
Tower ing lamps and porcelain flamingos
Forming a maze around me
And as I traverse this graveyard of sold memories
My memory of you
Like a long neglected map
Guides me back to her

Her diamond face stares up at me from behind a glass case
A fractal smile
Still glinting under dim yellow lights
After years of your fractured promises
A love you swallowed whole and then spit back out
Today her corners are still sharp and angular
Ready to slice through skin
Or years of love

As she lays sleeping on her midnight-velvet cushion
I remember how miniscule her golden body felt
In the palm of my hand
Emanating the same twinkling brightness she gives off now
A brightness that might have fooled me if I were a stranger
If I hadn’t left her here
If I hadn’t slipped her neatly onto your fourth finger
If I hadn’t loved you
And I almost want to ask to hold her one more time
But I know better than to trust her again
Cicada Shell

I miss the space
where my eyes once were,
pine needle legs,
burr-hook toes,
origami breastplate,
space for halo of sawdust,
when sun lit a warm, red
cushion of air between
the space of our Siamese bodies.

I pressed my skin to Shell,
but Shell never pressed back.
I took our wings and ran.
I abandoned it,
its shallow grave of face,
train-tracked skin,
peekaboo windows
where sunlight burned
parts of my skin it reached.

The ripple of the paper of
its back was drop of
water still in motion.
I throw my voice to Shell
hear rasp of breath,
like smashed paper ball.
Never would it reach out
or hold my pink hand
with its paper fingers.

Shell's ribs could not buckle,
not chirp back to me,
grow glass-shard wings,
cast a mud light in my wake,
rise into oozing tomato sun,
fly, buckling through sky.
But I have abandoned it.
Without voice, heart, breath,
even the buckle of wings.
I hugged Baby Dee
until her plastic limbs nearly detached.
She loved to sing,
over and over.
Every time I wrapped my arms
around her marshmallow body,
a tune echoed from her chest.

The more I hugged her, the more her song
hopscotched like double Dutch jump-ropes.
Some of her song got stuck
in the plush of her heart.
Her voice sounded like cracks
in the sidewalk.

Even my mango-colored walls were tired
of hearing Baby Dee whine her melody.
Dad became a cardiovascular expert.
Baby Dee needed fixing.

I watched the operation from below
the kitchen counter. Even my tippy toes
couldn’t lift me to see Baby Dee.
When the X-Acto knife made the first incision,
I waited for a tiny scream, or maybe
the last bits of a song.

Clouds piled on the kitchen counter,
until Dad found the broken voice,
carefully removed it,
and stuffed Baby Dee with her ivory insides,
leaving her chest scarred

with white thread.
No box was inside of her
for puzzle piece sing-alongs.
Baby Dee hopscotched, here
and there, looking for her voice,
but she was quiet.


**Therapy for a Witness**

We start with heroes far from whence they came.
One man but hark! there also was a dame!
I watch them make their way down Meyran Ave.
To get their bodies altered at Empire.

Yikes! that woman's, super
Short and homeboy also:
Radiating passions
Paired with prideful urges,

inbetween them and I were one million
miles. We shared skin, we shared broke, and yet
still, there were wild magies from infinite,
powerful sources, flowing all through them.

WALK TALK WALK TALK
HUM DRUM…then BANG BOOM!!!
pause, are numb
rest and from

Time to time I still see them walking
wrong place
wrong time.
the silence before car concealed metallic rain
was deafening.

…it holds fast in my mind…and I can still feel their
residual magics: what I lack. Whatever emptiness I
contain: the difference between us that day,
I survived…and my guilt boundless.


**How to Unfry an Egg**

Start with water, wash
the grease. Handle with ease,
because the egg is oblong crystal,
pristine yet vulnerable to shatter.

The next step is to unprep
its cooking. Turn the temperature frigid
so it uncooks. It’s best to leave hard,
this will make it easy to manipulate.

Your egg should stay cold,
stiff like stone, resemble a statue,
a memorial of its premature
condition, and return to potential.

After the egg uncooks, analyze its appearance
and see if it suffices your desire. Look at what it took
to make an opulent egg. There shouldn’t be mistakes,
filter the accidents to make it uniform.

The last step is to compress the egg
into its starting shape. This is best
for conservation. It’s convenient to protect
possessions for their value, especially eggs.
With wings

It used to seem like magic, metal eagle wings lifting above the tarmac without a single flap. I watched them glide with my palms pressed to the window, my golden plastic pilot wings fixed to my shirt. Flying over cotton clouds I was invincible, untethered to tiny towns, Tiny people, whizzing past those little lives. Begging my mother to stay I clung tightly to armrests and cushions, they come off in emergencies, my emergency was real life.

I know it’s science now, aluminum plates lifting above the tarmac, the engine screams under our seats. I watch them cut the air, cut off from tiny towns, waiting, tiny people waiting for me to come home in pajamaed feet for I am not invincible, I sit at the mercy of wind and cloud. Their sways hold sway over my future, the inevitability of human error a pothole for survival, this is no magic. This is an accident, my flying, my terror.

I am tethered to the ground now, bound as mother, wife, sister, friend, I whisper pray for safe landing. My hand hovers away from the window, the hard white plastic and pilot’s wings standing between me and a plummet cutting through clear blue. I beg to come down, clinging tightly, alone, to armrests and cushions, my panic, my emergency. I built a life solidly on the ground, my magic lies there, not swiftly flying away.

Palm Reading

Her hands rub together so fast they could start a fire, a mother nesting her child’s tiny fingers between her own, hugged tightly even while slipping her own gloves off, oversized, but she gives them to you anyways. Your hands mean more to her, captivating warmth, she studies your palm lines, each a trail of embers.

Meager hands reach towards your mother’s face, fingers twirling within her already curled hair. Crowds enter the bus in waves, drowning her, hands still swirl and swarm your mother’s head, both gloves fall to the ground, little hands stretch down, but she scoops you back upright.

She counts each finger, grazes up and down, she could read your palm without even looking, already knows that your heart line easily reaches across your hand and so does her’s. You coddle your head into her chest, your hands covered, gloves too far shoved under the seat, yet she can still recall each crevice, each kindling spark.

You look to the back of the bus, coffee eyes, hands still warmer than the outside of a mug, eyes drooping shut over the hum of the bus, your mother flips your hood over your sleeping head and straps the Velcro upon your cherry-vanilla shoes, a frown falls among her face as she must wake you
The glove rests upon the ground like leaves in autumn, frostbitten air surrounds the bus, snow crystallizes, no one remembers that it’s even cold outside anymore, especially you, still taking up your mother’s lap, you don’t need to worry about the numbing air outside when there’s this kind of warmth sitting in the front of the bus.

Waking Routine

Low resolution mornings keep everything out of focus and dry clouds hang inside my sticky eyes. Outside the world has already left me behind and the groaning of the morning buses puncture my bedroom. The air scratches my lungs and I gasp for new atmospheres while stumbling onto icy tiles in front of the somber mirror where I store light. I feel the cold before I hear the faucet and my dreams drip off the tip of my nose carrying an entire night down the drain and into the ocean for some fish to drink up.
Some Nights in August

Arizona iced tea
sweating more than me.

There’s a breeze here,
it took me a second to notice.
Cool night air dances
on damp skin.

I don’t know when
the sun will set.
I don’t look forward to the night,
three teenagers trying to outrun dusk.

Look both ways,
wait three seconds for the Toyota,
okay, go.

Two pairs of new Adidas,
one pair of old
slap across dry concrete.

Reaching the base of Flagstaff,
my friends and I ignore the path
in favor of a climb straight up the side
spent mostly on our hands and knees.

Mud digs up under my fingernails,
invisible pebbles leave hard indentations
all over my palms.

I almost fall twice,
**Break-up Photographs**

Egg cartons nailed to vending machine

Cigarette burns, a recording booth like coffee

Cars idle spitting out blue clouds of exhaust

Windows cracked, someone listening to the radio.


The snow, the gray skies, flakes under my collar.

Icy ooze in my shoes. Heavy

parking lot glances.

a cigarette, the flame, the falling snow.

The sky squinting. Her.

My feet jealous

Piles of snow, black

on my eyelashes. My phone in the puddle.

Her voice. Coughing and spitting

She’s talking heavier and faster.

All of it finished. The shot. The cover.

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**June 19, 2019**

The iron gates were welded shut, but soon the dead had learned to hire lawyers practiced in laws that bound the afterlife to lesser gods. - William Logan

Allegheny County (is now known) for the homicide trial of a 17-year-old (black child. He) was shot running from a stopped car. (He) was not armed, not involved.

Police officer Michael Rosfeld, (only sworn in a few hours before the shooting). Michael Rosfeld, (that boy) was not involved in the drive-by shooting, Michael Rosfeld. (What did you have to fear?)

(No one wants) to deny the defendant his Constitutional right to a speedy trial with an impartial jury, but (no one can help) that (the) people (of Pittsburgh) are aware of the case and have formed opinions.

(Who will be) surprised by the judge’s decision? Even the defense attorney, who is not involved in the case (won’t be). “Read his opinion and order,” (he says). “I think the case is problematic as a whole.”

The trial was scheduled to begin in late February. (It is now mid-March; we have only now been informed) from which county the jury will be chosen. (Nine months to choose a jury, no one knows if there’ll even be a conviction).
Before there was Satan, Lucifer had an affinity for the earth he walked. Tangled forests, cerulean seas, rich deserts, drew him to the warming tones of nature and the peace it offered.

When God created humans, they reveled in the wilderness. Discovering new temptations of the flesh blossoming brighter than cascading marigolds.

They spent their days intoxicated off sweet reflecting waters, bringing with them ruin that burnt tongues and tasted of sulfur. Lucifer’s soul shred to ribbons upon seeing the extraordinary horrors of man. He exacted revenge with plagues that shook the horizon, trumpeting a tune of death, pain, and despair.

Crestfallen, God banished Lucifer to a crescendoing inferno beneath the earth’s crust where his rugged attitude cannot harm the creations.

But God’s punishment left a connection between Lucifer and his beloved world,

Lush countryside dissolved into jagged wastelands of splitting bark. Now he is doomed to sit atop a throne of bitter memories, seething poison into the land until once perfect nature rots and twists, violently feasting off the darkness of Satan.

**Nature’s Sin**
As Easy as Giving Candy to a Dancer

Pirouettes for peppermint patties, caramels
for a performance not even Mariah could pull off.
A scrunched-up nose and tapping your toes lead
to sour lemons that burn your tongue, Kisses

that melt faster than ice. Rich, puffed gram mies
eyed me from behind a saran window, leather
smiles, swollen eyes hidden behind dark sunnies.
I stare out that window now and fear the familiar.

There are toddlers outside, swirling around fountains
like soft serve, pretending each shot of mist from the ground
is a marker for a move in dramatic choreography.
I realize now I’d rather leave empty handed

than be so openly joyful. To think as a kid,
I could sway my arms to mariachi, lip-sync
like some mediocre celebrity on New Year’s
makes me wonder if I’m still the same shameless girl

who’d do anything for a gummy bear. Maybe the nights
spent swaying in my room make up for the lack of sugar
in my system. I miss the energy to groove, the drive
for taffy has curved and crashed like a nasty sugar rush.