



mê tis X

mê tis volume X

Welcome to the 10th annual edition of me tis! Our magazine is a compilation of literary and artistic pieces submitted by students, staff, faculty and alumni of Ivy Tech Community College statewide. “me tis” is Greek for “somebody.” Our mission is to publish new voices, and to provide a public forum for the stories, poems, plays, memoirs and two dimensional images created by those in the greater Ivy Tech community. We believe that each one of you is a potential, literary “somebody.”

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Lookout

By Matthew Begala

Special thanks to Ashley Bayer and the contributors, past and present, for helping to create *mê tis*. We look forward to the possibilities that future editions will bring.

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For submission guidelines, please visit www.metislitmag.com

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Editors

Jack Dreesen has been in a perpetual existential crisis, but he has learned to cope with the help of philosophy and applied self-analysis. As a retired fool, comedian, and humorist, he can't help but to see the sincere absurdity of human nature, and the inherent beauty of the full emotional spectrum.

Levi Farlee is a first-year Ivy Tech student. This is his first editing experience, although he has always been in search of stories uniquely human in both content and execution. He hopes readers will enjoy (if possible, as much as he has) experiencing the narratives and insights that these pieces offer.

Abby Ladin is a hairdresser, mother of three, professional percussive dance performer and teacher, musician, editor, scheduling wizard, and social butterfly. But creative writing, now that's hard! She has returned to school to complete a long overdue bachelor's degree.

Advisor

Dr. Emily Bobo is the author of a short book of poems, *Fugue* (Lost Horse Press, 2009), and the founder and editor of Bobo Books (Hemlock Press, 2016), a local, non-profit press turning poems into sandwiches for public school kids. She has also published more than 30 original works in literary magazines, such as *Hermeneutic Chaos*, *December*, *Seneca Review*, and *Redivider*. Having earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Wichita State University and her PhD in English Literature from the University of Kansas, Dr. Bobo is, currently, Professor of English at Ivy Tech Community College-Bloomington, where she teaches writing to single moms, ex-cons, military vets, and other non-traditional students. Also, she is a professional wrangler of three year-olds.

Special thanks to Tony Brewer for his time and expertise.

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Meditation

'The air outside is still,
a mason jar
that didn't get filled, sitting
there on a basement shelf
thickening to opaque
with dust.
My garden is brown and crispy,
a mess of petrified stems
stabbing up in
a cacophony of bones.

As spring threatens, I
impregnate
the plastic and terra cotta
pots in my basement,
under the purple lights
my fingers buried in
dispensing
Lily of the Valley.
'The womb accepts this
offering, and closes in around it.

'They say
germination was incomplete
when I was unearthed,
but the blood was flooding in
and rushing like scarves
from my plot.
So they dug me out,
blue skinned and lined
with purple rivers
like an old map,
my bones limp and still
unable to take root when
the womb was done with me.

What It's Like to Be a Fat Girl (For Those of You Who Aren't)

It's struggling to squeeze into size 6 jeans,
Belly bulging, sweat rolling,
Panting, crying, screaming,
Finally, a connection, then—
A button flying across the room,
Landing on the box of chocolates waiting
Since your birthday. Webs crawling up the sides
—120 calories per piece—a sin, if I've ever seen one.

It's runningrunningrunning.
Fat scurrying away from your body in fear.
A piece of cake to celebrate, only to hear your father say:
“I thought you were on a diet.”
Acid climbing up your stomach and out of your mouth,
Splashing onto white porcelain,
Tainting it with your guilt and sin,
Thinking, this will make me pretty.

It's being teased as a child for the extra rolls,
Like pale mounds of fresh snow,
Because hills are only good
On your chest or backside.
Barbies with small waists, big boobs, and a nice ass,
Thinking, I wish I looked like that.

It's wondering why some women can eat what they want
And remain like an hourglass—
Smooth, soft, timeless, desirable—
While the sands of time fill you up all wrong.

It's having people tell you,
"You'd be pretty if you were skinny,"
And hating that you must hide this skin underneath layers as it
Attempts to crawl out and break free,
Stuffed in between the seams,
Cut with scissors and delicately placed,
Because somewhere along the line the self-worth of a woman became
The number on the scale, the size of her pants,
And the way her body must fit a cookie cutter
Molded and curved to the desires of those who consume her.

The Words of a Song

The music of the elders becomes the music of the youth, and I was no exception. As a young girl, I recall my drunk mother tending and watering her many plants while she listened to the public radio's low-key jazz and blues programs. This background music became the thread stitching together the vibrant and turbulent patchwork quilt of my early elementary years. Billie Holiday's lyrics, *Southern trees bear a strange fruit, blood on the leaves and blood at the root*, does not bring to mind dead bodies swinging from trees, but rather the tears of a depressed, beaten-down woman who affectionately tended her plants only when alone and inebriated. For her, loving and tending was a one-on-one situation, only tapped when accompanied by strong, sorrowful music by other oppressed people.

I chose my own music as a pre-teen. Equipped with a turn-dial radio and cassette player (CD's were not invented yet), anything that hit deep or hard was good for me. Strong bass beats, the thrashings of an electric guitar, wailings, and wah-wah's were fuel to my budding antagonism towards the mainstream culture. The bigger the hair, the better. The deeper the bass, the raunchier the rap, the more I was about it. I felt different from others and needed a sound to represent that difference. If the music annoyed or the lyrics offended, I was intent to blast it, regardless of whether the subtle content or meaning was understood. The insinuation behind Too Short's lyrics, *What's wrong, are you bleeding, can't think about sex, irritated by your Kotex* was clear, even to me, who had yet to experience menarche. But I didn't quite grasp the misogynistic message. Yet when I sang it, it had a shock factor of the highest level, and my dancing stepped up to a new level. As a dancer, hip-hop was my jam.

By the end of middle school, hair bands and death metal were over. The grunge scene reflected my indifference to budding teenage insecurity. Bands like Temple of the Dog, Alice in Chains, The Smashing Pumpkins, and 4 Non Blondes reflected my inner awkwardness. This music scene was fast, and it brought the absurdity of the norm into existential angst. Pearl Jam's *Jeremy* foreshadowed the phenomena of school shootings that has since become secondary news in our country:

*I remember, picking on the boy,
Seemed a harmless little fuck.
But we unleashed a lion;
Gnashed his teeth and bit the recess ladies' breasts,
How can I forget?*

That video caused such a stir, as did the rise and demise of Kurt Cobain. Though I reveled in illuminating society's hypocrisy, I did blind myself to its functions. So, I balanced the gritty grunge with LL Cool J, Fresh Prince, Queen Latifah, bridging the

gap between with Public Enemy and Missy Elliot. R & B boy and girl bands lulled me to sleep.

In high school, I traipsed into the world of the Grateful Dead. Everything I needed from music melded together in the Dead: political and social awareness, heartbreak, fun and joy, lyrical conglomerations of movement and sound. Though the Deadhead stereotype is synonymous with drugs, I was saved from those destructive vices as I witnessed the degradation of folks around me who took those trips down Mali Lane. When Jerry sang the lyrics to *Eyes of the World*, I believed one could awaken from a dark night with clear vision and optimism:

*You wake up to find out that you are the eyes of the world,
The heart has its beaches, its homeland and thoughts of its own.
Wake now, discover that you are the song that the mornin' brings,
But the heart has its seasons, its evenin's and songs of its own.*

My hip-hop moves were getting tired. I began to prefer lyrical music to battling, and jam bands provided a stimulating pulse to my musical desires.

A time comes when one's external appearance undermines the internal development in social interaction. I struggled to steer attention away from my physicality. At this point I was a senior, and I decided to leave high school to step into the working world. I travelled thousands of miles, intent to discover how to present myself to the world. Tori Amos, Ani DiFranco, and Nina Simone brought focus to my lens, sharpening my truest self—a person rising tall in feminism. All three singers groomed different aspects of my nature: Tori – symbolism, Ani – activism, Nina – righteousness.

Ingesting Tori's song, *I Crucify Myself*, I came to understand how and why women self-deprecate; Ani's revelatory spoken-word pieces, speaking of being *Not So Soft*, lengthened my spine and barbed my tongue; Nina's testifying how she takes it *Just Like a Woman* and declaring injustice in *Mississippi Goddamn* inspired my mettle and sharpened my wit—all major cuts on my many-faceted, inner gem.

Sitting in nostalgia, deepening into reflection, I realize that the soundtrack of my mother's drunken solitude was a seed planted in fertile ground, germinating to grow into one who walks in the light of the *Divine Feminine*. Lyrics that speak to my soul now are chants, sung around a fire at night, sitting with sisters or my children. Blanketed by the firmament and sacred spirit, dancing in the warmth of its light, meditation leads to insight, deepens into wisdom, and nurtures hope. I am continuously learning and growing, time and again, coming full-circle, working to answer the questions penned in another Billie Holiday song:

*Why was I born
Why am I livin'
What do I get
What am I givin'*



Floral & Ink

Megan Stephens

Tempest

Is this how it goes—
a wandered hand,
wisping fingers
on skin, raising
into braille odes
in the blindness of
the night,
my body accepting
this verse?

And then
push—
now friction, now heat,
now farther lost
the hand explores
the unknown geographies—
softer here,
ebb and flow
the ground trembles
ebb and flow
pull,
gasp,
release...
Coils of tendon
and nerve
unfurling.

Weight here, heavy
breath,
my frame falls.
They say
the continents are moving,
crashing
into each other,
that's how mountains grow
and valleys sink
and the tremors that
shatter them all
are born.

These continents collide
and quake
and tremor,
tectonics of flesh
pushing into a congeal
of lust and fear
this Scorpio,
this Cancer,
these two oceans
pouring in, and
I sink
beneath the tides.
Ebb.
Flow.
Seize...

Is this how it works
blind and guessing
his perimeters into a silhouette
Watching a new moon
pass over,
hold, and drop?
The tide rises,
wet and rubbered flesh,
a slimed fish, swims
into my breath
then out, then bite,
and release...

Wind blows
a salted groan
out and in—over me he pours
foamed at lips
bearing down
heave after heave—rouge wave, rip tide,
pulling me
below.

My body accepts this...
the fingers hook
his anchor of weight,
surge of breath,
he swells and crashes over
turned to a tempest
this sea surrounds me
ebb and flow,
wash and wane.

I erode into the moonlight
that streams between
the curtains like ice
made of silk
woven from
threads of smoke,
white as death— am I
still here, am I
reborn now?
Or still
drowning—sinking
down,
the cold clutch
snuffing out the remainders—
my senses are gone.

I am marble smooth.
I am the bare rocks left
when the tide recedes,
and there I lay
dumb and deposited
heap of bone,
I watch the moon
sink too into the water
and the bright burning
day rises to show
what's left
and what has gone.

In Islam, women don't pray when they're menstruating. "You must be clean to pray." That's why we have wudu, a ritual washing, to make ourselves clean. Bleeding makes someone unclean and dirty.

My father would call me and my siblings to prayer. Sometimes my older sisters would politely say, "I'm not praying." This was my first introduction to menstruation, some vague nebulous phrase my sisters said, that I didn't understand. I never made any connections about the frequency of when my sisters would say this. I was just a child. I floated through time never seeing a pattern. Sometimes my sisters didn't pray and I didn't know why.

I had very little knowledge of what a period was before I got mine; although, the idea wasn't totally foreign. I had the vague thought that it was something that prevented my sisters from praying. When I was nine I asked my oldest sister what it was. She told me to make sure our mom was okay with her telling me beforehand. I felt like it must be some extremely important secret if I needed permission to find out what it was. Since I was nine it was a bit of a lackluster introduction into the physical plights of being a woman. I remember her describing blood, pain, and that it lasted for about seven days. I knew I was a little girl and that one day I'd be a woman, but I didn't really make the connection that I'd get a period.

My sister gave me *The Care and Keeping of You*, a book about basic hygiene, offering advice on how often to shower, how to shave, etc. I did not appreciate this gift! I resented her for truly showing me what it meant to grow up, to become a *woman*. I was in some sort of childhood denial. I didn't want to grow up. I wanted to stay the same forever. But everything changes and everything stays the same. When I got my period, I was still a child in every other way. I knew how to deal with the mess, but I didn't know it was okay to feel happy about it. The feelings of embarrassment felt so alien to me. I'd never had to hide something for that long.

I was thirteen when I got my period. As hard as it was, I couldn't imagine how distressing it must be for girls as young as eight to get a period. Periods were just this thing that shouldn't be seen or heard. You sit quietly, making sure not to make others uncomfortable. Being a woman is saving face and trying not to disturb others.

I never felt a great deal of shame about my period, just the crushing teenage embarrassment about not feeling normal. When I was in middle school I was terrified someone could tell just by looking at me. I was convinced that everyone knew. Either they'd smell it on me like a shark or they'd see how I'd tried to cover myself more and connect the dots. I wasn't prepared for the great taboo of having a period. I was extremely cautious about bleeding through my pants and always wore an extra-long

sweatshirt. God forbid I forget to bring pads and have to ask the school nurse! That's the way it was for most of my young life, the nearly debilitating self-consciousness of being terrified that I'd leave blood on the toilet seat or be asked antagonistically by some boy if I was on my period, a way of disregarding my feelings. Being a typical self-absorbed young teenager, I couldn't fathom that other girls might feel the same way. There was definitely a certain level of "no one understands me!" teen angst. The taboo played into this, but the overall anxiety of being thirteen didn't help either. My ignorance about menstruation lead me to believe that every other girl my age had it completely figured out and had none of the anxieties and worries that I did. Even in writing this I still have some internal voice telling me that it's just me, that I'm some delusional weirdo.

I have sisters so I wasn't completely isolated from talking about the subject. But even with them, I felt anxiety when I had to tell my older sister we were out of pads. Whenever anyone would bring up menstruation they would use the most detached phrases: "Aunt Flow's coming for a visit!" "surfing the crimson wave," and my personal favorite, "my end of sentence." I feel like my life has been inundated with delicate ways to refer to menstruation. At times it felt like the only gross thing you *couldn't* talk about. My peers would be having disgusting, vulgar conversations about every bodily fluid and sex act they could think of, but talking about periods was too gross to mention. For once in my life, I'd like to hear a woman say, *"Excuse me, I need to jam a tampon up my bloody cunt."*

As I got older and the symptoms of my period got worse, it became more difficult to avoid openly and honestly talking about it. People would ask why a normally cheerful upbeat person seemed a bit down, so I started answering honestly. "I just started my period, and I feel like shit." It wasn't something I truly thought about, so I had no expectations about how people would react. But no one cared. Sometimes people were taken aback, but that was it. No one cared; no one chastised me. It wasn't a big deal. When I was a senior in high school, I bought a Diva Cup on the recommendation of a friend. I was in love. It was so much more convenient! I was using my bodily autonomy for something I chose. I stopped thinking about what other people thought of me. So what if people knew I was on my period? It's just a bodily fluid. Half the population has a period.

A lot of my confidence was derived from the book my sister gave me. Despite my original feelings, the book taught me so many things I wouldn't otherwise know. I would flip through colorful pages of girls doing the most mundane things—running, swimming, sleep overs—and I'd think, in the childish way you daydream about being grown, one day I'll do all those things, too. Years later, I was browsing in a bookstore when I saw the book. I picked it up and perused the pages. THEY HAD FUCKING CENSORED IT! It no longer had the diagrams about how to put in a tampon. It was an affront to everything the original book stood for. If a book about puberty can't honestly talk about menstruation, then what's the point?

There will always be a part of me that feels I'm being subversive. I want to stand up for what I believe in, but no matter how much I say otherwise, I do care what people think of me. I'm not impervious to other people's criticism. It'd be a little arrogant if I said I truly didn't care what people think of me in every aspect of life. Now the embarrassment and isolation has gone away and what remains are two polarizing parts of me: one part that says, "Fuck you! This is a natural part of life!" and the other more realistic part of myself, the part that doesn't want to be weird, that wants friends and doesn't want to make people uncomfortable. My life hasn't become all rainbows, butterflies, and puppies; I still have days where I feel extremely insecure. I still struggle. But I have developed a great deal of self-acceptance through time.

To My Adult Child

The most difficult part of being your father
is your self-containment.

You are the child I have not yet met
as a young lady. You're "La belle au bois dormant."

 You are locked behind hedge-thorns that surround
 the Indiana limestone blocks of your solitary castle.

 Your love is enclosed. You are sleeping
through any possible communication with me aside from music.

I am the green weed in the red lava rocks.

You are the silent princess at tea time.

I am the shadow of the tulip tree outside your window.

You are the sunlight on my knees when I
 swing beneath your balcony and write—
 when I sit and swing on the wooden swing and drink
 the words I distill on the fire of a fatherhood
that could be warmth for you if you would talk to me.

Sugar

If I'm a rose, you're a thorn
If I'm blood, you're the body.
If I'm bones, you're my skin.
One of us is beautiful.

If I'm sick, then you're my medicine.
You're my sugar for my strawberries.
You're my pastels for drawing.
Only one of us is needed.

If I'm silence, you're the music.
If I'm the light, you're my electricity.
You are my caffeine to my coffee.
One of us is amazing.

If I'm a kiss, you're the love.
If I'm the water, you're the heat.
You are my blue diamond.
Only one of us is flawed.

If I'm black, then you're space.
If I'm a corpse, you're my coffin.
You are the meaning to my life.
Both of us are love.

Little Moon

Franny was a tramp. Now, before you get the wrong idea about the girl, let me explain. I don't mean to suggest that Franny was the promiscuous sort. In fact, it'd take her longer to recite her favorite Hokushi haiku than it would to recount her sexual history.

experimenting
I hung the moon on
the various branches of the pine

No, Franny was a different kind of tramp. She was a wanderer, a dirt-road drifter, a venturesome vagabond, a woman of the road. It had been over a year since she'd spent more than three consecutive nights in a single zip code. The tramping lifestyle suited her. She'd walk if she had to, but it wasn't hard for her to hitch a ride. There were plenty of drivers willing to stop for a seventeen-year-old girl. She knew some of them were creeps, of course. One of the few items she always had with her was a folding knife she nicked from her father's workshop the morning she took off. Her right hand instinctively found its way into her pocket, wrapping around the weighty steel whenever someone stopped to offer her a ride. Most of her encounters, though, had been pleasant enough. Old farmers in dusty trucks would drop her off at the nearest campground. Traveling salesmen ushered her to the next suburban neighborhood on their route. Vacationing families made room in the back of their station wagons long enough for her to cross another state line. Those trips usually included a meal and unsolicited advice from worried mothers. She'd catch them watching her as she ate a second tuna salad sandwich or drank the last few sips of her soda. The smile they'd give her was somewhere between pity and envy. Regardless of who had picked her up, though, she was always careful not to reveal too much about herself. She'd steer the conversation to them, where they were headed or where they had been. If they asked about her in return, she'd get creative. She'd been a runaway orphan, a washed-up ballet dancer, and the daughter of an over-bearing peanut farmer. She didn't tell them that her real name was Lunetta Francis Marchesi or that both of her parents still lived in Brockton, Massachusetts.

Brockton was a town with two claims to fame, the first being that it was America's largest supplier of shoes during the Civil War and the second being that it was the birthplace of boxing legend Rocky Marciano. Franny could not escape the significance of either of these facts. Both her parents were the children of Italian immigrants and, as such, worked where most of Brockton's Italian population worked, Plover Shoe Factory. They'd met as teenagers on the production line and, subsequently, fell in love. This was the basis of her mother's favorite joke, telling people that she and her

husband were “sole mates.” Get it? They were married in the summer of 1951 and expecting their first, and only, child by the fall of the following year. Her father, however, would not be present on the day she was born. He and his three brothers had taken the train to Philadelphia that morning to watch Rocky “The Brockton Blockbuster” Marciano fight Jersey Joe Walcott for the heavyweight title. When he returned to learn that his daughter had been born on the same night Rocky won the championship, he pleaded with his wife to name her Rocco. Luckily for Franny, they compromised.

On the eighteenth anniversary of that fight, she woke up in a small tent outside of Branson, Missouri. She’d made camp the night before on the wooded land of a local dairy farmer. The town had become sort of a central hub for Franny. Whenever she crossed from one side of the country to the other, east to west or north to south, she tried to make her way through Branson. Her first hitchhiking ride had been in a semi-truck on its way to Oklahoma City. The driver, a monosyllabic beard named Dusty, treated her to greasy eggs at a diner in Branson. After breakfast, he moved on and she stayed. She bought a ten-cent postcard to send to her mother to let her know she could send mail general delivery to the Branson Post Office. So she’d stop in every couple of months to see if her mother had written. Since today was her eighteenth birthday, she thought there might be something waiting for her. It was difficult to believe that she’d already been on the road for so long. It’s easy for a person to lose track of the days when she has no particular place to be and no particular time to be there. She felt lucky. She couldn’t help smiling as she treated herself to an apple and a slice of the cheese the farmer had given her. Soon after, she packed up her tent and rolled the rest of her meager belongings into an old wool blanket that would soon need replaced. She tied the bundle together with two pieces of rope and slung the makeshift pack over her shoulder. It was one of those perfect September days. The sun was shining, the temperature was still preparing for its final descent, and trees were clinging to thin threads of modesty before baring it all through the winter. She retraced her steps out of the forest, crunching over dried pine cones and fallen twigs. Back on the main road, her legs stretched and sighed in relief to be on the move again.

The Branson Post Office was a squat, red-brick-faced building sandwiched between an old-time saloon and a beauty shop. The saloon was new. The last time Franny was in town it was a used book store. Downtown Branson was being given a face lift. It had seen a sharp rise in tourists recently and city officials were rebranding the place as somewhere you could go to remember the “good old days.” They’d even built a replica village called Mutton Hollow where you could ride horses and tour gift shops posing as rustic cabins, if you were into that sort of thing. As Franny walked passed the saloon, she could hear clinking bottles and piano music of the Old West. She missed the book store.

Inside the Post Office, she was greeted by Jessie James. Not the outlaw, obviously, but a plump, middle-aged woman of the same name who had been a government employee for the last twenty-five years. She got a kick out of meeting new people and seeing

their reactions when she introduced herself. She'd tell them how her great-great-grandfather was a second cousin of the infamous Jesse's father. She never offered any proof of this, of course, but everyone enjoyed hearing the story nonetheless. At Franny's arrival, Jessie threw her hands up in the air and hollered the way she always did.

"My word. Lookie here at what the cat dragged in. How long's it been now?"

Franny just smiled because she knew by now that all of Jessie's questions were rhetorical. She'd start talking again before you had a chance to answer.

"Hun, look at ya! Skin and bones. One of these days you're gonna have to let me cook for ya. Fatten ya up!"

Franny laughed. "One of these days."

Jesse continued, "Mmhm. Well, I got something for ya now. A package came in 'bout a week ago." She disappeared around a corner and waddled back with a small box wrapped in brown paper. With a toothy smile, she placed it on the wooden counter between her and Franny. No doubt she was just as curious as Franny about what was inside. She wouldn't get to see its contents, however. Franny thanked her, said goodbye, and left the Post Office with the wrapping still intact. It was bad enough that Jessie knew her full name and the return address. She didn't need to know what was inside, too. Safely down the street, Franny swung her pack from her shoulders and plopped down under a tree, resting her back on its trunk. She pulled her knife from her pocket and cut the box open. Inside was an envelope and a square box of chocolates. Her stomach growled in anticipation of the sweet bites, but she made it wait. She reached, instead, for the envelope. It was a paper birthday card, filled with her mother's loopy handwriting and a plane ticket from St. Louis to Boston.

Lunetta,

*Happy birthday, little moon. I hope you are well.
Send a note when you can. I'll worry less. Please think about
using the ticket. Don't worry about the money. I've been saving.
Your dad would like to see you, too.
I love you.*

Mom

Franny sat under the tree, rereading her mother's words. It must have taken her ages to save up enough money to buy a plane ticket. Franny wished she hadn't. She closed the ticket inside the card and stuffed them both in her pack. She threw away the package in a nearby trash bin and carried the chocolates in her hand. She opened the box and smelled that intoxicating aroma of sugar. Choosing carefully, she bit a few of the

candies in half. Caramel, peanut butter, cherries. They were heavenly. But oh, then there was the coconut one, that nasty surprise lying in wait, sneaking up on you when you least expected it.

Franny walked along the main road until she had to make a choice, west to Oklahoma City or east to St. Louis. She stood at the “T” in the road and waited for the next car. This morning, the choice would have been easy, west for the winter. Maybe it was the chocolate or maybe she was feeling sentimental because it was her birthday, but she couldn’t bring herself to start walking. Finally, she heard the purring of a car engine as it came towards her. The driver, seeing her pack, slowed to a stop.

“Where you headed?” Franny asked.

“Albuquerque. You want a ride?”

Franny hesitated, then shook her head, “I’m headed east. Thanks anyway.”

The car pulled away and she started off in the opposite direction.

Chatterbox Bus Stop

SCOTT is a chatty fellow with messy brown hair and slightly tattered clothes.
EMILY is a slightly snooty young lady in a band tee and jeans.

Setting: a bus stop somewhere in NYC

Time: Late morning

(Emily sits on the left side of a small bench reading a newspaper. A sign to her left reads BUS STOP. Scott walks in from stage right, talking to someone offstage, holding a newspaper in one hand and a green apple in the other.)

SCOTT: Sounds good, Earl! You take care, alright?

(Scott waves to someone offstage and sits down opposite of Emily.)

SCOTT: So, how are you today, ma'am?

(Emily reluctantly glances over from her paper.)

EMILY: I'm alright, yourself?

SCOTT: Can't complain. Beautiful day, huh?

(Emily flips a page.)

EMILY: Sure is.

SCOTT: Headed off anywhere special?

(Emily flips another page.)

EMILY: Nope.

SCOTT: That's a shame. Myself, I'm headed off to my sister's place. Going to babysit my niece. With this weather, I think we'll probably head off to the park.

(Emily remains silent, nodding disinterestedly.)

SCOTT: Ah, look, I'm sorry to bother ya'. I notice you're a Times reader too, though. Good choice.

(Scott sits back and opens his newspaper. Emily looks over for the first time, setting her paper down.)

EMILY: Thanks.

(Emily continues to stare for a beat.)

EMILY: You read the news?

SCOTT: Is that so surprising?

EMILY: No, no, I'm sorry. That's wonderful. That's great. It's just that my boyfr-, ah, no, my ex-boyfriend, he never read the news. And he kind of made fun of me for it.

SCOTT: I cannot understand why it would be comical to mock someone for keeping up with current events.

EMILY: That's what I think, too.

SCOTT: Well, I'll let you get back to your reading.

EMILY: Oh no, no, look, I'm sorry. For being so rude. It's just, I've become a little apprehensive of chatterboxes at bus stops.

SCOTT: Chatterbox, huh? (He Chuckles.) Is that how you would define me?

EMILY: Oh, no, well, yes—a bit.

SCOTT: That's alright, I take no offense.

EMILY: Good. You shouldn't. It's just that, in my experience, people who are too friendly at bus stops are either out to screw you or turn you into a skin suit.

(Scott sits rigid for several seconds.)

SCOTT: My God, that was incredibly blunt.

EMILY: You read the news, right? You've seen all the cases.

SCOTT: You know, I can't say I remember seeing a high rate of—

EMILY: Well, they're out there. And that's how they always start. Some chatty fellow who's "just making conversation." And "just making conversation" turns into "just making conversation" all the way home, and suddenly you're "just making conversation" in your own home with this stranger—

(Emily gradually leans nearer to Scott.)

—and suddenly this stranger has your number, and then you're "just making conversation" all day at every hour on the hour, and one conversation turns into lots of conversations and you've got yourself a little conversation buddy.

(Emily sinks back in her seat and props open her paper. Scott stares at her for several seconds until sinking into his own seat and exhaling.)

SCOTT: Is that the way it works now?

(Emily peers out from her paper.)

EMILY: It is. Until it turns out that your conversation buddy has been living in your house for six months but has also been "just making conversation" with about seven other girls who must be better conversationalists.

SCOTT: I am so sorry.

(Emily sets the paper down on her lap.)

EMILY: That's alright. It's not your fault. Really, it's mine.

SCOTT: Now don't go down on yourself like that.

(Emily sets the paper aside.)

EMILY: Nah, really. We never had much in common, anyway.

SCOTT: You must have had something in common, to have been together for so long.

EMILY: We both breathed air. I should have kicked him to the curb the moment he said he didn't like Grassroots Punch, though.

SCOTT: And that, my friend, is my favorite band.

EMILY: Mine, too!

SCOTT: Anyone who says otherwise needs a good punch in the right direction.

EMILY: Haha. That...that was slightly dark, but I appreciate the pun. You're funny.

SCOTT: I'm Scott, actually, but I get that a lot, too.

(Scott puts out his hand. Emily smiles.)

EMILY: Emily.

(They shake hands.)

SCOTT: Well, Emily, I'm sorry to hear of your misfortunes. He sounds like a true arse.

EMILY: He wasn't all bad.

SCOTT: Of course not.

EMILY: But that's where I'm headed now. He left his watch at my place, so I'm returning it to him while he's at work.

SCOTT: So this is not a fun trip at all.

EMILY: Not at all. But the worst part is he works at one of my favorite cafes: The Cozy Cup. Have you ever been there?

SCOTT: Is that the one on the corner of 11th and...Dunkirk? With the gold railing and opaque windows?

EMILY: Yeah, that's the one!

SCOTT: Man, I do know that place, they've got the best bacon crum—

EMILY: —ble chocolate donuts.

(Both look at each other.)

EMILY: So, you know the place?

SCOTT: It seems, unfortunately. God, those are good, though.

EMILY: You're telling me. Brad used to bring them home all the time.

(Brief awkward silence.)

EMILY: But enough about me. What about you, Scott? Visiting your niece, you said?

SCOTT: Yes! Lilah. Just turned four.

EMILY: I have a four-year old niece and nephew as well. They're riots. Love 'em, but my sister looks like she's about to pull her hair out sometimes.

SCOTT: Understandable. That's the best part about being an aunt or uncle. Play all the fun parts, and send 'em back at the end of the day.

EMILY: Ha. I guess that's one way to look at it.

(They both chuckle.)

EMILY: So. Any interesting reads this morning?

(Emily points to Scott's newspaper. Scott, who has gradually been leaning closer to Emily, picks up his newspaper that has nearly fallen out of his hands.)

SCOTT: Oh yeah, yeah, actually. Did you see about the mayor's new proposal to implement city recycling bins for used metro cards and distribute them to the homeless?

EMILY: What? No, I didn't. That makes so much more sense. Why didn't they do that before?

SCOTT: My question is, why are we still using metro cards in the 21st century? How is it that we're not using thumb prints or little phone gadget apps or something like that?

EMILY: Haha, you've got me. I couldn't tell ya.

SCOTT: World's greatest mystery and inconvenience.

(Emily chuckles.)

EMILY: Hey, have you got the time?

(Scott glances at his watch.)

SCOTT: Appears to be half past ten.

EMILY: Bus should be here any minute now. Also, the perfect time for a midmorning snack.

SCOTT: Quite true.

(Emily draws a green apple out of her purse while Scott grabs the green apple on his right and gives it a light toss. They both munch down simultaneously, then turn to the other.)

SCOTT: Granny Smith, huh?

EMILY: It's the only way.

(They look at each other and smile.)

(A bus honk off stage signals its arrival.)

EMILY: Well, Scott, I must say, this is one of the best conversation's I've had in a long time.

SCOTT: We should do it again sometime.

EMILY: Absolutely. I'll see ya around.

SCOTT: Sure thing. It was nice to meet you, Emily.

EMILY: It was nice to meet you, too, Scott.

(They shake hands, lingering for a moment until the bus honks again. Emily slowly breaks away, moving towards the front of the stage. She begins to climb an invisible step of the bus and hand over a metro card until she pauses, then rushes back to a startled Scott.)

EMILY: Or we could not.

SCOTT: I'm sorry?

EMILY: We could not hope to see each other again and just see each other right now.

SCOTT: I beg your pardon?

EMILY: Where are you headed?

SCOTT: 11th. 11th ave.

EMILY: I'm headed to 12th. Why don't we ride together?

SCOTT: Are you sure about that?

EMILY: I've never met someone else who reads the news and eats green apples.

SCOTT: You'd think those would be quite common qualities.

EMILY: You would think. But...you're the only one.

SCOTT: I must say, you are the only girl I've ever met that likes Grassroots Punch.

EMILY: What can I say? I'm a woman of eclectic taste.

SCOTT: You're not afraid that I'm not just a "chatterbox" at a bus stop?

EMILY: I know that you are. But I'm willing to take a chance.

(Both smile, then walk up stage towards the "bus." Emily ascends the steps as Scott realizes that he's left his newspaper on the bench.)

SCOTT: Shoot!

(Scott rushes back to the bench and retrieves the paper, only to hear the sound of the bus rolling away. He rushes upstage.)

SCOTT: No! Wait! Emily!

(Scott stands, watching the bus roll away. He lets out a sigh and returns to the bench, then opens up his paper.)

(A young woman in casual business attire (SHEILA), absorbed in her phone, enters from stage left, assuming Emily's previous seat. Scott, decidedly more defeated than before, initiates the conversation.)

SCOTT: How are you today, ma'am?

(Sheila remains absorbed on her phone.)

SHEILA: Fine.

(Scott flips a page of his paper.)

SCOTT: Glad to hear it. Beautiful day, huh?

SHEILA: I guess.

SCOTT: Got any exciting plans?

SHEILA: Not really.

SCOTT: That's a shame. Looks like it's gonna be a good one today.

SHEILA: Interesting.

SCOTT: Says here we might get up to 70 degrees. Pretty good for April.

(Sheila looks over at Scott for the first time.)

SHEILA: You read the news?

(Scott looks over at Sheila, then face palms the paper to his face. The stage fades to black.)

End scene.

Axiomatic proof of the inequality of communication

for
{everything you say : x }
there is
{everything I hear you say : y}
such that
x does not equal y

```
{
(the neurons in my head will never be like yours,
everything you try to convey only underscores this fact.
(ideas are the entry points to a complicated function,
its entrails built up to an operation left unknown.
(the point of reference left abused,
can easily phase out of focus.
(ideas become impossible as they constantly shift,
moving from one head to another in a drifting dissonance.
(form becomes rhetoric and communication builds civil war,
battle lines will be laid as analogies form.
(there's no point in saying anything if the intent is to be understood,
(there's never true agreement,
I never truly understand you.)))))))
}
}
```



Gatherings

Nikolas Maden

The Gown

Gowns in hospitals are numbered, not by hospitals but by uniform companies. Gown #930422 had a history of death.

1939-1962

In a little corner of Ohio, just outside the town of Defiance, was First Trinity Hospital. It was sparsely staffed and tightly budgeted. As a rule, all patient-worn gowns were washed and sterilized following patient care at First Trinity. Heavily soiled gowns and gowns that were worn by patients that became deceased were to be placed in a bin marked for disposal. But at First Trinity, the administration made it clear to its chief residents that if the gown wasn't soiled, it should remain in circulation.

It was this practice that gave birth to the undetected curse of #930422.

1941

The first patient to wear #930422 was an elderly African-American woman with dementia and signs of mental illness. In the 1940's, if you were termed mentally ill or insane, you were cared for by your family or condemned by them to an asylum. First Trinity wasn't equipped or staffed for their care.

The tall nervous man who dropped off the elderly woman that fall afternoon left something else at the front desk—a blank check; a check to which First Trinity would unknowingly become indebted.

Although the hospital had no record of her name or next of kin, it was Lucretia Truth. She was dead within hours. Cause of death: natural.

1943

The next patient to wear #930422 was Helen Johnson, a twenty-four-year-old female admitted for an expected two to three days with a severe ankle fracture. She was found unresponsive by the nurse assigned to her at first shift change that evening. Cause of death: undetermined.

1944

The gown was worn twice in 1944. Robert Hobbs was a forty-three-year-old mill worker admitted with stomach pain. He died that evening before his ulcer was diagnosed. Cause of death: heart failure.

Patricia Bridgewater was admitted to the maternity wing of First Trinity with premature contraction pains. #930422 claimed her and her newborn son within hours. Cause of death: complications related to pregnancy.

And so it went with the gown. There were over a dozen more curious deaths over the next ten years, until First Trinity and the powers that be decided to order new scrubs and gowns.

In its absence, First Trinity and its staff were none the wiser.

Epilogue

Lucretia Truth remained in the South following the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. She was mentally ill and beaten severely as a teen. Many slaves in the South remained loyal to their masters, some by force. On the 22nd day of the 4th month in the year of our Lord 1893, Lucretia brutally killed the slave owner and his family of six.

93/04/22.

For those who only sort-of love their mothers

1. Some love their mother like a Norman Rockwell painting on the front of a Hallmark card beside red roses on Mother's Day in the house where they grew up. You may talk weekly or think daily of her smile or lipstick or her meatloaf steaming in the oven, her unsolicited advice or popping your pimples. If you think death will carry her to a better place, I'm sorry, this is not for you.
2. When we are dying, when we die, there's shit. Whether a lofty estate or a cremation bill in a gas-station bag with her belongings or a formless pile beneath sterile sheets, there'll be shit, and you have to clean it. Some call financial advisors. Debt collectors call the rest of us.
3. Mother is not in a better place. If there were a better place, she wouldn't have been invited. If she were invited, she wouldn't have stayed long before sneaking to the neighbor's for a beer. If the neighbor weren't home, she'd call her old boyfriend for a ride, or she'd call you. But you wouldn't answer.
4. For those who confuse grief with guilt. Who are reminded during every conversation of diapers changed decades ago. Who called cops during fights. Who know the difference between apologies and amends. Whose skin pales with every midnight message or doorstep declaration. Who move state(s) away, only visit when we have to, only sometimes answer the phone, spinning the conversation like a late-night reporter when your partner wants to sleep. Who spin when our eyes are closed, wake up at 1:27. Who can't help imagine the way she got drugs without money. Who will never know the dark cloud hanging, the bell jar over her. Who see in the sag of our cheeks, our pill-popping, couch hopping, cigarette bumming. Who swear we aren't her. Who know we are. Who know it's not her fault, the who never matters. Who don't cry when we hear ICU. Who hear vegetative state and brain damage, who hear bruised apples. Who know bad apples still with patches sweet. Who wonder if death could be any worse than the inability to heat a can of soup. Who think *pull it* before they ask. Who stand stiff and hug siblings, snuffle quietly at night, our backs to loved ones. Who don't feel. Who busy ourselves with death's chores, feeling but choosing to think. Who can, if we think hard enough or find pictures, remember smiles. Who learned to establish boundaries, terms of visitation: a no booze-breath, no pin-holed or blown-out pupils, no *Fucks* or *Shits* around the toddler, no cash for anything. Who don't think the prospect of suicide as self-ish. Who cry because we condone, because we didn't cry. Who think harder to remember smiles. Whose tears really flow in the car, the place where we always move forward, the only place without tissues. Who know mirrors for looking back. Who could've returned a text or said hi or happy holidays or happy birth-

day. Who feel at least partially responsible for the empty bottle. Who wonder, making bedside amends with the living dead, if they hear our *Sorry*.

5. They'll look at you like their mother died and tell you it's not your fault—that there's nothing more you could have done. They're lying. There's always more we could do. Always. Both of us. Faults run deep beneath our skin, a roadmap of veins. Know the shortcuts.
6. Dave writes: *Stay hydrated, no joke, sleep when you have to, no matter what time of day. The brain is always processing this kind of loss. Enough. You know what to do.*
7. Love is a patched-over pothole.

Genetic Jackpot

Living and navigating life has always been a dramatic, abnormal, and tedious ordeal for me. Maybe it was my overbearing mother who made me the way I am. Is it fair to blame someone's lack of parenting skills for my unique, albeit annoying and time consuming, characteristics, though? I don't know, but probably not. Maybe it was a combination of my overactive imagination, hyperawareness of the world from a young age, and the fact that my mother had me at the ripe old age of fifteen. She probably shouldn't have been parenting a child while she herself was still a child. Maybe it was all of these things, or maybe none of these things mattered. Maybe it's because I tried to be the complete opposite of my mother who didn't have a care in the world—other than escaping with green trees in bags and candy in orange bottles. Maybe that's why I care so much about minute happenings, or maybe I just didn't hit the genetic jackpot.

Is it normal for a first grader to check and recheck that the alarm clock is set fifty to a hundred times every night? Not that I recall, but it's also not normal for a six-year-old to get herself up for school, get dressed, get her own breakfast, yell goodbye to her sleeping mother, and head off to school without any supervision either. This was my reality, though. I had to care. Someone did. I really didn't think it was odd that I felt the urge to be so thorough. I was six! I didn't know what obsession, compulsion, or anxiety was. I just knew that if I didn't check my alarm clock more than once something was bound to happen, and I'd be damned if something bad happened on my watch! I was in control of something for the first time in my life.

It wasn't until high school that anyone noticed there was something off with me. Sure, I freaked out and almost had a stroke any time the volume on the radio or television was set to an odd number, but didn't they realize that an even volume number was what was keeping us safe from vicious burglars and house fires? They just chalked it up to me being a control freak, and I chalked it up to them wanting to die.

My sophomore year, I had a red locker. I swear I thought the gods were smiting me. A red locker! Are you freaking kidding me? Red, the color of passion for many, was the color of a danger zone waiting to happen for me. That was the year I carried the contents of all seven of my classes with me. All day. Every day. Not once did I ever touch or open my diseased red locker. Can you blame me, though? If I did, the roof and walls of the school would cave in with asbestos, I would fail all of my classes, and my dog would probably die. Why didn't anyone understand this? I was basically doing the entire school a solid.

As I've gotten older, I understand that the things I do aren't normal and that most people don't have to cut and chew their food an even number of times, in rainbow order, with a special fork because if they don't they'll choke or get food poisoning and

die. Locking a door once is, apparently, a sufficient number of times for the average person. Well, I hope they can sleep at night, knowing they're setting themselves up for disaster. Luckily, I check my locks forty times each night, and not to brag, but I've successfully evaded unwanted guests and carbon monoxide poisoning because of my vigilance. Logic.

I could go on some more about the funny things I do and the way I think, but honestly, none of it really matters. Do I wonder why I'm still like this? Yeah. Will I ever really know why? Not likely. I've been on guard and battling dragons, mind terrorists, for twenty-three years. I'm still alive. Is my life a fairy tale? No, not even close! Am I living happily ever after? Well, that depends on what day you ask me, but maybe if I rewrite this sixty more times, I might.



Drowning

Katrina Turk

Purity

It's interesting
'To watch the seasons change
Watch the sky shift
'The clouds part
Watch the world
Watching you
Watch the tiny buds
Just barely beginning to
Poke
'Through the wetness
And dirt
'Taste the sunlight
'That first time
It trickles so
Lightly down
Your throat
And warms you up
Belly
Heart
'Then mind
'Tiny, pink softness
Newborn hands
Fresh fingers
Grabbing blindly
At the sun
'Trying to snatch a piece
Of that warm
Comfort
And preserve it in their
Shining
Empty mouths

Oz

'The cyclone makes its way
Ripping
and tearing
across the corn fields
It moves from left
to right
Framed in the back window
of our house
A perfect little view
of destruction
We all sit
lined up one by one
Faces still
Calm
Serene
in the illumination of
the lightning strikes
'Thunder rolls and yet
no one stirs
Incognizant to any impending demise

I make my way forward
'There is a loud
Crack
And then the window glass
'Transforms itself into an intricate web
before shattering
As I make my way through
this new empty space
I do not notice
the process of jagged shards
making a home in the softness
of my flesh
'The dark, rich blood
lightly creeping its way
down my shins
Leaving a warm trail
and staining

the tops of my socks
I stand in the grass watching
as the dark, coiling annihilation
continues its approach

The weight presses
Down
heavy on my chest
and rubbery spine
Lungs are squeezed
as the air compresses
Tightness
Shaky bones and grisly tendons
Dusty muscles
unable to control the gestures
of my hands or calloused feet
It is as if
the yarn
that compiles my being
is unraveling
And it leads me
to believe that
the sky is falling on us

It is crushing us

Queens

In a strange turn of events, Lilah finds herself at a bus stop, in the middle of Queens, around one in the morning, in the middle of January, wrapped in the arms of a man that she had only met a week before.

It is ok, though, because this guy has pretty eyes, and he has his arms locked around her waist while she hesitantly crosses her own, fists loosely folded in, placing them on his chest. Her thick black coat protects her from the chilled winter air while his flimsy silver zip-up does little to fight the elements. But it looks good. Kind of like a shiny superhero, like Buzz Lightyear if he was given a chrome upgrade.

The problem is, he is not a superhero. She does not know this, as his hands tighten their grip while her eyes attempt to find something else to look at. Her lips fight a smile while his twist into an irresistibly adorable grin.

“What?” he whispers, tilting his head to the side.

All she can manage in return is a shrug and a stifled squeak.

To this, he grins, closes his eyes, and lets his lips find her lips while she melts away, right there on the sidewalk.

When her friends decided to go out to the pool hall the week before, she had promised to herself to be back by midnight – tops. But somewhere along the line, Alex had swooped in and made her his pool partner. One thing led to another and they were sinking object after object, winning three games in a row and splitting a celebratory pitcher of Cherry Wheat, even if she was too young to do so. Next thing she knew they were sitting across from each other at a musty old table tucked in the corner, chatting about travel and college and hometowns. Then they were setting down their drinks once more, picking up their cue sticks and braving another game. They planned to meet next week: same time, same place. He said she looked cute when she tried to sink stripes. She thought he looked cute whenever he moved a single inch of his body.

Maybe that was the problem, from the start. He was always a god and she was always a whim. He passed the test with her friends, easily – charismatic dude with slicked back, pitch black hair, and a knack for passing out compliments. Best of all, he got up each morning and went to work, even after nights out, and then on the weekends volunteered his time rebuilding houses and putting other people’s lives back together.

He won everybody over, especially Lilah.

Especially Lilah, because she was the special one. He didn’t treat her like he treated the rest of her friends. He complimented her tan, too-tight boots and her frizzled blonde hair, even when it became slightly mangled after a night out. He took care of her friends after they threw up in the bathroom and tried to stumble out the front

door. After a couple drinks, he would tell her she was gorgeous and then use his sturdy hands to explore her waist, still covered in the white cloth of her sweater, but not for long.

Not for long, because what Lilah doesn't know at the bus stop is that soon Alex will convince her to go his room, his hotel room kept so immaculate that she will feel compelled to align her boots perfectly against the wooden nightstand next to his bed. Soon her body will find his sheets, and his body will find hers, and she will wake up the next day in a bed she doesn't belong in next to a guy she's only just met.

But it is alright, because soon he will invite her over everyday to watch movies and to not watch movies. He will continue to go to work during the week and fix other people's lives during the weekends, but find room for her in-between. Her friends will become their friends and his room will become the place to adjourn on Saturday nights. They will use a mismatched array of cups to mix Fireball with flat soda while enjoying good company. This will work, for a while.

This will work because Lilah will enjoy the nice release of dopamine that trickles through her brain anytime Alex pulls her closer to his chest, and Alex will enjoy the gentle numbness of having someone to hold instead of thinking about his ex, of whom he still thinks when Lilah isn't around, or when Lilah is around.

But this will all be ok, because Lilah will always know she is temporary. She will always know, but she won't really know until Valentine's Day rolls around. Even when he buys her discounted chocolate, she will know it is a pity move. She has an expiration date, even if he won't admit it. She will especially know this on Valentine's Day when he only calls her by her first name, not sweetheart, not anymore, and even then when that won't stop him from taking her back to his room, back to the sheets, back to the bed.

She may always know she is temporary. But when the day comes for her to leave Queens, to say goodbye to their mismatched cups and good company, she will expect Alex to say goodbye, too. But he won't. He won't say anything.

He will agree to sit down with her in a stairwell, the only place in that hotel that they can get any privacy. "We're leaving tomorrow," she will say, and "we knew this was coming," is all he will be able to say in return. "I like you, I do," he will say, while he doesn't deny that she is not just his play toy, and "I understand," she will say while he doesn't deny that she may not have been the only one to share evenings with him.

On the other hand, "you are worth it," are the words that she will not hear as he pads out of the stairwell and she is left to climb up the stairs alone, back to her room, and "you are a beautiful woman," are the words she will not hear as she remembers all the nights she had laid topless next to him, wasting any ounce of dignity she had left, and "I'm sorry for reducing you to the status of an object worthy only of sex when you are worth so much more than that and I respect you as a person," is the ridiculous string of words she does not hear as she clutches each green linoleum step, wonder-

ing whether or not he might actually mean any of those things, even if he doesn't say them. Because she won't mean to do it, she won't mean to be that girl who falls for the fuckboy, but "I love you, I do," will be the only words she will keep tethered to her chest.

None of this matters, though, back at the bus stop in Queens. Alex will wrap his arms around her waist as Lilah melts faster than ice by a flame. His lips will meet her lips for the first time and it's alright, because right now she's happy, and he's happy. No one has hurt anyone yet. She still thinks he looks like a superhero in his silver jacket.

That's the thing, though. He's not a superhero. He's human, just like her. They will part ways eventually, one a little more wounded than the other, but still each the other's mistake.

First Contact

I believe it was the 5th of May 2003. The chaos had begun three days earlier in Kuwait; this was the first time I was doing something other than driving, as the first thirty-six hours had been nothing but driving. We started at night. We had just crossed the border and approached our first village on the route that would become known as Tampa when the sky erupted into a shower of red, orange, and the occasional green streaks. Tracers everywhere. It continued to happen at every village, and we found ourselves in a panic. Clearly, they were signaling someone. When we got to Baghdad, the skies were so lit up that you could see to thread a needle. It wasn't until we linked up with some units from the 3rd Infantry Division that we learned that it was celebratory fire. They were signaling us, to say thank you for ousting Saddam. They were probably Shiite.

The 101st Airborne Division hadn't made it south of Kirkuk, and 3rd ID was spread from Kuwait to Basra to Baghdad. From this point on, we were in no man's land. We staged out of what would come to be known as Samarra East Airfield, a place we would return to several times throughout the year. It had been snowing when we left Colorado a month earlier, yet when we started this day off at 0300, it was already over 100 degrees. The lack of sleep, the heat, and the stress were starting to take their toll.

Sand permeated everything. It was 1230, and we had been on our target, a Republican Guard Compound, for nine hours. My mouth was parched, and my boots crunched into the dried mud as I shifted to shoulder the machine gun. Psychological Operations, or Psy Ops, had been blasting instructions over the loud speakers, telling the locals to stay where they were, in Arabic, since sun up.

Staff Sergeant Boxer was a mean, old, crusty son of a bitch. I was more afraid of him than I was the enemy. This was his world; I was a stranger. On several occasions, he had made it all too clear that he would shoot me if I endangered his life, that I would not influence whether or not he made it home. My Gunner, Stitch, had about eight months more in the Army than I did and was just as lost as me. Neither one of us had signed up for this. It had been a time of peace when we enlisted; we were in it for the college money and a chance to travel far from home. I was in my last days of basic training on the 11th of September, 2001. The world as we knew it changed; I reported to Ft. Carson, Colorado, on October 5th.

That's when it happened; two vehicles, a bongo van and a car, with the unmistakable orange and white paint job of a taxi, made a break from the compound. We had three trucks on our side of the perimeter. There were no other elements in sight, just us and the noise from the damned Psy Ops truck. The seams of my gloves were already starting to split. Once the sun came up, you had them on—if you wanted to touch anything that is. The black gun had become unbearably hot, the kind of hot that burns

your hands through the gloves. The target was a Republican Guard compound, about twenty buildings with a fifteen-foot perimeter wall. The barracks were the tallest structures on the compound; they were also in our sector. We were about 600 meters from the wall. The building had many windows to watch, so that no one window ever got more than a fleeting glance. The rear gate, tucked into the far right of the wall, barely registered as important. Suddenly, without warning, the two vehicles shot from behind the wall, speeding towards us. But why? The Psy Ops truck had been blasting instructions for hours. This was not going to end well.

I was manning the M240B machine gun when SFC Dangle, my Platoon Sergeant, yelled “FIRE!” I squeezed the trigger; I wasn’t shooting at plywood targets this time. “BANG! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!” Or at least it should have been. The gun fired that first round, and the sound was wrong. I didn’t have ear plugs in. We weren’t training. Yet this machine of great, raw noise sounded miles away, not inches. “Bang!” Second round. In this configuration, the 240 should have a rate of fire around 1,000 rounds per minute. Instead, it seemed closer to ten. “Bang!” Third round. It sounded so far away. “Bang!” Round four. As parched as my mouth had been, it couldn’t compare to the dry, gritty desert it had now become. “Bang!” Fourth round. What was this? What was happening? “Bang!” Fifth round. Clunk. Misfire! The damned sand! I was moving faster than I ever had in my life, but everything was in slow motion; no matter how much I wanted to move faster, I couldn’t.

I had seen it in countless war movies, like Tom Hanks on the beaches in *Saving Private Ryan* or Adrien Brody in *The Thin Red Line*. As a child, I assumed Hollywood had taken liberties to create drama and suspense. This wasn’t a movie.

I reached for the charging handle, watching my hand move at such a painful speed, turning palm up, my fingers curling around the checked metal tube. Finally, with it in my grasp, I wrenched it towards me. Time had all but stopped. I could feel the sand grinding between the metal as it was slammed back into the locked position. The smell of burnt gunpowder and gun oil began to tickle my nose as smoke spiraled upwards from the barrel. At this point, it dawned on me that I was no longer thinking about what I was doing, merely reacting. Had my training prepared me for this? Was I functioning like the well-oiled professional they had trained me to be? I grabbed the pistol grip. “Bang!” Round six. As the pace began to mock me, things changed once more. Round seven came quicker, as did round eight; everything eventually returned to normal speed, but not without one more nod to Hollywood. You don’t just skip back to normal speed. No, it speeds back up exponentially, each round coming slightly faster than the last. “BRRRT!” Chaos, confusion, and sound returned to my world. I fired off ten or fifteen more rounds before I heard SSG Boxer screaming, “Ceasefire!”

On this day, my perception of mankind and my understanding of violence changed, forever. The toll for this awakening is an undisclosed sum, a tax on your soul, collected in small chunks, at unbeknownst and inconvenient times: times when you’re alone in a crowded room; times when your family will be appalled by your reactions; times

when your wife stares at you with tears in her eyes, wishing she knew how to help; times anyone else would run away, but to your kids, dad is just having another bad day; times when you pray to the god you've abandoned for the ability to feel again; times you pray to feel nothing; times you wish you could go back and change it all, knowing damn well you wouldn't change a thing; times when you understand the price and why it must be paid.

Even with the consequences, there is no greater high than this, no better understanding of life, and you never really experience it more than once. I came close to it only one other time, though I flirted with it for the better part of two years. This high, like any drug, has its own repercussions. The adrenaline dump afterwards is only comparable to the likes of food poisoning and a migraine combined. You only ever really get this feeling of godhood once. You're always chasing that first high. Unfortunately, the dump remains unchanged. It would never be the same after that. I was never the same after that. I was no longer a stranger to SSG Boxer's world. This was the first time we came into contact, and it would not be our last. It was the longest five seconds of my life.

In as many different ways as there were men in my Platoon, first contact came for us all, carrying with it an epiphany about the insignificance and fragility of life eclipsed ever so slightly by the power of one man. On this day, I was lucky; I only had to shoot tires. This allowed me the ability to process and understand, to a point, the weight of it all. This afforded me the opportunity to truly understand what I would be asked to do. Over the next three and a half years, with each Platoon member's first contact, I would watch this debt incurred, the innocence of youth stripped from them all, one trigger pull at a time. Their understanding of these events would come to them in their own time.

When deployed to a combat zone, emotions and deep thought are distractions that can get you killed, so you shut them off as best you can. When you get home, when the war is finally over, you must deal with these emotions and thoughts. This is when your final battle starts. This is the time when you truly begin to contemplate what you have done, good and bad, and how you're going to deal with it.

Nietzsche said, "Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster." No one warns you, before your first contact, about the monsters residing in the dark recesses of your own imagination. Once awakened, they begin feeding on fear and anger, preparing for combat. Their presence goes unnoticed for months, allowing them to dig in and prepare for a siege. With each passing day, the monsters become stronger, more influential—insurgents grasping for control. For a time, they will appear as allies, allowing you to perform feats most men could not fathom. During this time, you are in control, but only just. For when you recognize their influence, their control, that's when the fight starts. This is the ultimate struggle, the quintessential battle, for if you fail, you lose: your morality, your identity, maybe your life. Private Fahr, these are your monsters. Try not to let them consume you.



Bells From Time

Jeffrey Grounds

Sovereign of the Wilds

Why are you the Queen for this forest?
Is it because you glow and shine like the moon?
Crimson, Emerald, and Sapphire the color of your armor.
How do you cling to such grace and love?
Why can you screech and howl all day long without a word being whispered?
Is it because everyone is laid at your command?
Soaring and scouting new worlds to lead.
How you reign and spread your bounty, being the size of a mustard seed.

“Vous êtes la Violence”

“As a point of departure, let us say that violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.”

Johan Galtung

She Touches the bars to hold in the pariah of society's streets/
The misunderstood/that raped and reaped in a fit of cries—

You/Do/Nothing.

She Overhears Hallelujah in the glorified trinities/
The over-forgiving/the squandered/the wandered tries—

You/Do/Nothing.

She Smells the shiver of your lungs as they breathe/
The whimper/rippling up through the big fatherless eyes—

You/Do/Nothing.

She Tastes the drip of red dawn on a moving picture on TVs/
The succulence/the sadism of this/the high of the fist's rise—

You/Do/Nothing.

She Sees the white picket fences hold amenities/
The tie of housecoats/on their housewives/harboring house flies—

You/Do/Nothing.

The
misunderstood/
hallelujah/
from the lungs/
on the TVs/
inside your fences guarantees—
Violence does nothing.

Bonbons and the Magic Mind

bon·bon

noun: a piece of candy, especially one covered with chocolate.

Mary knew that New York was a busy and beautiful place in the fall. The colorful leaves painted the nearby parks, and the air was perfumed by bustling people on side-walks. Since her marriage to Steven, she felt a growing sense of isolation in their apartment. Steven worked throughout the day, and just a few months into the marriage, he was working well into many nights, leaving Mary alone. Most afternoons when she wasn't watching soap operas, she resigned herself to sitting near the 10th floor window, counting the taxis and imagining she was one of the women in a dress suit passing by, heading to an important meeting. Mary didn't feel important.

Muffled screams echoed through the apartment of Steven and Mary Dennison. In the bedroom, on the bed, Mary straddled Steven's head. She wore her pink night gown. It was as large as the bed spread itself. Steven's legs were flailing. His upper body pinned down. If the light were on, you could see that he was wearing only his tighty whities. His head was somewhere under Mary... all 385 lbs of Mary. She had her arms against the wall above the headboard. When the silence came, Mary reached over to the nightstand, turned on the small lamp and backed herself off of Steven's head. She looked down between her legs. This must be what it's like giving birth to death. Steven's face was like a caricature of himself; one eye bulging open and his mouth in a crooked grimace. Mary wiped the sweat from her brow.

She let out a little giggle as she went towards the living room. She squatted down onto the couch that had become misshapen under her weight over the previous weeks. She wiped her brow again, caught her breath, and picked up the TV remote. Mary balanced herself and reached under the opposite corner of the couch, slowly sliding out the large, shiny aluminum bowl, filled with bonbons. She couldn't wait to get them into her mouth to hear their praises. But Mary couldn't hear anything. She'd feverishly eaten every one left in the apartment. She screamed into the air, "Why? Where are you?" But, she heard nothing. After all they'd helped her through, and now, for her greatest triumph, they abandoned her? This was not right. This couldn't be. She started to sweat as she tore the kitchen cabinets open. There had to be others. He switched them. That's it. Her cries turned to howling sobs as she soon tired and fell onto the couch, nearly tumbling it over. She bawled and screamed until the police broke the door open.

Inside the Lower East Side Police Substation #41, the room was gray, painted concrete block. The lighting was bright, white, and florescent. Mary was seated at a long, faux wood conference table across from two officers in dress clothes with loose ties and clipboards. Her body bulged over all sides of the folding metal chair. Her brown hair was disheveled, thin, and sweaty. She was still wearing her pink nightgown.

“I first heard the bonbons when I brought them home from the market, the day after the first big fight I had with Steven. He had yelled at me because his meatloaf wasn’t warm enough. He’d never yelled at me before. Oh, he did plenty since. But that was the first time. I was thin then, like a model. They were just a small bag of round chocolates in beautifully colored wrappers. It was getting late and Steven wasn’t home for dinner again, so I decided to have one. The moment the first one fell from the wrapper into my mouth, I could hear whispering, *Mary, you’re pretty. How was your day? Thank you. I love you.* They lied to me. That’s how I got this way, you see. I never meant to hurt Steven. It was...it was *her*.”

The detectives glanced at each other, seemingly on cue, sharing incredulous grins. The older of the two detectives put his chin in his hand: “Let me stop you for a second there, Mrs. Dennison. Did you say you heard the candy? What does that mean, exactly?”

A fleeting, melancholy smile stretched across Mary’s face. “It was always the same voice. I never placed it until now, but it was Bette Davis. She spoke softly right into my ear. Gosh, I never knew a celebrity before. Sometimes I even sang when I opened them. The way you use both hands to pull a twisted wrapper, it would open just enough for you to see the bonbon. Then you just hold it above your mouth and plop. I was eating over 100 a day near the time of the accident. Steven didn’t even notice until the weight came on.

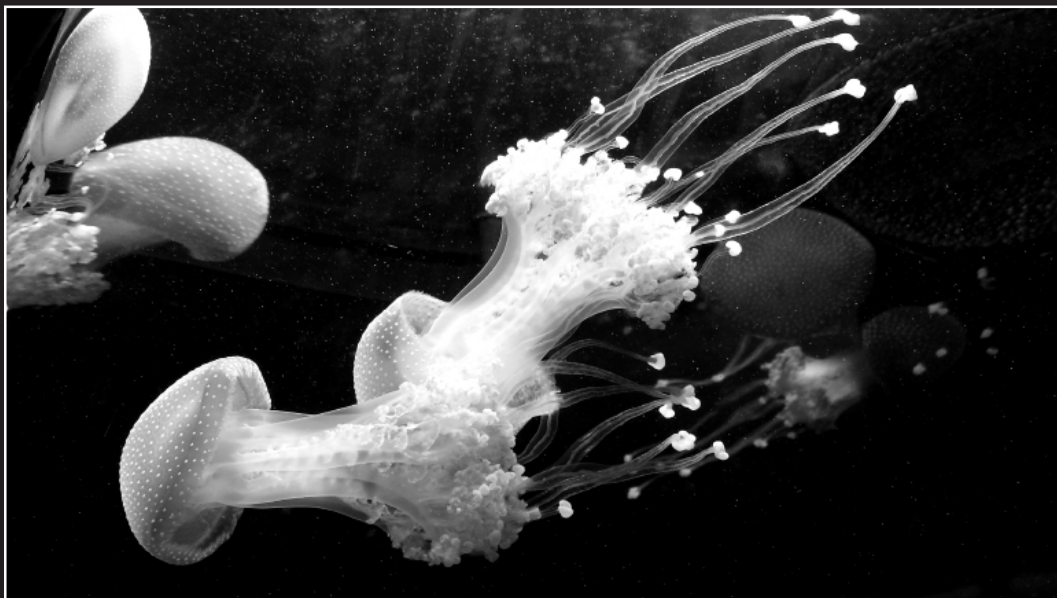
“Eventually, Bette was the only person I talked to at all. Steven became more and more distant and angry with me, until we barely communicated. But she told me what was really going on. The shameful things he’d been doing at work with his secretary, the times he was late for dinner, the reason he sighed at night when he rolled over after looking at me with loathing and contempt. I knew more about what he was up to than he did. She told me he was planning to leave me for another woman. I was going to be a stay at home, divorced, fat lady, with no friends or family. That’s when she made our plans. She began telling me every day. Eventually, I just did it. And then she was gone. She was gone, too. I don’t un-un-un-understand!” Mary began to sob loudly.

The younger detective nodded to the older detective.

“Excuse us one moment, ma’am?” They moved to the corner of the room.

Mary stared blankly at the gray block wall, “Of course.”

The younger detective had one hand in his pocket, the other holding his clipboard in front of his mouth. “Who the hell’s Bette Davis?”



Jellies

Heather Pate

With Special Thanks to Our Contributors

Noura Ahmed

Noura Ahmed was born in Bloomington and has lived here most of her life. She graduated from BHSN in the Spring of 2016. Her interests include reading, writing, drawing, and learning about the world. She looks forward to transferring to IU at some point in the near future.

Matthew Begala

Matthew is a student at the Ivy Tech–Bloomington Campus. He is an avid creator and enjoys photography, videography, writing, music, and learning in his free time. He is truly honored to be a part of the upcoming publication of the *mê tis* magazine and deeply appreciates the inclusion of his work alongside the many other talented individuals.

Troy Bigelow

Troy teaches composition, creative writing, and literature at Ivy Tech Community College–Northeast. His first book of poetry, *Resuscitivity*, won the Transcontinental Poetry Award sponsored by Pavement Saw Press. He lives in northeast Indiana with his wife and children.

Jennifer Bube

Jennifer writes for kicks, giggles, and tears. Her written murmurs are an attempt at synthesizing metaphysical musings with earthly experiences. She is a native of the heart of Nashville, IN, deep inside Brown County's rolling hills. Jennifer loves jars, beverages, and good company. She is one of over 170,000 students who study at Ivy Tech Community College. Nulla Dies Sine Linea.

Jason Campbell

Jason lives and works in Bloomington, IN.

Alisha Cornwell

Alisha is 30 years old and still figuring it out.

Kenneth Fahr

Kenneth is 34, married with one child, Retired Army, Major: Culinary Arts.

Jeffrey Grounds

Jeff is an all-around artist, who views any material as a potential medium. Be it painting or sculpture, drawing or photography, he remains versatile in his creative approach to best represent the source of inspiration. While he might start out with a plan in mind, it all goes to the wayside very quickly as the artistic process takes hold. He is a student at Ivy Tech Community College, and will be graduating with a Fine Arts degree.

Jonathan Holland

Jonathan started liking poetry at Ivy Tech. Isn't that awesome? While he loved writing, he can pin point the precise moment he began to like poetry to a specific seat in C100A. He now attends the University of Michigan.

Ashley Julian

Ashley is a Navy Veteran and has been married to a Marine Veteran for 11 years. She loves frogs, Boston Terriers, and California.

Nikolas Maden

Nikolas is in his second year at Ivy Tech–Bloomington. Creative writing, particularly poetry, has been a major part of his life for several years now, often occupying much of his free time. He also enjoys photography, music, and gardening.

Michael McConnell

Michael is 25 years old and originally from Columbus, Indiana. Last year, he transferred to Ball State from Ivy Tech to hopefully complete a degree in computer science. His main interests include simple living, permaculture gardening, functional programming, and cryptography. He has recently discovered an infatuation for writing and is working on a book he feels passionate about.

Bethany Owens

Bethany is a current nursing student at the Bloomington campus. She is expected to graduate in the Spring of 2017.

Kirsten Owens

Kirsten is a student at Ivy Tech Bloomington, studying Elementary Education. She was born and raised in Bloomington, Indiana, but wishes she was born in England. She enjoys spending her free time baking and cuddling her Pug.

Brynn Parkinson

Brynn is a freshman at the Ivy Tech–Bloomington Campus. This piece was created in her creative writing class.

Courtney Pope

Courtney graduated from Ivy Tech in May 2016 with an Associate's in Liberal Arts. She is currently a student at Indiana University, pursuing a Bachelors in International Studies and French with a minor in Anthropology. Aside from college, Courtney is a part time barista, full time adventurer, and a lover of life. She wrote the poem "What It's Like to Be a Fat Girl (For Those of You Who Aren't)" to express the struggles she has had her entire life in learning to love her body, no matter its size, and she hopes that other people can relate and realize that their worth as a human being cannot be summed up in a number on the scale or by a certain clothing size.

Cori Smeltzer

Cori grew up and still lives in Spencer, IN. She graduated in May of 2016 from Ivy Tech Community College with a degree in Communications.

Megan Stephens

Megan is a writer, photographer, and student. She is currently attending Ivy Tech Community College and pursuing an English Degree through IUPUI. She has been previously published in the Central Indiana Ivy Tech's literary journal, *New Voices*. She lives in the heart of Indiana.

Katrina Turk

Katrina is a former student at Ivy Tech. She transferred to The Herron School of Art and Design in 2015 and "Drowning" was her first final project completed there. She is currently a Junior set to graduate in May of 2018 with a BFA in Drawing and Illustration and a minor in Art History. She loves ink and watercolor, and as a fun fact, "Drowning" is actually her largest work to date, being about 3x3'.

Summer Vergiels

Summer is a wife, mother of three, full-time student, part-time teacher, and birth advocate. She will be graduating from Ivy Tech-Bloomington in the spring with an Associate's degree in Liberal Arts.

