

What time are we upon and where do I belong?

-Francesca Lia Block, "Witch Baby"



mê tis Volume VII

mê tis is a compilation of literary and artistic pieces submitted by students, staff, faculty, and alumni of Ivy Tech Community College. All views expressed by the contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of Ivy Tech. In addition, contributors retain the rights to their materials.

“*mê tis*” is Greek for “somebody.” The mission of this magazine is to publish new voices from the Ivy Tech community, to provide a public forum for the stories, poems, plays, memoirs, and two-dimensional images of our students, faculty, and staff, because we believe that each one of you is a potential, literary “somebody.”

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For submission guidelines, please visit www.metislitmag.com.

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mê tis

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Courtney Baxter

Stone

“There’s something about leaving a little blood somewhere, Boy. You never forget it.”

Dad always used to say that to me, and I never knew why. It just seemed like one of those things that parents said every so often that didn’t quite make all the sense it should. Well, not until a day like today anyway.

There’s something chilling about looking at a grave.

Everything gets all quiet, like the universe understands you need a moment, even just a short one, to come to grips with something so . . . life changing. What irony. Surrounding silence should be something peaceful, or so I once thought, but there’s no peace. The hollow feeling of emptiness and nothingness within yourself is unsettling and painful.

God, there’s something chilling about looking at a grave.

The world fades away around you, and all that remains is the stone and the memory of what lead to it. You can never escape it, never erase the pain or the sounds, or the pictures that would haunt the rest of your waking hours. Every time you close your eyes you can see the barrel of the gun pointed with purpose. You can still feel the cold metal pressed against your overheated skin. And every time it gets quiet, you hear the shot ring out in your ears. No, none of that ever goes away.

But it seems so much worse when you’re looking at a grave.

“You gotta leave a little blood somewhere,” he would say, his hot breath

ripe with drunkenness. “Wouldn’t want you to forget, Boy.” And then the pain.

Every time I close my eyes I still see the room spinning, rushing past me in my attempt to flee for sanctuary. And then the cold in my palm. There’s the way out. There’s the escape. How hard could it be?

“You think you’re man enough for that, Boy?” He spat, guiding my shaking hand till the barrel pressed against his sweaty forehead. I squeezed my eyes closed tight, both then and now, unable to look.

There’s something chilling about looking at a grave.

It does something to you. It makes you remember things you want to forget. It makes you see things you never wanted to see. It makes you hear things that are long gone and should stay that way. It makes you re-live the moment that you couldn’t bring yourself to pull the trigger and end the pain forever. The moment when everything moved in slow motion, but you still couldn’t move fast enough to get away. The moment when an evil man steals the gun from your hand and points it at you with a smile that makes your stomach turn. The moment when the shot rang out like an explosion and everything went black. The moment when you woke up . . . Only to realize you weren’t really dreaming at all.

There’s something chilling about looking at a grave.

Especially when it’s yours.

Addiction

A grin reaches across her cheeks
as I fall from feet to back.

Her sweet scent pushes into my nostrils;
I inhale her into my lungs.

When she wraps around the vein in my arm,
my stomach fills and my body warms.

Embracing me, she is my judgment:
that a just-law will not detain me.

But when it does, I sit
in a concrete hole and declare
independence in shaky pen strokes—
I applaud myself for lying
in sweat sopped sheets, sobs
and stench for three nights—
I catch fastball insults
and curved criticisms
from the person I should be—
the person I want to be. I thumb
away throbbing tears and cringe
and itch and hurt for tomorrow.

But the moon
swallows the sun.

Betsy

I grew up in a northern Ohio town. We lived in an average middleclass subdivision in a modest three-bedroom brick ranch house. My sister and I rode our bikes down the tree-lined streets and would stop at the corner store for an ice cream treat. Mom stayed home and a balanced dinner was on the table at precisely six o'clock every night when my cranky father got home from the bank.

Betsy was my best friend in elementary school. We sat side-by-side and ate the same school lunch every day. We were a team and always challenged the other kids to a game of kickball or tag at recess. She was a tall, lanky black girl with buck teeth. She wore her hair the same way every single day, two ponytails on the sides of her head and one on the top near her forehead, almost resembling a horn. Adorning the pony tails were hair-ties with large multi-colored plastic beads on them. I thought she looked beautiful.

One day, Betsy invited me over to her house after school. To my surprise, my mom said yes. I was so excited. All day long we whispered and giggled about the fun we would have after school.

I rode the bus home with her. I was used to riding the bus, mine went north of town and hers went south. The bus ride was a blast. I usually had to sit in a seat with my pesky little sister, but today I got to sit with my best friend. We bounced in the seats as the bus moaned and groaned over potholes down the back roads.

As the bus came to a stop, Betsy said, "Come on, this is us."

I followed her and we excitedly leapt from the bottom step. The first thing I noticed was the cloud of dust our shoes made as we jumped off. Then, as the bus drove off, I almost gagged at the cloud it left behind. All of the roads near my house were paved. Betsy shuffled her feet on the ground, she didn't even seem to notice the dust.

It finally settled and left us standing in front of a community of tenement houses. Tiny little shacks all in a row. They all looked the same; battleship gray peeling paint and cracked windows with missing panes.

Betsy led me to her house and we went in the unlocked back door.

The back step was a solitary concrete block. As she opened the door I noticed that it didn't fit properly in the frame. Big gaps on either side allowed the brutal Ohio winter easy access inside.

It was early spring and the weather was warming up nicely. I wore a light jacket but still felt how chilly it was inside. The first thing I noticed was the absence of doors throughout the house. Instead there were colorful blankets and quilts hung by nails in every doorway. The quilts were hand-made, complete with frilly yarn tassels and intricate patterns. Many of these were also used as curtains, covering the cracked and broken windows.

Betsy bound into the house with a big smile on her face. "Want a snack? I'm starving!"

I nodded, "Yeah. That sounds great." I was thinking Oreos and milk, but she handed me an apple and one thin gingersnap cookie. I watched in awe as Betsy's big buck teeth chomped into that apple like it was the best thing on earth. She grabbed two glasses and filled them up with tap water. As she sat the glass down in front of me I noticed things swirling in the cloudy water. Not bugs or anything, just impurities. I tried to be polite and sip the water, but it was difficult to get down.

Even though her house was different than mine, I could feel the love there. Betsy's pictures and papers from school hung everywhere: on the refrigerator, walls, and windows. It was obvious they were very proud of her. Cut wildflowers in a drinking glass sat on the table. They weren't roses, but lovely just the same.

Betsy smiled at me as we sat on hodge-podge kitchen chairs eating our snack. "Do you gotta use the bafroom fore we head out?"

I nodded and replied, "Yeah, I do. Where are we going?"

She smiled at me and was so happy. But come to think of it, I don't recall ever seeing Betsy anything but happy. "Toilet's this way. Let's hurry up. I gotta go to work."

Work. Did she say work? Maybe she meant that she had to do chores.

She led me through the small house with uneven floors and drafty windows to the restroom. The bathroom was a tiny room with a hole in the floor next to the commode. She held back the blanketed door and let me in.

Then she said, "Don't use no more than two sheets of paper. I'll wait out here."

Two sheets of paper? I was accustomed to wrapping a long section around my hand many times before I went anywhere near my butt. Two sheets, my gosh, that barely even did the job, but I managed.

We left her house and Betsy led me down a long dirt path which ran alongside a never-ending row of trees. The sun was low in the sky and the spring chill was setting in.

The walk seemed to take forever. Betsy picked up sticks and rocks, laughing as we walked the mile or more down the dusty road. It finally opened to a farm field with a large metal building in the middle. Betsy smiled, "We're here."

I shook my head in confusion. "What is this place?"

She laughed at me like I was acting stupid. "It's a potato field."

She rushed through the door and the cold slapped me in the face. It was freezing in there. When I walked in, everyone stopped. I had never seen so many black people together in one place before. There seemed to be a hundred of them, maybe more, and they all stared at me. I stood out like a sore thumb.

Betsy dragged me by the arm and we walked over to a table. "This is Janet. These here is my folks."

They nodded politely and said, "Nice to meet you. Betsy talks about you

all the time."

I smiled and shyly replied, "Nice to meet you, too."

Betsy jumped in, "Can we help?"

They moved down giving us space to slide in next to them. I saw other kids in there working, too. Some were even younger than us. Betsy dove right in. I stood there, blankly looking at her, "What do we do?"

Once again Betsy looked at me like I was being dumb. "Wash them, silly."

I followed her lead, picking one up from the bushel next to us and immersing it in the water trough in front of us. The water felt like ice water and chilled me to the bone. I pulled my hand out and winced. "It's too cold, Betsy."

She burst out laughing at me. "You'll get used to it."

I tried my hardest, but there was no way I was getting used to it. It hurt like hell. It felt like my fingers were freezing off.

The workers seemed happy in the ice box building, getting frostbite on their hands. They smiled and joked with each other.

Occasionally, someone would break out in song. Before I knew it, Betsy was smiling and singing along as the entire place resonated with happy music.

Betsy smiled, "Keep going. Don't stop. You'll get the hang of it."

As hard as I tried, there was no way I would ever get the hang of this.

Betsy just dug right in with her typical cheerful disposition and positive attitude. I, on the other hand, began to complain. There was no light at the end of the tunnel. When one bushel was empty, here came a big strong man with a fresh one. I couldn't take it anymore. The spoiled little girl in me reared her ugly head. Eventually I proclaimed, "I want to go home."

They had no car so Betsy's mama said, "Go over to the Smith's house and use their phone to call her folks to come and get her."

I froze the mile walk back to her house down that dirt path. The sun was setting and my hands were numb. We walked into the Smith's house and used the only phone in the entire neighborhood. I called my parents and they said they'd come get me. They weren't familiar with the area, so Betsy had to give them directions.

Afterward, we waited outside by the road on the small log that served as their bus stop. I looked over at Betsy and asked, “What are you gonna do next?”

I thought maybe she would say, “Watch some TV or do homework.”

Instead she smiled her warm smile at me and replied, “I’m gonna go back to work and help my folks. That’s what I do every night. We work until it’s too dark to see anymore. They get paid by the bushel and need the extra hands.”

My parents drove up in a cloud of dust. I climbed into the back seat of their Buick and said good-bye to Betsy. “See you tomorrow at school. Thanks for having me over.”

As we drove away, my Mom began to question me. “Janet, where are we and who are these people?”

I shrugged and replied, “It’s my friend Betsy.”

I watched Betsy out the back window of the car. She hung her head, dragging a stick behind her as she made her way towards that long cold path leading back to the potato farm.

Alive

I was used to traveling to Mexico yearly.

The gentleness of the land followed me, as the vehicle made its way into the heart of Mexico, thirteen hours past the border. And the landscape was a beautiful one; it changed over the course of those thirty-eight hours it took to reach home. On those journeys, I witnessed the liveliness of the land, an ever-expanding persona that seemed to be never satisfied, never entirely fulfilled. Along with it came the different people that I witnessed, the different ethnicities that seemed more concentrated and tangible the further south you go.

I remember gazing out that window, the hum of the car seemed it would take us away from the reality of life. I was an avid reader even back then: I was armed with a multitude of books, notebooks and writing utensils in case a child’s mind could ever grow bored, the audacity of it. Yet, thinking back on it, most of my time during these car rides had actually centered on watching the shape of the land as it grew or diminished through the perspective of that small, lovely window.

The verdant beauty of the land rose, the endless azure-blue sky, the forming of the desert with its wicked heat: Nature was truly ever-present, ever-evolving to the ardent watcher. This setting constantly watched my family and me as we traveled home.

The experience of going to Mexico was not entirely new to me. I grew up in the middle of a Hispanic revolution. The onslaught and chatter of the

culture constantly surrounded me when younger. The smells of the food, the brilliant colors streaking across my vision at times, the noise of the family and friends animated around me, the passion of a people that I knew so well. Yes, I was American, but I often felt that I was a hybrid of sorts, an alien that could never fully comprehend the importance of both cultures. At times I felt as if I were missing something important, something that would easily reveal itself to me if only I had been raised completely in one setting, one surrounding.

I was used to friends and family alike praising my upbringing, telling me that I was so lucky to know both worlds, both languages. I played my part well, nodding and smiling and agreeing that yes, I was indeed lucky, and yes, it truly is amazing to be the Mexican-American that I am. Often I would feel guilty. What did these people know about me? Nothing.

The truth was, there was a fear there, a sickness I carried throughout my youth. I was afraid that even though I knew two worlds, I truly knew neither. When I was in Mexico, with the whirlwind of the language and the beauty and the fire of the people consuming me, I felt too left out, too cold and too American. And whenever I was in the U.S., going through the motions of time and living my life and education as any other child would, I felt too Mexican, too passionate, with a fire consuming me from the inside out.

Though I was a quiet and good child, these feelings rose within me at times, threatening to overtake me. There were moments I longed to burst, to let the emotions completely consume and leave nothing but the memory of the girl that lived. It seemed if I traversed one territory within myself, I was forsaking the other. If I fed one part of my soul, the other would groan and grumble and beg to be embraced. At times, it seemed impossible the two could coexist, and I could feel them struggling to within me to overtake the other.

In the United States, I never felt it more clearly than in the presence of my friends. The way they carried themselves, the daily activities of their family, their worries. However, what grand thing it was, this free life, the time of the American, and the politeness behind it all, the strength, the grandeur

and the justice, the goodness, the opportunity.

When I went back to Mexico, I could sense my troubled spirit when I glanced at the land, each time feeling like the last, as if I would never see it again. The people who were so far apart yet connected, one tremendous big spirit that had undergone generations of a violence I could feel boiling beneath my skin at times, holding a tender emotion I could never place. And the pride, oh yes, the pride and the gossip and the physical senses all hurling at me, wounding me.

Where was I in the middle of all this? Caught somewhere, bleeding somewhere, trying to piece myself together. I had felt a desperation rise within me, a fire that could not easily be quenched. Yet, at times, it was easily silenced under the mere prospect of being Mexican-American. I was a mix of a girl, not a woman; a woman knew exactly who she was, and I did not yet know myself.

Octavio Paz summarized the essence of the conflicted Mexican well: "The Mexican is always remote, from the world and from other people. And also from himself."

I was too immersed in the moment, too caught into trying to figure out exactly who I was and what I would do, so enwrapped in my thoughts that even though I thought I knew it all, I was distinctly removed from even knowing myself. Allowing myself the luxury of such a confession at such a young age was too much, and so I drifted as only half-breeds can do at times; without acknowledgement.

Whenever I would arrive in Mexico, these feelings grew. They expanded over me at times. Though I neither knew myself nor my mix of a culture and passion, the moment I arrived at our charming ranch in the middle of a breathtaking valley surrounded by mountains, I knew only one thing.

I was alive.

Those moments I spent in Mexico throughout my childhood, roaming the flatness of the valley, wandering the thickness of the forest, following the trail of the river and the several ponds on my father's ranch, I felt a compromise fill me. It did not matter who I was, truly. All that mattered was that I

existed at that moment. My presence was undeniable, and it seemed to be connected with the presence of the land as well, something I could not deny. My existence was not an accident, nor was it a peaceful one. It was a savage thing and I loved it, because I reveled in it every day from the morning I would rise to the night when I would fall, exhausted. It took those yearly travels to Mexico and the presence of the land for me to realize it. Because from the moment we began our journey the land would follow me, and it concluded to the same revealing every year; I was alive, alive, alive.

Chad Martindale

Into the Mirror and There

There are many beautiful things
That few friends dare to see
Where I view in the mirror of the green, still pond
Spare leaves fall and gloss leaves grow
Trees are buttered in mist
Sparrows sound sounds
The thin, weak rain drips
In still-life nature
The masterpiece is real-time
Beauty strolls the waking-life
And on a wire-string from heaven
A farrowed leaf corkscrews to the ground
Alive in the mirror is the garden where
We'll reawaken as bees, lest wiry leaves
Made sure of their fragility

Victoria Neely

She's Mine

I know everything about her. My connection with her is stronger than any she enjoys with her parents, her best friend, or even him.

She might call him her boyfriend, she might even make love to him, but I assure you she spends more time fondling me. Even those moments when she lies naked under him she will sometimes reach for me, look at me, touch me.

It doesn't upset me when she goes out to dinner with him because she never ignores me.

She once spent the whole evening staring at my face while he sighed and picked at his lasagna.

He tried to tell her about his new job at RadioShack but she just smiled and said "Uh huh." The fool should have texted the news to me instead; I would have shown her the message.

She takes me to bed with her so she won't miss any sound I might make in the night.

When she feels nervous, or bored, or lonely, she reaches for me and seeks my comforting glow.

There was a time when she thought she'd lost me forever. I heard her cry, "Where is it, where is it?" I heard her breathing hard and fast as she tore through piles of papers, books and magazines to find me. She was almost in tears by the time she discovered me buried at the bottom of her Vera Bradley purse.

I am her comfort. I am her music. I am her window to the world. I am her everything.

The only thing I can't do is make love to her, yet.



Recovery

Dear Broken Ego,

You are stubborn. Stubborn is to ignorance as ignorance is to stupid. You make up your mind and that's that. Instead of seeking advice or heeding warnings, you constantly look to yourself for the answer. You are scared—scared of asking because you're scared answers won't come, scared of putting yourself out there and being a naive fool. You're terrified of being burned again. Something wants to answer your questions. Something wants to help you and guide you down a path of completeness; something is there, but you stand in its way.

I stand in its way.

You've obstructed its ability to help me. Answers are right in front of my eyes, but you are too busy looking behind them. You're so wrapped up in yourself, your reasoning, your experience. You're so entrenched in yourself it consumes me. You pray, but you've stopped expecting answers; you seek, but you've ceased believing in miracles; you try, but you don't expect results. Your pessimistically optimistic outlook is stupid, foolish, a scapegoat for a larger problem. THE problem. Your faith is shattered.

My faith is shattered.

You are broken, and I can't figure out how to fix you. If you can't fix you, what the fuck am I supposed to do? Nothing. Your expectations doom me down the same road I've traveled so many times. They destroy me, forcing me toward the same path of mediocrity we fear so much. I'm scared of it. I'm scared of you and the decisions, perceptions, and actions you force upon me.

You're so busy feeling sorry for yourself that I miss opportunities to grow.

You pretend you don't pity your situation, but you do. It's pathetic. You make me a sorry, self-centered fool. Your pride is a roadblock to my progress. It makes help such a foreign idea. Charity is so alien. It surrounds you like the warm heroin that blanketed your skin like itchy wool, but your pride makes me ignore it and go at life alone. Accepting the concept of charity and love forces you to accept that, for the most part, human nature is kind. You are petrified of judgment. You're a vain fool and your vanity will doom you... It will doom me.

You interpret things that aren't meant to be interpreted and analyze the unanalytical. You make me justify the unjustifiable. Not everything has an answer, an underlying meaning, or a malevolent ulterior motive, yet you assume it does. You assume that some things are impossible when in reality everything is possible. My dreams are attainable if I can break free from you and do what needs to be done, not just the things that coddle you. You assume and assumptions will ruin us. Something even bigger than you is using me to serve some astronomical purpose. You often forget that our purpose isn't arbitrary. Your life isn't meaningless. My objective isn't obsolete.

At some point I hope you'll realize all this and quit being stubborn. Stop feeling sorry for yourself; the only person continuing to wrong you is you. At some point you'll hope again—trust again. One day you'll step out of my way and we'll mend together for some great purpose. We'll step aside and save people from the depths of their own destruction. One day you'll restore your faith and save me from my own destruction. We'll become one and finally serve our role in the cosmic scheme of life, instead of tearing away at each other's destiny, destroying each other's faith, and spoiling our future. Right now we are detached, but one day we will become one, fighting for a common objective. We are nothing separate, but everything together.

Sincerely,

Fucked

Dear Raging Addict,

What happens when the glory of sobriety and freedom fades and everyday

life becomes monotonous?? You. Liberty breeds so much opportunity which is unbearably hard. Choices bring pain. Sometimes I miss you, and I envy your reasoning. You lived in the moment. You could've given two shits about others, the future, and everyone's opinions. Everything you ignored engulfs my sober mind. There's no time for now in my life; everything I do is for the future. You had friends and highs; I have no one and lows. Sometimes I look at the cherry on my cigarette and remember how good it felt to plunge into my arm when I felt depressed. I lack the courage and the reckless abandonment you lived by even though I know physical pain feels so much better than emotional pain. It clears my head. Drugs clear my head. Sobriety makes me focus on everything. My body is clean, but my mind is eternally tainted. I have so much good, but I only focus on bad. Loneliness makes me feel like you before you escaped into a few finite moments of bliss. The seclusion is a trigger, and fear of prison is the only thing that separates us.

Freedom is the only thing that stops me from reverting back to you.

I felt so happy when I was around friends. I felt so full when I was loved. Right now I am empty. I sit in a room full of addicts in NA meetings, yet I'm in total isolation. I feel like a stranger—like I'm wearing an Abercrombie sweater vest in a room full of people with ICP shirts and black pants with those horrendous straps connecting the legs. Sometimes it's like I don't fit in anywhere. But you... You fit in everywhere because you don't give a shit...

How do I take the positives of you without becoming you? How do I empty the despair from my brain? All I want is to fit in and be excellent. I only yearn to be normal and to stand out. I want to be like everyone else—but GREAT. I am a walking oxymoron; even my desires are pathetically hopeful, just like you and I.

Sometimes my heart is so heavy I want to cry, but the tears aren't there. I wish they were, but I feel no sympathy for myself whatsoever. I'd like to confide in others, but all I can relate to are these blank sheets of paper; full of potential, but nothing left untouched. My ego prevents me from trusting anyone. It seems so easy for others to make friends, and it used to be for me. But since I've been free from drugs and jail, it's all but easy. I felt like

I'd come out a new person, but I'm even more fucked than when I went in. It's like I don't want people to get to know me. Actually that's all I want, but I don't have the energy to explain myself. I want people to want to get to know me. I wish they'd prod me with questions like they were writing an in depth newspaper article on me and what I've overcome. I'm a self-centered, selfish fool with nothing to talk about.

What the fuck am I supposed to say? It was so easy for you. When around new people, I can't figure out who I am, but around those who know me, I feel so clearly defined. Everything about me is a glaring contradiction. I sit in groups wanting to say so much, but when it comes my turn to speak, I don't have the balls to say what I'm thinking. My thoughts are trapped in my head because I'm scared to say the wrong thing at any given moment. Often if I sincerely speak what's on my mind, people will probably feel sorry for me, and I fear sympathy; it's quicksand for new relationships and first impressions.

I'm bored so often now that I attribute that with sobriety, yet I'm busy 17 hours a day. It's not that sobriety is boring, it just didn't fix the underlying problem: Me. I think constantly, and sometimes I just want to stop. My brain never stops, and it makes me wish I was you again.

You had a clear, achievable purpose every day. You had ambition and got shit done. You had the right means but the wrong end. Now I have the right means and end, but it feels exactly the same. I watch these people bitch about their family and friends on intervention, but I yearn for that love. I scoff at crazy Pentecostals flailing arms and screaming nonsense, yet I crave that God. I have yet to find anything to fill that.

Sincerely,

Fucked

Dear Broken Ego,

You've never been comfortable with yourself, so you've always surrounded me with people to be happy. I've never made an identity for myself because of this; you've always made me take on my friends'. If I'm around successful people, I'm successful; if I'm around crack heads, I'm a crack head. All of this is some crazy

attempt to fit in. I'm sad when I'm alone because I don't know who you are or who you want to be. You're selfish. You don't hang out with people for who they are; you hang out with them for who they make you. Every night, I sleep by myself with a stranger.

Sincerely,
Fucked.

Dear Delinquent criminal,

There's something comforting about being somewhere you know you're gonna be for a while. In the whole scheme of things 6 months isn't long, but when you bounce around as much as you will in a couple years, it feels like eternity. Jail is even comforting when you realize it is your home. It's weird, but I just want to better myself, and I don't really know how to do it. I feel like I'm going in the right direction, but storm clouds gather so fast. Even at my worst, you'll always feel like you're doing the right thing for you and maybe you are. Mistakes are made for a purpose because their consequences will better you to the very core. The deeper the hole you dig, the more you'll have to climb out, and I'm just now realizing that my back is covered in dirt. Your whole life is a choice between lying down in it or climbing out to live. If you become content with your bull shit life, you become content with death. If you're content with artificial happiness, you will doom yourself to all the sadness and despair that come with it. Life is painful, but without that pain, happiness becomes monotonous and bland. But when will you find somewhere you can actually call home?

Sincerely,
Fucked

Dear Broken Ego ,

You will become frustrated with God—Not with God, but the idea of God. Your idea of it and what it's supposed to be. You believe in this fantasized version of God: the deity in a bottle that you can rub, ask for wishes, and put away for the next rainy day. You want God for your desires. You dis-

regard it until you're in need. You only call on it when you're broken, lonely, and depressed. You attribute success to your power, determination, and decision making, yet you don't understand why you are where you are and why you feel like getting fucked up to forget.

You fuck up and do only things that make you feel good. When you dig your grave, you wonder why God doesn't pull you out. Your perception is fucked—we are fucked. We see God as a fix all, some existential duct tape to be thrown in the tool box between times of need. We see it there to seal up our life's leak until the patch busts, and we need it again.

I don't know what God is, but I know your perception is wrong. You grew up with the Christian perception of 'Super God-Man,' that New Testament Lovie dovie ask and you shall receive God. You ask for love, money, and success, but you don't know what any of these actually mean or are. You see each of these as connected. You believe you must have money to have love to have success and that each one is a milestone to be toppled before the good part of life starts.

You think that God owes you this and It will give you everything because you asked. The blessing is the road, not the result.

As you grow up, if it ever happens, you will grow more and more frustrated, disappointed—forsaken. When you are down, you will pray. When you are rock bottom, you will ask to be lifted. When you hurt, you will wish to be healed. Then you wake up feeling exactly the same: broken, alone, forgotten. You don't get that you can't be lifted until you are ready to stand. God won't do this for you, but It will lay out the opportunities. It won't step on Free will, and It won't give you things without work or sacrifice. It offers choices between what you want and what you need, which are seldom the same. God doesn't answer prayers—It answers situations.

Sincerely,
Grateful

Charles von Tagen

Of His Craft

Swift glide across the water's sheen,
he crafts the mud in sweeping arcs.
Stroke follows precise stroke.
His float lifted, he feels
with lightest pressure. In afternoon sun,
his back gleams, and now
sweat from his brow and sweat
from his back mingle with the water
that is drawn and separated from concrete:
the beginning of a slow cure.
This is his work. It is a finishing, a last
release of the chemical exchange begun as calcined
mixtures of lime and clay, and he knows
he is not an intelligent man, but believes
this to be a completion or a solidifying of something
more than earthy elements.

Before him is a job site
littered with remnants of forms
and rebar strands, gravel piles and rotting plywood.
The other workers have gone, the super left. Screed
boards bake, caked in hardening mud. The trowels

glisten silver. He thinks of none of this. He works
the surface of the slab. Nothing may be rushed.
He seeks and then attains the ideal pass.

Later that night he will return home. After a long drive,
he will sit down to a cold dinner, smoke
a final cigarette in the kitchen's dim.
In bed, he will reach across to his wife. Please ,
she will say, Don't touch me . She will roll her back
to him. Besides , she'll add, her voice heavy with sleep,
your hands are rough .

Breathing Memories

In my rearview mirror, I remember your syllables
serrated and carving me like a plump Butterball.
I remember your cold brown-eyed
glare: that swirling red and blue siren.
I remember your teeth crooked
and lips spiteful with adjectives.
I remember your snarl when I awoke you
for numbing my arm and stealing the blanket.
I remember your incessant sniffles and the
mindless babble about malls, Ugz, and Xanax.
I remember your stale breath, weasely
laugh, and clammy palms.
But one chilled September morning when I
see you flicking the butt end of a smoke,
all I remember is the time my spine
spasmed so that I could only lie flat
backed against the bare floor. As muscles tense
and pain begins to pound through every nerve,
all I can see is you curled into me,
resting your head on my shoulder. I taste
your strawberry shampoo and cucumber
melon lotion in the back of my nose.
Your hair brushes like velvet beneath my
chin. And I feel your small body folded
into my agony. But when the light
greens, you drive forward—back into my past.

The Creature

The creature has appeared to me many times in my dreams. But that's all it had been, a dream. I would awaken in a sweat with my heart racing.

It would follow me through the woods. I could hear twigs snapping as it stalked me in the darkness. Until now it had kept its distance, but tonight it was coming closer. Dangerously close. I grew more and more uncomfortable. For a moment, I thought that I could hear it breathing right behind me. The hairs on the back of my neck bristled and my mouth went dry.

It was almost as though I was teasing it with my scent or trying to coax it out of hiding. But what then? What if it caught up to me? What would it do to me?

I always awoke before it found me, but tonight felt different. I purposely walked slower, like I was waiting for it. I didn't really want it to catch me, or did I?

My mind wandered as I tried to imagine what it would look like. What would I see in its eyes? I waited patiently for the day when the truth would finally be revealed.

The days all ran together as the fake smiles and lies intermingled with reality, until nothing seemed real anymore. There was no truth in the daylight. Darkness reveals what the eye cannot see, what the heart refuses to feel, and what we hide from ourselves.

I found myself alone. Isolated in a busy world where reality was only an

illusion. My thoughts were drawn to the darkness. Only there am I truly accepted. Only there do I really feel the light. Not a false external light that the world shines on me, but an internal one that is a beacon for my soul.

My mind wandered as I searched for the truth. What exactly is my soul? Is it the life-force that sustains me or just some battery that charges my physical body? If the creature catches me, will it kill me? Maybe I'm dead already; just a shell wandering the streets in search of life, desperately searching for a light to illuminate the darkest corners of my being. Even I don't know what is hidden in those parts of myself that I hide away: parts that I don't want to acknowledge, the parts that scare me.

Darkness is coming. I feel its warmth begin to envelop me, swaddling me in the comfort that only it can bring. Sleep is near. I am nervous but also excited at what might be. Will this be the night that I meet the creature? Is it my friend or is it my enemy? Maybe tonight I will stop and face it. Let go of my own fears and turn around, patiently waiting for it to approach me. Or maybe I will run away, just as I have done all these years. What am I afraid of, it's only a dream, right?

My eyes are growing heavy and my heart rate calms. My body sinks into the bed. I pull the covers up snugly around my weary frame and rest.

The forest is peaceful tonight. There's a warm breeze that caresses my face as I slowly walk amongst the trees. Animals scurry through the canopy, searching for shelter. Life is peaceful here, deep in the woods where no one ever goes. There is no path and no footprints. Here, I am all alone.

The animals chatter and then there is dead silence. It is here. I begin to hear a noise behind me. I can feel it watching me. My face gets flush as my adrenaline begins to surge. Taking a deep breath, I try to calm myself, but it's no use.

I continue walking onward through the darkness. The moon is the only light I see. It casts shadows in the woods that frighten me. I see movement all around. The wind begins to howl and the trees sway and moan as their leaves dance in the moonlight, completely oblivious to the threat in their

midst.

The noises distract me and for a moment I lose track of my mission. I've decided that tonight is the night that I will face the beast. I will not turn away and I will not hide. I'll stand my ground and call it out of the darkness, forcing it out of the shadows and into the moonlight. Tonight, I will see its face and look into the creature's eyes for the very first time.

I take deep breaths and notice that my chest is strong. For the first time in my life, I feel brave. Something is telling me that this night will change my life.

I know that it's watching me as I make my way through the darkened woods and I am no longer afraid. As I approach a clearing, I boldly step out into the unfiltered moonbeams. There is nowhere to hide anymore. As I walk out away from the tree row, I turn and come to a complete stop... waiting.

The forest grows eerily quiet and I hear twigs snap. The forest animals even grow silent, warning me of impending danger.

In the misty moonlight I see a form appear in the shadows. It is larger than I thought it would be, but I can't distinguish a definite shape. At this moment I want nothing more than to turn and run for my life in the opposite direction. My heart is racing, but my feet refuse to move. They feel cemented to the grassy knoll where I am making my stand.

Live or die, tonight is the night that I will face the creature. I will call it out of the darkness and force him to show himself to me. I've lived my entire life in fear of it. Tonight I will be braver than I've ever been before.

The sky grows dark and rain begins to pour down on me. The wind blows so hard that I can barely stand straight. I hear howling all around me. Cocking my head, I struggle to decipher if it's the wind or the creature.

The storm swirls around me like a tornado. I can feel small strands of hair whipping my back as it circles around me. The fury makes it hard to tell if it's protecting me or attacking me.

Out of nowhere, it assaults me. I didn't even see it coming. It has a tight hold of me rendering me helpless. Struggling to free my arms, I fight against

it with all my will. It has a firm grasp around my body and begins to lash at me. Spinning me around in circles, it whips and beats me as though it is trying to wear me down and get inside my body. Although I am exhausted from the battle, I continue to resist the beast.

Finally, it is done. As my strength leaves me and I feel that I can't go on, the creature releases its grasp and I find myself standing alone in the clearing.

I refuse to let it win and scream out into the darkness. "You will not defeat me. I will never give in to you."

I fall to the ground and begin to cry. The battle was too much for me to bear. I cannot even muster up the strength to walk. My body might feel defeated, but my soul remains strong and steadfast.

The alarm clock frightens me from my slumber. I jump up from my bed and assume a fighting stance, still ready to defend myself. With my heart racing and dried tears on my cheeks, I realize that yet again, it was only a dream.

The faces on the street are all staring at me. They appear to judge me. But they are all strangers, what do they know about me? Can they see the battle scars? Do they see my confusion and fear or am I projecting that onto them? Maybe their faces are just a reflection of what I am feeling inside.

I find myself fearful of sleep tonight. I am exhausted from the confrontation last night. I need a good sleep, but I doubt that I will get that lucky.

The darkness beckons me, like a long lost friend. Come to me, visit with me... let yourself go.

I am at the clearing and once again the creature attacks me. I try to lash out against it, but eventually I just want to protect myself. Winning the battle appears as simple as surviving its fury against me. I will not let it have me. I will never give in or give up.

This ferocious dance takes place for several more nights. I try to head in a different direction as I walk through the woods, but I still end up in that

same clearing where the beast is waiting to confront me.

The assaults began with angry outbursts of physical violence, but now they're coupled with verbal explosions and angry screams. I can't tell if the screams are coming from the creature or from me.

I can feel the beast wearing me down. It wants access to my soul. Part of me knows that if I let it in, I lose. But what exactly I will lose is what I don't understand. Will I lose my identity? My soul? My life?

I'm afraid of the darkness that was once my only solace. I used to look forward to coming to this forest and finding peace. But now, there is only a struggle that it appears I can never win.

Darkness comes and the rivalry continues. Tonight I try to outrun the creature. I run as fast as I can through the forest. It chases me, faster and closer than ever before. I run in a zigzag pattern. Maybe I can confuse it so that it will lose its way. But it's no use. The beast remains right on my heels, panting heavily as it chases me through the bramble and brush.

The faster I run, the closer it gets. Eventually, I realize that I cannot win. As I reach the dreaded clearing, I am exhausted from the relentless chase.

I fall down on my knees, desperately trying to catch my breath. My strength is gone and I accept that I have been defeated. I roll onto my back with my arms wide open on the grassy bed, no longer able to keep up this fight. The creature has won the battle. Gasping for air, I close my eyes and wait for the final attack that I will not resist.

Taking a deep breath, I open my eyes. The creature hovers over my conquered body. I see its shape and feel its power. It appears to carry an electrical charge which causes my skin to tingle.

I close my eyes and lay waiting for the attack, grasping handfuls of grass as I prepare myself for the torture that is sure to come.

I can feel it. It is right beside me, taking its time and drawing it out, almost enjoying the hunt and not wanting it to end. But it must end tonight. I concede that the creature has finally won. All these years of it chasing me have led to this one moment. I am making the choice to give in. All the fight in me has gone. Whatever happens to me now must be better than living in

this constant state of fear, looking over my shoulder and running in the dark.

I hear it breathing in my ear and can feel the heat of its exhalation on my cheek. The stench of the beast gags me and I hold my breath. It clutches me tightly. I resist a bit for the last time. Its grip tightens, almost suffocating me. Its rough skin scratches me. The creature begins whispering and it takes me a moment to comprehend what its saying. Its voice is gruff and aggressive at first. Then, as I relax, it becomes softer, almost as though it's reassuring me that everything will be okay and that through the darkness there will once again be light. Its words calm me and a peaceful feeling settles deep within. I am no longer afraid.

Daylight peeks into my room and the routine begins. I stand before the mirror, staring at my reflection. Finally, I can see the truth. The creature I'd been running from for all these years... was me.

The faces on the street are cold and their smiles are fake with strict societal demands. Their consciences are heavy as their hollow eyes desperately search for meaning in their empty lives. Maybe if they're lucky, the creature will visit them too.

The Shadow

Characters:

Amy, a little girl

Shadow, a dark specter

AMY sits on the floor facing the audience. She clutches a blanket and a plush bunny named Mr. Foofypants. There is a window behind her.

AMY: I was bad today, Mr. Foofypants. I lied to Mommy about eating all my potato salad. I didn't. I threw it in the trash, and then I put more trash on top so she wouldn't know. Then I broke one of the teacups Grandma gave me and hid the pieces under my bed. It was an accident, but I'll get in trouble if Mommy finds out. I'm scared, Mr. Foofypants, because God saw what I did. If Armageddon comes soon, God will kill me, because I haven't been good.

(AMY jumps at the sound of thunder)

AMY: Oh! Is it here? *(Bows head in prayer.)* I'm sorry, please, please, please forgive me. I'll be good. I promise. I don't want to die.

(A large, dark shape appears in the window.)

AMY: *(Gasps.)* Oh no, oh no. Go away!

SHADOW: I'm not here to take you. But you might as well know I'll come for you someday.

AMY: No. I won't go with you, not ever. *(Pulls the blanket over her head to*

hide.)

SHADOW: You need to stop being afraid of me. If you live in fear, then you'll never live at all.

AMY: I can't stop being scared of you. You're Death. You're the enemy, you and the Devil.

SHADOW: I am Death, yes, but devils have nothing to do with me. I lead everyone to their final destination.

AMY: You're lying. I don't have to die, not if I'm good. Lots of people will never die.

SHADOW: You call me a liar? Child, you've been fed a steady diet of lies and nonsense. Some of the lies might be comforting, but they're still lies, and they'll strangle the joy out of your life if you take them seriously.

AMY: *(Peeks out from under her blanket.)* I don't understand.

SHADOW: I'm trying to tell you that you can't escape from Death.

AMY: But I don't want to die.

SHADOW: And that makes you special, does it? Why do you think you deserve a different fate from every other person who has lived, loved, and died before you? Saints and murderers, children and elderly, I come for them all. Good or bad has nothing to do with it.

AMY: So I'm going to die?

SHADOW: Someday.

AMY: Then why? What's the point? Why did I have to live at all if I was just going to die in the end? *(Throws aside her blanket.)* I hate you!

SHADOW: Amy, do you remember the little bird?

AMY: What? You mean the baby bird I found that hurt her wing? Yes. We took care of her until she was strong enough to fly away.

SHADOW: Why did you bother?

AMY: What do you mean?

SHADOW: Why didn't you just let the bird die where you found it?

AMY: Because she was hurt. Because I wanted to help her get better.

SHADOW: What was the point? You knew the little bird was going to die someday. If you'd let it die or killed it yourself, that bird would never know

cold, hunger, or pain again.

AMY: Those are awful things to say.

SHADOW: But what I say is true. The bird will die sooner or later, so you think the bird's life is pointless, yes?

AMY: No, you're wrong.

SHADOW: Why?

AMY: Because she can still fly and sing, and... and I just wanted her to live. To be happy.

SHADOW: That's all?

AMY: Yes.

SHADOW: You thought the bird's life was worth saving, and here you are telling me that your life has no point! Do you wish you had never seen the stars shining, felt the wind on your face, or known your mother's embrace? Do you wish you never saw the little bird that needed your help?

AMY: That's not what I meant exactly...

SHADOW: No, that is exactly what you meant.

AMY: I just don't want everything to end, that's all. Why does life have to end?

(The shadow appears to jump down from the window.)

SHADOW: Every life is a story. Every story has an ending. I am nothing more than the last chapter in the book of your life.

AMY: When does my story end?

SHADOW: Even I can't tell you that. I only know when I'm summoned.

AMY: What will happen after I'm dead?

SHADOW: I take you to the Portal.

AMY: Where does the Portal go?

(The shadow shrinks and becomes cat-shaped.)

SHADOW: I can't tell you. I'm not allowed to pass. It's something you'll have to learn for yourself someday.

AMY: *(Drops her doll and reaches out to touch the shadow's head.)* I didn't know you were a cat.

SHADOW: I am many things. You'd be surprised.

Mother, Child, Earth

Shaken, Earth.
Death resting upon it, burned
together, devastating blast.

Survivor, Mother.
Body bloody, eyes do not look
to the camera, eyes overcast.

Victim, Child.
No cries of pain, too weak
to nurse, ten days his last.

Contributors

Courtney Baxter, *Stone*: Courtney is a young wife and mother to two beautifully perfect children. Her daughter Isabella just turned three, and son Jett will be two next July. Though writing is her passion and outlet for life's stresses, her world begins and ends with her little family.

Jonathan Holland, *Addiction, Breathing Memories*, and *Recovery*: Jonathan bites his nails, chews his lips, and eats after 8pm. His name is Jonathan, but he introduces himself as Jon because he is a lazy speaker. He has jumped through clouds, stepped on glass, ran up and down stairs in a musty cell-block. Jon has found hope in a bag, a pen, a class, and then a book that wasn't bound in leather with golden trim.

Jan Tilley, *Betsy* and *The Creature*: *Betsy* is a story Jan wrote about her childhood friend, Betsy. She is a student at the Bloomington campus, studying Human Services. She takes creative writing classes on the side because she loves writing.

Isabel Vazquez, *Alive*: Isabel is an Ivy Tech student at the Muncie Campus and is also an avid reader of literature and the English language. Her interest varies when it comes to reading and she has always enjoyed the art of writing.

Chad Martindale, *Into the Mirror* and *There*: Chad is a curious individual, as in generally curious (about life, the universe, and everything). He dabbles in writing, graphic design, painting, music, and graphic novel storyboarding & design. Currently a student at Ivy Tech-Bloomington, he plans to transfer to the Herron School of Art and Design in Indianapolis to major in Graphic Communication Design. He firmly believes in the powers of persistence and determination and works relentlessly to achieve his goals.

Victoria Neely, *She's Mine* and *The Shadow*: Victoria is finishing her degree in general studies at Ivy Tech - Bloomington and is currently the editor of the school newspaper, Ivy Student Voice. She also took several culinary classes and completed a culinary internship at Walt Disney World.

Charles von Tagen, *Of His Craft*: Charles lives and writes in Ellettsville, Indiana and teaches math at Ivy Tech Community College in Bloomington. Besides writing he enjoys trail running, traveling, and musing over Sudoku puzzles.

Dana Allgood, *Mother, Child, Earth*: Dana is currently an Ivy Tech student at the Bloomington campus. She has one semester left before graduation. She discovered her love for creative writing during her first semester at Ivy Tech. She went back to college to finish her degree late in life but has enjoyed the experience and only wishes she had discovered her creative side earlier.

Photography

Courtney Sinclair, *Go On*: Courtney is a photographer living in Bloomington, Indiana, photographing what appeals to her.

Kallie Hamm, *Skeletons of Our Past*: Kallie is a student of the Richmond region, a 25-year-old Liberal Arts major.

Kelsie Risk, *Frozen Masterpiece* and *Queen Anne's Lace*: Kelsie is a freshman studying Business Administration at Ivy Tech, Bloomington. After earning her Associates at Ivy Tech, she plans to pursue a Bachelor's degree in business at IU. Her photography has been selected through the Owen County 4-H for exhibit at the IN State Fair several times. She hopes to one day own a "Sweets" business where she will display some of her favorite, personal photographs in her store.



Death plucks my ear and says, “Live - I am coming.”

-Virgil, “Death Plucks My Ear”