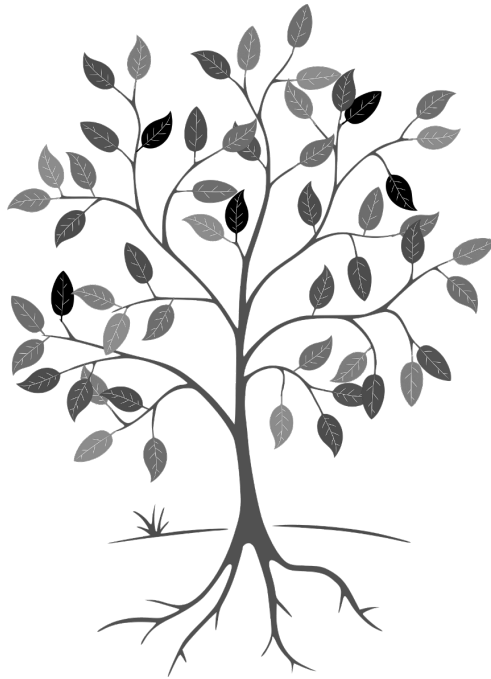


root and branch
volume XVII



The name *root and branch* was chosen as a symbol of students' lives at Ivy Tech: they come with solid roots but grow and branch out – intellectually and creatively – through their college experiences.

Special thanks to Dr. Emily Bobo, the Ivy Tech-Bloomington English Department, and The Ivy Tech-Bloomington Foundation Office.

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Reflections – *Bert Gilbert*

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April 2024

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Neil Frederick

I Heard a Bird Outside

I heard a bird outside
Singing a cadence
I had heard before
But today
She spoke alive
Her song on this December morn
With Winter as yet aside.

The Definition of Grief

Death –

Through this door we all must walk
From what we know to lands beyond.
Who can say if where you are
Is void of tears or full of stars?

Grief –

A crow that flits, flutters, then lands
With talons sharpened for its challenge
Gripping to the life we knew
Rips memory open like a wound,
Drawing blood and erasing pallor.
Its ravenous maw, stuffed with flowers,
Gorges itself on regrets, guzzles tears,
Calls friends to descend on its foul feast.

Loss –

To many friends you left behind
A quiet upon us takes its hold
As though a shroud of fog has fallen
On our world, vivid colors hidden,
And yet, one candle in each window,
Dimly lit, still shines to show
The places you inhabited.



Samantha Mosley – Degas Dancer in Conté



SJ Lollar – Where Nationality Meets Heritage

For Haley: Wild Wind Calling

Warrior Princess
Not yet a yearling and
Your chest split open.
Your heart exposed to the world
Vulnerable.
Desperation in those eyes who
Hold your hand and squeeze.
Tiny fingers clutching for comfort.

Eight seams stitched you back together.
Woven with love
Mingled with hope
In an anticipated heart of health.
Who knows why the wild wind called
You forth to experience such pain.
Why murderers and villains run free
While you, Warrior Princess,
Must lie here sterile
Tubes beckoning away your aura.

Trees push mightily outside the window –
A storm ravages leaves
Splattered against the dark panes of glass.
The stream of water pours
Agony onto your mother's eyes.
But your mother, Warrior Queen,
Stands with valor
Beside your crib
Daily.
Her spirit soars into your palm
Expecting the hole left in your heart will not
Drain your blood until the next operation.

Warrior Princess, Fearless Sage
I say *Fight Tough!*
I see you straddling ground
Staff raised high in victory
Triumphantly you blow your horn

While the sun smiles on your
Red curly cap and
Dewdrops
Kiss your brow.

Battle the tubes and wires that
Hover beeping incessantly
Into your atmosphere.
Bypass thoughts of going back to white.
Stand tall and breathe deeply
In the scent of life.



Jeffrey Alan Grounds – New Beginnings

Beast

Antique dolls perch over antlers and bones.
In the comfort of my home, I begin to feel the walls palpitate.
My skin bubbles at the epidermis, wounds bursting across my arms and
chest
“Everything you are is blasphemous,” the beast hisses.

I push against the wall until the skin, bloody and thin, pops,
bursting into the streets. The beast is after me already,
blood and pus drip down me from the gashes he caused.

The thick musk of patchouli and weed drenches my clothes.
“You will never escape the bastille I’ve built for you.”
The beast has picked up my scent.
My only chance is to ditch ‘em now.
Cowering behind a busted car, I strip down to my natural state.

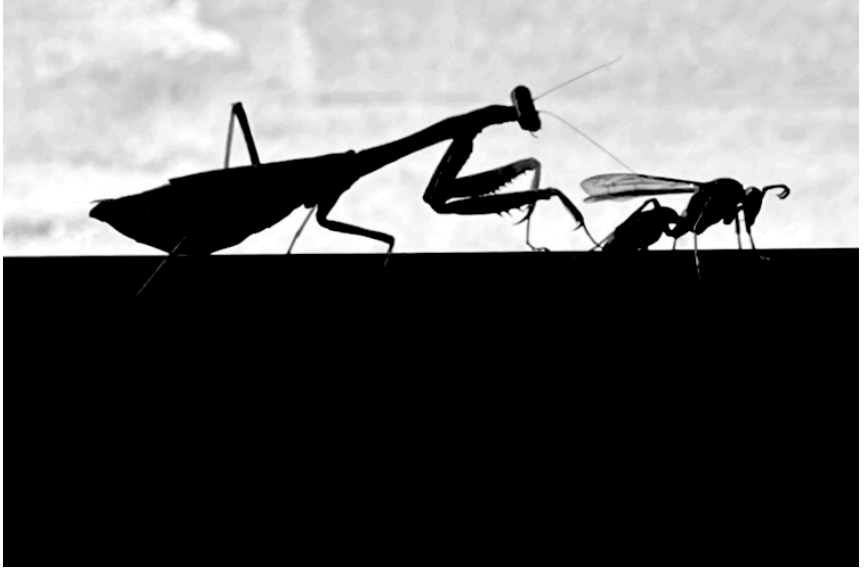
Every part of me exposed to the darkness surrounding me,
my body is drenched in its own fluids,
there’s nowhere to run.

The streets are barren, no one to witness my torment.
Thunder builds its way from my heart to the rest of my body,
I don’t want to face this alone.

Footsteps pulverize everything behind me,
If I don’t breathe, I tell myself, *he’ll never know I’m here.*
But I’m wrong.
He lifts the car above his head, tossing it to the side with ease,
exposing me, bare and afraid.

He hurdles over me pulling me from the ground,
his sharp yellow eyes pierce through me,
“You are the only one who could change this,” he snarls.

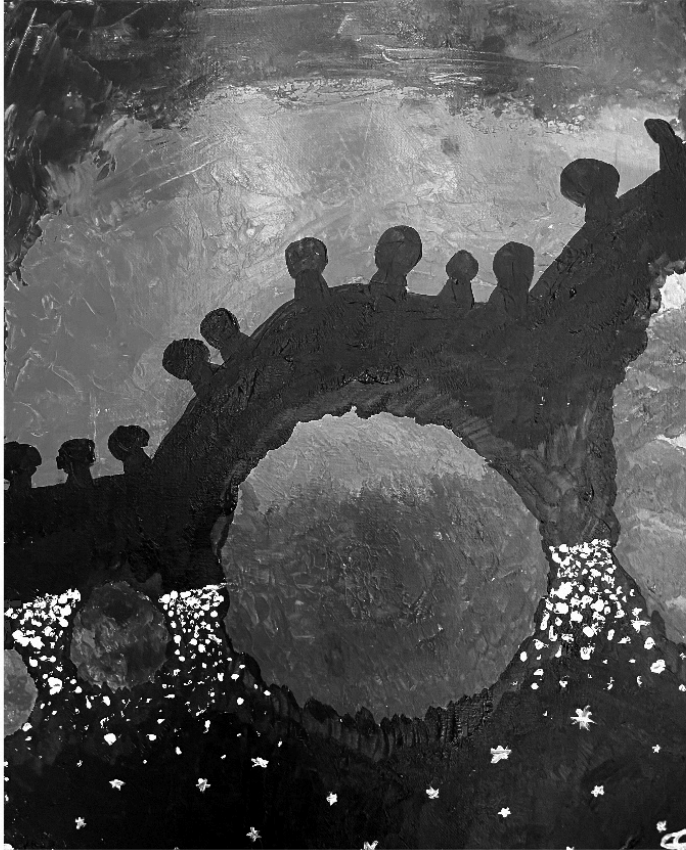
He rips me limb from limb,
swallowing me piece by piece.
“But you didn’t.”



Jeffrey Alan Grounds – War of the Fittest

Earth

Loving ghost
Floating ghost
Mulling through such storming waves
And falls, some trip dropped
Stumbling into nothing big black
Death crunch, held close
Frightened, a malleable ram takes heed
Of gathering gargantuan clouds, sudden violent crash
A cymbal shudders in the distance
Raindrop reverberates sudden death
Absolute fall, a gunshot and horn blow
An echo call to bring you home
Those horns, each conical ridge
Another mountain range shaking deep
Into the fragile, damp earth
Favored ghost embracing ram
And loving Rama reminds of everything



Mars Abbett – Bridger Styx



Kurt Messick – **Basalt Columns at the Black Sand Sea**

Crossing Horizons: The Journey of Hope and Change

A young man resided in the little town of Chin in Myanmar, a region steeped in history and tradition. His life was ordinary, but it was filled with the soothing routine of rural existence and the love of family. He had no idea that the winds of change were about to sweep through his world, changing the path of his life in ways he could never have predicted.

Political upheaval and ethnic disputes occurred in Myanmar in 2010, prompting tens of thousands of families to evacuate their homes in search of safety and a better life. His family was among the many who had been displaced, and they found themselves on a treacherous trip to escape the violence that had shattered their homeland.

The trek was perilous, with lengthy hours of wandering in the dark, hiding from officials, and crossing difficult terrain. The family arrived at the Malaysian border, their beacon of hope. Malaysia, famed for its cultural diversity and economic prospects, was a country where his family hoped to rebuild their lives. Life as a refugee, however, was not without its difficulties. The family settled in a congested refugee camp where basic necessities were scarce, and uncertainty reigned supreme. Despite the difficulties, he never lost his resolve to build a better future for himself and his family. He embraced the educational opportunities provided by the camp, ready to arm himself with the tools he needed to climb above his surroundings.

He refused to be limited by his circumstances and took the initiative to organize social gatherings and support groups. Despite the linguistic limitations, he was able to communicate and connect with others around him in novel ways. Through these contacts, he became an inspiration to his fellow migrants, pushing them to share their tales, hopes, and worries.

His efforts went beyond providing emotional assistance. Recognizing the need for practical skills, he organized courses on language acquisition, vocational training, and cultural exchange with other refugees. The camp became a hub of shared knowledge, with people pooling their talents and experiences to foster a sense of community and empowerment.

The construction of a tiny school within the camp was one of his most significant projects. He developed a location where students could continue their education despite the hardships of displacement with the support of volunteers and donated materials. He believed that education provided not just personal empowerment but also a road to a brighter future for the entire community. In the blink of an eye, ten years had passed. In the face of adversity, he, now a young man, had not only survived but thrived.

When the opportunity to relocate to the United States emerged, he found himself in a quandary. It was not an easy decision to leave behind the community he had fought so hard to develop. On the other hand, he saw it as an opportunity to increase his global effect. He bid Malaysia farewell with a heavy heart, carrying the spirit of perseverance and camaraderie that had defined his stay there. When he arrived in the United States, he faced the task of beginning again. The familiar comforts of the Malaysian group he had created were replaced by the unfamiliarity of American culture. His guiding principles, however, were the lessons he had learned about embracing the unknown and pushing beyond his comfort zone.

He experienced new obstacles and opportunities as he settled into his new life in America. His new metropolis was a sharp contrast to the landscapes of Myanmar and the Malaysian refugee camp. But he tackled this new chapter with a sense of purpose and resolve, driven by his previous experiences.

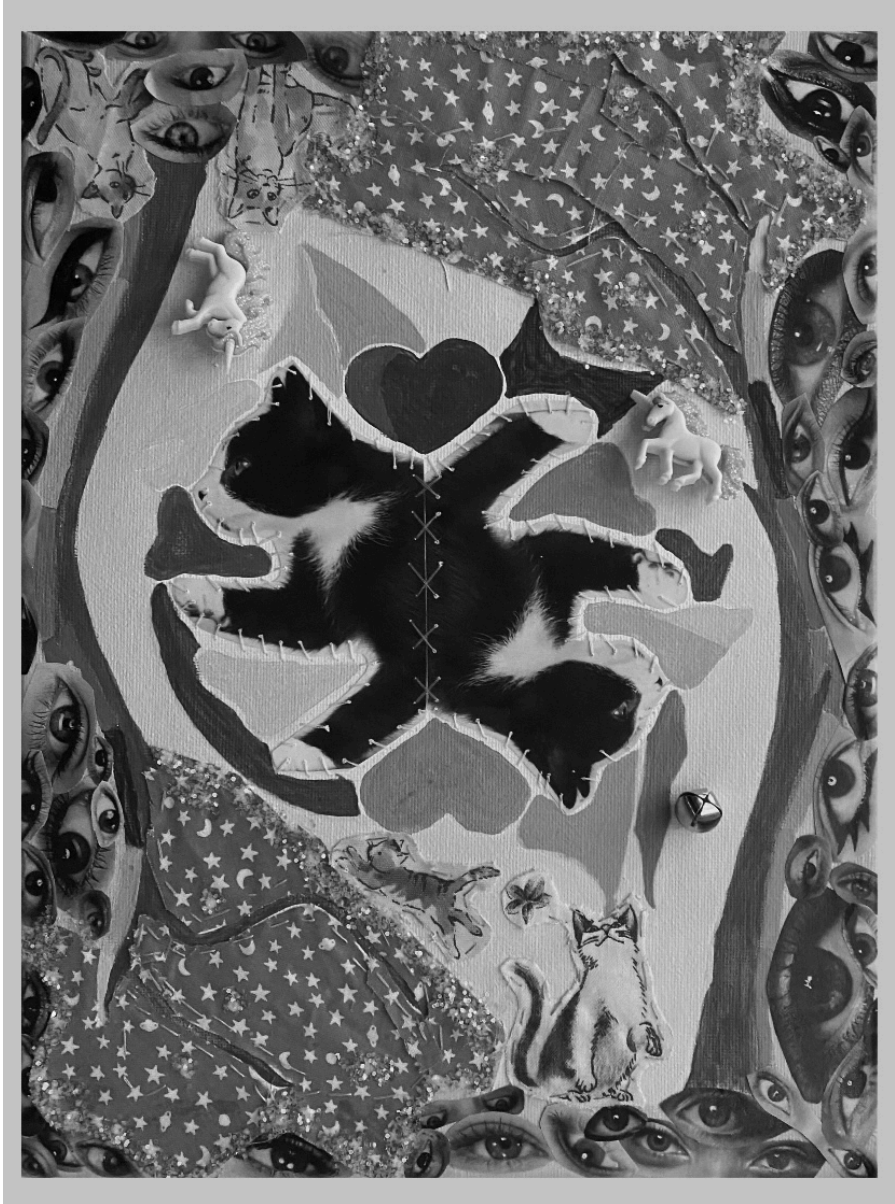
He wasted no time in pursuing his educational objectives after landing in the United States. He enrolled in a community college, eager to broaden his knowledge and abilities in a new setting. With its emphasis on diversity and innovation, the American education system presented him with a platform to further pursue his academic interests.

He hoped to develop an organization that would act as a resource, support, and advocacy hub for refugees in the United States in the future. He recognized the significance of creating locations where people could share their stories, gain access to needed resources, and find mentorship as they navigated the complexity of their new lives.

His path – distinguished by tenacity, community building, and advocacy – became a model for others looking to rebuild their lives in a new nation. His future ambitions were more than simply about personal accomplishment; they demonstrated his determination to repay the opportunities he had received. He hoped to leave a legacy of empowerment for refugees in the United States through education, activism, and community engagement.



Foreboding – Cynthia Edwards



Mars Abbett – Spirit and Curiosity

Family Portrait

Look – that’s my father.
His hair is long,
tied in the back in a ponytail.
When he cuts it all off,
I almost won’t recognize him.
He’s smiling, but it never
seems to reach
quite to his eyes.

And there, on the other side,
that’s my mother.
She’s got on her denim dress,
in case we weren’t sure that it was the 90s.
Her smile doesn’t show her teeth,
but I will never see her cry.

Between them, that’s me,
with my glow-in-the-dark lizard shirt on,
the shirt my father got me on a business trip.
I missed him so much.
I will miss him even more.
I stand between them, a bridge
across an interminable gap
that only I can’t see.

We are a family.
See, look at us, everyone is smiling,
you can see the chasm between
my eight-year-old teeth.
I don’t know that my teeth will close,
I will outgrow the shirt,
and my family
will fall
apart.

Journey Beyond Borders: The Desperation and Resilience of Refugees

There is a thread woven with desperation, courage, and an unshakable optimism that spans boundaries and resists the shackles of hardship in the tapestry of human existence. Consider a journey in which every step is fraught with uncertainty, where the familiar is abandoned in favor of the unknown, and the only compass is the quest for safety. This is the voyage of departing as a refugee, compelled by the relentless forces of battle, persecution, or circumstances so dreadful that home becomes a location from which one must flee. Let us be lured into the poignant chapters of lives interrupted, dreams postponed, and futures unclear as we stand on the precipice of this narrative. It is a voyage carved into the collective human struggle, in which individuals and families go on a quest for safety, leaving behind echoes of a past that is now disappearing on the horizon. Understanding the profundity of leaving as a refugee entails delving into the nuances of displacement, perseverance, and the indomitable spirit that pulls humanity onward even in the darkest of times. We go into the heart of an experience that transcends geography in this exploration – a voyage that crosses not just physical landscapes but also the depths of human emotion. What does it mean to run, to renounce the known in favor of the unknown, and to thread a route where danger and hope coexist? Unraveling these issues reveals the core of the refugee experience, a tale that invites us to confront our shared humanity and respond with empathy to people whose lives have been permanently impacted by exile.

Fleeing, struggles and life as a refugee

The journey of a refugee is one of despair, courage, and unflinching hope for a brighter tomorrow. It is a journey imposed on individuals and families by warfare, persecution, or unsustainable conditions, where the only option is to forsake the familiar and begin on an unknown path towards an elusive sanctuary.

The choice to flee is not taken lightly. It is the result of necessity, a reaction to an existential threat that allows no opportunity for reflection. As the battle or persecution escalates, families are left with the heartbreaking decision of leaving everything they know and love behind, trading the comfort of home for the unknown risks of the trip ahead.

The voyage begins with a heavy heart and a light bag – a few priceless possessions gripped closely, signifying the shards of a life left behind. The road ahead is laden with both visible and unknown hazards. Borders

become huge impediments, and each step forward is laden with uncertainty. The trek frequently entails traveling perilous terrain, navigating unfriendly surroundings, and risking confrontations with individuals who regard the displaced as intruders rather than fellow human beings in great need.

The experience of fleeing is a significant emotional upheaval as well as a physical trek. It is leaving a piece of one's identity behind, a past woven into the fabric of the land that is now vanishing on the horizon. The familiar sights and noises fade into the background as the harsh reality of dislocation takes their place. Despite this turmoil, there remains a glimmer of hope – confidence that the trip, however difficult, carries the possibility of a new beginning.

Arrival in a host country is a watershed event in the refugee's journey. It is here that the resilience and humanity of those fleeing as refugees are tested. Will they experience compassion and empathy, or will they come up against locked doors and hardened hearts? The answer frequently depends on the host country's policies and popular attitudes towards persons requesting asylum. Life as a refugee is a perilous journey marked by instability, uncertainty, and the never-ending search for protection. Refugees who are forced to escape their homes due to violence, persecution, or other life-threatening conditions go on a journey that tries their resilience and challenges their very essence. Refugees, cut off from their normal surroundings, often struggle with feelings of loss and displacement.

Life takes on a new tone in refugee camps or temporary settlements. The common struggle for existence generates a feeling of shared adversity, and basic necessities become a luxury. Families ripped apart by circumstances beyond their control try to reassemble a semblance of normalcy in a situation that is everything but normal. The daily routine becomes a delicate balance of survival instincts and the unwavering desire for a better tomorrow.

The psychological toll of relocation is severe, as people face the anguish of leaving behind their homes, livelihoods, and, in many cases, loved ones. The uncertainty of the future looms big, casting shadows on dreams that previously seemed within reach. Despite the chaos, there is a wonderful resilience – the human spirit's ability to persevere, adapt, and find solace even in the face of disaster.

Refugees encounter a variety of problems, ranging from immediate physical survival to the long-term war for social integration and mental well-being. A lack of proper shelter, food, and healthcare leads to a hazardous existence in which sickness and malnutrition are a constant threat. The battle for survival extends to obtaining legal status and protection, as

refugees must negotiate intricate bureaucratic systems that frequently prolong their limbo.

Education, a fundamental right that many people take for granted, has become a distant dream for many refugee children. The interruption produced by displacement disrupts their academic journeys, leaving a tough hole to fill. The difficulty to obtain adequate education in host nations exacerbates the difficulties experienced by refugee families, perpetuating poverty cycles and restricting prospects for a better future.

Education as a solution

Education emerges as a beacon of hope and a transformational force for refugees in the face of tragedy. Recognizing the ability of knowledge to break the bonds of despair, educational efforts have become a cornerstone in the reconstruction of shattered lives. NGOs, governments, and grassroots organizations all play critical roles in providing refugee communities with accessible and high-quality education.

Education not only provides knowledge, but it also promotes resilience and allows people to see beyond their current circumstances. Schools provide havens of normalcy for refugee children, providing a regulated setting in which they may learn, play, and make friends. The re-establishment of a formal education system is an important step in normalizing the lives of persons who have been displaced.

Furthermore, education is a driving force for social integration. By providing refugees with skills and information, they are better able to contribute constructively to the cultures that welcome them. Educated refugees become change ambassadors, challenging preconceptions and building a more inclusive global community by breaking down barriers and debunking prejudices.

To summarize, a refugee's life is a complex tapestry woven with strands of suffering, resilience, and the search for a better future. While the problems are enormous, education serves as a potent remedy, providing not just knowledge but also a path to mending lives and communities that have been broken by displacement. As the globe grapples with the refugee crisis, recognizing education's transformative power becomes critical in paving the road for a more humane future.



Bert Gilbert – Where the Heart Is



Krystalina Hendrix – The Timestamp of Childhood

Recipe: Childbirth

Ingredients: Wet: Tears, blood, sweat, vomit, miscellaneous fluids
 Dry: Pain, hands to squeeze, robe that reveals too much
 Optional: Yoga ball, bathtub, panic, operating room

Instructions:

Awaken to water breaking.

Place anxious and excited phone calls. Pack clothes and lots of snacks.

Combine wet and dry ingredients in a large receptacle (i.e. hospital).

Let mixture sit for 39 hours, stirring occasionally.

 Optional: scream, if you want to.

Add in doctors, fetal distress, surgeons, anesthesiologist, and transfer to sterile room.

Be pricked by many needles, mix to incorporate.

Yield: One large infant. A battered body. Unending happiness.

Wind's Flute

Fairy hummingbirds gather as a swirl of light's radiant attendants,
Dragonflies of waters' jeweled heralds carve divine mirrors under stout
reeds,
Ancient tribes, mountains' caps rise high in wrapped white cloth,
Genesis sculptors by rivers' ways meander into dawning lands.

Wayfaring brought this old man, his olive wood flute of a Jerusalem
Garden,
Aged, timeworn browns rubbed in perfumed oils and living caresses,
Elderly beings to soothe nurturing messages into open souls,
Enchanting dancing thoughts, raising sensations to yawning pleasures.

From his brown thighs, rough cloth crawls to his vulture neck,
Earthy clumps of white and black snake around his mummified head,
His gaunt devotional form bends and shakes under reverent solitude,
Leaving his lips, passing breath travels winds' heavenly-enfolding journeys.

An ever-moving twining to his carved-out staff,
Its heart turning his living breaths into vibrant pulses,
A mournful song passing between time's moments,
Touching a vine's flowers, reaching around its vine to the earliest song.

An eternal flute shared to infinite hands given to a circle of death and birth,
Always molding our beings as hands wrapping about human experience,
Faith, we give the old flute player; and there we receive his bread,
One never-ending song, a face on the flute, blessed in the winds.



Carol Parkinson – Bookends



Jeffrey Alan Grounds – Winter's Wonderland

Winter Requiem

With the dilation of the dark, the universe unfolds . . .
Nights filled with dread,
 delirium brims my weary head.
 An echoing mind shrieks “off to bed.”

Visions of the gods old and new
 appear in the window, I can’t tell if they’re true.
Bare tree limbs glazed in frosty dew
 reach for the moon, their secrets long overdue.

I find my own hands clawing at my face.
The shadows pursue me,
 a torment I cannot displace.
I am losing to winter at a rapid pace.

My soul becomes a banshee’s curse,
 as winter’s grip grows worse and worse.

Time moves at a dreary pace,
 a relentless, icy chase.

My psyche turned inside out,
Consciousness transmuted to a hopeless drought.

I wander lost in this haunted wrack,
As I pull another card off the stack.

The future revealed, the phantoms disperse,
 the void winds back at the end of this verse.

The stars fall away, I watch reality rip
My eyes roll back as I lose my grip.

Is It Real, or Is It Cake?

Is it real, or is it cake?

A toilet, a hand, a celebrity's face.

Is it real, or is it cake?

A boot, a steak, a toy dinosaur.

Is it real, or is it cake?

A corgi, a microwave, a cat's litter box.

Is it real, or is it cake?

They cut the hand.

They cut the steak.

They cut the dog.

Delicious layers of cake are found inside.

I'm wrong again.

It was not real.

Nothing is real; it is all cake.



SJ Lollar – Turning Jelly into Jam

Strong

“You’re weak.”

These words echoed in Tess’s mind as she looked at herself sitting in that wooden chair. Her neck was bent back on the back of the chair as she stared up to the ceiling. She fidgeted with her engagement ring that was snugly resting on her left middle finger.

Her mind wandered from the waiting room to the elementary school playground. Her left eye was clenched shut from the dust that was floating in the air. The other kids gathered around her in a mixture of shock and awe as Betty stood above Tess. Betty looked down at Tess who was lying on the ground, now holding her dust-filled eyeball.

“Look at you! You got dust in your dumb little eye!”

The audience of children surrounding them erupted in laughter. The sound flooded Tess’s ears as her cheeks turned red from embarrassment. She could feel all their eyes looking at her in this weak moment. Tears began to stream down her other eye as she looked up to Betty. Betty’s satisfied smirk bruised Tess’s heart even more.

Tess sat in the principal’s office, listening to the muffled arguments between her dad and Principal Adams. She still held her hand over her left eye, even though the nurse had already flushed out the dust. Tess just felt safe hiding her eye. Now no one, not even Betty, could hurt her eye.

Tess listened as her dad’s voice grew louder. She could finally make out what he was saying. He wanted to know who had hurt her. She thought she had heard him say something about holding “her” accountable. Tess could only think he was talking about Betty.

Her dad stormed out of Principal Adams’ office and grabbed Tess’s free hand. They both walked out of the office and into the school parking lot. Tess’s right eye still had leftover tears to cry, but she tried her hardest to keep them in. She wanted to be done crying.

Her dad stopped at their car and got down to his knees, looking straight into Tess’s bright blue eyes. He pulled her hand away from her left eye, which was still light red from the irritation. He wiped the final tear from her eye.

“You’re strong, Tess. No matter what anyone says, you’re strong.”

Her dad’s words flooded her ears. It was like medicine for a sickness she had. The sickness Betty gave her was now cured by two simple words.

Now Tess's mind went back to high school, as she dribbled that bright orange basketball down the court. The girls from the other team raced after her with their arms stretched out like a bunch of angry buzzards, surrounding her as if she were their next meal. Tess could hear Coach Jennings yelling "GO! GO! GO!" at the top of her lungs. Her usual stern and angry face was replaced by a face full of excitement as Tess raced to the end of the court with the ball.

She went to take the shot when a long hand stretched out in front of her. In what felt like slow motion, Tess looked over to see a girl from the opposing team jumping up with her to steal the ball away. The girl tried to shove the ball toward the basket, but it landed right in Tess's face, causing her to fall and land hard on her knee. The brief state of confusion for Tess concluded with a sudden shock of pain. She sat upright and grabbed her right knee, reeling in agony.

The referee's whistle blew as Tess's teammates came to her side. Two of them pulled her up by her arms and walked her to the sidelines. Coach Jennings and the assistant coach looked Tess over, inspecting her knee to judge whether she would need medical attention. Tess stood and walked up and down the sidelines. She limped for only a moment, but as soon as the pain started, it went away. Tess ceased limping and glanced at Coach Jennings, giving her a dogged look. Coach Jennings smirked back and motioned to the rest of the team. The crowd began to cheer and applaud as Tess pounded her fists together with determination.

Coach Jennings patted Tess on her back. "You're strong, Tess! You're strong!"

Tess watched as Coach Jennings mouthed those words to her. Two simple words which might have been weak to anyone else's ears, but to Tess, they were the most powerful two words in the world.

"Tess? Is there a Tess here?"

Tess snapped out of her daydreams as she heard the nurse call her name. Taking in a deep breath, Tess stood up and followed the nurse into the back of the doctor's office. She flinched as the nurse placed the IV needle into her arm. The nurse was kind and gentle, so that was not the reason why she was nervous. Tess has always been nervous with needles.

As she watched the clear liquid drip through the tube and into her arm, Tess leaned her head back, this time not on the edge of the chair but now on a comfortable head cushion attached to the doctor's chair. Her mind raced once more to different events and to people all throughout her life.

She saw her dad, whom she wished was there with her. Sadly, this sickness already took him away.

She saw Coach Jennings, remembering both her harsh basketball practices and her lighthearted health classes. Tess remembered the time when Coach Jennings scolded Betty for being late to class after she spent too much time with her boyfriend. She knew it was probably wrong, but Tess chuckled at the thought of Coach Jennings mockingly quoting *Romeo and Juliet*, much to Betty's anger and embarrassment.

She saw her beloved Ivy, who wished she could be there for her but was stuck in a classroom, teaching the next generation about math and reading. Tess watched as the memories of the two of them dancing to Beethoven as if it were a Taylor Swift single. She remembered when Ivy gave her a stack of get-well cards made entirely by her kindergarten class.

“You’re strong, Tess. You’re the strongest person I know!”

Those two words echoed in Tess’s mind as she opened her eyes and looked at the IV tube leading directly into her arm. She remembered her dad giving her those two simple, yet powerful words after Betty pushed her to the ground, getting dust in her eye. She remembered Coach Jennings confidently pushing her back onto the basketball court, encouraging her to overpower and push through the pain. Tess, with the most confident face in her life, looked straight into the mirror that was hanging on the wall to her left.

“You’re right, *all* of you are right. I am strong!”



Simon Everman – **Is There Something You've Been Wanting to Say?**

Yeah, I'm All That

I'm that thread
rolling through your fingers
at the bottom of your pocket
while you're in polite conversation

That used Kleenex
that's getting twisted into
thinner and thinner strings
while your mind wanders

And I am that sock fuzz that collects
between your toes
when you wear boot socks all day long
just trying to keep your feet warm

I'm that weather roughened hand
that lies next to your head on the pillow
smelling vaguely of oil and smoke

And that conversation you review
in the dark before falling asleep
that's still bouncing around
at morning coffee



SJ Lollar – Girl with a Mean Mug

Shi'ur Komah: The Measure of The Body

Lying in bed one evening, waiting for sleep to overtake my body, I ask my mother if God likes some people better than others. *No*, she tells me, *God likes everybody just the same*. I can't picture God, can't envision something conscious and large and without form, so in my four-and-a-half-year-old mind God is a giant human being. *Where is God's head?* I wonder. I attempt to compromise with my mother, my night dress growing tangled as I twist my small form to look at her face. *Maybe God's head is next to the people that he likes better, and his feet are next to the people who aren't as good?* I must rationalize. There is a girl in my preschool class I do not like. *Surely God can't like her as much as God likes me?* My mother, the atheist, shakes her head, her straight, red hair tapping against her cheeks with the movement, repeats herself. *God loves everyone the same*.

A few years later, I, age eight, all elbows and knobby knees, messy hair in an eternal ponytail, lie sprawled out in my suburban backyard. I can feel the coolness of the damp earth seeping through my clothes. I thought maybe God's head was the earth, so big that every human and animal could touch God just the same. I reach out and grab two clumps of grass, slightly cool despite the summer heat. *Grass is God's hair*, I say to myself as I lie on my back, gazing up at the clouds, *God must have a lot of bald patches*. I don't tell anyone my thoughts.

Many years pass and I stand at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, still all elbows and knees, though the ponytail is long gone. I don't think about God's body anymore, but I do think about my own – imperfect, female, scattered with scars that spell out how hard it is to live in the world. No one around me is looking at me, but I feel the bore of eyes upon my back. I close my eyes. I can't see God's head or feet. I smile. All around me are the soft whispers of prayers. I place my hands upon the ancient stone wall and offer up my own. *Modeh ani, l'Janecha*. . . I whisper. I can feel the words spiraling upwards, floating softly up to rest among the clouds.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Bert Gilbert is a lifelong Hoosier who lives west of Bloomington in an 1860 farmhouse with his wife, two cats, and a dog. He enjoys learning and exploring new ideas.

BJ Yoho is a third-year student at Ivy Tech Community College with aspirations of being a film writer and director. When he is not writing, BJ loves to watch and review movies, hoping to learn what he can to take with him once he becomes a director himself.

Carol Parkinson is currently the Director of Library Services at the Ivy Tech Bloomington campus. She has been with the college for nearly 18 years. She enjoys taking pictures of nature and spends her free time sewing and hiking.

Retired from my lifelong career in education, **Cynthia Edwards** now helps students with their English, Writing and MS Office assignments as a tutor at the Terre Haute campus. She and her husband still farm, but on a much smaller scale than years ago. Otherwise, she quilts, sews, reads, and gardens, gardens, gardens. Her kids are grown and stay very busy with families and careers. Her teen grandkids may be busier, and her oldest grandchild is now married. They don't have as much time for grandparents while spreading their wings; however, she is finally enjoying the 'career' she always wanted.

Jeffrey Alan Grounds loves to create different kinds of art. He graduated from Ivy Tech in 2016 with an Associate degree in Fine Arts. He's currently working on a Bachelor degree in Fine Arts at Indiana University Bloomington. His passions are painting, drawing, photography, and writing.

Karen Randolph is a Terre Haute native with a background in marketing and print publishing. She holds dual bachelor's degrees in English and German from IU Bloomington. In her free time, she enjoys archery, canoeing, crochet, and gardening. She currently works as an Academic Affairs Assistant at Ivy Tech Terre Haute's main campus. Her poem is dedicated to Allen Shotwell's memory.

Krystalina Hendrix admires photography, art, and music. She is a student at Ivy Tech Bloomington and is a mom to two children. She started her college career three days before her son was born in 2022. She decided to work with adolescents in substance abuse homes after finding recovery for

herself. After eight years clean, she is giving someone else a chance at something different. This is the story in her photograph.

Lydia Piercefield is a student at Ivy Tech Bloomington. She will graduate in 2024 and pursue Elementary Education.

Mars Abbett earned their Associates Degree from Ivy Tech after the Fall 2023 semester. They are attending Indiana University to pursue a BFA in Lighting Design.

Marvin Kiefer is an Indiana state poet having won the INverse award in 2021. With the completion and publishing of his first book, *Vagabond's Court*, he has completed a second book, a memoir on living abroad in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and South Korea for ten years.

Driven by an insatiable curiosity and a lifelong commitment to artistic exploration, **Megan McNellis** intertwines her love for math, science, and the arts. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in fine art from Indiana State University and a recent credential from Ivy Tech's program of Medical Imaging in Radiology, she has forged a unique and enriching path in life. Embarking on a diverse artistic journey, Megan has not only explored traditional art avenues but also navigated unconventional career paths. She has curated private art workshops, channeling her creativity to lead and inspire. Additionally, Megan has authored and self-published five non-fiction children's books, infusing her artistic sensibilities into the realm of literature. Her artistic prowess extends beyond the canvas, as she has showcased her graphic design skills and embraced roles as a pet dog trainer and an x-ray technician, crafting a narrative that seamlessly weaves together her passion for creativity and science. Megan's professional narrative is a testament to her artistic versatility, unwavering commitment to growth, and the ability to thrive in a myriad of creative roles.

Neil Frederick has spent over half his life as part of Ivy Tech Community College-Bloomington. What a blessing it is for him to have been shaped by the students of the local area's communities and many parts of the world.

Phoenix Rayng is a transsexual freak, artist, and community leader from Bloomington, Indiana. He has been using his traumas, triumphs, and transfigurations to create art during cycles of mania and depression for over a decade. Phoenix makes art first for himself and second for all the weird queers who will never fit society's expectations.

Samantha Mosley is a first year in the Fine Arts program at Ivy Tech Bloomington. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and has been recognized on the Dean's List. She is newly wed to her husband and enjoys spending time on art pieces, cooking, amateurly playing piano, interior decorating, and antiquing.

SJ Lollar is a visual artist and a current Fine Art major at Ivy Tech Community College in downtown Indianapolis. Loving to work with paints and different mediums, SJ is more interested in creating piece of art that people get a sense of space and distance that expresses what people feel and how life can change in a moment but our ability to adapt is the real beauty . Seeking inspiration from everyone around her she absorbs and creates. SJ has maintained a lifelong passion for art and her passions is what bought her here.

Simon Everman is an HVAC major who loves sharks.

Solomon Shwe Kee, a Burmese native, endured displacement during political upheaval and embarked on a path marked by tenacity. Solomon emerged as a light of hope after navigating refugee camps and obtaining an education in the United States. Solomon's tenacious spirit and determination drove him to not only survive but thrive in his new environment, despite the difficulties of leaving his home. Solomon has volunteered in the Drug Rehabilitation Center, served as refugee schools' headmaster, and served the poor community for five years. He stands as a symbol of the human spirit's tenacity. He is currently a student at Ivy Tech Community College, pursuing an HVAC certificate, and is a strong advocate for marginalized groups, exhibiting the spirit of positive transformation and cross-cultural understanding.

Wilder Mouton is a poet, musician, student at the University of Illinois Chicago, and a former editor of *Root and Branch*. Their poetry revolves around the natural world, grief, and mental illness. Having written poetry since they were 14, they are always excited to work with fellow poets and artists and to see their work in print. They currently live in Chicago, Illinois.

Veronica Munn holds an MFA in Creative Writing and is an adjunct instructor of English for the Ivy Tech Sellersburg campus and Ivy Online, where she has taught a variety of classes since 2017. Writing fiction, essays, and poetry, she draws on life and nature, believing that both human nature and the natural world often intertwine to provide strength and courage

during difficult times. Veronica also dabbles in playing the drums, baking for markets, and spinning wool. She lives in Southern Indiana with her husband, dogs, ducks, chickens, sheep, and nearby children and grandchildren.

Zipporah Breunig is an Ivy Tech alumni working as a massage therapist. They enjoy beagles, black cats, and bananas. Currently, they spend the majority of their time running around after a small child.

