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61 Patterns

61st edition



615
edition

patterns 61st edition

If the present is the nexus of the past and future, the smart, retro cover of this year's edition of Patterns is the right now. The clean lines and bold colors pay homage to the Modern but tell you what's coming, too. And as you turn these pages, you'll see that what's next is art that pulses and writing that hums.

Artists and writers – here, today – are taking on issues social and personal, from the cover design by Hannah Wallace to the reflective poems and stories of Karla Warshefski and Mackenzie Hiller. The SC4 artists and writers who appear in these pages remind us

“
**Art
that
pulses
and
writing
that
hums.**
”

of the function of art: to astonish, to please, and to unsettle. Though art and writing are mostly individual endeavors, publishing a magazine requires working together.

To that end, the 61st edition of Patterns is a group effort, guided by faculty and staff but driven by students, who produce its content, participate in the editing, assemble and create the layout and design. It is thanks to them, and to all the students who submitted work, that you are able to experience this convergence of worlds in the following pages.

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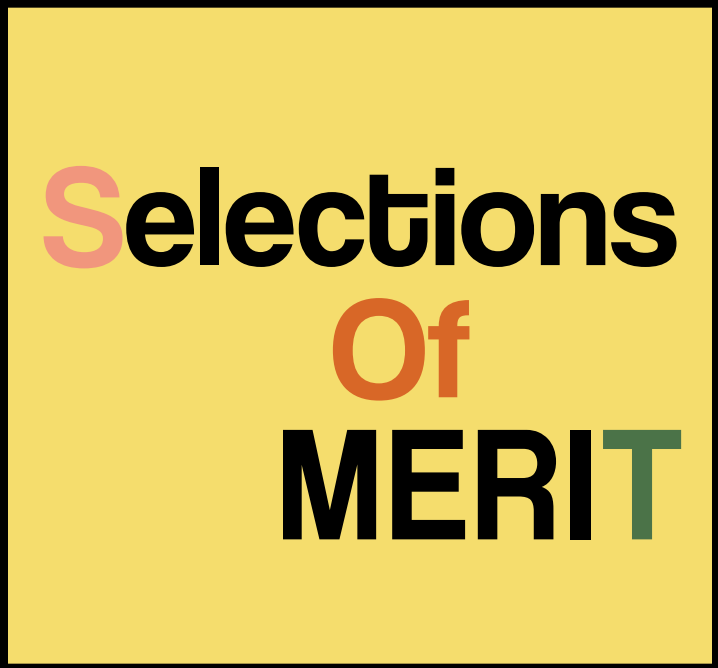
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Special Honors for Writing and Art

You will note that each year five special awards are given, named for past faculty members who made extraordinary contributions to the arts and literature on campus and to *Patterns* in particular. The Blanche Redman, Richard Colwell and Kathy Nickerson Awards are given for the highest quality submissions for that year in poetry, fiction and essay writing, respectively. The Patrick Bourke and Eleanor Mathews Awards recognize students who have done exceptional work in a variety of genres.

PATRICK BOURKE AWARD

The Patrick Bourke Award honors an art or design student who has made a commitment to pursue an advanced degree in one of the visual arts disciplines and has been an advocate and emissary for art at St. Clair County Community College. This year we honor Noah Muxlow who helped design the 60th and 61st editions of *Patterns*. Noah is a prospective graduate in the Graphic Design program at SC4 and has received several prestigious SC4 scholarships including the *Thomas A. Treleven Communications Scholarship*, *Ellen Kean Scholarship*, *Dr. Carol Nowakowski Scholarship*, *Joseph and Betty Mericka Friends of the Arts Scholarship*, *Clara E. and Joseph M. Bourke Memorial Scholarship*, and the *Clarence Scott Memorial Scholarship*.

Noah's work projects a clean sense of design. His attention to detail and his understanding of spatial and visual relations bridge the gap between function and form. His work was selected by local business *Exquisite Corpse* for their menu and cold-brew coffee labels, and also by *Alternative Healing Equine Massage* for their commercial logo. Noah is planning to continue his studies at a four-year university. His long term goal is to be a professional graphic designer and to continue learning new software and modes of design.

Noah Muxlow





Mackenzie Hiller

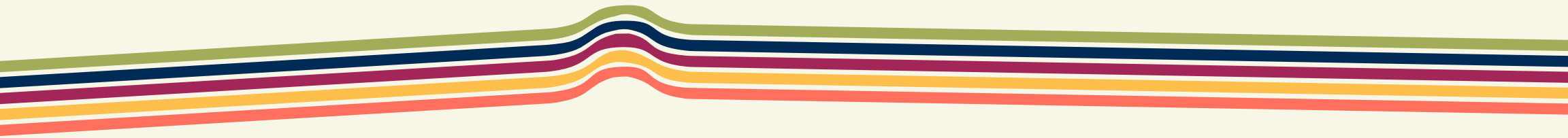
Mackenzie Hiller says she “loves how simple words can transport people into different worlds.” While her words may be simple, the worlds she creates are not. They are fractured places, peopled by restless, striving characters. For example, her protagonist Vincent’s near-blindness in “To Be Normal” leaves him socially isolated, yet he is nobody’s victim: “I am not blind,” he says. “I just see things differently than everyone else.” In her essay, “The Daughter of Mediocrity,” Hiller describes “this constant struggle between who I want to be and who I was raised to be.” Hiller’s bifurcated worlds, whether rendered in short story or essay, practically leap out at you; they demand your attention. Because of that compelling voice, appearing in multiple genres in this year’s edition of *Patterns*, Mackenzie Hiller is the co-winner of the coveted Eleanor Mathews Award.

ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD

Karla Warshefski shares the Eleanor Mathews Award for two works that alert us to the priceless nature of life and its potential to escape us too soon. She presents us with characters in her story who defend their children’s well-being from threats real or perceived, and she presents us in her poem with the lyricism of life juxtaposed with death on a porch when the world is coming to life after a long winter while the speaker holds a loved one on the cusp of death. Her ability to balance competing emotions, forces, and characters results in poignancy and wisdom earned from living life fully. Her two award winning works in their respective categories demonstrate the skill and artistry we accord to winners of this award. Read her works and be dazzled.

Karla Warshefski





essays



THE DAUGHTER OF MEDIOCRITY

Mackenzie Hiller



Kathy Nickerson Award



REMINGTON

Sabrina Mason ■ Photography

ess/
ays

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THAT DIDN'T TAKE LONG

Devin Bergman

I was five years old when my best friend moved in with us. It was the most exciting thing to happen to me. Papa would say, "Bruno," his obese chocolate lab, "doesn't like driving so far every weekend to see you guys. He wants us to stay here, since you have a spare room and all." In other words, they wanted to move in. I quickly learned that Papa loved coffee and had some every morning. Bruno loved it too and would have some with him. Usually not to Papa's knowledge. Shortly after he moved in, he taught me how to make his coffee: splash of evaporated milk, one sugar. That didn't take long.

Over the next few months Papa watched me while my parents were at work.

"Whatcha wanna do today, George?" He'd ask.

I'd think and usually respond with, "I don't know, but, one day I said, "I wanna play on water slides."

He didn't laugh or tell me no. Instead, he left. Papa didn't tell me where he was going, just that he would be back. About an hour later, he came home, and drove straight back to the pond. I watched from a distance as the short, sassy carpenter with Einstein-like hair pulled a sun-bleached broken blue slide from his white carpenter van. He strapped it questionably to the top. Before he could say anything, I climbed up, and slid down, scraping my exposed skin on the way down.

"Damn it Devin! Are you okay? You didn't let me pour the water down first." He was genuine in his concern, despite having a



INNER FIRE

Elijah Cephlecha ■ Digital Media

vis/
uals

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yelling tone. Still in that moment, I learned to pour water down first, then slide. That didn't take long.

Papa always had the best stories, so at night I'd ask for him to tuck me in.

"There once was a purple elephant with green stripes and smelled like chocolate!" This exclamation was usually his go-to opening. He'd stop and I'd add on to it. Then I'd stop and he'd pick up. Sometimes the elephant was a pizza-delivering alien, and other times the elephant was just trying to make friends. Every so often we would read a real book together, but he'd make up the rest of the story half way through. Those hybrid stories were always the best.

"I don't like the way this one is going to end. Let's pick a different ending" is usually what Papa would say. Together, we would finish the story, he would give me a kiss, say goodnight, and walk out. That didn't take long.

In the years that followed, Papa took me everywhere and called me George for reasons I still don't quite understand. We would go to Save-A-Lot and he'd teach me how to shop on a budget and meal plan for six people.

"Shop to what's on sale, and if it's a new grocery store, just buy a cheap roast. If it doesn't turn out, don't go back, and don't waste your money." He taught me how to drive and how to cook. One time a recipe called for buttermilk.

"What's buttermilk?" I asked.

"It's buttermilk. Do you like butter?" He'd ask.

"Yeah," I responded.

"Do you like milk?" He asked me, seeming excited at this point.

"Of course!" I said.

"Well then you're going to love buttermilk!" Papa poured me a glass; I took a huge mouthful. Immediately, I spit it out. He laughed hysterically to the point that he had tears in his sky blue eyes. That day I learned that buttermilk is absolutely disgusting. That didn't take long.

After high school, I got engaged to my now-husband, Brandon. Papa was the first to share in excitement with me.

"I can't wait for the wedding! Taco will be a great husband!" Papa was the one I always looked to for advice, so naturally, he was the one I asked to help me pick final details for the wedding. He helped with everything from flowers to music and even people to stand with me. He helped me write my vows and listened to my complaints about the planning process. Papa was the only one I took dress shopping with me.

"Oh that's the best dress you've ever worn. I love it!" He started to tear up.

"I love it too, but it's a little out of budget," I replied.

"How much?" Papa asked.

"Just \$200 over. So I can get it, just not today." I returned to the fitting room, with plans on going back after my next pay period to get it. While I was changing out of the dress, Papa put a deposit on the dress, making it affordable for me to buy that day.

"Here, now you don't have to wear a toga down the aisle." With him, wedding planning wasn't awful and didn't take long.

Two months before my wedding, Papa, my best friend, was placed on home-hospice care. Since my parents worked all day and I planned on moving to North Carolina after the wedding, I quit my job earlier than expected to help care for him. I watched him become less spunky. He moved less and gave up things he loved: like feeding his chickens and riding his four wheeler. He would wake up

confused, and look at me like I was a stranger. Sometimes he would say, "Do I have legs? Can you pinch them?" I'd have to reassure him he had legs, but I never pinched him. Other times he would wake up without pants on, even if he would only nap for less than a half hour. I remember thinking, "Good Lord, that didn't take long."

I used to try to get him to tell me stories.

"Let's go on an adventure, Papa!" I'd say. He would glance in my direction,

"Okay George, where do you wanna go?" He'd say, sounding more and more tired.

"Anywhere! Let's try to go to the 1940's!" I'd say, hoping it would spark a memory or conversation. We would start an elephant story, only to have him fall asleep, or hospice nurses come to check on him for their weekly visit. That didn't take long.

He ate less, and lost a lot of weight. I would try to make Pediasure shakes with ice cream in efforts to make him gain a pound. Papa went from jolly St. Nick to Jack Skellington by the time my wedding arrived. I watched him turn almost unrecognizable. That didn't take long.

Before he lost his cognitive abilities, he used to say, "After the wedding, go. Go be with Brandon, start your life together." The morning I was going to leave with the U-Haul, I went to his room, kissed him goodbye, and told him it was okay to let go, that I knew he loved me, and I'd be sure to show him around the new home. I swear I felt his hand squeeze mine, and it said more than he ever could. What happened next didn't take long.

He passed away the day I moved in, which was two days after leaving him. I wasn't there to hold his hand in those final moments, but I was there to hear his sass for those final few months. I heard stories, old and new, about his life and things he

learned along the way. Papa gave me marriage advice, plus I was able to make a few final memories. Even though those final two months were cloaked in sadness, Papa's spirit was always upbeat. He had a smile on until a week before he passed. He made it easier to let go, because we had those final moments together. To know him was to love him, and that didn't take long. ■



THE 30 YEAR CYCLE

Mackenzie Hiller



Wouldn't it be amazing if there were some way to travel through time? If, somehow, people could magically be transported back to some of their happiest moments to experience them once more? Luckily, this ability already exists; however, it is not a piece of technology but something that is inside everyone. Nostalgia is the ability to remember specific parts of a person's life, whether it be an awkward date as a teenager or the first day of kindergarten. Because there are certain events in people's lives that everyone experiences, it is easy to evoke nostalgia in people through various media; more often than not, it is films, television series, and video games that are making audiences feel nostalgic for various parts of their lives. However, due to nostalgia being a positive feeling that many people long for, production companies strive to create this feeling to increase sales and the number of good reviews that their products are receiving. In short, nostalgia is rapidly becoming a box-office hit.

In Greek, "nostalgia" means "pain from an old wound," as nostalgia usually leaves people feeling happy despite its connections to sometimes unpleasant memories. Nostalgia can also be said to be similar to rewinding film and watching a movie over and over again (Moore). Every year, there are dozens of reboots and spin-offs and sequels and adaptations aimed at exploiting an audience's natural feeling of nostalgia. Film director George Lucas is often credited as being one of the first people to capitalize on nostalgia with his 1973 film *American Graffiti*, which takes place in 1962 (Ho). However, the 30-year cycle of nostalgia would not go into full swing until the 1980's, when films such as *Back to the Future* and *Dirty Dancing* aimed to monetize the longing for

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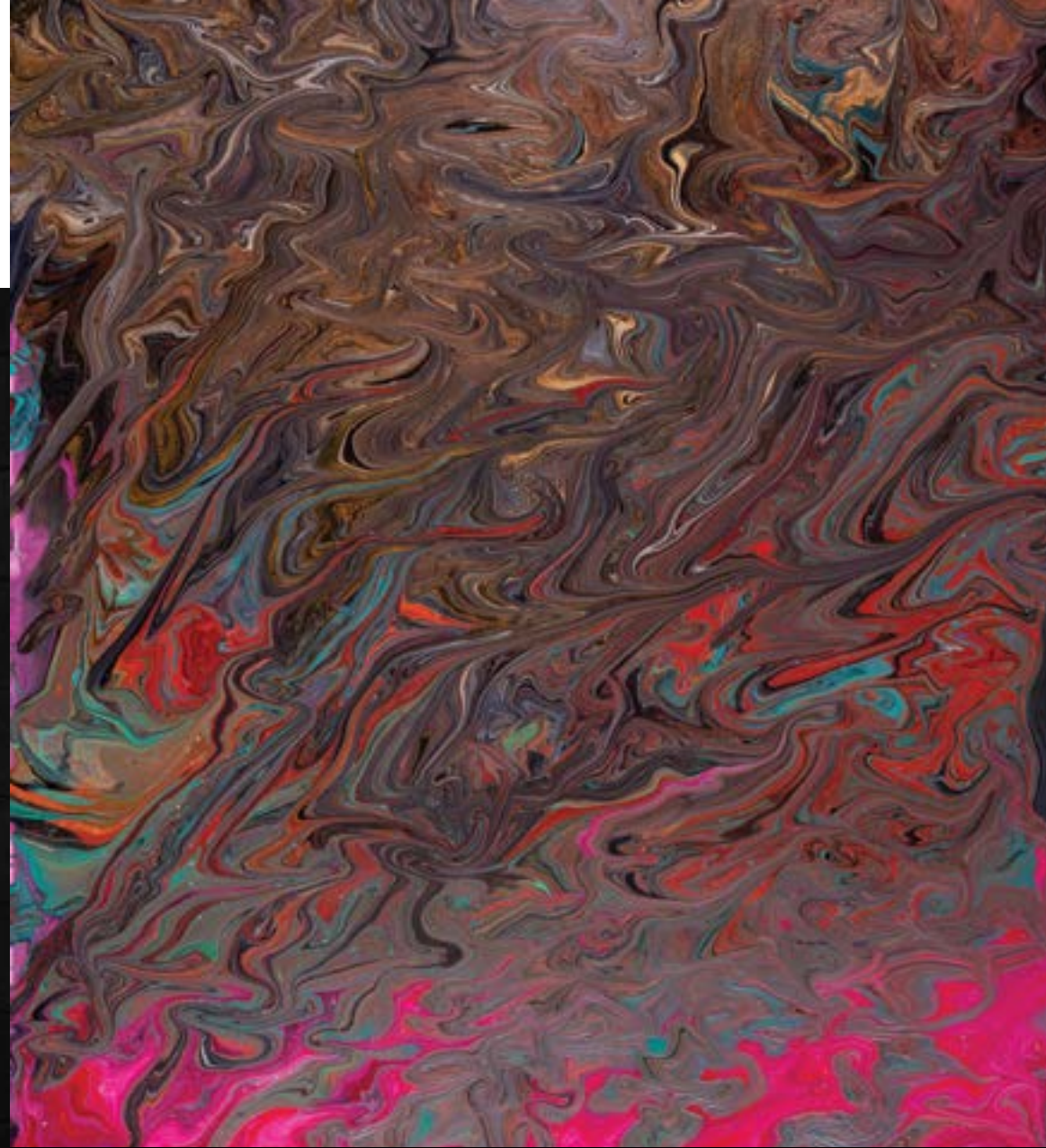
Joella Killion ▪ Digital Media

a different generation. The 30-year cycle is the recurring cycle of nostalgia, as audiences are enamored by the culture of three decades ago; however, there is a gray area to the cycle, as many forms of media today still aim for the nostalgia of the 1970's, while others are attempting to rush the reminiscence of the 2000's. On a scientific level, nostalgia is a way for minds to cool down anxieties, as people are consistently changing from new friends to new moods (Stevens). Nostalgia is not a bad thing, as neither is the time spent as a child, though it starts to become negative when production companies take it on themselves to capitalize people's nostalgia in film, television, and video games.

Filmmakers are not unaware of what the feeling of nostalgia does to ticket sales and reviews of films. At one point in time, these numbers used to be arbitrary and worthless to filmmakers; film was once a medium of true art, where stories could be told in inexplicable fashion. Originality today has been replaced by nostalgia, which takes the art of filmmaking backward rather than forward. Creative and innovative forms of humor, for instance, have been traded in for jokes about the decade's pop culture or about the fact that the setting is in the past so characters are oblivious to the culture of the present; "Exactly, like *Footloose*. Is it still the greatest film in history?" asks Peter Quill (Chris Pratt) in *Avengers: Infinity War*, part of a running gag throughout the film as the character becomes gradually accustomed to the current decade (Russo and Russo, et al.). Other films, such as Andy Muschietti's 2017 adaptation of Stephen King's novel *It*, are set in past decades and use a main cast of children to instill the feeling of nostalgia into adults who grew up in those decades (Muschietti's adaptation is set in 1989 while the novel is set in 1958); the cast of the film included actors known for roles set in the past, as Wyatt Oleff and Finn Wolfhard are known for their roles in *Stranger Things* (based in the 1980's) and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (based in the 1970's),

respectively. Due to its updated setting and well-known cast, *It* became the highest-grossing R-rated horror film of all time in just a few months, something unimaginable for the 1990 adaptation that stayed true to the story's original settings: all because of the 30-year cycle that could not be broken. Then, there are films based in modern times but nonetheless shovel endless past references down audiences' throats, such as Stephen Spielberg's *Ready Player One* adaptation, based on the novel by Ernest Cline. A mixture of both 80's pop culture references and modern video game references, *Ready Player One* was poised to dominate at the box office months before its release because of its cultural awareness and appeal to a very specific audience. These are just a few examples of how filmmakers and production companies use nostalgia in order to not only create critically-acclaimed films but also ones that are very financially successful.

Though television series based in past decades are a relatively new method for success for production teams, it has proven to be just as effective as when used in film. However, some television series today often break the 30-year cycle of nostalgia, with series such as *The Kids Are Alright* and *This Is Us* being either fully or partially based in the 1970's. ABC's comedy series *The Kids Are Alright* premiered in the late fall of 2018, with the series being based in 1972 southern California. Despite its simple premise, *The Kids Are Alright* is mainly a fictional one, meaning that its production team created this series solely for the nostalgic purpose. Nonfiction period series are created not only for the capitalization of nostalgia but also to inform viewers of true events. In cases such as *The Kids Are Alright*, the different plots of each episode are not unique to the series' chosen decade; the series' pilot episode follows Timmy Cleary (Jack Gore) as he attempts to pursue his dream of becoming a theater actor, the following episode having central themes of perseverance and honesty, with the third episode



MIND OVER MATTER

Sabrina Mason ▪ Acrylic Paint

vis/
uals

being the first to contain a plot (a secondary one, nonetheless) specific to the 1970's: the first instance of the commercial microwave oven (Doyle, et al.). Many of the series' plotlines can easily be set in a modern setting, but the series would obviously lose interest without the nostalgic setting, music, costumes, and hairstyles. These elements are crucial to an audience's reaction to a series and also to its lasting ability; if popular and/or nostalgic enough, television series may be rebooted, such as the 1990's sitcom *Roseanne*. Though the series first began in the late 1980's, *Roseanne* is most known for its 1990's setting. Uncoincidentally, the series celebrated its 30th anniversary this year; this year also aired *Roseanne*'s reboot and its subsequent spinoff, *The Conners*. Because the current decade of the 2010's is coming to an end, the new 30-year cycle will begin again with a wave of other 1990's reboots, spin-offs, and sequels, among other things. Though traditional network television seems to fall behind in the 30-year cycle when it comes to original television series, digital streaming services such as Netflix have proven to display nostalgia to great success, both financially and critically, with their horror series *Stranger Things*. Set in a fictional Midwestern town in the 1980's, *Stranger Things* follows a group of children as they adjust to the odd events that take place. Similar to *The Kids Are Alright*, however, *Stranger Things* is a series that unnecessarily takes place in the past. The series capitalizes on its audience's current infatuation with the 1980's decade, with many of the series plotlines being influenced and inspired by other popular crazes of the time, such as *E.T.* and *Star Wars*. Overall, television is a long-lasting medium for production teams to use in order to capitalize on the current nostalgia fad, with series being able to run for years. However, many series often lack originality when it comes to the presentation of past decades, presenting themes and plotlines that are common to every series at some point.

Video games became a surging medium of entertainment in the 1980's, particularly in Japan, with companies such as Nintendo and Sega having dominated the market with their respective consoles: the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and the Genesis. As time would tell, Nintendo came out on top in the competitive race, as the NES was home to some of the most popular video games of all time; the video game series *Super Mario* and *The Legend of Zelda* had their beginnings on the console, with the series' main characters serving as mascots for Nintendo for years to come. It's hard to find someone who is not familiar with the character of Mario, as Nintendo would pull out the character for various games in the 1980's when video games were beginning to become popular all around the world. Games unaffiliated with the *Super Mario* series would also feature the mustachioed hero, such as the 1987 boxing game *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, where Mario serves as the referee (Takeda, et al.). As Internet personality Dan Avidan states in his playthrough of the boxing game: "They used to have Mario judging all kinds of Nintendo games back in the day ... Just to show you where video games were in 1986, it wasn't like *Andre Agassi's Tennis Explosion*, it was *Tennis*. So, with a game called *Tennis*, Mario was the line judge of the tennis match" (Avidan). Avidan points out the fact that Nintendo would have the world-famous character appear in its games that Nintendo most likely anticipated would not be as successful, in hopes that audiences would react more positively simply because Mario appeared in them. This is a tactic still used today, but now the character is seen as a nostalgic one due to the minimalist changes to the character since the 1980's and his overall lasting ability. Nintendo's mascot has appeared on every one of its consoles, from the NES to the Switch. This can be attributed to many things, but Nintendo has a habit of relying on its oldest characters in order to drive sales with sequel after



sequel. The video game industry hit its high in the 1990's, when Japanese company Sony began producing its PlayStation. One of its most popular games is Naughty Dog's *Crash Bandicoot*, hailed as having the best animation, design, and visuals of its time. Similar to *Roseanne*, 2018 saw the reboot of the original *Crash Bandicoot* game, released as the *Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy*. Remastering video games has become increasingly popular, with companies being able to capitalize once again on the games that were once immensely successful; remastering consists of changes to the coding of a video game that allows the game to be played on more recently-released consoles (for instance, Bandai's 2004 Sony PlayStation 2 game *Katamari Damacy* was recently remastered in 2018 for the Nintendo Switch). Similarly, Nintendo released a reboot of the NES console in 2017, which sold copies faster than they were being produced (Ho). Of course, re-releasing these games and consoles makes audiences feel nostalgic for them. Instead of creating new stories for sequels or spinoffs or new technology for next-generation consoles, production companies often remaster games and consoles as a relatively inexpensive way for companies to gather an audience's attention back to its most well-known games, characters, and technology. Because the 1990's was such a crucial decade for the video game industry, some modern video games are going back to their roots when being developed. In 2015, indie developer Toby Fox released his crowdfunded game *Undertale*, to large success. The game is obviously inspired by the early days of video games, from its visual style to the musical score. The game adopted the simplistic style to both stand out in the crowd of hyper-realistic, three-dimensional games that major companies are releasing each year and to also help people remember the simple moments of their lives; because the protagonist is a child and the humor is somewhat immature, those playing the game are easily brought back to their own youth while progressing through the complex story. Influenced by the games of the 1980's and 1990's,

GLITCHED REALITY

Amethyst Stevens ▪ Digital Media

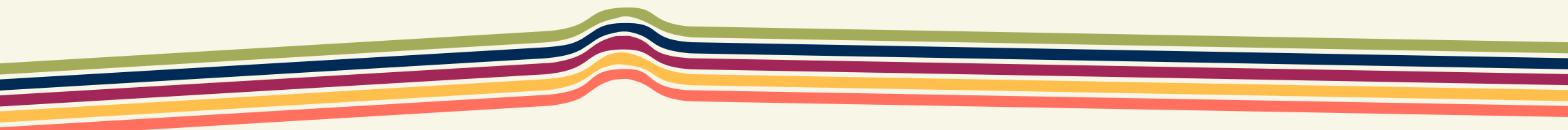
Undertale capitalizes on its audience's nostalgia for those games by adopting a similar style. Overall, though, video game producers are now only seeing the ability of nostalgia and the 30-year cycle, as they were first being introduced worldwide in the 1980's. With the 2010's decade coming to a close, producers will see an exciting financial opportunity in the next handful of years, as the most popular and successful video games were released in the 1990's. Whether it will be more reboots, remasters, or re-releases, video games have the unique ability to capitalize on games that are not completely original, and they are able to do so in a way that leaves audiences complacent.

Because nostalgia is a purely emotional and psychological feeling, it isn't illogical for people to try and take advantage of that similar to car salesmen and retail workers. They aim to sell you on a product, nostalgic or not. Nostalgic films, for instance, do very well; however, it can be argued that nostalgia alone is not big enough of a selling point for audiences. Truthfully, it is difficult to state how well a film does based solely on its nostalgic feel. However, one of the basic laws of economics is "the law of diminishing marginal utility," which means that the more we consume something, the less it makes us content; for example, the more candy one eats, the sicker they will feel. Nostalgia is a cycle, meaning that audiences do get tired of the current wave of nostalgia after a number of years of seeing the same decade dominating period pieces. Economics and nostalgia are connected in this way, which helps to prove the point that nostalgia is a big selling point for audiences; those aged 35 to 55 make up a large portion of audiences seeking out nostalgic media, as that is the age where spending power is at its highest. Similarly, media that are at roughly the same age appeal to those people the most, meaning that forms of entertainment that are about 30 years old will always be popular (Ho). Thus, the 30-year cycle is born, and it will thrive.

All in all, the entertainment industry has an unwavering relationship with familiarity, as do audiences everywhere. This is why nostalgia is so popular and why it will always be, despite the fact that it hinders creativity and originality. Because nostalgia is purely psychological, there are many ways to exploit it and for production companies to use it for their own benefit. Films portray bullies to make audiences feel upset at the way they were treated as children, television series use old music to transport audiences back to the first time they personally heard the song, and now video games recreate old games so that audiences can experience them again. Nostalgia is a great way for people to have the ability to relive some of the most impactful moments in their lives, but one of the negative aspects that comes with it is that companies will use that to become financially successful. As waves of nostalgia come and go, it's important for us to remember that people should not have to pay to be able to fully experience their memories. Though the 30-year cycle applies to the entertainment industry, personal experiences are able to be shared whenever and wherever people choose to tell them, which is much more important than the financial success of any film, television series, or video game. ■

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**short
stories**

A CALM WINTER'S DAY

Lauren VanEenoo

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Richard
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Award

Winter in Michigan is never consistent. This year, the days were sunny, but bitter cold. The fresh fallen snow would glisten at high noon and almost blind you. The shaggy, unkempt look of the livestock gave them the appearance of having been neglected. The crimson paint on the barn stood in stark contrast against the icicles hanging from the peak.

It was a calm day, unusually still. The screen door of the farmhouse swung open with unnecessary force. Two small girls emerge, finishing their winter ensemble with purple and teal mittens.

"Be good and listen for when I call you," the hazel-eyed girl's mother said. "Lauren, stay away from the pond and the creek; your dad hasn't tested the ice yet."

Rolling her eyes, Lauren snidely remarked, "Yes ma'am. I'm sure the ice is fine though, Mom."

"I'm serious, Lauren, stay away from the water!" her mother chided.

The two girls tromped across the yard toward the bridge that suspended above the creek, their snowpants swishing with every step. As they crossed the bridge, they stopped just in time to look down and see a rabbit running across the snowy surface of



Seymour Creek.

"See, it looks frozen," said Lauren. "My mom always thinks the worst is going to happen. Let's go down there."

"No way, I am not going down there. Your mom will kill us!"

"It's really no big deal, Mariah. My brother, sister, and I go down there all the time!"

"Big deal, they're older. They know how to check the ice."

Lauren rolled her eyes and sighed. If her cousin was going to be a chicken, she could just stay on the bridge and watch from above. She's sure she will get jealous and join her on the ice in no time.

"Fine, but I'm going down there. You're not going to tell, are you?" ask Lauren.

"No, but I still think it's a bad idea."

"I'll be fine. If it's frozen enough, will you come down and join me?"

"Maybe, but I doubt that it is."

With determination to prove her cousin wrong, Lauren walked the rest of the way across the bridge and began descending the steep banks of the creek.

Nearby pine trees, laden with snow, jolted with a sudden brisk breeze. All was still, except the crunching of snow under foot.

Mariah shouted down, "Lauren, please be careful. I don't want to get in trouble."

Lauren balanced herself on a small tree near the bank, sticking one tiny boot out and pressing the sole to the surface. It certainly felt frozen. She stuck out the other boot, testing her bravery, and stood with both feet on the ice. Looking around, the

cold breeze and the beaming sun both hitting her face and making her cheeks and her nose shine bright red.

She squinted up at Mariah, shielding her eyes with her hand. All she could see was Mariah's eyes peering out over the scarf wrapped around her face.

"Well?" she yelled down. "How does it feel?"

"Frozen!"

"Take a step to make sure."

Lauren took two steps. The ice creaked beneath her feet, but nothing happened.

"See, it's frozen. Come down here; we can clear the snow with our boots so we can skate!"

With a sigh of resignation, Mariah walked to the end of the bridge. Several icicles that clung to the bottom fell with a crash onto the ice below. Afraid that one would fall and hit them, Lauren began walking out from under it, "Oh man, the icicles are falling. We should move further down!"

She walked further around the bend in the creek. As Mariah reached the bank, a loud crack echoed through the woods. Lauren had disappeared through a hole in the ice, only to reemerge drenched in icy water. She went back under and struggled to find her footing.

Her cousin began to panic, "Lauren! Hold on, I'll get you out!"

"Hurry!!" she screamed through bluish lips.

Panicking, the little rosy-cheeked girl found a branch sticking out from a pile of snow and extended it out to her counterpart, who was struggling to climb onto the ice, as it broke away with each heave.



SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

Jordan Martin-Nichols ■ Digital Media

"Grab this, I'm going to pull you out," she instructed fearfully.

"I can't!" Lauren yelled.

Lauren reached again, but the branch slipped from her hands, as if she was trying to hold onto Jell-O.

"Use both hands; you have to help me!" Mariah instructed, trying to stay calm.

Standing on her tip-toes and reaching as far as she could, Lauren grabbed onto the branch. She had a firm grip, but that didn't make pulling her out any easier. Mariah grabbed onto the small tree at the bottom of the bank as she pulled.

Trusting her, Lauren grabbed onto the branch as hard as she could. Mariah, with the strength of a large man, fueled by her rushing adrenaline, adjusted her grip on the branch and pulled. Two tugs later, and both girls sat on the bank, breathing heavily.

The pair sat on the snow, and seeing the tears well up in Lauren's eyes, Mariah wrapped her arms around her cousin, comforting her. "It's okay; you're out! You're going to be fine."

"Thank you so much, Mariah. I don't know what I would have done without you," Lauren cried. Looking down at her drenched snow suit, she wailed even louder, "My mom is going to kill me!"

They looked at each other, and through a mischievous smile, Mariah said, "No, she won't; I have an idea. Let's go back to the house."

Standing up, Mariah held her hand out to help her up. She led them back up the slippery bank, across the wooden bridge, and through the yard to the back door.

The two crouched down to look through the bay window. Inside they could see Lauren's mother, sitting at the kitchen table, paying bills, her Tuesday ritual.

"She doesn't know we are back yet. We need to go in through the side door, but be really quiet so she doesn't hear us. Okay?"

"What are..."

"Don't ask questions; just follow my lead!" Mariah interrupted.

Nodding her head in agreement, Lauren followed her cousin to the side door, where the two snuck in. She closed the door behind her silently.

Whispering, Mariah said, "Take your wet clothes off here, so when we get into the mudroom, I can throw them right into the washing machine!"

"The washing machine? I'm not allowed to use the washing machine!"

"Trust me; my mom makes me do laundry. I know how to use it! Stop asking questions. I thought you didn't want to get in trouble," Mariah hissed.

"Fine, let's go," said Lauren, unzipping her coat and snow pants and taking them off.

"You better take your sweatpants off too. They're soaked!" So she did.

In her underpants and carrying the wet clothes, she opened the door of the garage that led to the mudroom. Walking straight to the washer, Mariah ripped the clothes from her cousin's hands and threw them in. Grabbing the bottle of Tide, she poured a cap-full and dispensed it into the machine. She then closed the lid, as silent as a mouse.

"Here goes nothing," Mariah smiled, turning on the machine. Instantly, the sound of rushing water filled the room. Her

mother must have heard, because a few seconds later, the sound of footsteps from inside the house could be heard, drawing nearer and nearer to the mudroom door. Finally, the door opened, and her mother stood on the step with a look of utter confusion.

"Lauren, did you start the washer?" she asked.

Looking at Mariah, and with tears in her eyes, she blurted out, "Yes, I got into some mud in the barn, and I didn't want you to be mad at me, so Mariah showed me how to use the washing machine!"

Tears streamed down her face, and her mother, still very confused, stepped down and put her hand on her back.

"Wait, what? Why would I be mad at you? Take the rest of your clothes off and go inside and change. I'll make you a snack."

The girls did as they were told. As they ascended the step into the house, they looked back to see Lauren's mom opening the lid and peering into the washer. Shaking her head and still looking confused, she smiled and followed them into the house. ■

TO BE NORMAL

Mackenzie Hiller

When someone asks what your favorite class at school is, the natural response would be an academic class: math, English, history, even science would come to mind. However, the response of “lunch” is usually followed by laughter as if the response was meant as a joke. Lunch is a class in school, though not an academic class, but rather a social one. You are tested every day when you walk into the cafeteria to sit down among hundreds of your classmates. Like academic classes, lunch is exhausting; to many people, social interaction for such a long period of time is just as tiring as hearing a lecture for an hour.

I think about this as I walk around the cafeteria at South Oran High School, searching for a seat. The room was exploding with voices, all too amalgamated to distinguish between individual conversations. At once, though, it is obvious the types of groups that settle into the seats at the tables: the athletes here, the seniors taking selfies there. Towards the back corner of the cafeteria, I am finally able to find a seat at a near-empty table, where only one other kid was seated. Seeing my opportunity, I rush towards it and set down my lunch box as I swing my legs over the bench. The boy across from me was very odd-looking, most likely the reason why he sat in isolation. His dark hair is unkempt, and there is a smear of blue paint on his cheek. However, I don't engage with this presented social test and begin to eat my lunch without speaking up to the strange figure across from me. Not that my standards are too high to talk to the lanky teenager, but because I am not that well-versed in the ways of lunchtime socialization. However, the boy across from

me looks upwards towards me, where I can see the reflection of a boy with brown hair and brown eyes hidden behind his own pair of glasses.

“Took you long enough to find a seat, Jude. Morgan said she'd kill you if you didn't sit by me at lunch.”

I look around but see no one else reply. The boy continues to look towards me, and I shift in my seat before realizing he is speaking to me.

“My name's not Jude.”

He seems surprised by my answer, as well as a bit embarrassed. He smiles as he points to his glasses.

“Sorry. I can't really see that well... or at all for that matter. I'm surprised you didn't pick up on that.”

“I try not to question a lot of things here.”

“You don't have to be so dramatic, dude. This is high school, not a prison.”

I chuckle at the ironic statement. In fact, high schools now are more like prisons than they've ever been. We're not allowed outside, we sit in locked rooms all day, and we have strict times for meals. I continue to pick at my turkey sandwich as I watch the strange person in front of me.

“So, what's your name? You're the first kid to talk to me all day.”

“Leonard Perkins.”

“Yeah, I'm not calling you that. How about Lenny? Lencer? Renaissance Festival?”

“Everyone calls me Lenny.”

“Lenny, Vinny. Vinny, Lenny. I'm Vincent.”



THIS IS SPARTA!

Brian Wells ▪ Wire - 3D

"Nice to meet you."

"I know you are dying to ask the question, so you can just ask it."

I crumple up the plastic bag that my sandwich was in and toss it back into my lunch box. I open my can of lukewarm soda and take a sip before pondering Vincent's implication.

"What question?"

"The question everyone asks. 'What's it like to be blind?'"

"I guess I kinda know the answer to that. I've been wearing glasses since I was like eight."

"Everyone thinks that it's just a pitch-black nightmare. 'It must be terrible!' I wouldn't even know that I can't see if people just stopped asking me about it."

I nod as I watch him poke at his half-eaten peanut butter sandwich. I barely notice as an older student walks up and sits next to Vincent, slapping him on the back.

"I see you made a friend on your first day. Mom is going to be so proud of you!"

Despite not being able to see much past his darkened glasses, I can tell that Vincent is rolling his eyes as he turns toward the new face at the table.

"She's going to be even prouder when I tell her you were making out with Kimmy Zhou in the hallway."

Quickly changing the subject, the older figure reaches his hand out towards me, which I shake as he introduces himself.

"Jude Bodenstein. Vincent's my brother."

"This is Lenny Perkins. Don't talk to him too much. You'll scare him away."

"Maybe he just doesn't like you that much, Vinny."

I continue to drink my soda as I listen to the brothers bicker in front of me. As I pull my orange from my lunchbox, Jude looks up towards me, catching my attention. I turn around and notice the crowd of kids sitting at the tables; Jude waves at the crowd and excuses himself before leaving the table. I turn around to see Vincent solemnly eating his sandwich as I begin to peel my orange.

"Where did your brother go?"

"Probably to sit with his friends. He's a senior, so today's the whole 'last first-day' thing. I'm pretty sure I heard a girl crying about it earlier."

"Are you a senior?"

"I'm a sophomore. Today's my first day of real school; I was home schooled before."

"It's my first day, too. I'm a freshman."

I watch Vincent as he leans his head onto his hand, tapping his chin with his thumb for a moment. I glance up at the clock before he speaks up, throwing a question at me.

"What's it like to be normal?"

I sit there for a minute, unsure of how to answer the question. I adjust my glasses before fabricating a quick response, hoping that the conversation will return to a less awkward one.

"I'm not normal."

Vincent smiles before grabbing around at the table and picks up a slice of my orange. I watch him chew at it as he stares blankly around the lunchroom.

"I know it's a dumb question, but I love asking that. I say the same thing when people ask me how it is to be blind, you know? 'I'm not blind.'"

"Well, 'normal' is such a vague term. It's different for everyone. If you're blind, you're blind."

"I am not blind. I just see things differently than everyone else. When I see you, I see this kid that is afraid of confrontation. When I see my brother, I see a dork. People are only blind when they're dead because then they can't see anything."

"It's not like you can see the way that I look or the color of my hair. Or your hair, for that matter."

"That stuff doesn't really matter. Sometimes I'm glad I don't notice that stuff. When I'm friends with someone, they should be happy because I'm not going to be friends with people based off of the way they look. I can see whether people are actually good people or not. I mean, it's not easy being 'blind', but it's a relief knowing that that crap will never matter to me."

"I never really thought about that before."

"Not to be rude, but that is obvious. If I lived in a place where only blind people lived, I would go my whole life thinking I was a normal person. But because I don't, I get to understand that there are people that can see things with their eyes. It's not always bad, though. There are people like you who get to see my point of view."

"You should write a book someday."

Vincent shrugs as he eats my orange. I start to move it closer to him, but he slaps my hand away.

"It's not very different from how everyone else is. If you lived in a world where everyone could see perfectly, you wouldn't be grateful for the ability to see. I'm pretty sure no one would be."

"There are schools for the blind though, right? Why didn't you go to one of those?"

"I feel like there, I would just be learning about how to show

the world that I'm different. There, I would be learning how to use a cane and how to interact with people and how to find a seeing eye dog. Here, I get to learn how to be a normal kid. I mean, I know that I will always be different and weird, but hopefully not just because I'm blind."

A pale woman with red hair approaches the table and taps on Vincent's arm.

"Come on, Vincent. We've got to get you back to class before the bell rings."

"If you just show me how to get back to the classroom, I can get there on my own in no time. I am somewhat of a visual learner if I do say so myself."

Vincent begins to laugh at his own remark before throwing the rest of his sandwich and the orange into his lunch bag; he stands up abruptly, surprising both me and the woman behind him. Like Jude, he reaches his hand towards me, and I shake it.

"Nice talking to you, Lenny. Same time tomorrow?"

"Sure."

As the bell rings, I toss the empty soda can back into my lunch box, watching the woman walk Vincent slowly towards the hallway, but not before he tosses his brown paper lunch bag at a nearby garbage can – he misses by at least a foot. I watch as the woman stops Vincent as she picks up the bag and tosses it into the trash can. Smiling, Vincent turns back around towards me.

"Wouldn't it have been amazing if I actually made that, or what?"

I watch as they continue to walk back towards the hallway, and I stare blankly at the trash can. Would it have been amazing? Sure. But as I think about it, anything with Vincent seems to be just that. It beats normal, that's for sure. ■



RISE AND FALL

Karla Warshefski

In the backseat of her old yet reliable minivan, the flickering beam of a dying flashlight informed Karolyn that it was time to wrap up her late-night performance. Her eyes ached from the hours she had spent reading to her three children as her husband navigated the darkened roads of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Four years prior, her family had started what was now a beloved tradition of spending their week-long summer vacation exploring some of the natural wonders that their home state had to offer. Each year they chose a new campground to serve as their "home base," where they could rest, refuel and plan their daily outings. This year's destination was the small town of Paradise, and Karolyn was sure that the town's name was a sign that this trip would provide a much-needed break from her recent parenting struggles.

She laughed at the thought, even before it had fully formed in her mind. "Struggle" was the understatement of the year. She seemed to be spending more and more time practicing the controlled breathing exercises she had found during a late night Google search for "how to stay sane when your kids drive you crazy." It helped a little, but not as much as the t-shirt she had found and secretly ordered (after a particularly infuriating confrontation with her ten year old daughter Kayla) that featured a snarling grizzly bear and read "On Days Like This I Understand Why Some Animals Eat Their Young."

The shirt stayed hidden, like the shameful little secret it was, rolled up and stuffed in the bottom of her yoga bag. When the kids went to school and she was alone in the house she would put

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Sabrina Mason ■ Photography

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it on and applaud herself for the stand she had taken against the “perfect mother” image she had worked so hard to achieve. It was hard coming to terms with the fact that her kids didn’t need her as they did when they were younger. Recently it seemed they wanted to do everything on their own, and the “control freak” side of her felt that if she let go now, she would lose them completely.

Gripping the paperback that the kids had chosen from their vast collection, Karolyn cleared her mind of the perpetual family drama as she dropped her voice a few octaves lower, to what the kids had long ago dubbed her “Goosebumps” voice. She could see her husband smiling in the rearview mirror and knew that he secretly enjoyed these stories as much as the children did.

“All of a sudden, Sarah noticed dark brown fur covering her arms. Her nails had sharpened into claws, and her hands were replaced by large fuzzy paws. She opened her mouth to yell for help, but instead of hearing her voice, all that came out was a ferocious GROWL!!!”

The kids laughed at Karolyn’s exaggerated narration, all except for her youngest. At eight years old, Kelli was the picture of childish innocence. As her older siblings laughed and urged their mother to continue reading, Kelli curled herself up into her blanket, her stunning, unusually large eyes wide with fear. Her thumb hovered near her trembling lip as she struggled not to shove it in her mouth, a habit that had taken years to break her of.

“It’s just a story sweetheart. Besides, maybe Sarah would have fun being a bear; she could eat honey just like Pooh, play outside with her friends all day, and she would be really good at climbing trees...” she trailed off with a reassuring smile.

The corners of Kelli’s mouth began to tip upwards, until she noticed her big sister’s hands curl into bear-like “claws,” her distorted face snarling as she bared her teeth. Karolyn shot her a

disapproving glare and prepared to intervene, but it was too late; as quickly as it had appeared, the hint of a smile on the little girl’s face retreated, replaced by obvious apprehension.

“Kayla Marie, what is wrong with you?” Karolyn hissed, noting that it was the third time she had asked the rhetorical question since they had begun the seven hour drive. She pinched the bridge of her nose, attempting to ease the burgeoning migraine that had been slowly introducing itself to her frontal lobe. She slid down the worn burgundy bench seat and brushed the long locks of hair off her daughter’s distressed face.

“I don’t like bears,” Kelli reiterated in her familiar stubborn tone. She turned her gaze to the window, the preface of tears glinting from cerulean eyes that mirrored her father’s. “I don’t ever want to see a bear,” she spoke in a pleading whisper as she watched the blur of trees fly past the van window, and it had seemed as if she were sending her request out to the forest’s inhabitants.

“There aren’t any bears where we’re going, Kelli. Just wait until you see the adventure your dad and I have planned; I promise, you have absolutely nothing to be afraid of.”

“MOM!”

Karolyn stumbled on the well-worn path as her son’s voice brought her crashing back to reality. She still had not fully processed the danger her family was currently facing, and the tranquil beauty of the forest only made it more difficult to grasp the gravity of the situation. Karolyn could not remember ever being so scared.

She swung her head around to see her son bent over an object lying on the trail they were currently stopped on, and she sent a silent prayer to whoever was listening that he had

not found anything that would clue him and the girls in on her husband's recent discovery. Hurrying over to see what the object of his excitement was, she felt a momentary sense of relief as she crouched down beside him.

"What are those?" Kristopher asked, pointing to the strange spiked balls littering the path. The curious twelve-year-old had a mind like a sponge, questioning everything before absorbing the information and storing it away for future reference.

Catching her breath, Karolyn took a moment to collect herself before responding to her son's inquiry.

"That is a great find!" she replied, hoping her forced enthusiasm wasn't too obvious. "I think it's a seed pod from one of these trees, but why don't you go ask your father?"

"Good idea, Dad knows everything," Kristopher said as he stood with the easy, agile movements of youth and ran past his sisters to ask his all-knowing father about his newest treasure. Karl had taken the position of sentry, walking slightly ahead of them to ensure that the trail was safe while she brought up the rear and made sure the kids stayed between the two of them. Her husband's quick thinking and resolute bravery were just a few of the many qualities she loved about him. As if hearing her thoughts, he turned and gave her a reassuring smile as he walked alongside their son.

She scanned the surrounding forest as she recalled the whispered discussion she'd had with her husband shortly after they had reached the halfway point of their three-mile hike. A journey such as this might seem ambitious for a family with three children, but their plan had seemed so perfect. They would begin the hike at the lower section of Tahquamenon Falls, the breathtaking waterfalls that the town of Paradise was known for. The halfway point was said to have a few picnic tables set up on the edge of the forest, allowing hikers to enjoy a shaded oasis to retreat from the sun. They



PIECES

Barbara Rickerman ■ Photography

would stop here to rest and enjoy the picnic lunch she had prepared for them. It was near the river and would provide an ideal backdrop for the family photos she had hoped to take.

As they set out on their adventure it had seemed as though their careful planning had paid off. The kids had been excited and were as well behaved as she had ever remembered seeing them as they easily made it through the first half of the hike. She could hardly believe her luck, until her husband's urgent voice, calling her to where he stood just out of the kids' hearing range.

"Did you notice the tracks back there?" Karl had asked. She hated when he asked questions that he knew the answer to, but the tone of his voice stopped her from reminding him.

"They were bear tracks, a large black bear from the looks of them. They aren't typically anything to worry about, but I spotted some smaller prints nearby that could be cubs. We don't want to run into a mother bear and her babies."

Karolyn had felt the familiar nausea that surfaced whenever she imagined something happening to her babies but knew there was no time for a meltdown. She looked at her husband, attempting to adopt his level-headedness. "What do we do?"

"Let's keep moving," he said. "I'll walk ahead a little and you bring up the rear. We'll keep the kids between us and get to the upper falls as quickly as possible. The map shows a large public area there, and we can work out the rest of the details once we know we're safe."

They had gathered the kids after that and had been herding them along at a faster pace, much to their dismay. Each time they whined about the increased speed she could feel her heartrate spike, fearful of catching the attention of the forest's ferocious inhabitants. She rubbed her temples, hoping to alleviate the

headache building behind her eyes; a migraine was the last thing she needed right now. She opened the fraying black pouch around her waist to inspect the contents, hoping to miraculously procure the bottle of aspirin that she now clearly remembered rolling around on the floor of the van.

"Damn it," she muttered to herself absently, before looking around to make sure none of her children had heard her swear. Luck was not on her side today, as she noticed her daughter Kayla had been silently walking beside her. Her mind stalled at the realization that Kayla was silent. She did a quick visual inspection of the solemn-faced ten-year-old, and after finding no physical ailments, she put a hand to the girl's forehead. No fever, no life-threatening injuries, and no horrified announcement of her mother's foul-mouthed slip meant there was something serious going on. Kayla never missed a chance to incite a confrontation with her mother, and the only time the girl stopped talking or laughing was when she slept... even then it wasn't always the case. Karolyn slid into step alongside her.

"What's up honey?"

Kayla slowed her pace and looked at her mother with round, hazel eyes that mirrored both the color and concern in her own.

"Is everything okay, Mom? You and Dad are acting really weird."

Karolyn tensed; her daughter was beyond perceptive when it came to the emotions of the people around her. She attempted a light-hearted laugh, but Kayla's eyes narrowed before she could form the fabricated assurances that might alleviate some of her concern.

"It's nothing, Kay; I've just got a little headache," she said, slinging an arm around Kayla's shoulders. "It's probably from that

ridiculous song your sister was singing for an hour straight this morning.”

She spoke in a whisper before clamping a hand over her mouth. “Don’t tell her I said that.”

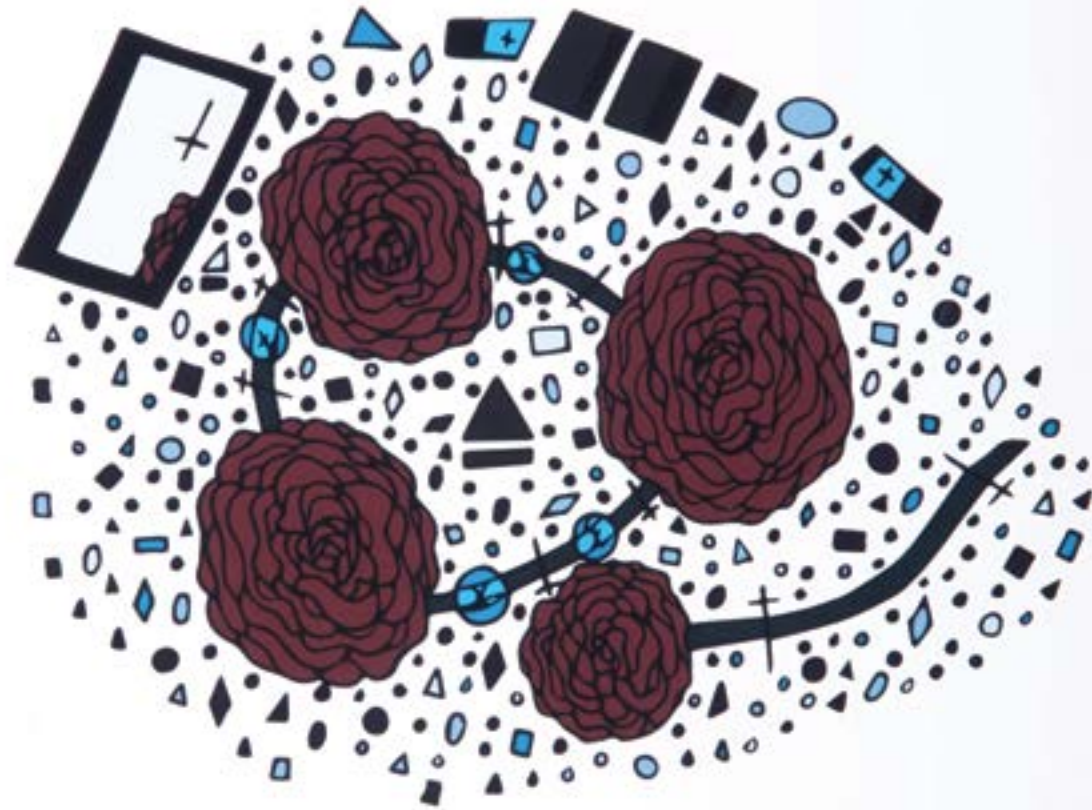
Karolyn knew that if there was one way to lift Kayla’s spirits, it was to share something with her that no one else knew about; as the second born of three kids, she bore the classic symptoms of “middle child syndrome.” She felt guilty using this tactic, but desperate times occasionally call for poor parenting decisions.

Kayla’s face split into a wide grin, and she nodded in agreement before taking off on an animated rant about the annoyances of little sisters. Karolyn enjoyed a moment of victory: she had averted a confrontation with her overly inquisitive daughter, Kris and Kelli were keeping one another entertained with a game of “I Spy - Nature Edition,” and according to the map they only had about a half-mile to go.

As they rounded a bend in the trail, she felt her heart stutter, the way her van did when she forgot to stop for gas and was running on fumes. Karl had stopped on the trail ahead of them, his arm raised and palm facing them, clearly indicating they needed to stop immediately.

“Hey guys, come check this out,” she whispered in exaggerated excitement, her hands waving them closer as she crouched down near the base of an enormous tree. The three exhausted children, who seemed to be losing energy at a rapid rate, simultaneously groaned as they shuffled towards their mother. Karolyn kept her husband, who seemed to be checking out an area a few dozen yards from the trail, in her peripheral vision as she gathered them close to her.

“What Mom? I don’t wanna look at any more dumb pine



STARDUST PETALS

Courtney Angebrandt ■ Digital Media

cones; I just wanna get to the Falls.” Kayla’s whiney voice, normally an instant irritant to Karolyn’s nerves, instead made her panic as she watched her husband’s head snap to where they stood, raising his finger to his lips.

“I know, Sweetheart; we are almost there. I promise. But... it’s just...” she stalled, trying to think of some clever ruse to engage them. Part of her wanted to just tell them the truth, that their father had seen evidence of bears near the trail and they needed to be quiet while he made sure they were safe, but she worried about the panic that would ensue. The last thing they needed were three hysterical kids to add to the issues at hand. But as she looked at their exhausted, dirt smudged faces, she decided it was the only way to effectively keep them quiet... she hoped.

“Ok guys, here’s the truth.” Three faces instantly snapped to attention with that simple phrase, so she continued. “When we stopped to take pictures near the river, Dad saw some tracks near the trail that he thinks... maybe... could be from a mother bear and her cubs.” She stopped to take a deep breath before assessing her children’s reactions. It came as no surprise that Kelli, being the youngest and most timid of the three, was visibly frightened as she buried her face into her mother’s side. Karolyn wrapped an arm around her as she looked to Kristopher, whose concerned yet intrigued expression was of no surprise. This left Kayla, her most unpredictable child, whose face she could not see as she peered out into the trees.

Karolyn sighed and prepared to comfort her. “Sweetheart, don’t be scared. Dad and I won’t let anything happen to you guys. You just need to stay-”, she was cut off by Kayla as she turned back to face her mother.

“I’m not scared Mom. You should have told us sooner.” She turned away again and quietly walked several yards off the path,

reaching down to gather something in a stealthy way that Karolyn had never known her to possess. She turned back towards them, her arms loaded with thick sticks and a large rock grasped in each hand. Karolyn watched her but said nothing as her daughter quietly lowered herself to the ground, depositing her supplies silently before turning to her younger sister.

“Kelli, remember on *Jack Hanna’s Animal Adventures*, when he went out to look for grizzly bears? Do you remember what he said to do if you ever run into a bear in the woods?”

Karolyn was shocked to see her youngest daughter nod in earnest, her ponytail bobbing and all traces of fear wiped from her porcelain face.

“Good, so you know what these are for?” Kayla asked as she handed Kelli the rocks she had returned with. Her sister nodded again, still silent but wearing a determined look that Karolyn didn’t recall ever seeing before.

“Ok then. Wait till Dad comes back, and then walk right behind him.” She turned to her older brother, who wore an expectant look, as if he was awaiting orders from his younger sister. Karolyn could not have interrupted if she’d tried; she was in complete awe of the scene unfolding in front of her.

“Kris, did you bring that whistle you were using to practice bird calls for boy scouts?”

“Yup. I also have my Swiss army knife; do you think we need it?” His eyes grew larger, as if he were picturing facing a bear with his tiny pocket knife blade. Karolyn almost laughed, but her daughter’s serious face held her back.

“No, just the whistle right now. Take these too,” she said as she handed him two of the large sticks. She picked up another set and handed them to her mother, who was still standing there, mouth agape.

"Mom, are you okay?"

"I... yes, I'm fine, Kay." Karolyn had no words for what she was feeling and was finding it difficult to even form a simple sentence. When had her daughter become so level-headed and mature? Where was the whining, insufferable child she had seen just moments before?

Her thoughts were interrupted as the sound of footsteps approached, her husband coming into view a second later. He met her eyes, looking curious as to why they were all standing there holding sticks and staring raptly at Kayla. She imagined it was quite a sight. He raised an eyebrow in question, but before she could respond Kayla had thrust two more sticks in his direction.

"Here, Dad. Bears are afraid of noise, so we really shouldn't be walking quietly. Kelli's stones will be the loudest, so she should walk behind you. Now that we all have sticks, we can bang them together while we walk. That will scare away the bears if they're close... and anything else around us."

She laughed and they all followed suit. No one said another word, and as they walked down the trail, beating their makeshift instruments and laughing at the craziness of the situation, Karolyn realized she'd been wrong all along. Having her children grow up wasn't the end of the world. Sure, the adolescent hormones and sibling arguments would make some days worse than others. But she had just witnessed a glimpse into the future, had seen the type of woman her daughter would one day become. From what she had observed, Kayla was infused with some of her parents' best qualities; the strong-willed, determined yet caring leader that she had always been known to be, and the quick thinking, level-headed provider that she saw every day in her husband. They would never be perfect parents, but they had done something right; she had just seen the proof of that.

Karolyn was pulled from her thoughts as she saw her family come to a standstill in front of her. She paused and listened, realizing she could just make out the sound of people laughing over the roar of the nearby waterfall. A smile broke across her face and she was certain she had never felt more relieved than she did at that moment, as they all took off for the clearing that was laid out in front of them, where dozens of other families sat enjoying the breathtaking view. They found a spot beneath a grove of oak trees and promptly collapsed. Karolyn had no words for what they had just been through, for what she had just learned about her family and herself, and for a moment she thought she might cry with the war of emotions battling within her heart. Instead of tears though, she began to laugh. Her family looked on, concern etching their faces for a brief moment before each of them joined in, reveling in the pure joy that they each felt a part of. They laughed until their sides and faces hurt, and as the laughter began to subside, Karolyn made two life-changing decisions. The first was that she was going to stop fighting the changes her family was going through. They were no longer helpless children, and she needed to accept the fact that there would be times when she would have to relinquish control and hope for the best. There would be times it might lead to some disastrous results, but moments like this, like the one she had witnessed with Kayla today, would make those disasters tolerable.

The second decision she made was to throw away that damn t-shirt. ■

FOUR YEARS

Breanna Sylvia

I visited my best friend with her dull, saddening eyes. She was stuck to her bed like a housefly to a glue trap. Breathing and alive, but hardly saying a word. Words of advice had vanished some time ago. Her voice was failing her. A body was fading away slowly before my eyes. I stayed beside her every Thursday night on a comfortable, oversized chair I found on my ride to her house. Someone had left it on the side of the street.

My employer was becoming increasingly irritated by the amount of time I had taken off. No one knew why I asked to leave earlier as each new week began. Telling someone would make it real. I was afraid to believe completely what I knew to be true. I had become depressed and anxious. Small annoying occurrences could set me into a sour mood in an instant. But I needed to remain strong for her sake, even while my own mental state deteriorated. Her pain would end. My pain would remain.

And so, I did. I held onto a bit of clarity I had and continued to stay with her once weekly. Sometimes I brought her gifts of comfort. One was a small, stuffed penguin. Penguins were always her favorite. Her eyes lit up at me as I set it beside her. We shared everything with each other, including our favorite film, *Buffalo '66*, which we watched once a month as a ritual. Though I was in an awful state of depression and anxiety, these little moments kept me going. How much longer would I have? How many more memories would there be? This was the other side of the rusty coin.

Sitting beside her, in that oversized chair...do you ever feel so alone in a room full of familiar faces and so dead inside even in such a lively situation? I know many people, most people, must experience this same awful sensation. I shouldn't feel this alone. Yet no matter the people I encounter and befriend or how much I am loved, it doesn't hurt any less or make the overwhelming sting fade away. Especially on Thursdays. We are alone where I am witness to her fainter breaths with each new week.

I arrive at her doorstep and retrieve the house key from underneath the wicker chair cushion on her front porch. Just like any other Thursday night. I stay beside her. I comb her hair, paint her nails, and read to her. I do these things so that she can save a little bit of energy she has left in her to say a few sentences.

Three long years ago is when she told me her body would slowly dissipate. She could leave this world, this bed, in less than a second. And then I will leave this bed as well. We are bonded by pain. I am losing my best friend. She is losing her life. How empty the room and bed will feel when she is gone. We attach ourselves to hope that she will fight another two years. Who knows? She is strong and full of willpower despite her weakness. Hope tells me she will dumbfound doctors and nurses who told her three to five years by making it to six.

Four years.

Year four has come. It is winter. Outside her bedroom window there is glistening pure white snow covering the grass and trees and the bird feeders that have been placed close by. These simple, quiet moments remain in my mind even after much time has passed. The amount of words that can be spoken are fewer now. Her hands are weaker. Completely affixed to the soft, sun-warmed, blanket-filled bed. Small, mousy fingers lift from the lap upon which

they secured for hours. They ever-so-slightly reach up to grasp my own. Our hands intertwine although her fragile hand can only hold on with the smallest amount of strength, but I still feel her energy and life.

"You've made it four years already. I'm so proud of you. You are stronger than you ever imagined."

I see her gaze, her lips slightly parted, "I'm ready."

"Ready?"

"Yes."

I see her eyes closed, hardly glowing, mostly dull and tired. She can't go. She can't leave me. We have at least another year. Every voice and sound inside of me screams with frustration, sadness, and dread. I can do nothing except remain, quiet, holding a nearly lifeless hand.

Through the night her words haunt me. Sleep isn't an option. I bite my lip. Holding her hand while she rests peacefully, clutching the arm of the chair with my other. She is the thinnest and frailest she has ever been. I hear her heartbeat. Throughout the night I listen. The soft sound is comforting.

I continue to listen closely, resting on my chair with closed eyes. The soft beat that comes from her chest, through her ribcage, is becoming fainter and slower. Fainter. Slower. Slower. Slower.

No... Please.

The only sound comes from my own heartbeat. It is racing. Accompanied by a white noise caused by a dead room. A Thursday night.

Four years. ■



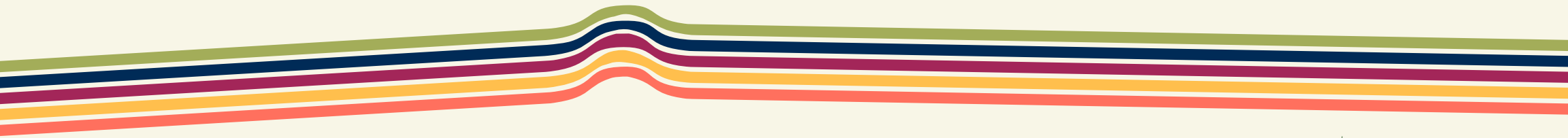
A GIFT FOR MY LOVE

Emma Thurman ■ Pen & Ink



IT'S ONLY A GAME

Everett Klimovich ▪ Digital Media



poetry

DECEMBER MORNING

Clea Stevens



Blanche
Redman
Award

Dawn breaks with the sound of coffee percolating.
The floorboards creak beneath my feet.
Steam rises from my mug,
While the creamer is busy making galaxies.

Birds sing sweet melodies,
While the still morning gives me pause to think.
A feeling of melancholy washes over me,
Like a baptism on Sunday morning.

The hot brew warms my hands,
But it cannot thaw the cold in my soul.
Dawn breaks with the sound of coffee percolating,
And I break with thoughts of you. ■



SAYING GOODBYE TO MARY JANE

Karla Warshefski

Side by side, we sit on your porch,
As we have done for so many years,
A familiar silence ignores the generations
that both divide and entwine us.
The sweltering air belies the spring season,
evidenced by the desolate remains
of impotent hyacinths bowing before us,
and the salty rivulets of sweat
that trail languidly down my chest.
Beside me your feeble body shivers beneath
a mountain of crocheted monstrosities,
concealing your delicate tissue-paper skin
that somehow contains your aging bones.

I soon break the sacred quietude,
desperate to release you from the veil
of loneliness that separates our worlds.
I smile and ask you about your boat,
Knowing this moment of joy still remains,



FUN GLASSES

Ryan Mikolowski ■ Photography

A memory left untouched by the parasite
that feeds on your century-old mind,
distorting the minutes and hours and days
and years that have come and gone until
all that remains are the fragmented moments
you desperately cling to without knowing why.

I stand and begin to gently comb the remains
of your thin silver locks, avoiding the scabbed
reminder of your most recent skirmish with gravity.
Your voice is brittle from the hours of disuse
as you slowly recount those summer days
spent fishing with nets in the old metal
boat that you proudly rowed alone. You speak
as though it was yesterday, a rare spark
of life illuminates your pain-glazed eyes before
you succumb once again to time's selfish ways.

As the sunlight fades and the heat subsides,
I take a moment to revel in the cool lake breeze,
knowing my relief is sure to be short-lived.
I begin to stand, but my movements still
as your small gnarled hand moves to rest
on my knee. Surprise mars my face as you smile,
before your gaze returns to the lake's serene guise.
Side by side, we are once more enveloped in silence,
As we watch the gulls still patrolling the skies, until
you cry out, asking who I am and why we are here,
your voice trembles, laced with panic, and I know
I've lost you once again. I take your hand in mine,
Turn my face to hide my silent tears; in the moonlight,
I glimpse an old metal boat as it drifts along the horizon,
and I whisper goodbye. ■

PERSPECTIVE



OTHERWORLDLY

Rilee Meyers

I have never seen an eclipse, but I see the way her irises shine with the light of a thousand suns only to be shielded of such brightness by her pupils.

I have never seen lightning strike the earth in a fiery rage, but I see where it scorched her skin with streaky lines of silk and pearls that would put even the most awe-inspiring earthly sights to shame.

I have never charted constellations, but I recall every cluster of freckles that dust her skin in a way that could only be described as otherworldly.

When I was young, I dreamt of traveling into space to study its most puzzling phenomena. Now that I'm older, I find myself getting lost in the galaxies brewing inside her mind and admiring the stardust that's pumping through her veins.

The universe created her in its image, so can you blame her for knowing her worth? ■



DREAM REALM

Elijah Ceplecha ■ Digital Media

Katie Meyers

The monster in my bed keeps me up at night.

We would lie in eerie silence, he and I, watching the hours tick away until sleep pulled us under.

When morning came, he would be gone, a faint heat still lingering on his side of the bed. ■



SPIRALING

Elise Edie ■ Photography

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A SHOE

Kayla Plenda

Deep in the closet,
Poking out of a pile of clothes
Was the lace of a shoe.

Shielding my eyes
As I look towards the sun
I see a shoe gliding through the air.

The ancient wood creaked
As the chair moved across the floor.
A single shoe sat on the wicker seat.

Under the cold bed
The ring lies,
On the soul of a shoe.

A threadbare shoe is haphazardly tossed
To the stray.

In the dimming light
The shadow of the shoe
Fills the cracks of the sidewalk
Until all is dark.

Living under the soles of humans,
The shoes know why.

At the sight of the shoe,
He looked down.

He knew where the missing pair
Had ended up.

The child was on the floor.
He mistook the snake
For a shoelace.

In the frozen embrace of the ground
The shoe waits silently
For the night.

The floor is cracking and fading.
The shoe falls through the darkness.

The icy fog drifts into the material
Of the black shoes,
Filling the insides
With memories.

Hanging from laces
The shoe swings in the breeze
Up in the tree. ■



REVERIE

Spencer Malburg ■ Photography

THE ONE

Sydney Griffor

Early morning dew and fresh leaves on the ground.
To the left, the sun peeks over the horizon.
Landscape is flooded with bright light.
Covered in camouflage,
She is virtually invisible to the surrounding life.
A snap of a twig, a scuffle of leaves comes from behind.
Heartbeats create a rhythm in her ears
as the bustle gets closer.
Her heart as fast as a train pounding down the tracks,
Turning to a invisible numbness through her veins.
The buck stood before her,
Sunlight glistens off his white antlers.
Overjoyed by the beast before her,
Strong emotions running like a mighty river,
The hunt is complete. ■

FAMILIARITY

Breanna Sylvia

scratching skin
crawling inside
push against the walls
just wanting to be free
leave me alone!
the voices won't stop
crawling inside my walls
my lungs feel full
someone, something
is sucking the air from inside them
the crawling voices formed to something bigger
putting wicked spells on my body
spiderwebs form on my skin
I can't move anymore
everything is too loud
everything is too uncomfortable
yet it's what I crave
all that I've known
the voices
the lack of oxygen it's awful and familiar
I tell the voices,
please don't abandon me
I'm alone,
I'm alone,
I'm alone. ■

VARIOUS WITH WHITE

Courtney Angebrandt ■ Graphite



BOREDOM

Emma Thurman ■ Acrylic Paint

TRIPP

Sabrina Mason ■ Acrylic Paint

