3Elements Review

Issue No. 26

Spring 2020
3Elements Literary Review
Born in 2013

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY
Spring, summer, fall, and winter by 3Elements Review
Phone: 847-920-7320
www.3ElementsReview.com

This issue ©2020 by 3Elements Literary Review

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Zig Zag Nude 2 by Roger Camp

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Gimme the light by Teresa Stern

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If circles exist inside circles, we call them atoms. Or sometimes cells. Or sometimes the eye of the fly on the outer hull of an all-but-empty sailboat, a suicide note in its own plastic baggie and the tiller roped to a starboard cleat. So yes, magnetic circles and desperate scrawling circles and the circle when a passing bluegill swims unaware into its own burgeoning—then, transfixed / transcends into something other than fish, a Rorschach test of hope or dread. And if the beard and jacket on the shore guts and fries that Rorschach test for dinner, with the first bite he returns to the idea of his mother’s last moment on the sailboat, her dry lips, the scorpion inside her, the back end of evening rubbing up against the very back end / where questions must be abandoned like an old
magician’s doves. He was a man for another
time, when it was a matter of mystery
to saw a woman clean in half. If boxes
exist inside boxes, we call them
a contortion. A million box. A trick.
And is there a moment when no more remains
to be opened, to trawl from the water
or ink on our wrists?
If I tell the truth. If I / don’t
even answer. If no one meets
my mouth with their equal
mouth. Sometimes
the nest I need is a circle inside
a bed of bent twigs
where my zigzag mind
stalls for a moment, rubs
the nub of its ear, un-
spools audibly
into sleep.
ALMOND PATH
Gwendolyn Pryor
Our study examines the behavior of individuals who have been diagnosed with thought disorder (TO) when presented with opportunities to escape treatment. It is noted that our focus was originally confined to the Test phase itself and was only extended through a recent increase in government funding to encompass the three phases presented below.

Phase I – The Test

Testing is by means of a traditional projective test, the Rorschach inkblots, with reactions evaluated by algorithms developed to detect the pareidolia associated with TO.

Pre-observance begins in the waiting room. Subjects are not separated by age or gender. Interaction among subjects is rare (9.28%), possibly due to the situational stress. Women interact more frequently (16.4%), the only exception being when there is a crass difference in apparent economic status, with this number rising slightly if the subject we refer to as the grandmother is involved. The teenage girl, whose name is Emma or Stacey, exhibits no measurable interaction with others. Between one and three of all male subjects seated in the waiting room will invariably speak to Emma-Stacey. The tone is for the most part fatherly or otherwise reassuring, even though Emma-Stacey has shown no outward sign of distress.

Testing is done individually in an inner room, with algorithmic evaluation carried out on the spot. As a rule, there are always several subjects not familiar with the Rorschach test, and we take care to explain to every subject before they are shown the inkblots that there is no right answer. Most (99.32%) do not grasp the significance of the statement. (See Annex 1 for the algorithms used in evaluation.)

Phase II – The Run

The reactions of subjects when they are brought to the field and told they are going to be shot vary only to some extent. Emma-Stacey begins to run toward the distant buildings before researchers start the recording, which may skew results. Her hair flies in the wind. Practically all subjects (99.73%) are observed to zigzag (“serpentining”) during Phase II. We present no analysis of these phenomena. Note that the gunmen at this stage have been expressly instructed to miss their targets.

To date, no subject has been observed not to run. We theorize that the subjects, after failing Phase I, view Phase II as a second
opportunity, a game they can win by reaching a goal or safe zone, as represented by the far-off buildings, in spite of there being no evidence nor any indication on the part of the evaluators that there is an escape from treatment.

Subjects who enter Phase II in groups follow what we find to be a narrow—and ultimately predictable—range of reactions. Those who identify as male tend to compete for survival (63.48%), in the form of shoving aside and tripping fellow escapees or using others as cover. In contrast, those who identify as female tend to cooperate, primarily in the form of shouted encouragements (Don’t let them win! Fight!) or physical assistance (helping others who fall on the loose gravel when serpentining). The difference in economic status seen in Phase I/Waiting Room does not appear to play a role here.

Of particular note is the shifting relationship between Emma-Stacey and the grandmother. In contrast to her prior reactions or rather lack of reaction in the waiting room, Emma-Stacey will tend to give physical assistance to the grandmother if they enter Phase II together. The grandmother exhibits what, for purposes of this paper, we will term tenacity, often to a much greater degree than younger and middle-aged subjects, whether male or female. The grandmother is more likely to reject the Haven door when it is marked “Safety” (see Phase III below) and to convince Emma-Stacey to push on together with her beyond the remaining buildings to reach the back of the field. (See Annex 2 for a layout and detailed description of the field, buildings, and perimeter area with its insurmountable fence.)

Phase III – The Haven

The building classified as the Haven is situated among and closer to the back of a group of 10-12 otherwise unmarked buildings ranging in size from a shed to approximately that of a high school gym. Alignment of the structures is random, with effort made not to establish corridors. 98.4% of subjects will enter the door marked “Haven” upon encountering it, even if they have passed up other buildings. This figure does not decrease significantly if the door’s label has been defaced to be more ambiguous, for instance “Have.” Remarkably, if the door is labeled with a less ambiguous term, such as “Safety,” the number of subjects choosing to enter drops to 86.23% (see above discussion of Emma-Stacey/grandmother relationship). One researcher has postulated that a suspicion of trickery may play a role in this phenomenon.

The contradiction in subjects choosing to enter this one door after having passed up others, as well as the overall contradiction expressed in attempting the Run at all, was referred to by one researcher repeatedly as “the obscenity.” For this and various other reasons (see below), this researcher is no longer associated with the study at the time of publication.

General Observations

The bond that we observe to develop in Phases II and III between subjects previously strangers to one another, especially among women and in particular between Emma-Stacey and the grandmother, has in some cases been so strong that it has caused
our researchers to double-check data as to whether these subjects were related in some way hitherto unknown to us. This bonding phenomenon was also indicated by the dissenting researcher (see above) as part of the reason for her unfortunate and rather chaotic departure.

As an aside here, we note that inter-rater agreement in general was low, with researchers at times strongly disagreeing on the results or even the efficacy of the study, and we have corrected for this in all cases.

The number of subjects entering the Haven building who grasp the significance of the back door opening (as shown by facial expressions or utterances), before the gunmen come into view, constitutes an outlier. The number of subjects who grasp the significance of the existence of a back door before it ever opens must be considered an extreme outlier.

Subject reactions when the gunmen actually enter through the Haven’s back door are described in more detail in a separate study.
DEAR CARMELA SOPRANO
Lara Egger

Again misjudging the bell curve,
I crashed my car into the hedge
you fashioned into a topiary elephant.
There are worse things than discovering
you failed the Rorschach test,
that your assumptions about gravity’s effect
on sunflowers, rising past the kitchen window
on stalks with circumferences barely wide enough
to hold the smallest Lladró shepherd,
were wrong. A zigzag across the lawn,
lighning stumbles homeward. I stumble too,
to the thought of you clipping out the ears,
rigging a guide from dry cleaner coat hangers,
rummaging through the hall table drawer
for scissors lithe enough to carve
the J-bend of a trunk. And when you were done,
forefinger blistered from the shears,
you probably stepped back and marveled,
Oh, my menagerie, my haven!
There are worse things, I imagine, than waking
to the sound of shattering glass.
Like watching a husband sleep soundly
through the noise of a heart crashing in.
RORSCHACH TEST, PARIS
Roger Camp
All I remember of that long ago Rorschach Test was the therapist’s conclusion: magical thinking. Perhaps still true, given the heart and Taoist symbol I find in my cat’s dry food dish or the novel pictographed in the bark of my favorite tree. Yet sometimes I read nothing but imprints of leaves burned into the snow by December sun or today’s zigzag of tracks leading to my steps.

Last spring the patch of dirt outside the library just looked like weeds. A tangle of green above landscape fabric prior to June blossom.

Each week thereafter, I tried to see the flowers for what they were: growing in the same soil, expressed in different ways. Then, stems ever-upward and a fist-knot of bloom before sunflowers’ outward spread and pillars left to anchor autumn soil.

In first snow, a young rabbit curled small onto itself silhouetted against the base of the barren lilac. I described it to my daughter but not well enough to cause her to look. The rabbit still there in the minutes after but not there still. Its fast-beating heart perhaps warming the haven beneath our shed. Not visible out any window at 2:00 a.m., when I’m summoned by the leak of white around the shades to seek out something soft while I’m awake.

Micki Blenkush
PATH IN THE GATES
James Reade Venable
ON THE BRIDGE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND SPIRIT: A TRAVELER'S TALE
Victoria Millard

My husband is a man of science, a biological psychiatrist, an expert on circadian rhythms and the body clock. I'm a clown and a writer who thrives on spontaneity more than routines. Early to bed and early to rise is more than folk wisdom, David tells me. The body needs a regular sleep schedule with morning light to synchronize our temperature, hormones, neurotransmitters, and REM sleep. He's got lots of complicated charts and research papers to explain this, but I tend to fall asleep during the lectures.

I know insomnia, depression, bipolar disorder, and general fitness improve with “good sleep hygiene”—aided by dawn simulator lights, medic desk lights, brisk morning walks, and open window shades at the crack of dawn, but I put the pillow over my head and sleep in anyway. At 10 pm, when David is lulled by melatonin and nodding off in blue-blocking glasses, I am wide awake, waiting for the muse.

One evening in October, I lingered past midnight, bewitched by the view outside our living room window. Black and still, the skeleton of the cherry tree seemed inked into an unworldly shade of sky, a true midnight blue. The season was turning; there was that chill, that scent of decay in the air, the landscape of death about to be rolled out before us. It was the time of year when the ancients believed the veil between the worlds was very thin, a hallowed, holy time, when the deceased left the damp and cold of the grave, and the living placed candles in windows to guide their way home.

Sitting there, just breathing, as the inner chatter of my thoughts faded to a quiet peace, I felt lighter, as if my body were diffusing, my mind opening—like an antenna receiving more channels. Suddenly, a figure in black passed by the window and continued up the front walk. I waited for a knock or the doorbell. There was no sound, nothing. I rose and peered out the window. There on our porch, on top of a storage trunk, sat a nicely dressed woman in her mid-twenties, a few years older than my daughter, head held in her hands. Without hesitating, I opened the door.

“May I help you?” I asked.

She raised her head briefly. “Oh, no, I only came here to cry.”

I persisted. “What’s wrong, honey?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said, speaking rapidly, “I think it has something to do with my car. I have an Infiniti and I don’t know where it is. I can’t find my keys and I’m afraid it’s gone into infinity because it’s not here anywhere. And I don’t know where Tony is, I need to find Tony because he is the love of my life, why I don’t know but Tony spelled backwards is y not, and he will help me find my car if I can only find him. I know we were meant to be together
forever and ever, and I have three people inside of me and I saw the Buddha and the baby and the pumpkin on the porch, so I came here to cry because this is what we do. Why I don’t know but why not?”

She continued babbling—a zigzag of ideas, free association, plays on words, symbols, rhyme, and euphoria mixed with sudden bouts of crying. I immediately suspected that this young woman was in the throes of a bipolar manic episode. She had all the classic symptoms; it was all there, the wild and curious journey of a mind unraveling, the same journey I have helped several of my friends return from, a mental disorder I know so much about because of my husband’s expertise, and also because I have a lesser form of it myself.

She looked up, with a sweet and open face, imploring me to understand, to help. I looked out in the street. No sign of anyone. I thought of myself as a young woman, depressed and confused, with no one to offer support or safe haven. What if this were my daughter?

“You look like you need a hug,” I said. Her bright blue, tear-stained eyes studied my face, assessing, in spite of her altered state, whether I was sincere, trustworthy.

We hugged. What were the chances that this confused and sad young woman, wandering far from home on a bitterly cold night, at the mercy of strangers, out of a million houses in Seattle she could have chosen, happened to pick the home of a kindred spirit, one of only 2.6% of the population who have been on the same strange journey? Not only that, but the sleep expert snoring upstairs was the inpatient director of psychiatry at the hospital best equipped to help her. It’s fate, I thought. So of course I didn’t hesitate. I invited the sojourner in for tea.

“Hi, my name’s Victoria,” I began. “What’s yours?”

“I’m Morgan,” she said, stepping through the door, “and now I am in the home of the family, my family, and there are the pictures of the kids and the chairs and the fireplace and we are safe because when you find your family you are safe.” She sat down at the coffee table. From a stack of CDs she took three and placed them upside down in a straight row, then made her way toward the piano. “I used to play the piano but I haven’t played in a long time. I will play it now, but there is no piano bench, never-mind.” She turned to a large exercise ball in the corner of the room. “Here is a big red ball. I will bounce on the ball while I play the piano, why I don’t know but this is what we do.” Her mood had now shifted from distress and confusion to spontaneity and glee.

Perhaps because I’d chosen the profession of clown, and am a tad mad myself, it didn’t seem surprising that a strange girl would show up at my door at midnight, go straight to the piano, and while babbling conundrums and bouncing on a big red ball, bang out “Fur Elise.” Fortunately, my husband is a sound sleeper.

Morgan continued, “We don’t have any music but we play anyway. Here are the high notes where the angels are in the spirit world with my aunt and grandma and grandpa, and here are the low notes where we are on earth. So where am I, in the spirit world or on earth?”

“I think you have one foot in each right now, Morgan,” I said. “Come on out to the kitchen and I’ll make you a cup of tea.”

I boiled the water for tea, thinking back to what Morgan had said on the porch about having three people inside her, wondering
if they were the three deceased relatives she had just mentioned.

I thought of three members of my family who have passed—my grandmother, mother and baby sister—whom I have called upon to guide and protect me. I remembered something David had told me about manic episodes—that a significant number have a spiritual component, but psychiatrists have no idea why.

I gave Morgan the tea. She then left the kitchen, entered the hallway, and climbed the stairs. I followed. She entered my son’s room, which hadn’t changed since he left for college. Seeing the computer, she said, “I am in my office. I love my office. Except this office is very messy” (an understatement). “But here is a fan” (she picked up a red Chinese fan, unfolded it, then found a tiny silver ring among the debris on the dresser). “I will take this fan because I am a big fan, a fan of my office and I will take this ring because this is why I came, for the ring and the fan, the ring and the fan.”

She entered the bathroom, closed the door and used the toilet. After a few minutes I began to worry and knocked on the door. She opened it, holding her tea. She took my hand and put it on the bottom of the mug. “You see you have given me this tea and thank you so much. You put your hand on the bottom and I put mine on the top and then you put your other hand on the top and I put mine on the bottom and we are safe.” I don’t know why but at that moment I winked at her. She winked back, as if we both knew the same secret: there was much more than madness here.

I thought about waking David, but I loved sharing that sacred space and wanted to amble a bit longer in this mysterious realm before the path diverged to crisis, pathology, and treatment. Mutual experiences sometimes seemed like Rorschach tests—each of us perceiving the same thing, but with different interpretations. I thought Morgan’s visit was surely more than coincidence. Perhaps we’d tapped into a universal mind, or were like the singularity of quantum physics—where two distant particles move in the same manner, due to some force outside space and time. Perhaps I needed her as much as she needed me.

“Look in the mirror,” she said. I turned.

“Yes,” I said, “Yes, there is.”

I followed her downstairs. That broke the spell. I knew Morgan was in need of help and I had to act. I asked for her address and phone number, which she gave me. I asked if she lived with Tony, or if she had a roommate. She answered both questions at once, saying she didn’t know, but probably. I called the number. It was a recording: “Hi, it’s Morgan. I’m not home right now. Leave a message.” I called Tony. No one home. I left an urgent message.

“Morgan is in a confused state and needs you to come get her right away.” I left my cell phone number and my husband’s. I asked her if she had a friend I could call. She told me she had a friend named Teresa and gave me her number. I left the same message.

“Do your parents live here?” I asked.

She gave me the number of her father. No answer. Turned out he lived in Tahiti. What should I do? I asked myself. It was one o’clock in the morning. I decided to drive her home to the address she had given me. Abruptly, she handed me her purse with all her ID, credit cards, house keys and money, and said she was going to walk home, some five miles away. Out the door she went. I ran upstairs to wake my husband.
“David, there’s a young woman at the door who’s manic and lost her car. She just gave me her purse, and we’ve had some tea. She lives in Queen Anne and I’m going to drive her home.”

David sat bolt upright. As I ran down the stairs after Morgan, I heard him yell, “You’re what???”

Outside, Morgan was walking down the middle of the street writing backwards on all the misted windows of the parked cars. It was freezing and she had only a light jacket. I tried to coax her to come back and get in the car. Suddenly my cell phone rang. It was David.

“How are you?” he demanded. I told him I was out in front of the house, trying to get Morgan to come back.

“You are not in front of the house because I’m looking out the window, and I do not see you!”

“Okay I am walking back toward the house. I am now in front of the house, all right?”

And Morgan was down at the end of the block walking in circles in the middle of the intersection, blocking the path of a car loaded with drunken men. I had to get her quick.

Suddenly, David was there, running after me down the block, dressed in jeans, a flannel pajama top, running shoes, and an unzipped down jacket. He thrust a telephone at me.

“Who is it?” I asked.

“Some guy named Tony. He says he got the message. Now what’s going on?”

I grabbed the phone. “Oh, thank God, Tony, can you come and get her?” No, he couldn’t, because he happened to live in Wyoming, and he wasn’t the love of her life, he was a co-worker.

Tony said he’d been really concerned about Morgan, because she had been depressed due to a recent broken engagement.

I lured Morgan back by telling her Tony was on the phone. She talked briefly to Tony, telling him how much she loved him and that she was perfectly okay; she was on her way home. I asked to speak to Tony again. He said he would like us to call the authorities and have them take her to the emergency room.

“That would be Harborview Hospital,” I told him, “and my husband who is standing right here is the director of inpatient psychiatry at Harborview Hospital, so that really would be redundant because she would meet up with him eventually anyway. Instead she just coincidentally it seems skipped about four steps and came directly to our house. Why I don’t know, but this is what she did and here we are.” I said we would keep him posted and signed off. Meanwhile Morgan had met David.

“David looks concerned,” she said, “and very cold, he should have a hat, and there’s one right there in his pocket, so I will put it on his head.” She took his knit cap and pulled it all the way down over his face. David laughed, acknowledging her intended humor.

“You look cold, too, Morgan,” he said. “Would you like a warm coat?” Yes, she would, so David went inside to get her one. And then he did something so simple and kind and clear-thinking I knew all over again why I married him. He took Morgan’s purse, found her cell phone, opened her directory and found her mother’s number. It was a local one, and she was home.

It was about two-thirty in the morning when Morgan’s embarrassed and alarmed mother arrived. She found us all in front of the fire, Morgan wrapped in blankets, drinking tea.
escorted Morgan outside, where she waited in the car with her mother’s partner. We offered her mother tea, and David explained everything: that this was a manic episode, a condition based in the brain, that she’d be all right, that she should be in darkness until the mania passed, what medicine she should take to come down, and where to go for follow-up treatment. I offered the name of my therapist.

We walked out to the car. Meanwhile, Morgan had divulged to her mother’s partner that her car was on the beach in West Seattle. She had lost the keys, walked down to the nearest Starbucks, and met a guy who thought she said her home was in Ravenna. This young man, being a nice guy, drove eight miles north to drop her off at our neighborhood walking bridge, which she crossed to arrive at our house just on the other side. Morgan told her mother that the spirits of her aunt and grandparents guided her to us. Her mother said she was certain of it. We made plans to keep in touch, and waved good-bye.

The streets were quiet. Stillness had settled over all, lighter than air. I wanted to prolong the moment, wander down the block to the bridge Morgan had crossed, look down on the ravine gentled by the creek and trail beneath, and reach beyond the railing to touch the tops of the trees. David took my hand. For him, this chance encounter—a mere coincidence—was over.

“Come, my love, let’s get some sleep.”

We walked to the house. At the step, I turned back to look at the crescent moon, a curved slit in the plush velvet of sky. I told my husband I’d be up in a minute.

There on the porch, I drew in the scent of ripened harvest and dying leaves. My gaze fell on the pile of pumpkins nestled on the porch, soon to be hollowed and filled with light. Then I noticed the little stone statue Morgan said had caught her eye and drew her to our home, the one I’d placed there the summer before, a year after my mother died. It’s a sweet-faced monk, a Buddhist bodhisattva, sitting in a meditative pose, holding a swaddled baby in his arms. I fell in love with that statue not knowing at the time what I know now: his name is Jizo, protector of women and children, and of those traveling between worlds.
THE MYSTERY
Karyna Aslanova
I have named the shapes in clouds.  
It’s been years, but I’ve lain  
On my back thinking of words  
That might stick to the condensing  
And receding suspensions  
Like guessing at numbers  
In the Ishihara plates  
That might as well have been  
Rorschach test inkblots.  
I’ve made a haven  
Of what others see,  

Believed invisible  
Zigzags in uninterrupted  
Circles, learned briefly  
The difference between  
Cumulus and nimbus,  
Felt the grass on my calves  
Even after I stood.  
There can be both rain and a face  
In any serious cloud,  

I’ve seen them, I’ve named them.  
It’s easy, saying what we see,  

Believing it known wholly.  
It’s easy, forgetting  
What a cloud is called before  
It’s out of sight, easy,  
Seeing the wrong number  
In a corral of colored dots.  
What’s hard is trying to open  
The green door to a red Dodge,  
It looks like theft to passersby,  
Trying handles, face to glass  
Without a word for what I see.
The first fishing trip of the summer started traditionally, with a 5 a.m. upstairs, waking me from the bonus room sofa bed. I already had my clothes laid out and my shoes laced up. It would take me less than twenty minutes to make it downstairs and give my grandmother the “Hi/Bye” kiss that would send her two favorite men, her husband and only grandson, on their way for the day.

Any visit to my grandparents’ house was a chance to display the growth and development of the family namesake and add commentary, often uplifting, to the natural process. These country folk with a city boy for a grandson, who had all the makings of their upbringing’s traditions, provided a base that further provided safety and security. I had few examples of paternal leadership in my life, and Papa proved to be my most experienced kin on the subject. His humble upbringing crafted a remarkably composed human. How could a “plowboy” come to be so smooth? Plowboy. His personal nickname for himself. Of course that wasn’t the only
thing he’d come to drive: plows, tractors, mowers, cars, trucks, boats… He could get anything from point A to point B so easily. I pondered this while being hyper adamant about the organization of my hooks, lines, and sinkers.

As I ran into the garage, my stomach felt a shift in energy. It wasn’t hunger as I usually assumed right off the bat. This trip already felt a little different. It carried way more weight than the average fishing trip. Why, I couldn’t tell you. It had been nine months since the last one, which was the norm. We got the poles, the cooler for the fish, the cooler for the drinks, the cooler with the sandwiches and snacks; we’d get the bait when we reached Urbana; life vests were on the boat—everything was covered. I personally double-checked everything. I even figured out the triple loop thing to make sure nothing would fly off the back of the truck. Everything was accounted for. Why was I feeling the nerves?

“You ready?” said Papa, the country boy that I always wanted to be.

“Yessir! Ready to ride when you are.”

“Well that’s just it, I’m riding this time.”

He tossed me the keys to the big blue F150. I hate driving, and he knows it. Sure, I can drive a pickup, SUV, tractor, stick, auto, compact, smart, dumb, new or busted anything but I don’t like to. “Why is he doing this to me?” the butterflies screamed from my stomach as I made perfect contact with the keys. Damn these football hands of mine.

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He tossed me the keys to the big blue F150. I hate driving, and he knows it. Sure, I can drive a pickup, SUV, tractor, stick, auto, compact, smart, dumb, new or busted anything but I don’t like to. “Why is he doing this to me?” the butterflies screamed from my stomach as I made perfect contact with the keys. Damn these football hands of mine.

“You ready?” said Papa, the country boy that I always wanted to be.

“Yessir! Ready to ride when you are.”

“Well that’s just it, I’m riding this time.”

He tossed me the keys to the big blue F150. I hate driving, and he knows it. Sure, I can drive a pickup, SUV, tractor, stick, auto, compact, smart, dumb, new or busted anything but I don’t like to. “Why is he doing this to me?” the butterflies screamed from my stomach as I made perfect contact with the keys. Damn these football hands of mine.
As we headed down to Urbana, the initial thirty minutes were full of prayer. This was a drive I had taken, not to mention further, but I knew what was at the end this time, and it wasn’t just a bunch of water and sunlight. Feeling suffocated, I cracked the window, putting my elbow on the sill. Moments later I was raising my hand, catching air in my open palm—a gesture I had seen numerous times from a certain relaxed old man. I interrupted the moment by looking over to see if he noticed how well I was handling his massive truck. He hadn’t said anything or expressed any form of approval. He just continued to rock and sway to the saxophonic sounds coming from his long-coveted XM radio, he himself halfway out the window of the passenger’s side. Calm, cool, collected.

As we pulled up to the dock, we assumed our usual positions. He was the one to actually put the boat in the water, loosening it from the gate it had been attached to all the way down 95. My job was to make sure it didn’t float away, working it down the pier with a couple of ropes, tying them to the docks as we loaded the boat with our necessities. In the process, I remembered again what I was tasked with. I felt so much pride in doing well the first time, the feeling got ahead of me, and I missed the step between dock and boat, falling side-first into the shallow water. The two-second flashback of that moment threw me for a loop akin to vertigo. As I stabilized myself, I looked up and saw Papa’s face, both confused and entertained. God knows what I looked like as I feigned comedy trying to pull off a sense of ease while maintaining prior excitement. Eventually, we returned to normalcy, as he pulled out to the water and slowly glided through the “No Wake” markers occupied by nests of a variety of sea birds.

“I’ll get us to the first stop so we can see what we workin’ with today. Then you’ll take over. Watch me, now.”

He talked me through the functions of the throttle, all the different gauges that occupy a boat versus a land vehicle, and probably most importantly, steering. It seemed to have far less traction and control of handling than anything I had been behind before. Somehow, his directions caused me to drift off into a place of comfort, taking good mental notes while simultaneously zoning out to his tone of voice. I was brought back to reality by the sudden slowing of the motor. I recognized this spot, just past the dock where they shuck oysters. It was time to drop line for the first time.

“You get all of that? You’re gonna have to go for it in a little bit when we head for the red barn.”

I gave him a thumbs-up while thinking to myself, what the heck did he say? Don’t think about that right now. The moment I’ve been waiting for all school year has finally returned. I was all too excited to reach for the juiciest bloodworm I could find. Naturally, Papa did it in half the time I could. I swear he pre-baited. No, I can’t tell, never could, but it’s the only explanation I have for his being in the water seconds after we stop. Every. Single. Time. But he could have that round, I decided, because I’d pull in the first fish. My arrogance proved to be a consistent fault, though, as Papa began to reel in his pole just as I pulled mine over my shoulder to cast out.

The highly coveted double-header was more than a good luck charm. The person on each trip who pulled the first double-header, if any at all, was ordained by Poseidon himself to have the biggest
haul of the whole trip. Papa yanked his out of the water, crying out “Whoa!” and “Hold it, Howard, hold it!” for the slapstick effect. I knew fully well that there wasn’t a chance he’d lose this fight. Once he conquered, he held the two fish in front of me and asked if I could tell the difference. Yet another rush of anxiety. How was I supposed to tell the difference between slimy creatures? Easily. That’s how. Because this was far from my first trip. Why didn’t I remember this “Easy A” level question?

“Can you tell?” he asked, not realizing he’d be better off administering a Rorschach test than this simple question.

“No,” I replied sheepishly.

“This one has a spot under its fin, hence the name. This one is a small croaker. If you listen, you can tell why.”

How did I get to be this big of an idiot? If I couldn’t remember something I’ve known since age six, how could I drive us out further, to our prime spot, the red barn?

“I bet you won’t forget after today,” he said coyly.

Now what could that mean? He motioned for me to join him up on his side of the boat, conveniently placed behind the wheel. As he stood behind me, he lifted my hands to grip the steering wheel. He kept his hands on top of mine as he steered left to right violently, muttering something. Then left to right smoothly, muttering something else. Wait, what did he mutter? I need to know! This was my internal cry as I felt his hand on my hand on the throttle slowly begin to move forward.

“Head for the red barn” was the only thing I caught.

I felt the hands on top of mine move away. What is happening? We’re moving. I’m driving the boat. The “King of the World” feeling rushed over me. Saltwater splashed up against my face. I didn’t know where I was going, but I didn’t care. This was a dream fulfilled. The zigzag of waves created from my wake bowed to the bow as I ran right into them. Suddenly, his hands returned on top of mine. I had zoned out, but this brought me back quick. Uh oh. Is this too fast? What if we crash into a buoy? Or into a crab pot, and what if it gets tangled in a propeller? What if I hit a wave really hard and it knocks Papa off the boat? Can he swim? I’ve never seen him swim.

“Pull back! Stop!”

I yanked back on the throttle, jerking forward anything that wasn’t tied down. Finally, the water subsided. I couldn’t tell if the wetness on my palms was sweat or saltwater that had splashed onto the deck and wheel. Either way, I needed something cool on my face and buried myself into my hands. After a deep breath, I double-checked the stability of precarious circumstances, noticing a grandfather sitting on the side of the vessel, catching his own breath.

“Piece of cake,” I uttered with a half-smile. Papa returned with a chuckle. A simple chuckle that carried so much relieving weight. Deflated, I ran as fast as one could on an eight-foot speed boat from behind the control booth. He dropped the anchor and I went to bait my rod, hoping I’d accidentally stab myself as I wiggled a piece of squid on, giving myself tetanus, requiring the amputation of my primary pointer. I deserved it. My panic had ruined this trip. I’d waited all year for this moment just to let my insecurities get the best of me. Papa was counting on me to show that I could handle the boat. My dream was to handle the boat. I more than failed: I
“Do you know why we come to this spot?”

I shook my head. Not only had I no idea, but also I was tired of all things fishing by this point and didn’t even want to be in one of my favorite places in the world, on this boat with my granddad.

“The red barn is a safe haven. You’ve never been out here during a storm or bad weather, but if you’re out here fishing, you can pull up to any of their docks and go inside the barn until it blows over. The water gets really rough, so you need to get off it quick, but you don’t have to pack up and go home. It’ll pass. So the red barn is a place where you can rest up for a little bit. Get off the scary, troubled water. You need to find your red barn, son. Life has many things that can throw a person off their game, but you have to have something that you know will bring about peace and still waters.”

I hadn’t heard him speak quite like this before, but I knew the look he had when he said it. This was all directed right at me. The whole day. Tossing me the keys, switching up his breakfast choice, even the fish test. And per usual, he was right about so many moments. The anxiety that had followed me through the day melted as I realized not only was someone there along the way, but I had far more control than I thought, and if not, there’s always a chance to regroup.
GIMME THE LIGHT
Teresa Stern
You say it’s paisley, but I see faces when we sit at the table in early afternoon. They never speak, though some laugh, some are in tears. I do not tell you this, but stir the honey in my tea. You are more concerned with ants that crawl along the windowsill.

I ask what you see in the wall, like it’s some kind of Rorschach test. *Paisley,* you say, straight line like the ants. I draw a zigzag trail with the honey wand across the table to your fingertips.

The faces watch with interest. I meet your eyes and wonder that I ever thought you might be my haven. I hear you breathe. You do not lift your hand.
THE FOUR ELEMENTS VIII
Josh Stein
A DIFFERENT TEXTURE
Samantha Xiao Cody

The first time the hives bloomed across her skin, we were both speechless. She was horrified. I felt like I was seeing something rare and strange and beautiful, like a vibrant salamander, or St. Elmo’s fire.

What is happening, she whispered to the mirror.

She’d always had a peanut allergy, and eczema that sometimes set a small blaze on her eyelids and fingers. I’d always thought that it made her look like she was wearing a daring shade of eyeshadow, but she hated it. There had never been anything like this though, unfurling like a map of red upon her skin. Islands and continents spilled from the nape of her neck down her back and arms. The image was arresting.

She took a Benadryl with shaking fingers and as her skin faded to its usual color, we decided that some nut residue must have gotten into her food and that we must be more careful.

But the next day, the hives were back. I ran my hands up and down her skin, partly from affection and partly from curiosity, feeling the texture of it, the tough, scaly topography interrupted with soft and vulnerable inches. I traced my fingers through the patterns.

She threw her shampoo and body wash in the trash. Together, we researched coconut oil, apple cider vinegar, things that would make her feel clean. Her hair became a new texture, bigger, throwing itself upwards and outwards. She wrestled it into tight, wiry buns. She ran her hands through my long hair, wistfully.

Sorry if I smell, she whispered in the night.

You smell like you, I said, inhaling her.

She decided to cut out gluten. She said it in a small voice, as if trying to pretend she was not sad about these changes.

Hey, I said. I’ll do it with you.

Together we cooked rice, pots and pots of rice. Our apartment filled with the unassuming fragrance of it. It brought us both back to our childhoods with our Asian mothers, and we told each other stories of our youths with white grains stuck to our lips.

The red patterns spread across her chest. We stopped consuming dairy. We woke up to find her sheets covered in tiny flakes of her skin, her body renewing itself at incredible speed. She was disgusted, embarrassed for me to see this residue of her.

I love every part of you, I said.

This is not part of me anymore, she said, whipping the sheet so that the flakes flew and vanished into the air.
The day the hives spread to her face, she cried. I brushed the tears off her scaly red cheeks. She became a Rorschach test: some days I saw butterflies on her skin; other days I saw whispering people, or sleeping cats.

I am monstrous, she said. I was stunned at how wrong she was.

We cut out all oils, all sauces, red meats, nightshades, acidic fruit, soy, alcohol, caffeine, legumes. We sat together over steaming bowls of plain oatmeal in the morning, watching the steam curl and dance in the pale sunlight. She crunched on raw broccoli and carrots through the day. She kept a skin diary, writing down each food she ate, how her skin responded to each morsel, a continual conversation. She talked to her skin like it was a child, begging it to heal before we’d have to face the expense of doctors. I noted the shapes I saw haunting her body: dancing bunnies, shivering trees. She seemed doubly alive, containing multitudes of life. At a certain point, when I tried to kiss her deeply, press into her, she stiffened, telling me that she didn’t feel sexual desire those days.

It’s not you, she said, her face buried in the pillow. I just don’t feel like a sexual being anymore.

I teared up, but wasn’t sure if it was for myself, or for her.

Instead, our nights became this: her taking a Benadryl and me hovering over her, propped on an elbow, stroking her hair and her face, trying to put her to sleep. My fingers knew the tough terrain of her face well. Her body softened, slowly. Sometimes, a tear would slip out the side of her closed eye to pool in her ear, but I tried to catch it before it did.

As she slept, she scratched. It awakened me—that was how vicious the scratching was. I watched her claw at herself, paralyzed, before I tried to grab her wrists. I felt the power and fury in her, and realized that I couldn’t save her from this. I let go. Afterwards, when she scratched in her sleep, I simply laid awake, burning with guilt.

She touched my face often, with her small, leathery hand. Your skin is so soft, she would say. You are always so beautiful. I couldn’t tell if she said it with bitterness.

So are you, I said, and I couldn’t mean it enough to convince her.

I carefully used a sequence of five expensive Korean skin products every night. One day, she rounded on me: You still use those lotions, don’t you? she snapped. Have you ever stopped to think that I might be allergic to those? Have you stopped to consider that maybe you’re causing this?

I quietly dumped my skin products in the trash. My skin became a little bumpier, but otherwise, nothing changed.

She thought maybe dust was the cause. I returned one day to find the apartment completely empty. Our bed, all of our furniture, was gone. She had been scrubbing everything down. The patterns on her skin were flushed, pink cirrus clouds floating over her collarbone, and her big, stiff hair was flying about her head. We slept that night holding one another on the shining wooden floor.

For her birthday, I got her an aroma diffuser. I figured that if one of her sensory experiences was ruined, then she should be able
to enjoy another, at least. The diffuser was also a humidifier. Her skin was always becoming parched and forming little cracks, like mud in a drought. I set up the diffuser. It glowed softly with golden light and exhaled a little ghost of steam smelling like eucalyptus, sweet orange, and bergamot. She sat before it, her eyes closed. The steam softly brushed her face before tumbling into the air.

I love it, she said.

That night, we sat cross-legged on the floor, in the light of the aroma diffuser, eating rice with seaweed sprinkled on top. We even laughed a little, about something.

She started going to doctors. None of them had any idea what was going on. They proposed different possibilities: contact dermatitis, some unknown auto-immune disorder. Some of them were bullshitters, pretending they knew, giving her creams and medications that enraged her skin further. She turned to alternative medicine, going down the street to the Chinese acupuncture clinic to buy a tea that looked and smelled like wet earth. It could calm the hives, but they wouldn’t go away. She got in a shouting fight with a highly recommended allergist who mocked her for turning to “quack medicine.” She told me she couldn’t trust Western doctors anymore. She showed me websites from the Netherlands talking about autoimmune disorders that weren’t recognized in the United States. Our mouths poured acronyms: HIT, FODMAP. We took endless notes on her food, her contact with anything in the world, until we narrowed in on viable culprits. But nothing was more terrible than when she thought she had found the root of the issue, that she was cured, and the next day, or a week later, the hives were flaring full force again. Rosy storms brewing down her arms and legs. Those false starts, a harsh zigzag of feeling that I couldn’t quite keep up with. Those days, she became paralyzed with frustration. She laid upon the floor, staring up at nothing. I tried to do silly little dances to make her smile, but they didn’t work.

She hardly ever left the apartment. I tried to entice her with walks, sunny parks, interesting films, bookstores.

Why are you letting this imprison you? I said, in one of my more selfish and frustrated moments.

You don’t understand, she said. This is on my face. In this world, that means that this is all of who I am now. This is what people look at, how they see me. The girl with the red patches.

One day, she was invited to play a small concert. Before the era of the Skin, she performed regularly, a musician who dazzled and mesmerized. She resisted for a while. But I think the idea of performing again, of being admired for creating something of beauty, tempted her. I came home to find her standing at the window in a glittering sleeveless gown. (The gown was also from before the era of the Skin—everything she wore now was as dark and as skin-covering as she could manage.) Her bare arms and shoulders looked like they were painted with roses. I stood in the doorway with my breath held. She turned and saw me. For a moment, we just looked at one another across the room, and the moment felt enormous, like a filled balloon.

Then she said, Thank goodness you’re home. I need you to put the concealer on my back and shoulders.
Do you really need it? I said.
Yes? she said, impatiently, as if irritated I would even ask. She held the concealer out to me. She stood looking out the window as I painted her over, hiding everything.

I sometimes stayed out a little later at parties, laughing about stupid things with other people, even though I knew she was lying there on the floor, twisted about herself, scratching, cursing. Sometimes, I met someone who pulled me towards them, across rooms and conversations, someone with a smile that hid a whole future, someone I could almost imagine touching, falling into. I enjoyed their smiles for an hour, sometimes more, before feeling the horrible guilt that came with forgetting, then remembering, her. Perhaps the only attractive thing about them was that they smiled at all, that we had something to talk about other than skin, that there were things we could say that were meaningless, stupid, their only purpose to create laughter. Sometimes, our home felt like a pit of sand, something we were sinking into, the walls crumbling as we tried to scrabble out. It was like I could not bear to return, re-shoulder that heaviness of hers. I realized how unfair this was, that I could take it off and leave. But because I could, I did.

I bought more aroma diffusers until we were living among a little forest of glowing orbs, sleeping in a dewy haven of essential oils.
One night, she grabbed ahold of me. I refused to hope, doubtful. But then:
I want you, she whispered.

We made love among the aroma diffusers, our limbs thumping and bruising gently against the hard floor, swirling through the steam.

She got approved to try a new drug. She took the train to New York to go through the trial. She covered herself with a turtleneck, gloves, and long black pants, though it was summertime. I took her to the train station and watched her sitting at the train window like a little shadow, speeding away from me. I heard very little from her for a while, and pretended that I was fine with it. Finally, she called me. Over the phone, she was excited, choked up.
It works, she said. It really works. God, finally, something works.
What is the drug? I asked. Did they figure out what was causing all this? I wanted all the details. I wanted all of her life, her new joy.
I’m not totally sure about the details of the drug, she said, and no, they didn’t actually figure out the cause. But it works. I’m myself again.
When she returned, I touched her face. It was amazingly soft. No more patterns and creatures danced across her body. My fingers, used to a different texture, slipped off her skin.

At first, we remained cautious, continuing to eat oatmeal and rice and raw vegetables and showering with apple cider vinegar, still sleeping on the floor with the aroma diffusers. It wasn’t so hard anymore to live so extremely. We’d adapted. But she burst forth into the world. She went to parties, got together with friends.
she’d hidden from for months. She smiled. She ran around. She did cartwheels. With others, she threw back her head and bellowed laughter. I noticed that when we were alone, we were mostly silent, smiles failing to stick long to our faces. I tried to pretend that it was the sweet, innocent silence of people who knew and loved one another, but it felt instead like a hollowness. Over the past few months, we’d cleared out all of our conversations to make space for her skin, the food we were eating, the small changes in our environments and lives that could be triggering the inexplicable spread of roses and continents and butterflies across her skin. Now that there was no need to talk about these things, our conversations remained empty, cleared out, like a house put up for sale. I realized I had not talked about myself, my thoughts, my feelings, in months, and I no longer knew how. Or perhaps I still felt as if I didn’t have the right. It felt as if the heaviness we had carried this whole time, we couldn’t seem to put down, to throw away.

She began to spend more time with other people than she did with me. I was unsure whether she was drawn to them because they never knew her suffering, and would never pity her for it, never know the patterns waiting like ghosts beneath her skin; they would allow her to be more than her illness. Or if it was because now that she didn’t need me to hold her through the darkness, I seemed purposeless, my only abilities to wipe away tears and pretend that things are going to be fine, abilities that were now obsolete.

One day, she came back from a party, clearly drunk.

What are you doing? I asked, sitting and staring as she stumbled to the window. Were you drinking? Why would you risk it?

Oh come on, she said. It’s over. I don’t have to live this way anymore. I’m cured. I can finally enjoy my life now.

She turned around and we stared at one another. We both realized she had said the truth without meaning to.

I let her have the apartment and all the aroma diffusers. I wondered if she had brought back the bed, all the furniture. I wondered who, now, was running their hands across the smooth, featureless planes of her body, if she hid her chapter of suffering from them, or allowed them to visit it, a tragic past that now served to add interest to her present. I wondered if she kept all the diffusers, or, if like me, the smell of eucalyptus, sweet orange and bergamot, the soft bubbling whispers of steam, filled her with a swelling muddle of desire and heartbreak and exhaustion. I tried having diffusers in my new apartment, but found myself wandering through doorways after wafts of scent, expecting to see her sitting cross-legged on the floor, only to have the scent escape into the emptiness of the room. It was too much hope, too much expectation—I gave the diffusers away to a friend.

That first night I was on my own, I bought the things I hadn’t eaten in months: I got a hamburger and a bag of chips and an orange and a bottle of beer and booked myself a hotel room. I fell asleep almost instantly on the bed, unused to such softness, with everything unopened and scattered around me.

There was one day in the thick of the era of the Skin where we’d decided to try and act normal. She’d wrapped herself up in
dark clothing and we went together to a thrift store, something she’d always loved to do, before the era of the Skin. Among old clothes, we wheezed dust. It made me sleepy and ignited her hives. She bought more black turtlenecks. We walked in silence to the river with our purchases, where the sunlight stamped itself on large patches of long grass and tumbled in the water as many blinding petals. We sat at a moldering picnic table, reclaimed by moss, set our things down. We were both numb with exhaustion, an inexplicable exhaustion at odds with the time of day, the intensity of the beauty around us, the otherwise pleasant activities we’d planned. We closed our eyes and fell asleep without deciding to, with our arms folded, heads plopped backwards onto the table, feet pointed towards the glittering river.

Anyone walking by might have smiled to see us, two young women, perhaps sisters or friends, napping so openly on such a beautiful day, in such a beautiful place. They might have seen it as something tender, sweet, an image of peace and safety. And when I woke up and looked down at her, red sheep and birds gamboling across her still and defeated body, a body she wanted desperately to escape, I blinked away tears and turned to the river, trying to pretend for those slow, sunny moments while she was still asleep, that she would wake and rub her eyes and laugh at herself for drifting off, that afterwards we would resume a conversation that had stopped long ago, resume our love full of light and laughter, that everything was just fine.
WALT WHITMAN AT 80S PROM
Wendy Cannella

A new world--a liquid world--rushes like a torrent through you.
—from a music review by Walt Whitman, 1880s

Dressed in a track suit towering like a winter oak as if he doesn’t know
Beat It Like a Virgin Fight for your Right to Party
something elemental arriving from the past, swelling like the high notes

of Italian opera—which at first he hated, then climbed into bed with—and so America opened like a door a gate a flooded haven

a new liquid world woman in a black lace tutu man in white framed glasses

and white shoes a pool of air between them electric river of their fluid moves

hot haloes under the purple lights unlidded eyes of angels blazing down
And as the women and men jog in place do the shopping cart

spin on their shoulders on the cardboard boxes the decorations were shipped in

Whitman begins stomping a rhythm looks like he might lift out his arms
drag someone down with him into the mud of the dance floor
The others circle around him as he slides into the center:
here come death-metal blondes wearing gray lipstick

men with gold chains women in taffeta gowns rows of neon
zigzagging Swatches Benetton stripes ringing him in luminous waves—
here come the black turtlenecks and pink tulle whirlpool of blue wigs

and leather leggings here come the glittery boots and fish tank platforms

the rivers of merchandise glowing cummerbunds toxic sludge
here come the plastic factories and bright bangle bracelets

the many-eyed fish born blind and the soprano’s last note

lifting up from the root here comes the moog the synth
piles of old keyboards endless vocal baubles batteries dripping mercury
dog whelk dripping slime I would like to say Walt Whitman

does the microwave the worm the robot But he doesn’t

he stands tall runs a hand through his hair starts a slow thrust of the hips

wholly American holy this form of resistance this Rorschach
test: do you see a sea cucumber waving slowly at the bottom

of the warming Gulf do you take a trip to Target for undershirts and gum
do you sing a song of yourself It’s Tricky Push It I Just Can’t Get Enough
“WATCH out,” my mother warned. “There’s a big praying mantis by the door.”

Lugging a heavy jug of laundry detergent into the laundromat, I followed my mother as she sidestepped something in the doorway. Heeding her words, I traced her quick zigzag of a route, and it wasn’t until I cleared the path that I looked behind me to see the cause of her warning: a praying mantis as big as my fist stood motionless in the entrance.

Even though I grew up in a small Pennsylvania town, my summer days spent outside with wasps that stung and mosquitoes that bit me until I scratched myself raw, I had never seen a praying mantis in the wild. To me, the praying mantis was one of the mysterious insects found only in my *Golden Field Guides* or a stray issue of *Ranger Rick*. Unlike the pretty ladybug or the fuzzy bumblebee, there was nothing really cute about the mantis. It looked like a monster with its triangular head, huge leering eyes,
and front legs crossed in some kind of hideous prayer.

But the most fascinating fact I learned about the praying mantis was that the female often ate the male after breeding.

“It bites his head clean off,” my brother once told me, smirking while making a slicing motion across his neck.

My mother winced. “Don’t be so graphic with her,” she scolded. Then, in an effort to soften my brother’s horror stories, she explained that the praying mantis was actually helpful. “It eats all the bad bugs that get into your father’s garden.”

Now my mother made several trips back to the car to collect more baskets of clothes, each time dodging the insect that seemed oblivious to her presence. As I started to sort the laundry, I watched the mantis out of the corner of my eye. I knew that a busy walkway of a public laundromat was not going to be a safe haven for any kind of creature. Yes, my mother and I were the only ones in the building at the moment, but that was sure to change, as it was a Saturday morning, a prime time for working parents without laundry facilities to get caught up on their wash. The next tired mother who walked through the doors would not be so careful.

Once my mother delivered the last basket of dirty clothes, she took over the sorting duties, tossing white clothing into one washing machine and dark clothes into another. I wandered back to the doorway and kneeled down to get a closer look at the insect.

The praying mantis looked just like all the pictures I had ever seen. I watched as its triangle head turned towards me, cocked to the side like a curious dog. Its huge eyes stared, but I didn’t think it was really looking at me. Its legs bent in front. One antenna twitched. It must have decided I was too big for its prey, because it turned away, seemingly dismissing me as something incredibly insignificant.

This was the insect which, in its own world, terrorized its kingdom. After all, sporting the same shade of green as a lush garden, it could hide in leaves and plants, waiting to ambush smaller insects. Here, however, in a gray laundromat thick with steam and the smell of soap, it didn’t seem to realize its vulnerability.

I was only seven, but in the last few months, I had started to understand vulnerability and the importance of power. There was power in a good job. There was power in a paycheck. There was power in strong family bonds and friendships.

But I had also started to realize the strain of life when power slowly drained away. Around me, husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers, and cousins were losing their factory jobs—good paying jobs that were once considered guaranteed for life. Some were forced to leave the area for other work. The year before, my best friend had moved away because her stepfather, one of many who had lost his job, had found work elsewhere.

Still, other men stayed. With no work, they were forced to survive in environments including their own homes that suddenly seemed strange to them. “Getting under their wives’ feet,” I heard my mother joke, but looking worried as though she wondered if we were going to be in a similar situation soon. My father was still employed, but we had lived through strikes and periods of mandatory layoffs. In general, even with a steady paycheck, there never seemed to be enough money to go around. In fact, we were at the laundromat because we didn’t have funds for the new parts of a
broken washing machine.

I balanced on one foot and tried to nudge the insect out of the way with the side of my other foot, but the mantis didn’t move. I grabbed a tattered Good Housekeeping magazine from one of the tables. I knelt down so I was again at eye level with the insect. Gently, I tried to push one of the pages underneath its legs.

But the mantis wouldn’t budge.

I sat there, holding my breath, fascinated. Yes, I was face to face with a monster of the insect world, in awe over its stubbornness. It was out of place, but determined to stay.

I wondered if a similar type of stubbornness would strengthen my family and community in the days ahead. But I also wondered if stubbornness was enough. Stubbornness, after all, was an important trait to have when working towards getting a perfect score on a spelling test or learning to ride a bike. It was what my father called bullheaded persistence. But even at my young age, I knew that there was more to both survival and success than being headstrong.

“Honey, please get off that dirty floor,” my mother said. She had started the laundry and had settled down in the corner of the laundromat. She shifted slightly in one of the plastic chairs while digging through her purse. “Here, I have some change. Buy some candy.” She motioned towards the vending machine in the corner.

I listened, as candy was a rare treat in our home. Distracted by the choices, I forgot the mantis in the doorway. I remained distracted as a Bugs Bunny cartoon started on the overhead television. With no big brothers around to gain control over what we were going to watch, I wanted to see as many cartoons as I could. Coupled with the chocolate, this usually tiresome trip to the laundromat suddenly seemed worth it.

But then the washers stopped their ragged jumble and were still. My mother got up to throw the wet clothes into dryers, and I remembered the mantis. I wandered back over to the doorway.

The powerful insect had been carelessly kicked aside and smashed into the floor mat. Legs and its triangle head were still identifiable, and a bit of wing stuck up like a stray hair, but otherwise what was left looked like a messy inkblot of a Rorschach test.

I looked around the laundromat. In the forty minutes since I started watching cartoons, the building had filled. A mother with a toddler hanging onto her leg was sorting laundry. A boy, who looked like he was about my age, was wheeling his little sister around in one of the carts. And in the corner, a young man who looked like the same teenager who pumped our gas at the corner station was feeding dollar bills into the change machine. It was hard to tell who was the culprit of the deed.

Feeling uneasy, I turned back to what was left of the praying mantis. What I saw was evidence that something so mighty in one place could so easily in another world be flattened, whether from wheels of a wobbly laundry cart or a single step of a steel-toed boot.
COURT SQUARE

Joel Rhymer
At five he calls smokestacks
Smile because he’s not wrong, exactly
Together give name to shifting shapes
that snake zigzag
from tall brick-tunnel wombs
Try not to think of a Rorschach Test, to resist
analyzing
and
and
Just be there with him
He calls the pink flesh of his mouth
that sprouts new teeth like barnacles
Don’t correct him—
I like the way it sounds and the world will tell him he’s wrong
enough without adding to the chorus
He terms the part of him that wants to make good choices his
and the part that wants to do wrong his
ever in competition
Not wrong about that either
Familiar are the ways a body can betray
He havens beneath box springs in the

cloud machines
iguana
zombie, but only its arm
grenade
gungs
mind team
body team
smalldarkclose
He needs to keep from breaking everything
The first time he says I want to kill myself is the worst—never good but never as bad again
He asks if a Medusa costume at the party store is a Statue of Liberty with Snakes on Her Head costume
Explain the myth
He wonders how could anyone know what she looked like
and share the knowledge, transformed to statues of themselves
Some things are just known like which words to use and when like looking others in the eye like a bedsheets is not a parachute
when you use your small smooth strong hands to ram open your bedroom window to escape to spite the locked door Sometimes it's not knowing that turns you to stone
Hugh Anderson lives on Vancouver Island in the unceded territory of the Snaw-naw-as people. He has grandchildren and thus the world gives him both dreams and nightmares. Recent publications can be found in Grain, Vallum, Right Hand Pointing, The Willawaw Journal, Praxis Magazine Online, Panoplyzine, and 3Elements Review. He has one Pushcart Prize nomination.

Karyna Aslanova is a Kyiv-born Ukrainian multimedia artist, director, and photographer. Although photography is her principal medium, Karyna also uses video, painting and illustration, and poetry to further her exploration into a multitude of subjects. Karyna describes her photography as atmospheric, moody, emotional, explorative, and conceptual.

Emma Anna was born in Australia and now lives and works in Barranquilla, Colombia. An artist, curator, and writer, her practice is focused on work in the public realm—from city streets to the highways and intersections of the Internet. A Masters of Art in Public Space, her work manifests as sculpture, critique, collage, and artist books.

Micki Blenkush lives in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and works as a social worker. She was selected as a 2017-2018 fellow in poetry for the Loft Literary Center’s Mentor Series program and was a 2015 recipient of an Emerging Artist Grant awarded by the Central Minnesota Arts Board. Her book, Now We Will Speak in Flowers, is forthcoming with Blue Light Press, summer of 2020. Micki’s writing has recently appeared in Josephine Quarterly, The McNeese Review, Typishly, Cagibi, and Crab Creek Review.

Brandon Rashad Butts is a writer, director, and producer based in the DMV area. His full-length plays Personal Protection and Reclamation have received readings at Baltimore Center Stage. His short play Between Us was produced at Manhattan Repertory Theatre. He is co-creator of Vigilant, which received a workshop at Flying V Theatre in Washington, D.C. He’s had an excerpt of an editorial piece published with the Black Voices division of The Huffington Post. Brandon has served as a Manhattan Theatre Club Directing Fellow and an SDC Observer. He is based in the DMV and NYC areas.

Roger Camp is the author of three photography books, including the award-winning Butterflies in Flight (Thames & Hudson, 2002) and Heat, Charta (Milano, 2008). His work has appeared in numerous journals, including The New England Review, New York Quarterly, and the Vassar Review. His work is represented by the Robin Rice Gallery, NYC.
Wendy Cannella has poetry appearing or forthcoming in American Journal of Poetry, Balancing Act 2 (Littoral Books), Crab Creek Review (Poetry Prize Semi-Finalist 2019), Mid-American Review, Mom Egg Review, Painted Bride Quarterly, Salamander, Solstice, Rattle, and RHINO, among others. Her essay “Angels and Terrorists” is featured in The Room and the World: Essays on the Poet Stephen Dunn from Syracuse University Press. She co-edited the anthology Lunation from Senile Monk Press and served as co-chair for the Portsmouth Poet Laureate Project board of directors. Her manuscript Hey There, Purple Sailor was a recent semi-finalist for the University of Wisconsin Brittingham and Felix Pollak Prizes in Poetry. Cannella was named a Maine Literary Award Finalist in 2019 and lives in York Harbor, Maine.

Harvey Castro is a social documentarian based in Oakland, California. Or, said another way, his passion is documentary photography with a focus on social justice, recording both the good when justice is served and the inequity when it is not. That passion stems from his own history as a native of Nicaragua. Introduced to photography shortly after emigrating to the states, he quickly fell under its spell, empowered by the stories that small but powerful tool could help him tell.

Adrienne Christian is a poet, writer, and fine art photographer. Her work has appeared in CALYX, phoebe, Today’s Black Woman, Jolie, The Los Angeles Review as The Editor’s Choice, and dozens of other journals and magazines. She is the author of two poetry collections: 12023 Woodmont Avenue (Willow Books, 2013) and A Proper Lover (Main Street Rag, 2017). She is a fellow of both Cave Canem and Edna St. Vincent Millay Writing Residencies. In 2007, she won the University of Michigan’s Five Under Ten Young Alumni Award. In 2016, she was a finalist for the Rita Dove International Poetry Award. In 2018, she won the James Gaffney/Society of American Poets Outstanding Poetry Award. In 2019, she won the Marie Sandoz Prairies Schooner Short Story Award.

Samantha Xiao Cody is a queer, half-Chinese writer with degrees in Physics and Creative Writing from Princeton University. She currently lives in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where she teaches Math and Physics at a project-based-learning high school.

Kelly DuMar is a poet, playwright, and workshop facilitator from Boston. She’s the author of three poetry chapbooks: girl in tree bark (Nixes Mate, 2019), Tree of the Apple (Two of Cups Press), and All These Cures (Lit House Press). Her poems, prose, and photos are published in many literary journals, including Bellevue Literary Review, Tupelo Quarterly, Crab Fat, and Storm Cellar. Kelly serves on the Board of the International Women’s Writing Guild (IWWG).
Lara Egger, an Australian native, is a recipient of a fellowship from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and a two-time Pushcart nominee. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Ninth Letter, New Ohio Review, The Pinch, Washington Square Review, Grist, RHINO, Salt Hill,* and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from Warren Wilson College, and lives in Boston where she co-owns a Spanish tapas bar.

Rhonda Eikamp grew up in Texas and now lives in Germany. Her stories have appeared in *Lackington’s, Apparition Lit, Neon,* and *The Journal of Unlikely Observances,* among others. When not writing fiction, she works as a translator for a German law firm.

JKGray uses mediums of watercolor and archival ink to create eerie, botanical concepts. She depicts abstract and surreal themes which explore the beauty of the feminine and natural world along with dark, contrasting moods. Her work hones in on the importance of trauma recovery and self-expression, believing that everyone has a region of pain that demands exploration resulting in growth and connection.

Mary Crockett Hill is the author of *A Theory of Everything,* selected by Naomi Shihab Nye for the Autumn House Prize, and *If You Return Home with Food,* winner of the Bluestem Poetry Award. Her work has been featured in *Poetry Daily, Best of the Net,* and *American Poetry: The Next Generation.* In her other life as Mary Crockett, she writes fiction for children—most recently *How She Died, How I Lived* from Little Brown Books for Young Readers. Mary teaches creative writing at Roanoke College and edits *Roanoke Review.*

Ryota Matsumoto is an artist, designer, and urban planner. Born in Tokyo, he was raised in Hong Kong and Japan. He received a Master of Architecture from University of Pennsylvania in 2007 after studying at Architectural Association in London and Mackintosh School of Architecture, Glasgow School of Art in the early 90s. His art and built work are featured in numerous publications and exhibitions internationally.

Victoria Millard is a resident of Seattle who writes essays, humor, and memoir. She has published in *Narratively, Halfway Down the Stairs, Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine,* and others.

Trevor Moffa is a poet and former coal miner, park ranger, and bookseller from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Gwendolyn Pryor is a San Francisco based artist who uses drones to capture new perspectives. She likes to make the viewer reconsider familiar landscapes by showing them an aerial and abstracted perspective. She is passionate about nature preservation and hopes her art will inspire viewers to protect the environment.

Joel Rhymer is a retired high school teacher and administrator. Although he has lived in rural New England for over 25 years, his photography draws him to urban areas around the world. “Court Square 6” is part of a series of photos he has made over the years attempting to capture the loneliness and isolation of commuters in crowded places. He calls the series “Between Seeing and Knowing” to acknowledge that moment which occurs in the brain between the observation of a scene and understanding what is going on.
Steph Sorensen is a feminist writer mom living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her writing has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Barrelhouse*, *Mississippi Review*, and *Matchbook*.

Josh Stein is a lifelong multi-mode creative artist, musician, writer, teacher, and adult beverage maker. He has formal training in calligraphy, graphic design, and color work; more than two decades as a researcher, teacher, and writer in cultural analysis in the vein of the Birmingham and Frankfurt Schools; and a decade and a half as a commercial artist and designer for multiple winery clients. He brings his influences of Pop art, Tattoo flash and lining techniques, and Abstract Surrealism and Expressionism to the extreme edge where graphic design and calligraphy meet the Platonic theory of forms. The resulting metallic inks and acrylics on canvas delight and perplex, moving between the worlds of solidity and abstraction.

Teresa Stern is a northwest artist, painter, and eco-activist. She runs The Art of Sustainability, an eco-art & action education project. Teresa studied art and art history as part of architectural studies at the University of Illinois and University of Arizona, and Pratt and Gage Art Schools in Seattle. Through her architectural career she focused on sustainability, and as an artist she continues with a focus on the human link to nature. Teresa’s paintings are primarily stylized representational oil on canvas or wood panel. Recent work uses limited palettes to explore the “essence” of light in the landscape.

James Reade Venable is a New Yorker currently living in Belgium. He is an actor, poet, and photographer.

Karen J. Weyant has poems and essays in *The Briar Cliff Review*, *Chautauqua*, *cream city review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Fourth River*, *Harpur Palate*, *Lake Effect*, *Poetry East*, *Punctuate*, *Spillway*, *Stoneboat*, *Storm Cellar*, *Waccamaw*, and *Whiskey Island*. She teaches at Jamestown Community College in Jamestown, New York. When she is not teaching, she explores the rural Rust Belt of northern Pennsylvania and western New York.
Submission due dates are November 30, February 28, May 31, and August 31, for issues forthcoming February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1, respectively, unless otherwise noted on our website.

There is no minimum word count, but please keep your fiction and nonfiction submissions under 3,500 words. Poems must be under two typed pages.

It is equally important that all three elements given for the specific submission period be included within your story or poem. Artists and photographers are only required to represent one element.

Visit www.3ElementsReview.com for more info.
Erin Evans received her MFA in Poetry from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her work was nominated for a 2018 AWP Intro Journals Award, and she has attended the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference. An avid photographer, she works and lives in Vermont with her husband and their 2-year-old son.

Christian Anton Gerard is a woodworker, a poetry editor at 3Elements Literary Review, and the author of Holdfast (C&R Press) and Wilmot Here, Collect for Stella (WordTech). He’s received Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference scholarships, the Iron Horse Literary Review’s Discovered Voices Award, and he was a 2017 Best of the Net finalist. His poems, reviews, and interviews appear in magazines such as, The Rumpus, Post Road, The Adroit Journal, Diode, Orion, and Smartish Pace. Gerard is also an associate professor in the creative writing program at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith.

Lisa Buckton grew up along the Hudson River and holds an MFA in Writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Hayden’s Ferry Review, The Writer’s Chronicle, Grist Journal, and other journals. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and received an honorable mention in the 2018 AWP Intro Journals Project. She lives in Vermont, where she works as a librarian.

Sionnain Buckley is a writer and visual artist based in Boston. Her work has appeared in Hobart, Winter Tangerine, Wigleaf, Strange Horizons, CutBank, Autostraddle, and others. Her flash has been nominated for Best of the Net, Best Small Fictions, and Best Microfiction, and won first place in Exposition Review’s Flash 405 contest. This fall, she will begin her MFA in fiction at The Ohio State University.

Tamar Jacobs is a writer and editor based in Philadelphia. Her short stories have appeared in Glimmer Train Stories, Hayden’s Ferry Review, the Louisville Review, New Ohio Review, Grist, and other publications. Her flash fiction appears and is forthcoming on the Akashic Books website, and her essays appear and are forthcoming with New York Spirit. She placed second in a Glimmer Train Stories “Short Story Award for New Writers” contest. She holds an MFA from University of Maryland, where she was awarded the Katherine Anne Porter Fiction Prize.
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