

**THE
RACKET | 35**

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THE RACKET

Hi.

How is everyone?

Ever since I was able to, I've had my cell phone set to get a push notification every time the New York Times deems something "breaking news." Increasingly over the last four years, the specific buzz that announces an important bit of news has brought with it an equally specific knot of dread in my stomach. Every tiny rumble bringing with an infinitely vast potential for previously unknown horrors.

And now, with Donald J. Trump, just another horrible human being lumbering off into the sunset of obscurity (I hope), the buzzing has steadily quieted and with it the gnawing sense of uncontrollable anxiety.

Where I thought this would be an unequivocally positive feeling, the weights of the Trump Era falling from my shoulders would leave me buoyant, ecstatic, filled with new energy (as much as any of this can exist in a pandemic). As it turns out with Trump no longer stalking my mental landscapes my personal atmosphere leans almost entirely towards wariness.

Even if I do think Joe Biden—his soothing blandness, his easily digestible standard bureaucratic micro-actions—are some approximation of what a country brought as low as the United States of America has been brought needs right now, I'm struggling to place my trust in the institution of government anymore. Biden will certainly do more and better than our former president if only because the last guy did so little, left so many things for him to fix.

When those are gone—when the pandemic has been beaten down, when the unemployment rate has fallen, when our relationships with our allies have been repaired—our country is still going to be in the terrible spot so many of us just realized we've always been in. And when we do get back there—wherever or whatever "there" is now—I am struggling to think our government has the wherewithal to fix the actual problems tearing our country apart.

We can look at America as a sick patient in need of the very best the medical establishment can offer, but in doing so we ignore the real problem: the establishment itself is broken. We should all be glowing that a tumor like Trump has finally been removed, but I'm still struggling to believe that regardless of who's at the helm, anything really changes.

The day after Inauguration Day, police teargassed protestors in Portland, Oregon. A part of me (that overly privileged kid who grew up in the suburbs and has barely seen a glimpse of struggle in his life) thought, "C'mon guys, can we have one day of peace?"

The answer is no, no we as a country can not. Because the problems that existed before Trump and became all the more apparent during Trump haven't gone away because Trump did. They've always been here and now, more than ever they need to be addressed across the very large board.

Don't get me wrong, Biden is a move in the right direction, but aside from Trump himself, nearly everything was.

We'll get past this moment in history, we will. I'm just worried once we're past it, we won't have it in us to go any further.

'Till next time.

-N

The Racket stands against
police brutality, racism and violence
perpetuated towards BIPOC
communities in all forms.

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I think you call it a "glimmer."

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We aren't in this for the money.

That said: there are costs in doing what we do.

Any help with those costs (and with the costs of future endeavors) would be greatly appreciated.

If not, we get it and we still appreciate you.

If so, we're working on some special rewards. And we know you love special rewards.

THANK YOU TO THESE FOLKS

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THE RACKET

35



EARTH'S REBAR
BRETT FLANIGAN
2019

when she died

LILIAN CAYLEE

when she died, i might have been eating churros out of a white paper bag licking the cinnamon
sugar crumbs from my fingers and the corners of my cherry mouth, she called it
or i might have been sitting in front of our family computer listening to a song about
nightswimming or stolen hearts and aching to feel these things too

the thing is, i don't know.

god forbid anything interrupt the forward march of My Bright Future
god forbid anything drown out my father's retelling of our pilgrimage, the seeds of our origin
story as American as the megaphone solicitations of Mexico City's junk vendors
"estufas, lavadoras, microndas..." (stoves, washing machines, microwaves)

when she died, she might have lay under a thin sheet in an overrun hospital sweating or shivering
browbeaten by a son with the gambling and the alcohol and the women or aching for the
daughter who left in an airplane one spring morning and never looked back

the thing is, i'll never know.

god forbid anything tip fortune's scales against my favor, my mother's tut-tut while knocking on
our antique table, a penny glinting-heads-up in the crack of a sidewalk, two eagles tearing each
other apart midair

god forbid anything poison the fruit borne of generations nested in a Russian
doll of dreams

when she died, she might have reminded herself that to live is to suffer or asked herself, “is this what a life is?,” as my grandfather with the crooked back and the disintegrating nerve cells held her burning forehead and her cold hand

spent four forgotten years with her

before i knew my mother

before i knew what it was to have a mother

but the thing is, i was finally ready for harvest.



Vista Chino

EMIL DEANDREIS

On the outskirts of town, just before the palm trees and azaleas are behind him, and all that is left in front of him are mountains the color of coarse mustard, there is an autoshop. Craig pulls in, where a couple of mechanics stand idly, arms folded in some clumsy morning concern.

“We’ll try to get you fixed before the rush,” says Olly, the head mechanic with a red cursive name tag.

All these cars, needing their therapies. Craig leaves his keys on his seat, takes his book to a solitary chair beneath an overhang. He finds the book crisp and puncturing, its characters having thoughts that embarrass him with their accuracy. He’ll recommend it afterward, mostly so people know he read it. As the air warms, he finds himself distracted by opinions of Victor, a friend who’s also on this vacation, staying in their rental house. Victor, who toothbrushes the rims of his car in the driveway and is oblivious to his shitty music taste when it’s his turn on the Jambox. How could someone so self-aware play songs heard in the aisles of Raley’s? Craig, on the other hand, drives an ‘03 Corolla with its fuel door permanently pried open. He hardly notices. His music, however, he pays close attention to, never allowing anything corny on his watch. One’s music taste, he feels, is an extension of themselves, a lens into their soul, their worth. Another thing: Victor lets leftovers rot in the fridge while Craig will eat souring food to prevent waste. Craig feels reasonably assured that between the two of them, he is the one of more substance. He closes his book having not read a sentence and looks up at the gas pump nearest him. Picking through trash is a sun-jerkied man, whose choice of denim in this

desert heat is an indicator of how far gone he is. Then Craig feels ashamed for thinking that this man, browsing a Carl's Jr. carcass on Vista Chino Blvd, has choice in any matter. Craig uncrosses his legs. He places his book beneath the seat then walks over to him and offers the only cash he's got. The man takes it coldly, as if his arrangement with the world is still new and raw. Soon he has moved on from Craig, from the moment altogether, to a different trash. Craig watches, and somewhere in his sternum is the warm ache of disappointment. Eventually his Corolla's rear lights emerge as it rolls out of the garage, its oil freshly changed.

In the shop, Craig inserts his credit card and waits for its chip to be read, and in that stillness, imagines an alternate sequence moments ago, one in which the trash-eater was struck by the reversing Corolla and left writhing with a cracked hip. The vacation ends days later, and Craig is hours into his drive home when it occurs to him that he must have passed the autoshop leaving town.



TORN AND FRAYED
HOLLY DOWNING
2018

Where Home Is

CARSON PYTELL

There's no such displeasure
as waking up anywhere but home,
yet no greater liberty than
deciding just where that will be.

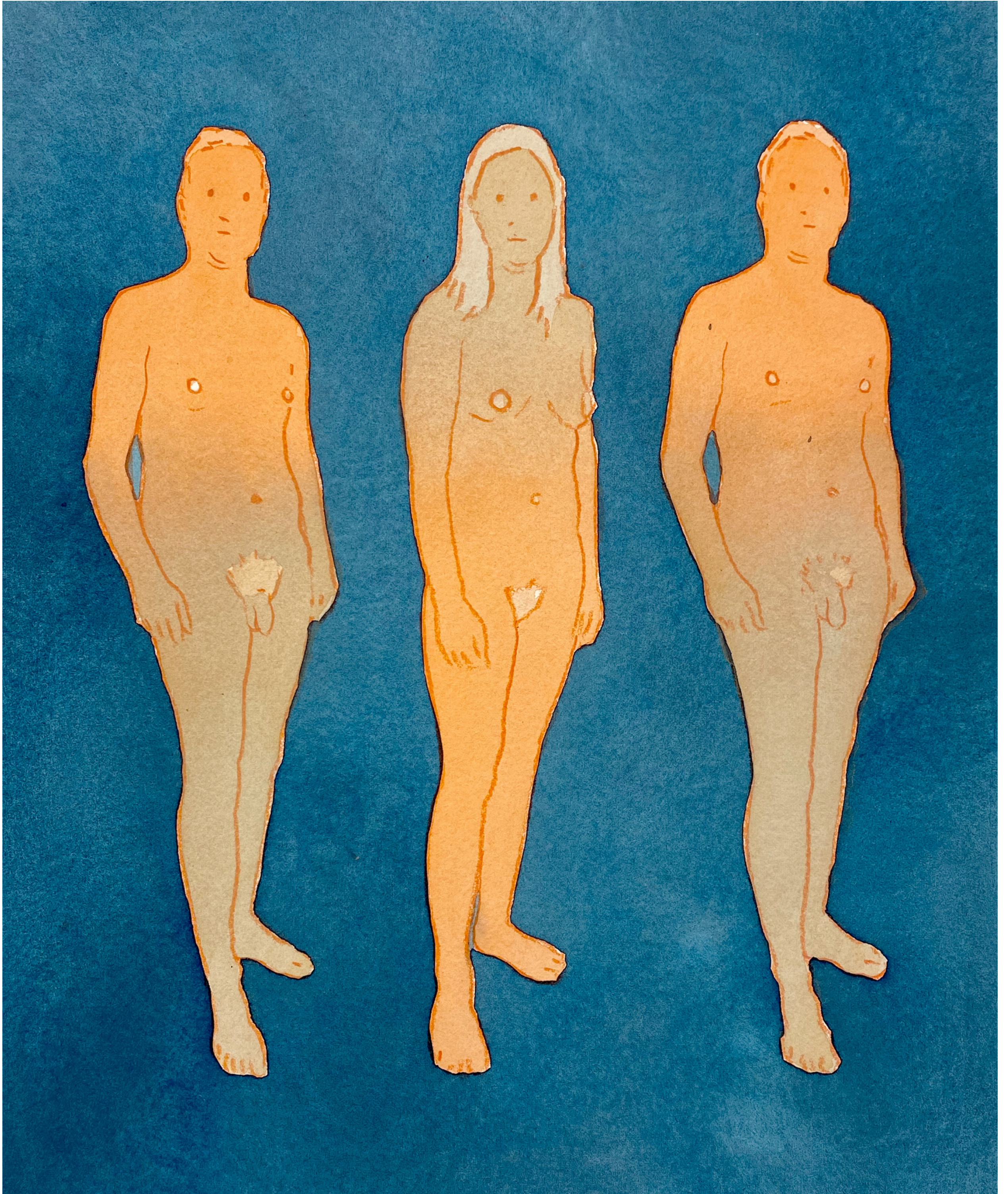
One evening, in my friend's dad's
G37x, we stopped at the ATM quick
so we had enough cash for popcorn,
soda and candy on top of ticket money.

We parked in the back of the multiplex
and got high before the movie, which sucked.
Or maybe it sucked only because of what
we saw just as soon as we exited the car.

A homeless man in a mid-90's murder van
had both slide doors open and was pissing
right into the parking lot. Before he saw us
and almost caught his cock in those doors,

I glimpsed an old captain's chair tucked in back,
an end table holding a full ashtray and neat brown
drink just next to it, and a Bakelite radio nestled on top
of a stack of newspapers, playing something jazzy.

The movie was a comedy, something with names
but no substance. I just couldn't stop thinking about
how my friend loved it, and how we'd get high again,
then drunk on iced Ketel One before I slept over at his place.



THREE FEET FORWARD
DAN GLUIBIZZI
2019

Strand

MEL SHERRER

When I want to see my father
I Google around for a copy of his mugshot
posted by the Cincinnati
Correctional Department.

I marvel at his age.
He's gotten so old since
I last saw him
fist fighting with my mother
on the front lawn
in Leighton, Alabama.

His hair is greyer than salt-n-pepper and buzzed short,
not like the energetic, springy strands, those braids.



HOMESICK ASTRONAUT
BRETT FLANIGAN
2019

**THE
BACK
PAGE**

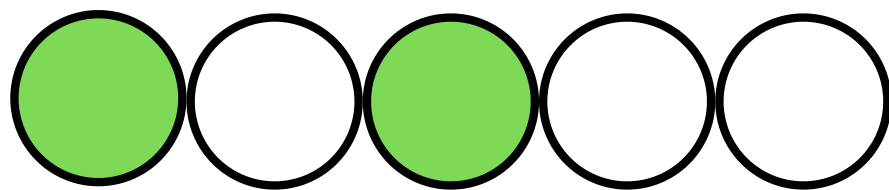
BY
LAURA JAYE CRAMER

THE WEEKLY MUMBLE

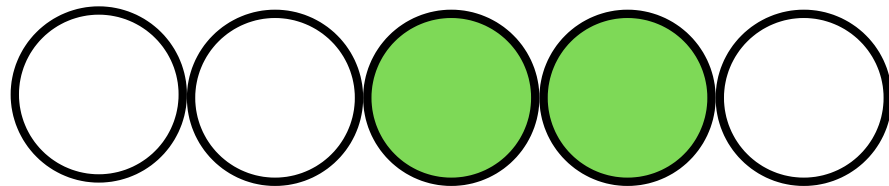
WORD STUFF

Unscramble each Mumble to form five ordinary words.
Then, arrange the green letters in the highlighted spaces to
complete the punchline.

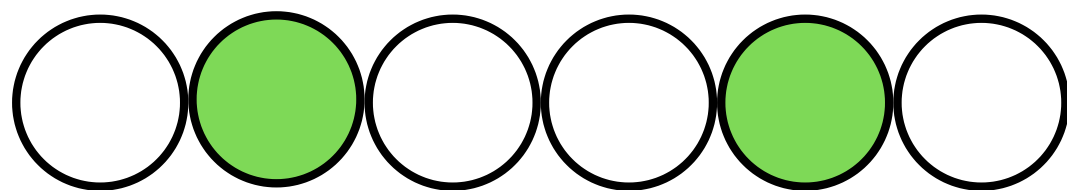
SUEGS



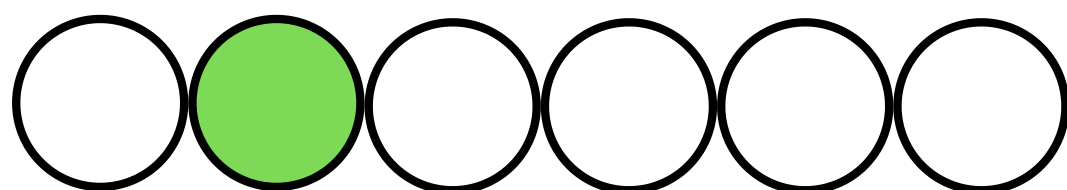
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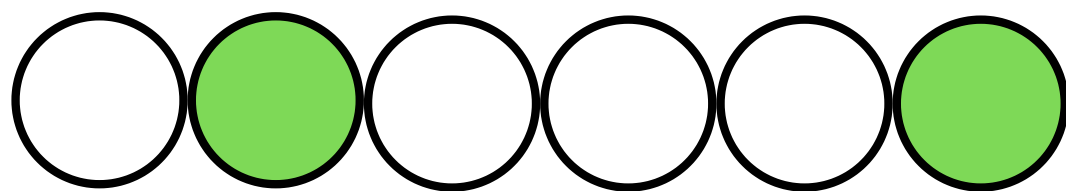
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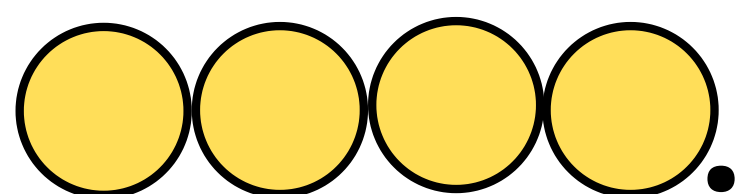
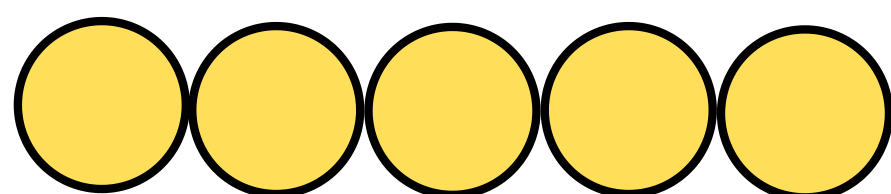
CISHWT



NIIOGD



When
everything
is coming
your way,
you're in
the...



(Answers next week.)

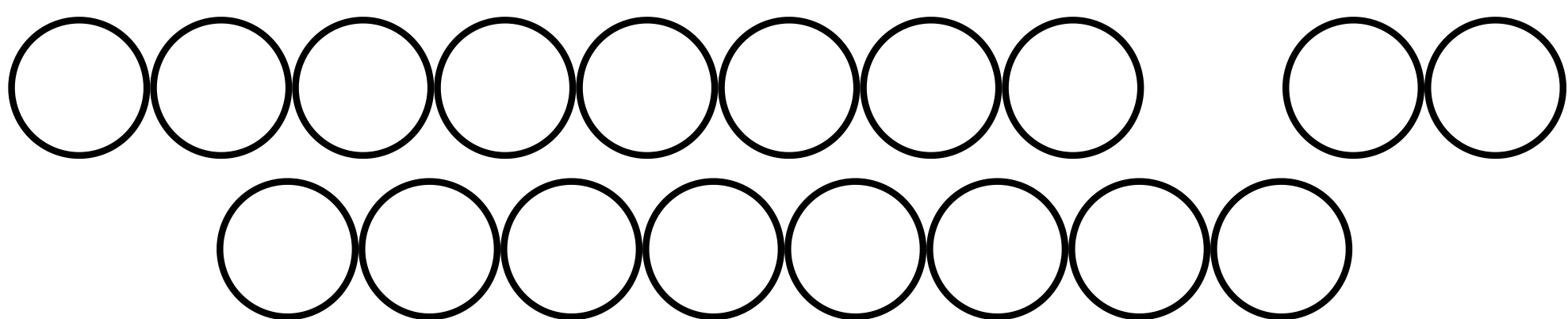
Last week's answers:

ITCHY, CHORD, CRANK, AMBUSH, POETRY

I thought I wanted a career, but really I just wanted a *paycheck*....

HUSTLE & REBUSTLE

Decipher the rebus to reveal a word or phrase that fits in the circles below.
(Remember: One letter per circle.)



ANSWER NEXT WEEK.

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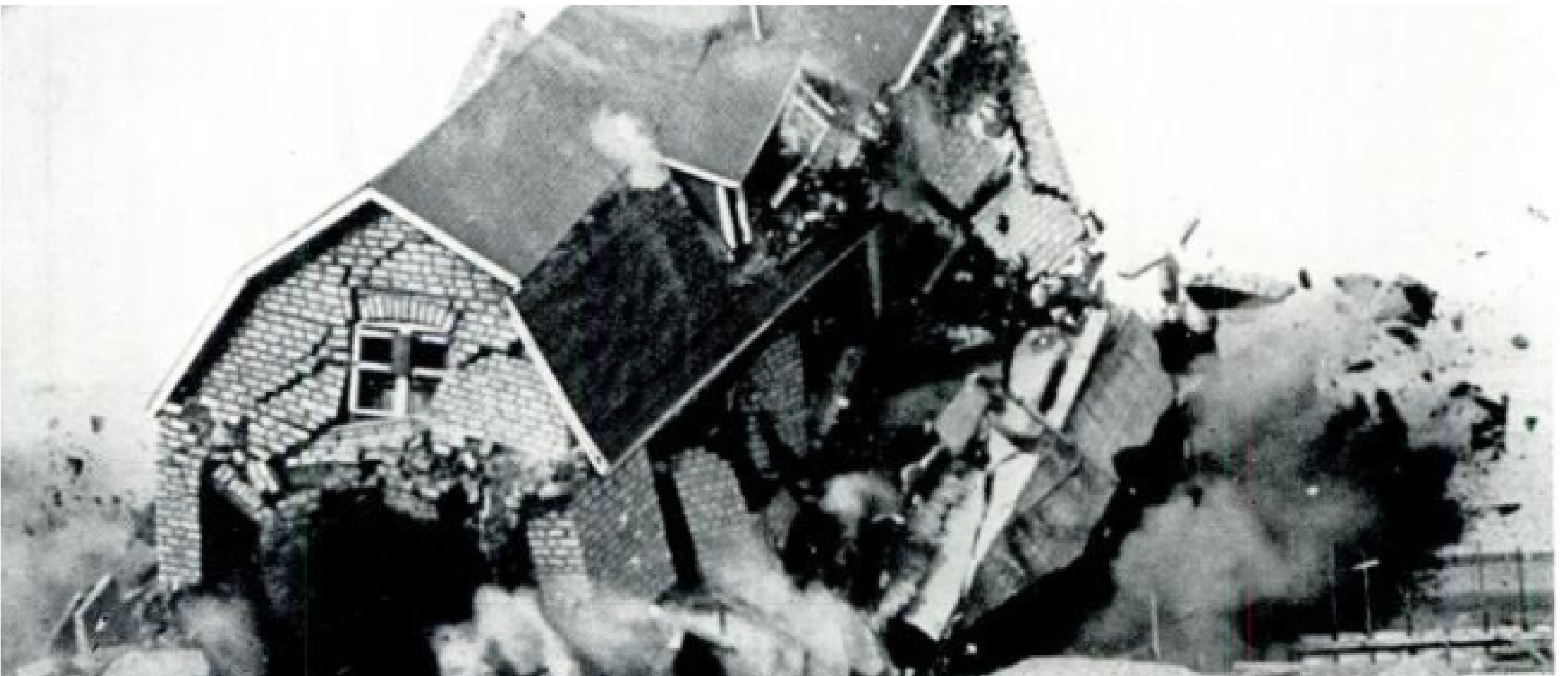
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THE RACKET

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RESTART

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AMY ESTES
LILA CUTTER
...AND MORE...

1/28
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ZOOM

**THE END
OF THE
TUNNEL.**

