

THE RACKET | 40



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THE RACKET

Hi.

How is everyone?

I've been thinking a lot about friendship this week. Specifically, what friendship is going to look like when (if ever) this pandemic is finally put to rest and we can sign out from our perma-Zoom lives and return to the wild, wild social jungle of in-person hangouts.

I'm not going to shock anyone by saying the way we interact has drastically changed. Not always, and not for every one, but in general our friendships now exist in a virtual space. And though staring into a multi-windowed screen at your friend's wan, poorly-lit mug isn't at all the same thing, it's a perfectly okay way of maintaining connection. Or, strangely, of strengthening that connection.

I have been pleasantly surprised (but surprised nonetheless) at the friends that I have interacted with the most over this absolutely bizarre last year. People who I adore, sure, but who I didn't think would become the pillars of my online social life are now those who I spend the most "time" interacting with.

On the flip side there are people who I spent hours of my time with each and every week prior to all *this*, who when, on the rare occasion, they do bubble into my mind I am shocked at how long it's been since I've thought of them, let alone reached out to.

Pandemic and quarantine have pulled down the boundaries of social dynamics and left us all as a bunch of people quietly quaking behind our computer screens. The folks who provide comfort, who we can talk to with ease - these are the people we're drawn to communicate with. There is no point in holding on to the toxic interactions we once knew, when all we need is someone to help remind us things might be okay.

I wonder though, what does friendship look like when the lights come back on? Logistically, a lot of the people I talk to now live in other neighborhoods or states or even countries, and if Zoom no longer acts as the primary source of hanging out, what happens to these friendships? Are long-distance video chats now an established part of our lives and our weekly happy hours with our global communities now etched into our schedules? Or when the doors open and we can all drink at a bar together again, do we maintain the expanse of our social life? Or does the stretch of our friendships suddenly retract?

Are we going to abandon virtual hangouts? Video call burnout is a real thing, and when we no longer have to do it, it seems likely many of us will not. So do the friendships we've forged over the void of the internet disappear as well? Or have we on a socially cellular level been so altered by this long, dark moment that video chats are now the norm? Do we go back to the way things were? Or have we found some solace in the distance?

More so, what about those friendships that have dissolved just out of the nature of the time? Do they return? Do I seek them out again? And if I do, can they ever be the same? The cards have been reshuffled and when everything is once again dealt out, I can't say I even know what the game is going to be anymore.

I have no answers to these questions, only endless curiosity,

But, as I imagine you are as well, I am ready to find out.

'Till next time.

-N

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police brutality, racism and violence
perpetuated towards BIPOC
communities in all forms.

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It is going to be a lot of forms.

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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

40



SPRING COYOTE EVENING
JULIA LUCEY
2019

Ode to the Hamhock

MEL SHERRER

Like my fist,
like my knuckle,
like my knee,
always turning over, grinding,
wearing away or hardening to stone.

Moving forward, reaching back,
choosing me to feed.





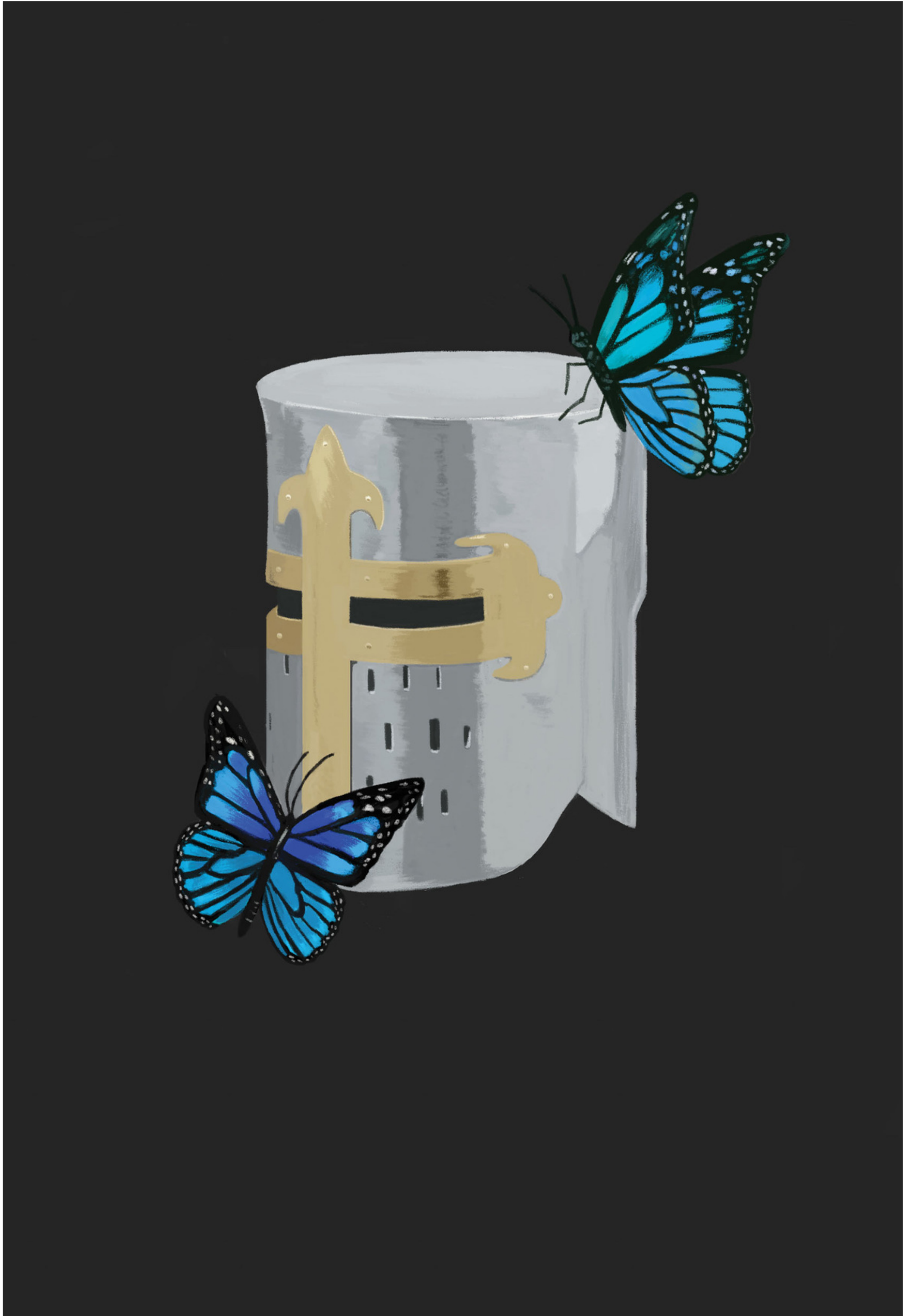
Gathering Wood, 1998

DANI PUTNEY

Our ebony wheelbarrow,
his breath at my back,
logs of cedar? fir?
at my feet, little hands
suspended midair—
roller-coaster instincts.
Our forage was equal parts
survival & play,
he wanted me to have
adventure like he did,
younger, countries away.
I wanted love,
maybe more, I was stricken
by his gray mane
& mustache. Since then,
every chest under my tongue
has been a homecoming.
Daddy, I'm here,
can't you see me? I want
the roller coaster back,
my back against

your breath, we need wood
for our fire, Dad. I'm frost-
bitten without you.

I must re-create,
give me beards & musk,
musk—the not-enough
of men's flesh,
always older, never
the same gray luster.



A good thing

MATT MILLER

#

When a tomcat is born we find it and feed it
and pet it and name him Tiger Junior,
Mama Tiger's little one, and nickname him TJ
and, if cute enough, double nickname him
Teej and he plays, grows big until his purrs are
deep as a diesel engine and one time when you
go to the barn because there's a new litter,
you want to see if they will be

held, so you slide the big door open
and see Teej gutting a kitten.

#

When tomcats are born a farmer has a choice
to keep peace or let nature take its course, for cats
are useful at keeping rodents from decimating
grain stores, plus they occupy the children, but
a surplus of cats will form their own shadow
government, as all living things do, and despite
their stature, tiny tigers are still tigers, meaning
they'll kill anything they can't fuck, meaning

the farmer keeps the strongest tom and gets rid of the rest or

lets the toms sort it out themselves.

#

Yuh ever wonder why the mama cats hide their litters, well, it's from toms, Grandpa already knows, he's fed the cats in the barn each morning for decades now, and most of 'em, if yuh can tame 'em right away, won't be any problem, but if they get too big they start thinkin' maybe they can be the big boss, and then, well, he shakes his head, the next time yuh see that tom, shoot 'im.

#

When tomcats are born they belong to a bloodline that's survived since the first tiger and at some point ran through the veins of the meanest tom there ever was, who fought his way to the top of society and took it upon himself

to eviscerate any cub that he didn't sire.

#

If you kill, you should get killed, that's how it's supposed to work, *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*, like Harry and his friends going to the forbidden forest to do something dangerous, then after getting caught



OVERGROWN
CHANEL HUNT
2019



COILED
CHANEL HUNT
2019

their sentence is being sent to do something dangerous in the forbidden forest.

I suppose there's a symmetry to it.

#

Pa's out doing something important, Brother's lifting weights or talking to girls on msn. I'm bored, roaming with the 0.22 after running out of cans to shoot, picking off blackbirds, gophers, the occasional rabbit or muskrat. I stop when I see Teej.

His little chin is wet with fresh red.

#

To kill the killer so that they quit killing little killers that will grow up to collectively kill hundreds more, a kill not to stop killing, but to ensure it continues.

#

Teej you're supposed to look evil. Teej you're supposed to fight me or run. Teej quit licking my gun.

Teej hold still you don't want this more than once.

#

The laws of tomcat and human aren't written down per se, but they boil down to this: we've got sharp teeth and know how to use them. I suppose

it's the same for mama cats too, after all
they do the real hunting. In this all are aligned.
The only thing we differ on is where and when
it's time to stop,

but that depends on who you ask.

#

After it's done I go straight to Grandpa. Figure
he'd need to know, to make it official. We sit in
silence, look out at the shelterbelt. It feels heavy,
like I'm in trouble, but I don't think so; he'd have
yelled by now if I was. I'm okay with the quiet,
doesn't feel like a pat-on-the-back moment, but
I know I did a good thing, it had to be done,

I swear I did a good thing.



Shift work

BRANDY MCKENZIE

Sometimes, early, at first light, // sometimes later, the sun high in its afternoon
she'd belt me // up in the tall seat of his pickup, stick shift and vinyl and ashtray askew.
This was the truck I knew him by, // the one he'd drive down the highway
deep into the country where their oldest lived, // the one whose land would flood each spring
so that she disappeared except in stories // and the half broken phone calls of adults.
He'd let us kids ride like cargo in the back, in the bed, // looking for footholds, squinting in the
sun.
When Nanny strapped me in the seat, we'd go // looking for him: we'd take him lunch;
or we'd bring him home. I'd like to imagine the contents // of the gray box and a thermos,
something
she'd made while he moved the steel // onto trains in the yard. Never allowed
to walk the food in, I'd draw all those men // in my mind at lunch tables, their frowns uniform
as the signatures sewn on their shirts. He'd listen // for whistles, for the rumble of furnace or
engine
under the crunch of the things he would chew. // The gate I never got to enter: that's where I'd see
him
coming. But I can't remember his face just then, // only his hat, billed, patched with the steel mill
sign,
sometimes a jacket to match. I'm trying to feel nostalgic // for a man who held little nostalgia.
I can't
remember what it felt like to sit snug // in between them, or what kinds of chatter took place
when she drove. Home, she cooked green beans // with bacon, chicken and dumplings I wouldn't
eat.

He'd sit in his chair and smoke, so much//that I wonder about the daughter who came
into the house, inherited, the same woman we'd visit//when we tumbled out of that truck be like
weeds.

Stains from the decades of her father's breath//on the walls. On the ceilings. Smells of menthol
and sweat. The wood trim weeping for a loss//I want to understand. He'd always sit
and watch the tv, news, Archie Bunker,//game shows. Sometimes, a man would win a great
treasure

as I plinked on my grandmother's spinet,//borrowed rhythms and simplified chords. In the
distance,

I could hear trains. In my dreams, pouring steel. Memories like the door//he'd use just past the
gate, opening a room

of working men lit so brightly from the inside//that when he looked back at me, everything was
dark.



NIGHTTIME TREETOPS
JULIA LUCEY
2019

the volume of hope available to me

(How the Korean word for “child”

actually means *adorably foolish*)

I simply

nod, trying to save

the heat I keep surrendering.

Outside, the sky is myopic.

It’s a callused Sunday in New Hampshire.

**THE
BACK
PAGE**

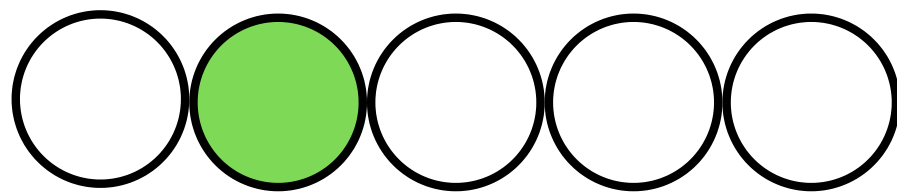
BY
LAURA JAYE CRAMER

THE WEEKLY MUMBLE

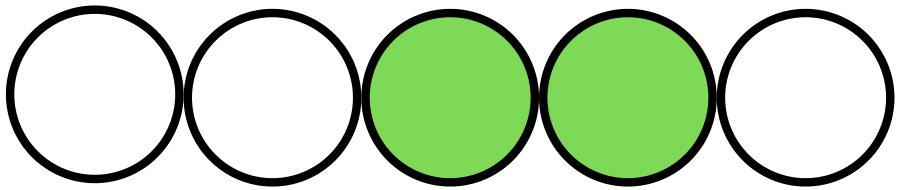
WORD STUFF

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

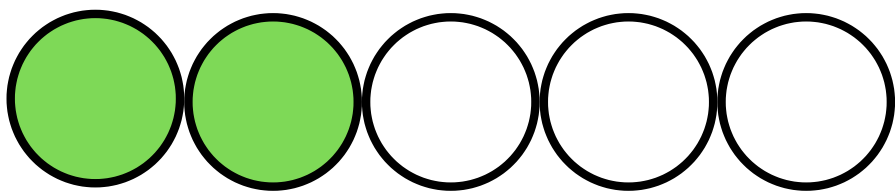
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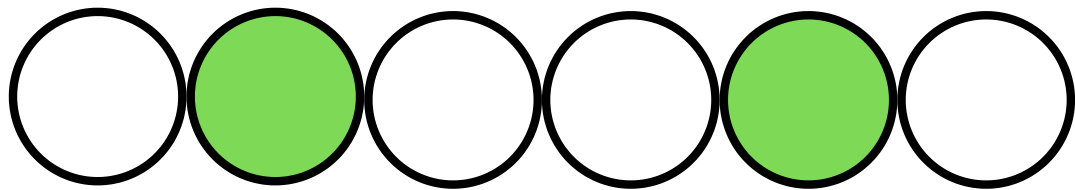
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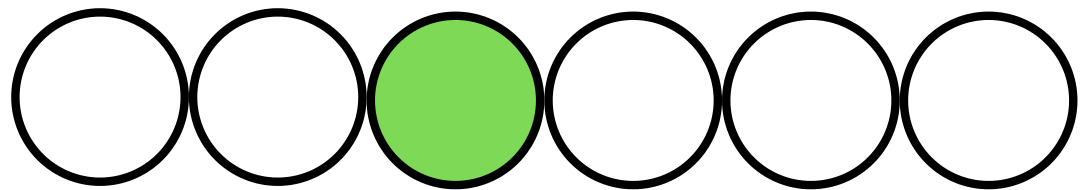
MAIEG



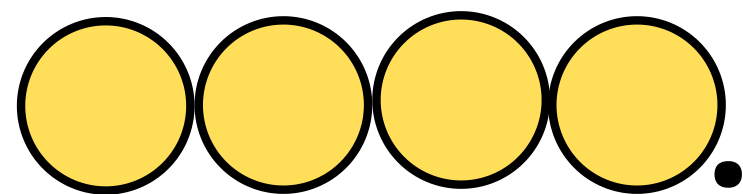
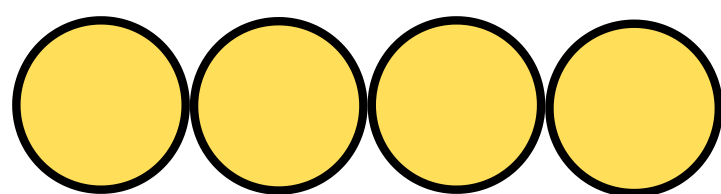
SELTSU



ARKEEM



The first
rule about
Mime Club
is you don't
talk about ...



(Answers next week.)

Last week's answers:

OBESE, SCOUR, CLENCH, RADIUS, GIGGLE

Just so everyone is clear, I'm putting my *glasses on.*)

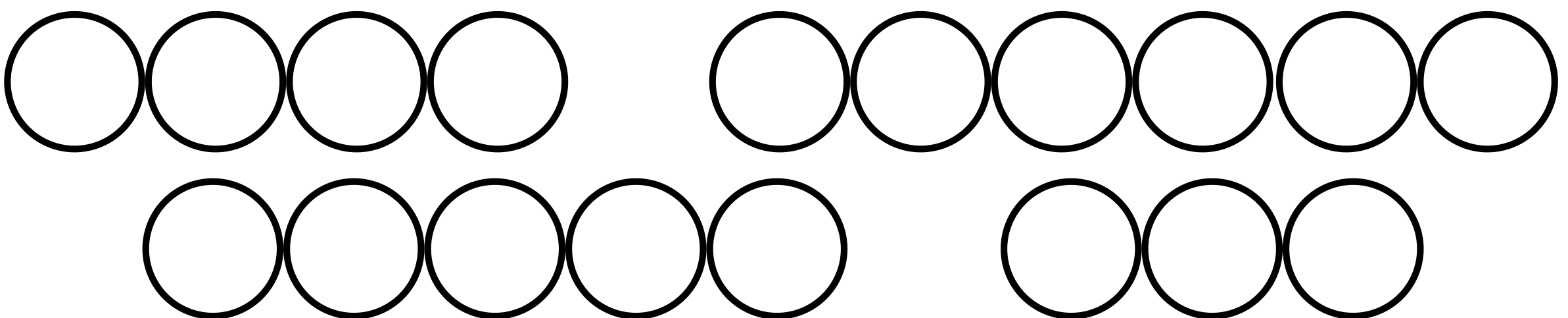
HUSTLE & REBUSTLE

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

BITTEN

SHY

SHY



LAST WEEK'S ANSWER

do something at the drop of a hat

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3/11 - 7PM - ZOOM

FORTY.
YES, FORTY.

