

THE RACKET

14

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Hi.

Everyone doing okay?

I usually like to start these things with some sort
of question, a bridge between you and me and
whatever emotion society
is currently enthralled by.

Today though, today I'm just tired.
Exhausted even.

Wrung dry by the constant worry and weight
of a disease we, as a country, just can't
seem to acknowledge even as it kills tens and
thousands of us.

Worn to the bone by the visible consequences of
our ignorance and our shared blindness
in continuing along the same stupid paths

The selfishness of our country is almost too much
to stomach and I find myself fighting
not only the stomach-churn of dread that has
become the air I breath, but battling
to still maintain some faith in what we refer to as
humanity.

I'm trying not to judge
because I'm just as guilty.

I think we all are.
This streak of stubbornness filling the veins
of each and every one of us born between
those shining seas.

So I wonder:
maybe all of us can do a little better each day.
Try a little harder.
Whatever that might mean.

Because this, right now, *this* makes me tired.

And I wouldn't be at all surprised
if you weren't feeling similar.

'Till next time.

- Noah Sanders,
The Racket

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

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Cover Image:

100 Years of Solitude

"In response to the anti-LGBTQ law passed in Russia in 2013, and Moscow's ruling to block permissions to organize pride parades for the next 100 years."

2014

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Celebrate surviving the celebration.

WWW.THERACKETSF.COM

WE HAVE A PATREON

We aren't in it for the money. Believe us.
Funding or not we'll figure out a way to
keep getting great writing and great art
into your sweaty palms at no cost
whatsoever.

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

And any help with those costs (and with
the costs of future The Racket endeavors)
would be greatly appreciated.

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

THANK YOU TO THESE FOLKS

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THE BACK PAGE
BY
Laura Jaye
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THE RACKET

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Spider

NINA SCHUYLER

The metaphor is so transparent, as I stand at the window, the morning sun spattering yellow everywhere, watching a spider rappel from the corner and furiously entwine the big fat fly in its ghostly silk. My mind compares A to B, this to that, murmuring the signs were always there, and now I'm trapped in this house, going on eight weeks, as death comes invisible on doorknobs, a word, a cough.

Dear Elijah,

HANNAH DUANE

Dear Elijah,

It is almost Passover when I see your grape embossed cup peak from a friend's cabinet. I have forgotten, in recent years since the four questions were passed down once, and then again, to open the door for you.

But I am trying to be more open. Elijah, do you go house to house in leather shoes? Smile at the thought of grandfathers gulping extra wine? Such is duty, they say, laughter rough in sung-out throats. Hillel sandwiches half-eaten. Elijah, do you eat charoset year-round?

Do you walk worldwide in gallant steps? I would like to believe I've seen your footprints in the sand of ocean beach or fire in family sabbath candles. `.

Elijah, this year, I will look for you, and this year, maybe, when the wine is drunk and swallowed, door open wide, you will come.



ANTI-GRAVITY SUIT / SELBY SOHN / 2020

Irving and 5th

PAOLO BICCHIERI

There's a magistrate in the fridge:
It's time to get rid of these old ass tamales.

Freezer burn babies of beef and cheese and I step into quiet wasteland.
Not a desperate land for Mad Max. Just cold emptiness like Gravity.

Big, Snorlax man outside the market. Beard like Klaus. Finger nails that
pulled flowers from Golden Gate Park.

N95 masks headed in and out as though tear gas wailed around like the
Kashmir Valley. I've microwaved the leaf-wrapped vessels of my
heritage – this nomadic neighbor will be ecstatic.

When I offer, he takes the folded brown paper bag, rubber banded like a
deck of cards, and asks:

“Do you have room?”

I pause.

Do you have a room? For me?

he spreads his hands up & down the street like a sultan's claim.

“I see so much but so quiet.”

I tell him I rent, that my land lord is not nice.

His prayer-soaked, ball-player mitt hands collect rain-wet magazines written in Chinese from near his shoes.

“Do you want these papers?”

I nod & thank him. I go home and I’m sitting inside and I’m thinking about all the birthday cake I ate just a week ago, purple frosting on a fish shaped chocolate cake, and all the strangers who came to my home for the birthday party, room enough there for anyone who might praise me, and all the Whiteclaw in the recycling bin the next morning, and the drugs those strangers gave me that I put up my nose like snowballs balancing on brass, til they melt, and I’m feeling like an idiot.

Like during a pandemic is when I finally bake blueberry coffee cake for somebody who isn’t my high school girlfriend. Like I could take all the preserves on my family farm a few states north and dump them into the street and let the Sunset run rhubarb pink and it wouldn’t be enough. Like freezer burn pieces of my abuela aren’t even close.

The Woods

AARON SANDBERG

Each night
she would
ask us
to help
unzip the
back of
her dress
so the
wolf could
climb out,
grin, and
show us
just what
sharp teeth
she had.



FUTURE BRYTE / SHANE DARWENT / 2016

Arizona

JULIA HARRISON

I wake up to a Tuesday, or Friday, or maybe a Sunday, in an apartment about as well-lit as the inside of a throat, where I have been for the last month reacquainting myself with my parents' habits like, for example: three sponges stacked on the kitchen sink at all times, no AC until we break the 90's, their insistent desire to stand behind me, chewing clementines and eavesdropping on my phone conversations. My 14-year-old brother entertains himself by regularly interrogating each of us as to just Whom left the jelly out *again*, the burner on, the paper towels wet.

Remnants of our old house gather about the dark dry wall, paintings of Catalina, incriminating fridge magnets, but the lifeblood of our old place is still in boxes, our yearbook photos packed away, decades of cidada shells and orphaned legos on the mantle all unaccounted for.

The air bears the familiar stench of citrus and brewing argument, but this is not home. It's a 900-square foot apartment in Phoenix, Arizona. It's a habitable interim and a strange place to spend suspended time when every day is so starkly similar out here—between 80-88°, sunny, silent until a dog barks or the senior couple across the street hauls out

their kiddie pool and a six-pack. Time evaporates like dreams, dull ones

There is simply nothing familiar to me about Arizona—I can only think of it as vacation space, the weather as baffling to me as the proximity of Nordstrom. My desert ineptitude is obvious, biological, even—my skin flakes off its rapid tan immediately, my hair grows brittle without southeast humidity, hill climate. I’m a dry, pink person among the apartment complexes of “Desert Ridge” and “Desert Valley,” which domesticate the fringes of a desert.

Spring in the Sonoran is to me, with my dainty East Coast sensibilities and aestheticism, like staring into a sandbox. The coming spring looks to me exactly like every other season in the desert: dry, uninhabited, endless. There’s nothing here to obstruct or complicate light, no trees or clouds to dapple or diffuse it. In the Sonoran, old growth is scrappy. A saguaro strains itself something like 100 years before it grows a single branch—an “arm” they say—and by that time it’s slanting, chewed up by generations of woodpeckers, arms surrendering to a century of heat. In 100 years, an oak could be 80 feet, any East Coast old growth enormous and unclimbable.

I can’t understand the desert, I grew up too far from it. I don’t know its toughness, the way it fights for life against all odds and comes out throttling in earth’s brightest colors.



FUTURE BRYTE / SHANE DARWENT / 2016

I only know the resilience of seasons, of the coming back to something new again. I know the flourishing, the thick heat, the humidity, autumn's winnowing and nostalgia, the withdraw, sulk and silence of winter, the beginning again. I know the woods of the Southeast—the smell of pine and leaf litter and black walnut, dead wood, the shade of broadleaf and the call of nearby water, where there is so much life I can see it even when it sleeps or starts its dying.

The sun shines with such steady brightness throughout the afternoon it's impossible to call the hour without shadows, of which there aren't many, except the dark tilt off a few patches of brittlebrush bursting from piled rock and some scrambled cholla thickets holding their own under sear. There's nothing as damp as breath out here, and my dad tells me this is a wet year.

He's right. The storms roll in every three days in late afternoon. They are quick, heavy, wicked. The rain falls more like rice than water. They'd intimidate my own kind of storms that climb over Blue Ridge and Plateau: low storms, pent up, troubled, always hovering between dribble and outburst.

I watch Westerns on my laptop while my brother sleeps and try to see the landscape like these cowboys do, like it's a place to get tough, be wild. I finish each movie with the same

with the same thought—they must also grow tired of callousing, of spending all that time with themselves. My dad takes me hiking early in the mornings before the char sets in. He memorizes the last days of lupin, purples huddled in cluster, and I try to feel the same exuberance. Instead, I wish for a different April, daffodils and trillium. He talks about the desert creatures: fast, fanged, unforgiving. We see a rattlesnake huddled under a creosote bush, shaded from persistent sweltering. Thousands of bees hover in the air, here long before we were, even at dawn, pollenating the crowns of saguaros and the blooming barrel cactus. Their levitating leaves a humming in the air that sounds like drones.

It's enduring out here, notably so, all of it gorgeous in six colors, inspiring in its effort.

I'm transfixed by the momentum of the desert, the way that all life bursts from dry, cracked ground. The environment taunts drought, starvation, failure, and still endures. The symbolism is not lost on me—the dry, shuddering quality of a thing that fights for place with circumstance opposed. My own heart feels like this: like a dry cough, a half-lidded movement on, encouraged by necessity to remedy displacement, to settle, set roots, bloom.

The hardest part of this is not the loss but the nature of the return, the uncertainty and unchoosing, the rebuilding,



FUTURE BRYTE / SHANE DARWENT / 2016

again. I came to the desert because my homes were gone. I had instead obligations of return, to act on the unchoosing, to be with the people I couldn't be without, the unconditionals, all of us sweating to death indoors and speaking in the same idiosyncracies.

Life is dormant now for all of us, a winter in the spring. But whatever the poets will call this spring of disease—stalled, stunted, colicked—I can see even in parched expanse, in rock-scrambled wash, the way that life comes back in the hardest color it can give.

I am far from breaking buds, from bluets, weeds of resurrection in Appalachia and the tangled zinnias underneath my old porch, the song and shade of forest. Still I am reassured, still certain, of the return.

Trigger Fingers

JOHN GREY

A woman in a dressing gown
stands with mangy dog
on the front step
of a farmer's shack.

How many years is this now?

How many feet half on, half off the land?

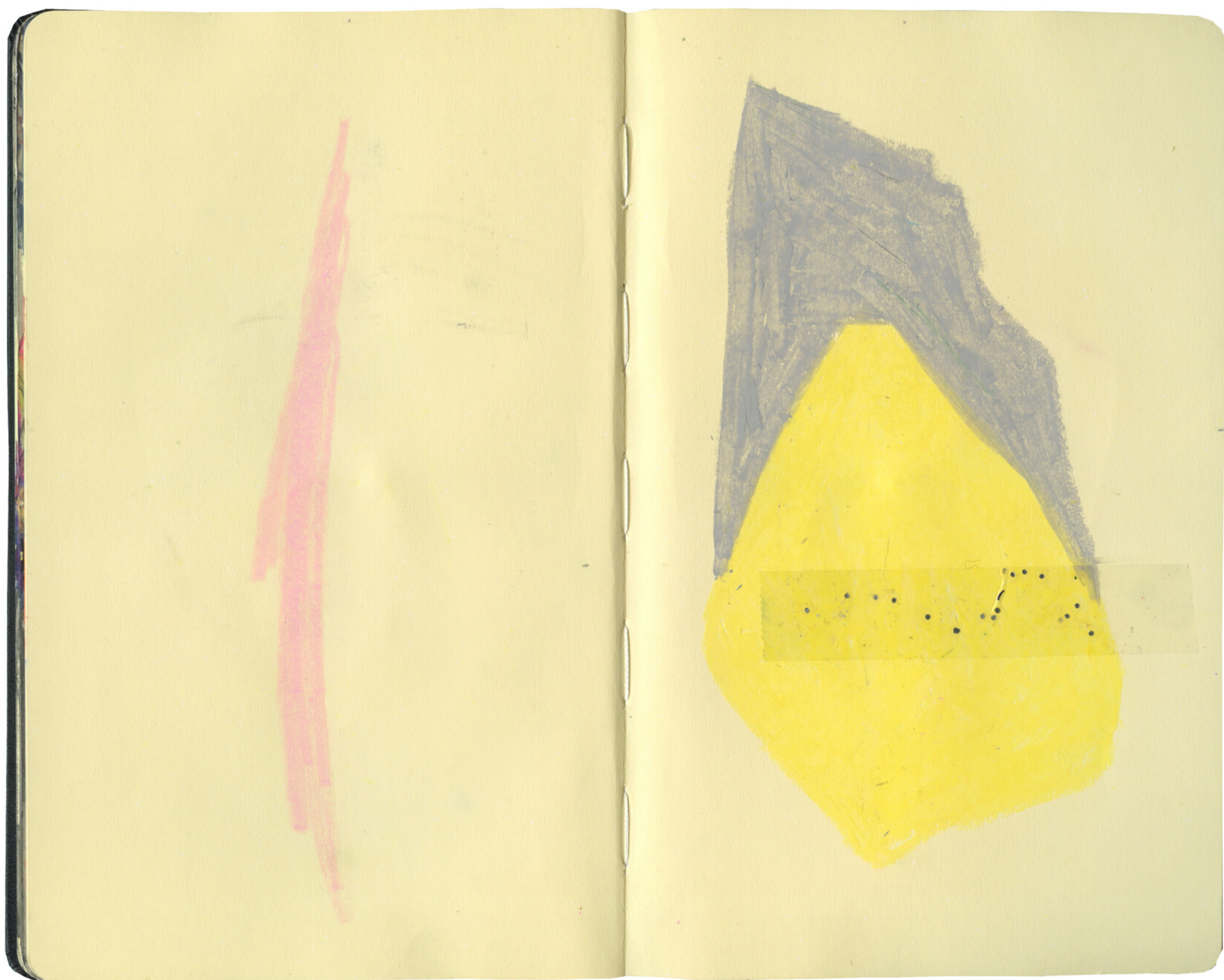
How many guns to the head?

How many fingers

sweating on the trigger?

How many pondering the question,
should I pull the damn thing or not?

How many women in doorways,
how many mangy dogs,
awaiting the decision?



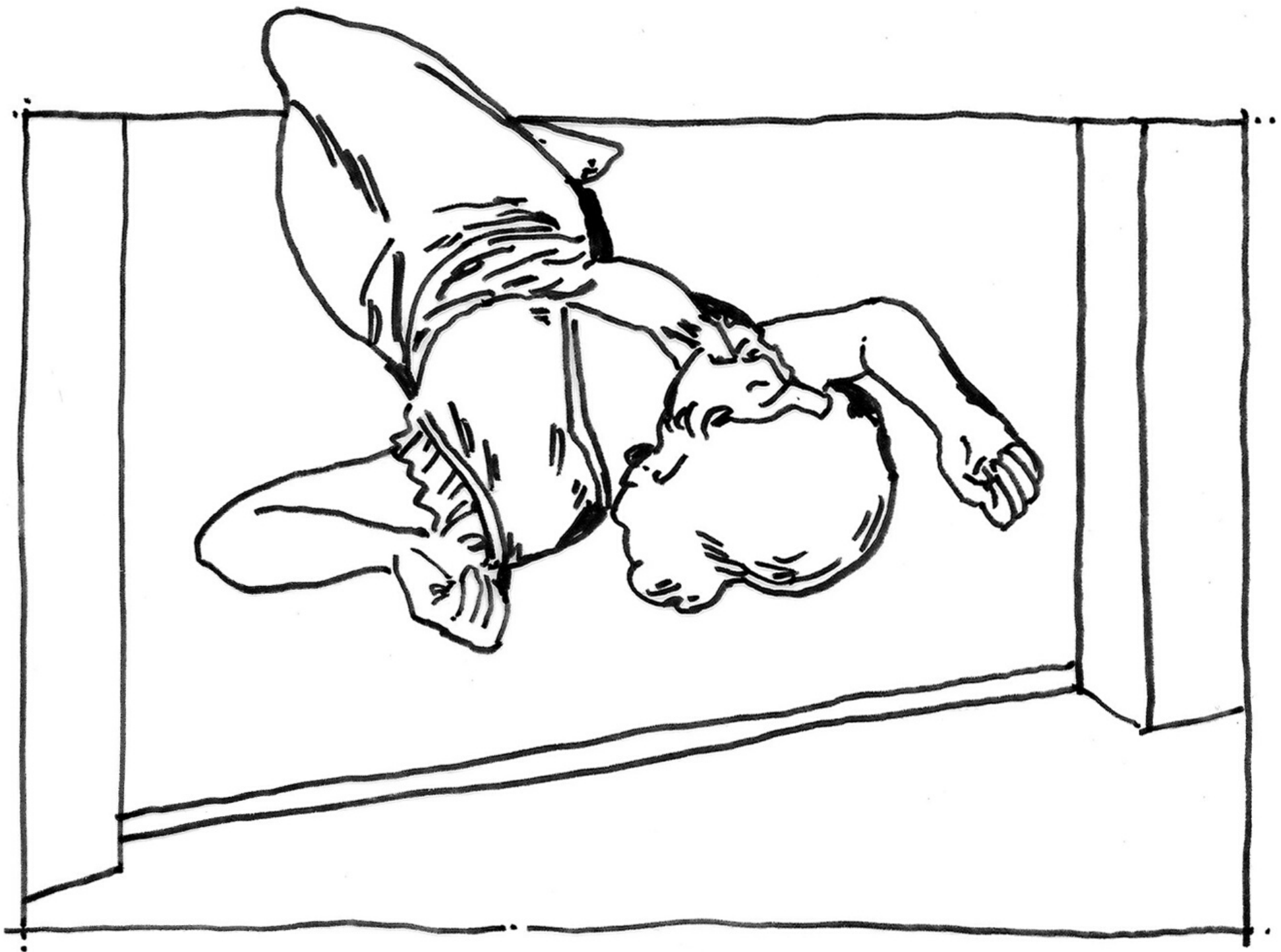
SKETCHBOOK SPREAD / MIA CHRISTOPHER / 2013

THE BACK PAGE

BY
LAURA JAYE CRAMER

EAT MY SHORTS

The Nosey Neighbors



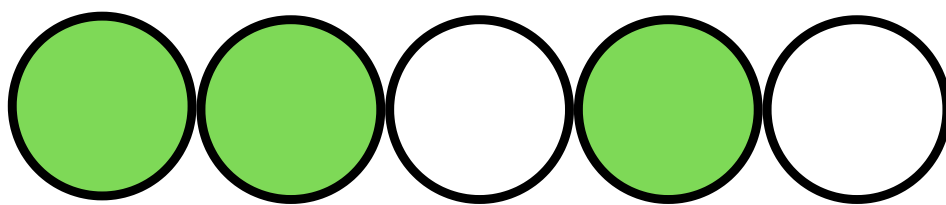
There's no reason I'm
passed out in your gazebo.
Well, no *good* reason.

THE WEEKLY MUMBLE

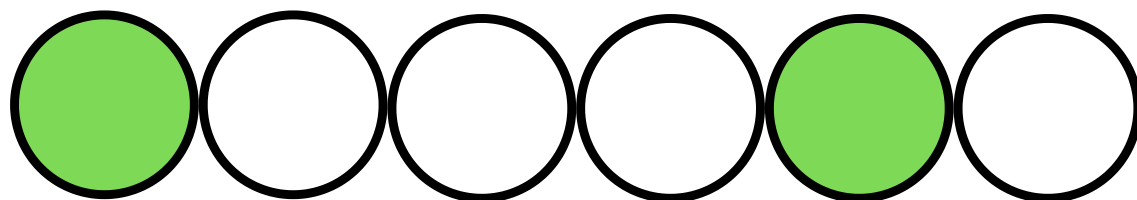
WORD STUFF

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

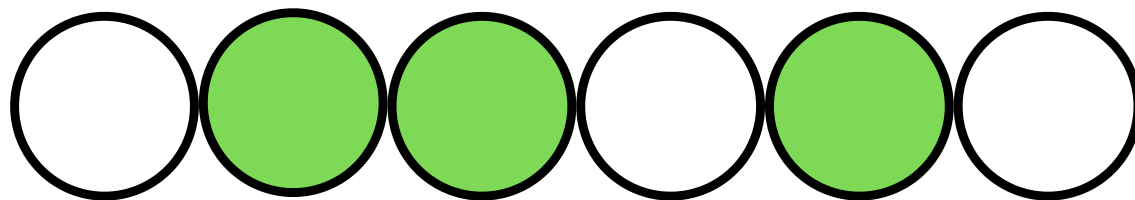
SEERU



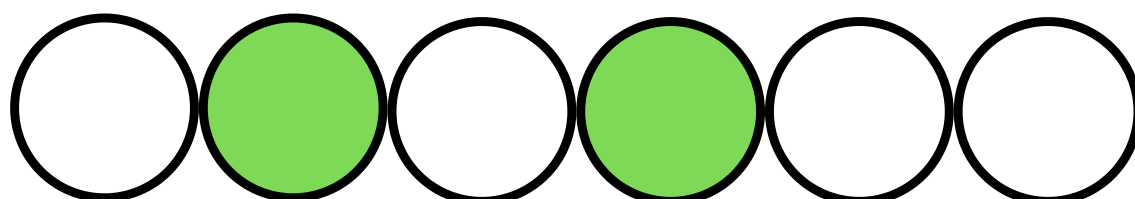
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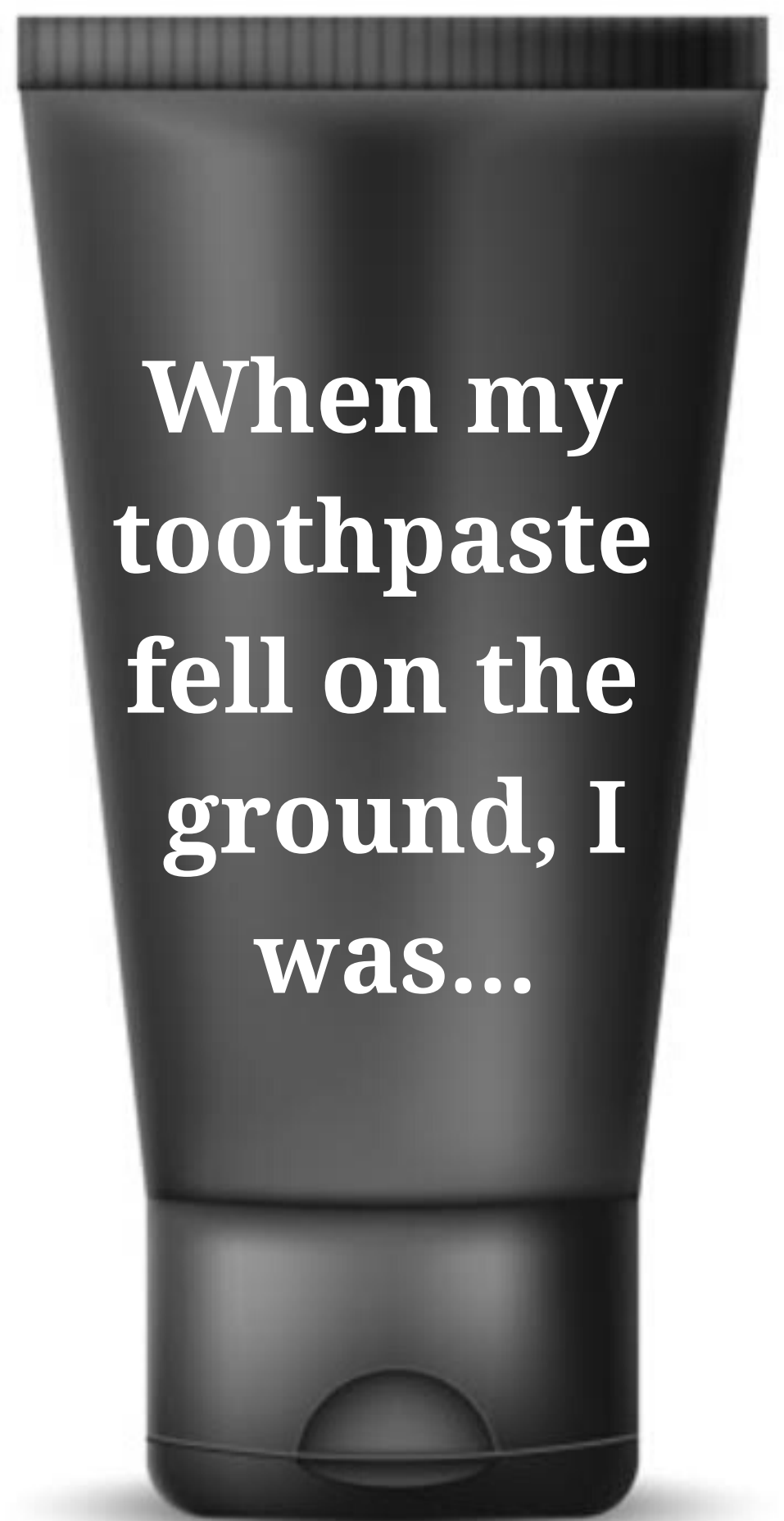
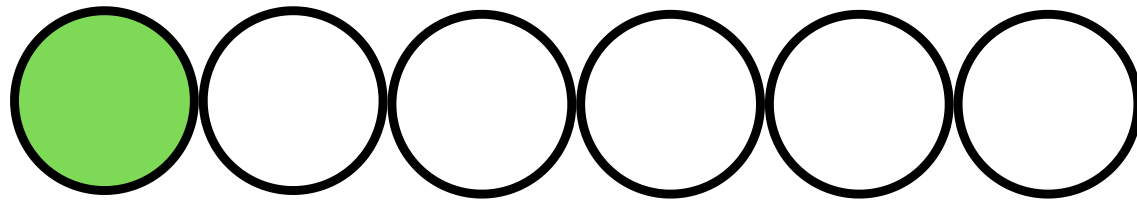
RATEYB



CPLUTS



BRIFEB



(Answers next week.)

Last week's answers:

MIGHT, WALTZ, HOBNOB, DITTO, NATIVE

I have the heart of a lion and a lifetime ban from ...
the zoo.

CONTRIBUTORS

At our monthly events instead of introductory bios, we ask our readers a question and then share their answers.

We'd like to continue the tradition.

QUESTION:

What activity has been keeping you sane?

PAOLO BICCHIERI

Hiking through Sutro Forest, masked to the teeth, lets the sun and leaves keep my brain healthy.

MIA CHRISTOPHER

SHANE DARWENT

HANNAH DUANE

I've not been staying sane because I started college in the high desert, but I'm trying by drinking water and drying flowers.

JOHN GREY

The activity that's been keeping me sane is writing. It's also what's been sending me a little too insane. For the first time in my life, I have all the time in the world to dedicate to poetry. And I sometimes wish I didn't.

JULIA HARRISON

Wish I could tell you it was synchronized swimming or Italian cooking or mommy-blogging, but the honest answer is: cigarettes.

AARON SANDBERG

I've been watching aquascaping tutorials on YouTube without any plans to ever actually do it.

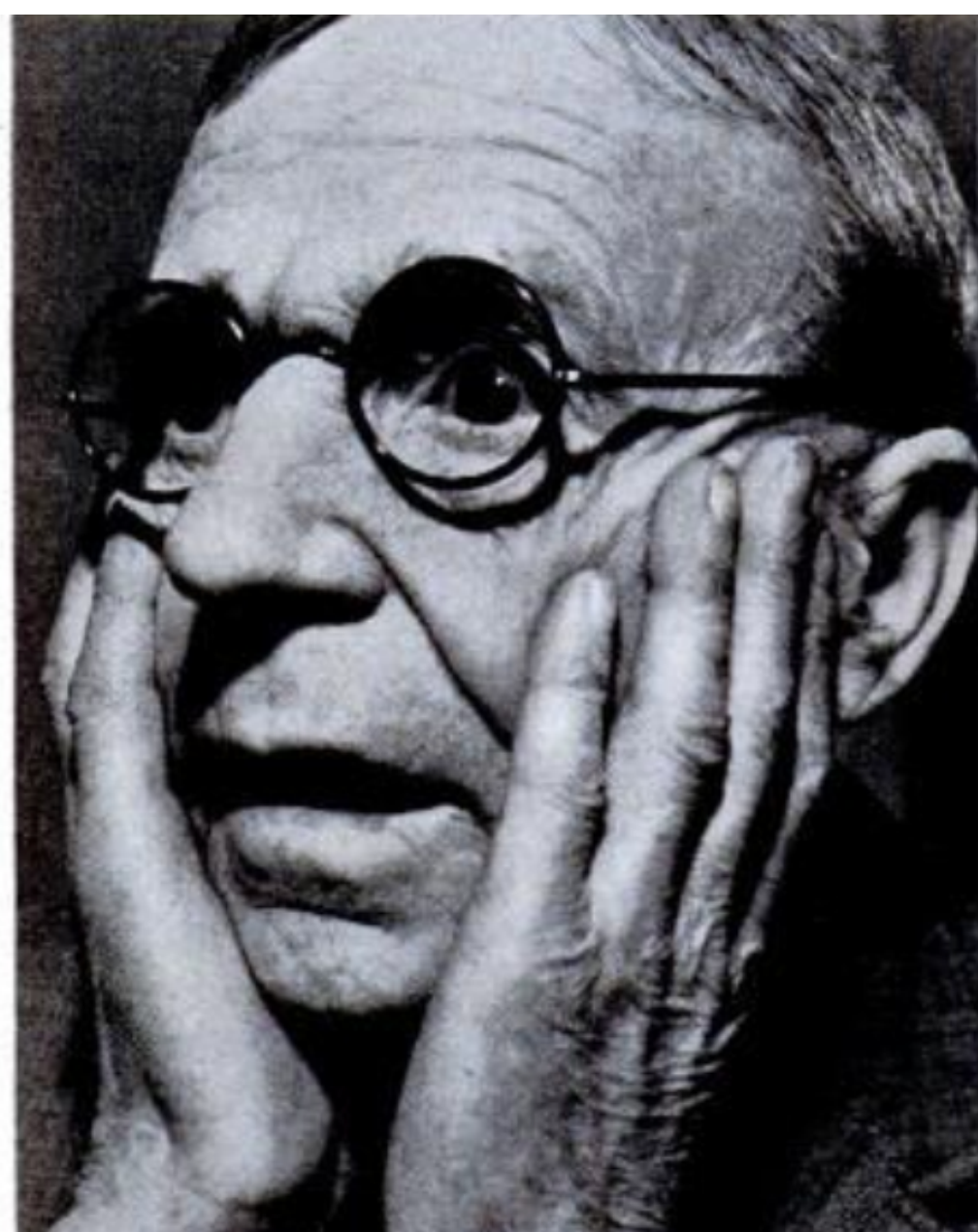
NINA SCHUYLER

Learning the ukulele with my nine-year-old son. We've got "Let it Be" down.

SELBY SOHN

Reading philosophy with friends.

**THE
RACKET**
WEEKLY



ALTERED STATES

+
READERS
TO BE ANNOUNCED

THURS. 7/16
7PM / ZOOM

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**WAIT, WHAT?
IT'S OVER?
MAN.**

