

# THE RACKET

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## 20





# THE RACKET

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# THE RACKET

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Hi.

Everyone doing okay?

I had a scree about climate change and mask wearing and selfishness all lined up. *But*, I've decided to take a brain from clawing out all of my anxieties out of my head and on to the page for a week.

Because, hey, this is our twentieth issue.

And you know what?  
I'm pretty proud of it.

I started The Racket Journal for two reasons. One, in the midst of all this pandemic I wanted to do *something* that gave back to the literary community *and* gave people a bite-sized distraction from the world's slow tip off its axis.

And while it started as a quarantine journal - a place for writers and artists to place work solely about this bizarre point in time - it's grown (conceptually at least) to encompass a whole lot more.

Personally though, it's become a bit of smooth surface amongst all the wreckage; in the most enjoyable way, an almost all-consuming project that diverts me from the edgy paranoia the present moment so often bleeds.

To celebrate, Issue Twenty is a bit beefier than our usual fare. Nay Saysourinho - a talented writer we've been lucky enough to feature at The Racket Reading Series - was nice enough to let us publish an excerpt from her upcoming novella. It's about a woman with a bird in her chest and it is, simply put, awesome.

We have a cover from Richard T. Walker (!), three pieces gorgeous paintings from James Chronister, a dark and beautiful poem from up-and-comer Anna Allen, poetry from Peter Bullen and and and, so much more.

Finally, **thank you**, our readers for being here along the way.

Truly, this thing wouldn't exist without you.

On that note, we'll be taking a small break to get a few new plates spinning, but we'll be back before you even know you miss us.

'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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**Breona Taylor's Murderers Are Still Free:**  
<https://www.change.org/p/andy-beshear-justice-for-breonna-taylor>



THE RACKET : QUARANTINE JOURNAL, Vol. 1, NO. 20

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**Cover Image:**

Photographer: RICHARD T. WALKER

Title: *the expansively acute #1*, 2018

Credit: © Richard T. Walker,  
courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

"Metamorphosis Musings" by Yuan Changming  
previously published as "Pondering Plasticity"  
in *Sons and Daughters Literary Journal*

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*The storm feels like it's waiting.*

WWW.THERACKETSF.COM



# WE HAVE A PATREON

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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've got weekly micro-playlists, special recommend email and much, much more.

## THANK YOU TO THESE FOLKS

CATHY & JOHN SANDERS

HALLIE YOUNG

JAMIE ENGELMANN

CASEY BENNETT

LILIAN CAYLEE

LAUREN C. JOHNSON

ANGIE MCDONALD

QUYNH-AN PHAN

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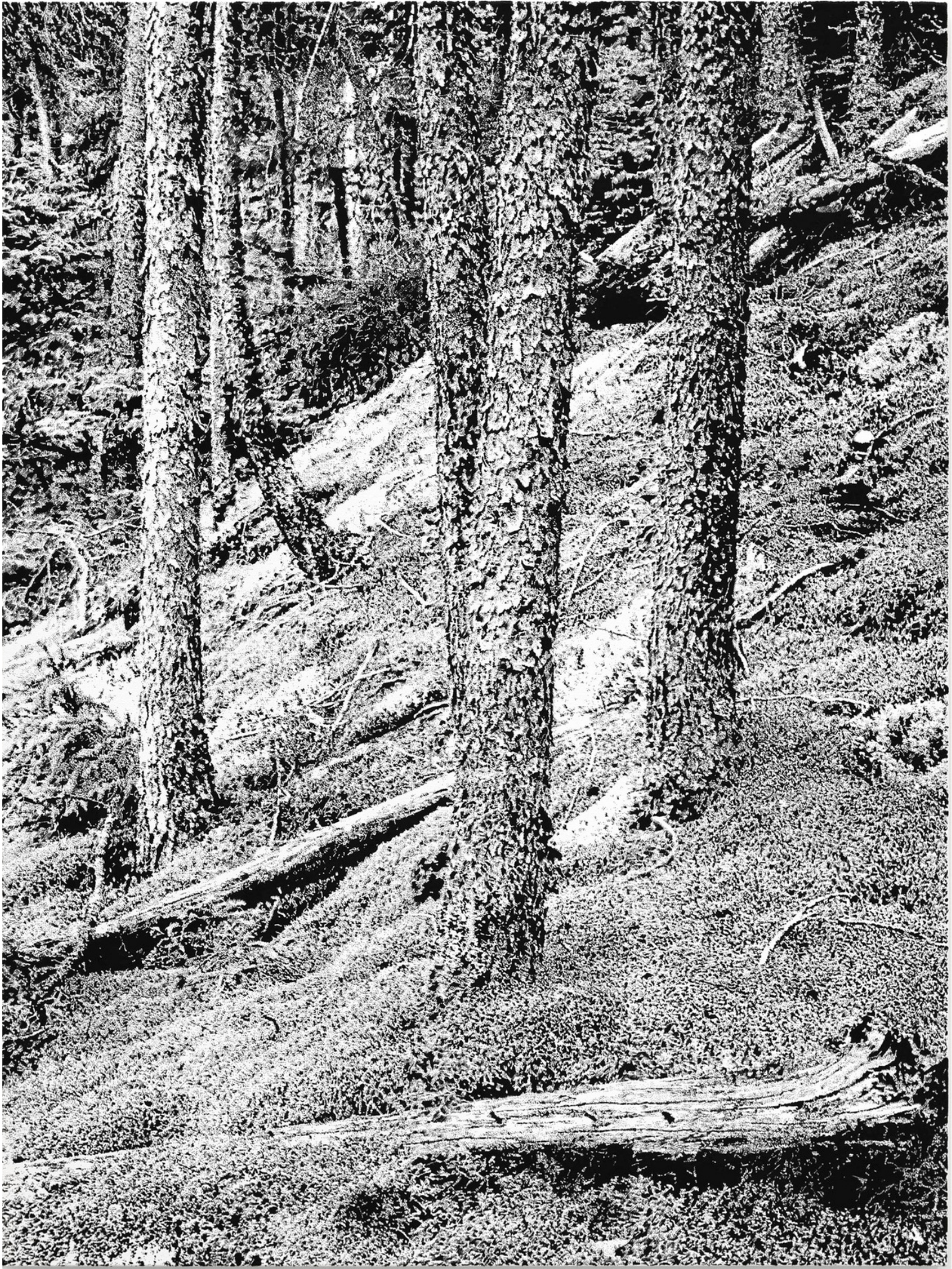
THE BACK PAGE  
BY  
Laura Jaye  
Cramer

CURATED BY:  
**Noah Sanders**

# THE RACKET

20





*JOLIET 2*  
JAMES CHRONISTER  
COURTESY OF ELI RIDGWAY GALLERY  
2020



# Judgement (Reversed)

ROBERT BEVERIDGE

---

There are accusations of bovine  
interference in the recent election  
but the investigation stalls over  
and over again on the sorts of points  
of order one finds in the lawbooks  
that were taken to the bathroom  
by enterprising clerks, forgotten,  
left there for centuries. Special  
counsel says the same things  
at every press conference. Even  
the tone of each moo is identical,  
almost robotic. The head of the  
Jackal Coalition is on the evening  
news to call for civility in discourse  
while the cats and badgers just  
chase each other's tails, an endless  
ring around the massive silo  
at the center of the world's tenth  
most populous city.



# Sick buildings.

DS MAOLALAI

---

tired of sending emails,  
scheduling calls and no damn  
oxygen – I get up,  
leave deborah  
and walk  
to the office canteen. don't bother

cleaning my cup out  
or anything – just empty  
the dregs of the coffee  
and make tea, stewed  
with brown rings,  
5 sugars  
and yesterday's milk. the air crowds in,  
a closed room  
in hot weather.

the ceiling is flat  
and lifeless as left out  
water,

the windows  
bolted shut  
against changes to the sky,

the entry of seabirds  
and any snap  
of suicide.





POOLSIDE  
LEONARD REIDELBACH  
2019



# Naming the Stars

ANNA ALLEN

---

I read once  
That the harder you try  
To remember  
A dream  
The further away  
From you it runs

Is it the same  
For nightmares?

In my dreams,  
She is kept Holy  
There is no  
Cursing my name  
There is no  
Hand slithered around my neck  
There is no  
Black eye  
Under layers of concealer  
No  
Thinly concealed threats  
In my ear



There is only her  
And her eyes  
Like fluorescent bulbs  
There is only magnetic  
Hands  
And ribcages  
There is only naming  
The stars  
After our future children  
That one night  
On her rooftop  
Flat on our backs  
Limbs knotted  
Wearing nothing  
But the night sky like  
The finest gilded capes

And when I dream that up  
And I pick up that telephone  
To call  
I nightmare the time  
She smashed my head against  
The wall so hard  
I saw the stars  
We'd named Amelia,  
Michael,  
And Abigail

Queer women get  
Left out of the  
Intimate partner violence conversation  
So often  
I thought my bruises  
Were of my own creation

Thought I'd  
Painted on the  
Midnight blacks and  
Blues as blue as  
Her eyes  
While she slept silent  
Beside me  
Not at all the tick  
Tick  
Tick  
Bomb  
You knew she was

But my body has never  
Fibbed  
My ribs still creaked  
From the fractures and  
Cracks  
My vision still blurred  
From praying at  
The glaring moon



Still

I ate nothing  
But ashes  
The day she left  
Wept mourning songs

We existed in circles  
Passing through  
I-love-you's  
Screamed so many times  
I wondered if she'd  
Run out of breath  
The way I did  
With her hands  
Wrapped around  
My neck  
So many  
Gentle caresses  
That it seemed impossible  
Her hands would ever  
Turn into claws again

And then  
And then and then

She says  
I was flirting with  
The girl at the grocery store

Or  
I wore a bitchy tone  
That looked awful on me  
Or  
My smile when she walked  
In the front door  
Wasn't quite traffic light bright enough  
And the wheel would spin again  
And the cycle would begin  
And I'd end up on the hardwood floor  
Again

Is it true  
What they say about  
Dreams?

Will my grip on  
Her strands of hair loosen  
A bit  
Everyday

What about this nightmare?  
I wouldn't mind this exorcism  
I wouldn't mind the forgetting  
I wouldn't mind the loosening

My fear has boiled over  
Sizzling when the refugees



Hit the stovetop  
Smelling of charred milk and her

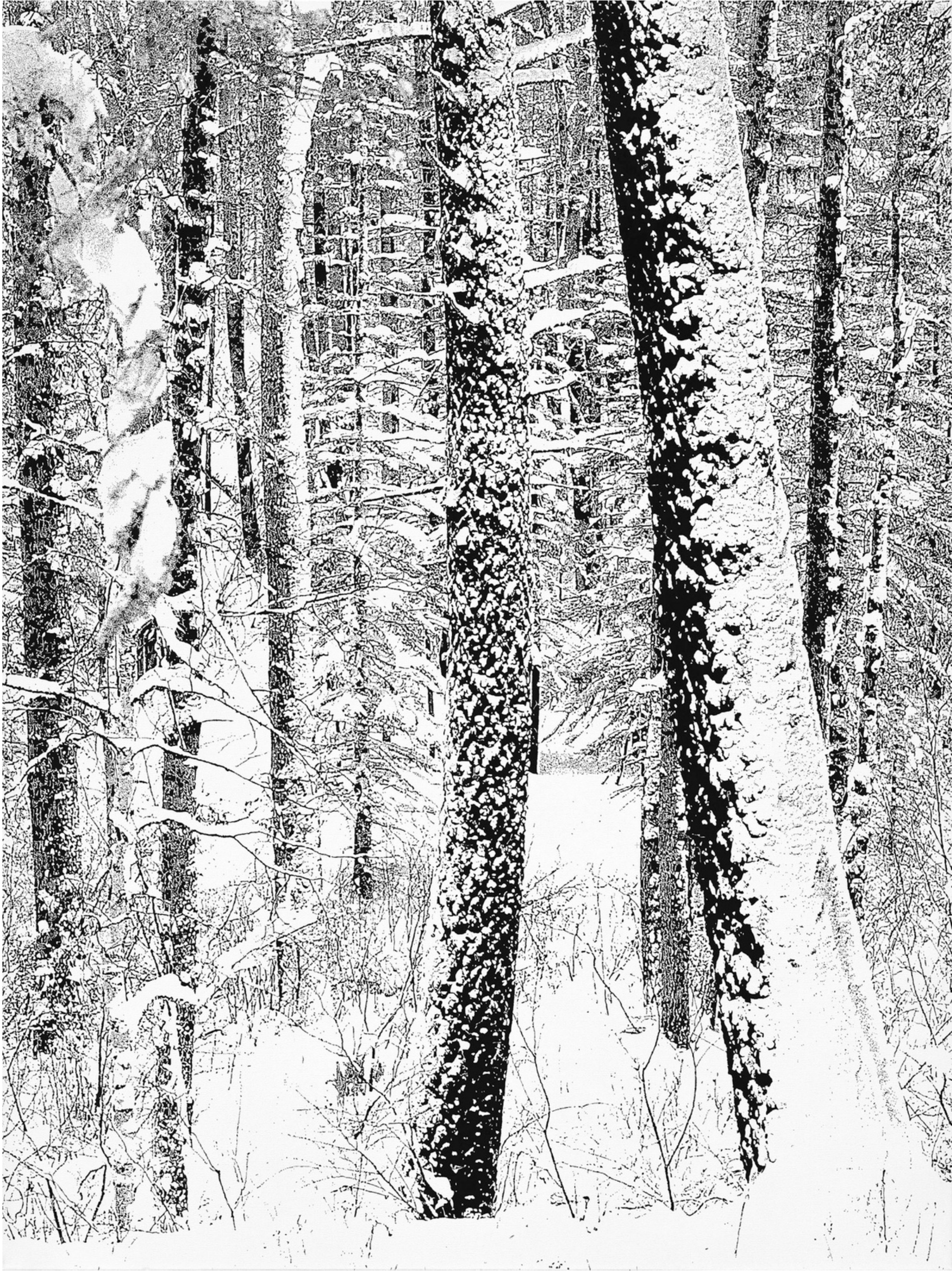
Every day there's a little less  
Every day I'm a little more.





LONGSTREET CORPS, BATTLE OF CEDAR CREEK REENACTMENT  
ALANA PERINO  
2019





*HYGGE*  
JAMES CHRONISTER  
COURTESY OF ELI RIDGWAY GALLERY  
2020





MARDI GRAS INDIANS SUPER SUNDAY, NEW ORLEANS  
ALANA PERINO  
2016



# My Wild Beautiful Bird

*an excerpt*

NAY SAYSOURINHO

---

There was a castle on the beach, she began, before it burned to the ground, and then the castle was gone and replaced by a rectangular-shaped building with big bright letters spelling out Cliff House. I had a heart, she told her visitor, before it was broken to pieces, and then it was gone and replaced by a bird.

“A bird?” asked her visitor.

“The bird sings old Motown songs whenever I bring it to the ocean.”

“Like a radio?”

“It’s a strange bird with a predilection for the Isley Brothers.”

Her visitor was named Simone and had come all the way from Paris to visit her in San Francisco. They had found each other online, through a historical society that collected vintage photos of buildings that no longer existed. Simone had manifested a strong interest in seeing Cliff House. She thought it would probably be destroyed in the next big Californian earthquake, so she was in a hurry to take photos. Anita had warned Simone that the new building had none of the allure of the old castle, but Simone insisted. After all, it had a beautiful view of the ocean.

“When did the bird move in?” asked Simone.

“I think sometime in August.”

The city had recently allowed fire pits on the beach again, but it was slightly past 9:30 PM now, and the fires had been extinguished. The wind had died, and the plumes of smoke were undulating in the sea air. She wondered if it bothered Simone. She knew her visitor had quit smoking not too long ago, and maybe the smell of burnt wood would remind her of old pleasures. Old pleasures were always the most difficult to quit. She used to have very long conversations. Conversations within conversations. Conversations in Morse code. Conversations in piano notes. But then she learned that her conversation made people sick, the way second-hand smoke did. She felt so guilty, she reduced her conversation to small talk and historical trivia.

“What’s the song playing right now?” asked Simone.

“I Guess I’ll Always Love You, 1966. From the album This Old Heart of Mine.”

“That’s nice. I like that one.”

“In 1966, Dr. DeBakey implanted an artificial heart inside Marcel DeRudder. Left ventricular bypass pump.”

Simone nodded with understanding.

“Big year.”

Anita felt grateful for her company as they walked down the shore together. She did not want to admit that she had missed being around other people. In the distance, ships were blinking over the waves, swallowed up by the fog and reappearing again like new stars.

“Do you like Motown music? I imagine if you don’t, it must drive you crazy,” said Simone.

“I like it. It’s happy.”



Anita's eyes strayed to the sand under their feet. She tried to sidestep the broken crab shells, even the slivers, but the ones she could not bear to look at were the ones that were almost intact, their thorax punctured, allowing air to rush inside the exoskeleton where the soft flesh had been. She could imagine this air grazing the surface of her own bones, in the space where the warmth was no longer warm. She sunk into her coat, burying her hands deep inside the pockets. She had picked the wrong scarf. This one was too thin. She worried about the bird whose singing had taken on a frenetic quality like a vinyl record spinning too fast. Simone seemed to instantly understand her concern.

"Let's go back to your place. I'll make you some cordyceps tea. My naturopath swears by it."

"I don't trust naturopaths. They place too much faith in nature."

"Says the woman with a bird in her chest."

"A pie."

"What pie?"

"My bird. It's a black-billed magpie."

Anita sidestepped another carapace, another minuscule death. She crumpled the sigh that bloomed against her diaphragm.

"I like cherry pie", she said, "with ice cream."

---

When she awoke the next morning, the bird was quiet. It was always quiet when it was not near the ocean, but something had shifted in her ribcage. Without an x-ray, there was no way of telling what was happening, but her body sensed something was changing. There, in the palm of her left hand, she could feel a tinge of fever beginning to radiate. Her cheeks were warm.

She glanced at the calendar on the wall. It was February, which meant that the bird had been inside of her for almost seven months. It had never been a comfortable arrangement. The claws were too sharp, and the wings were too long, but she had welcomed the bird's arrival all the same. If she could no longer have conversations with people, at least the bird kept her company.

She untied her bathrobe, a white terry coat she had lifted from a hotel in Japantown and made her way to the kitchen where Simone was already preparing another cup of tea.

"Anita, you look terrible!"

"I'm just not a morning person."

"No, I think you really need to see a doctor."

"A doctor or a vet?"

"A doctor of course. Who cares how the bird feels?"

Simone helped her get dressed and slid into the driver's seat before Anita could protest. Too tired to resist her new friend's maternal resolve, Anita obediently entered their destination into the GPS as they rolled down Hayes Street. It seemed to her as if the morning fog was dissipating like a curtain rising above the next act, but she was not sure if she was in the audience or on the stage. Or perhaps it was both. Did the bird move in or did she dissociate herself into a bird and a human? Her hands were hot. She clasped them together.

"Mitosis is the word that Walther Flemming came up with in 1882 to describe the cell cycle when replicated chromosomes separate into two new nuclei."



Simone did not take her eyes off the road but smiled encouragingly.

“I know you must be scared right now.”

“Mitosis comes from the Greek, mitos. It means warped thread.”

“Nothing warped about you.”

“Warp comes from Old English—”

“Anita, stop it.”

“It means to be thrown away.”

“A-nee-ta.”

Urgent care was on the third floor and was auspiciously sparse for a Saturday. The waiting room consisted of chairs in the hallway, in front of a reception desk helmed by a reduced staff. But overall the hospital was clean, bright and cheery. The day was a dazzling blue outside the windows. A magnificent, Pacific-ocean shade of blue. Anita would have preferred it to be blue gray, as gray as the back of a blue titmouse.

When the nurse came to fetch Anita, Simone also got up and followed them to Dr. Kimifusa Abe’s office. It was Simone who spoke first when the doctor clicked the door behind him.

“Something is very wrong with my friend.”

Her French accent sounded thicker when she was upset, Anita noted, the r’s revealing their fricative upbringing in the 6th arrondissement of Paris. Anita was touched. There was something endearing about a language forgetting itself in the throes of worry, but she was not able to bask in it. Dr. Abe was already focusing on her, his kind scrutiny making her feel like she wanted to give the right answers to whatever questions he had but knowing that those answers would elude her. She tightened her coat around her body, a failed student of her own condition.

“I’m going to have to listen to your chest, if that’s okay,” he said.

Simone put her hand on Anita’s back and the coat slipped off noiselessly. Not a sound could be heard in the room. Not Simone’s fidgeting with her enamel bracelets, not the doctor’s auscultation, not even Anita’s breathing. For a moment, only the magpie existed, surrounded by awed spectators, marveling at its existence and the soft flutter of feathers brushing against a woman’s lungs. Dr. Abe’s reaction made it clear that the news would not be good.

“I can hear it in your anteromedial thoracic cavity, moving just above the diaphragm. Do you feel any pain?”

“Sometimes. In the middle of the night. It hurts then.”

“What does it feel like?”

How to explain the sensation of needles pressing against the tenderness of her organs? How to explain the phantom pain that always appeared at midnight, and lasted for hours, and made her cry? How to explain the fitful state of her sleep, the void she seemed to keep falling in, the sense that there used to be something in her life, something that made her whole, and not knowing what that was anymore? Anita could not explain any of it. She could not even explain why cherry pie tasted like burnt bread in her mouth.

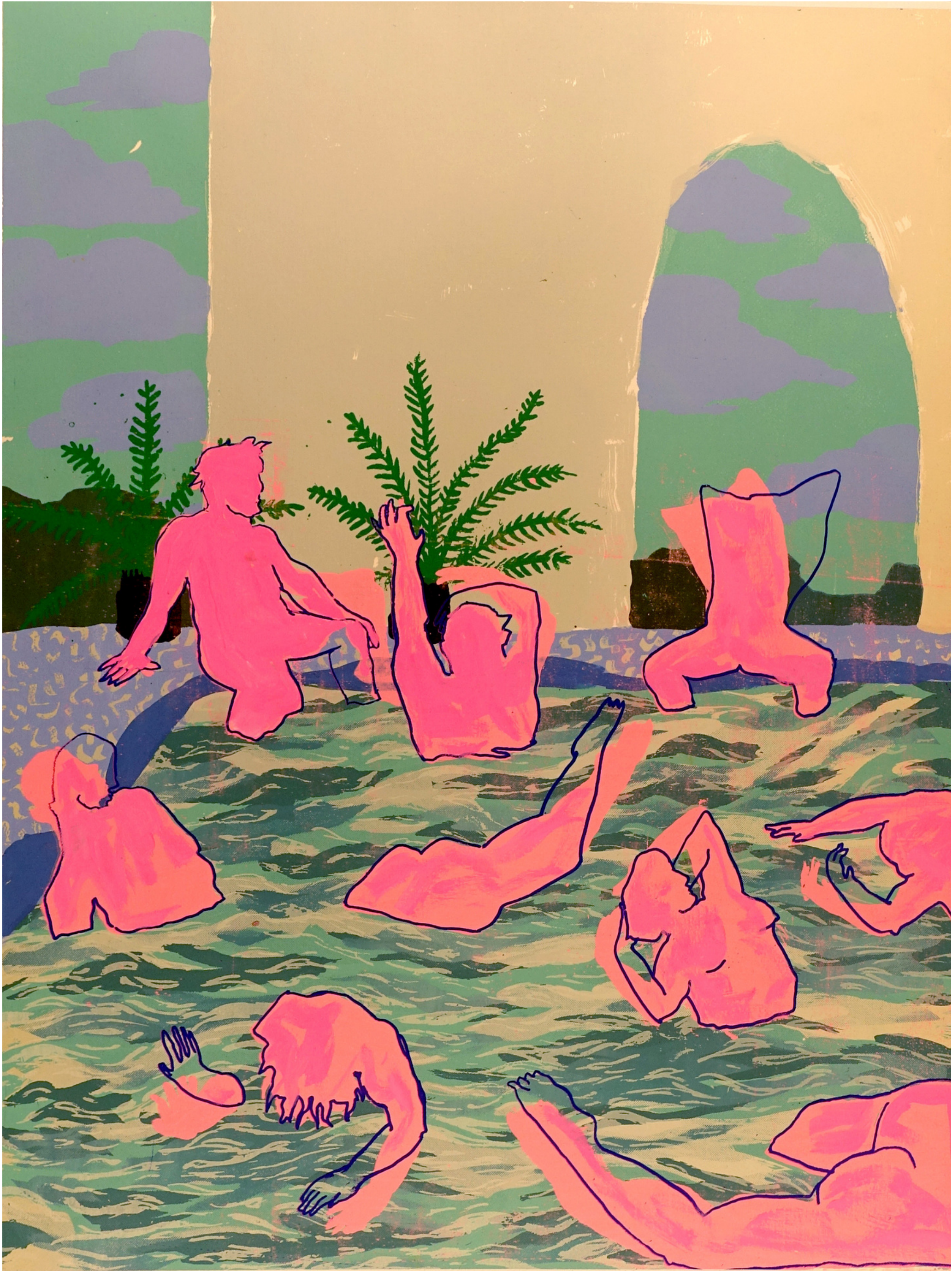
“I see in your file that you suffer from severe depression. You’re still taking your fluoxetine daily?”

“Yes.”

“That’s good. Keep taking it.”

He looked at his computer, about to type something, then changed his mind and turned to her once more.





POOLSIDE  
LEONARD REIDELBACH  
2019



“I see you were infected with the magpie back in August. Magpies are chatty afflictions. Has it been saying anything?”

“It sings Motown,” she replied, “when I go to the beach.”

Dr. Abe pinched his lips, as if this confirmed what he already suspected.



# Metamorphosis Musings

YUAN CHANGMING

---

There's no doubt, I would paint my skin  
Into a colorless color, & I would dye my hair  
Wear two blue contacts, & I would even  
Go for plastic surgery, but if I really do  
I assure you, I will not remove my native village  
Accent while speaking this foreign tongue (I began  
To imitate like a frog at age nineteen); nor will I  
Completely internalize the English syntax &  
Aristotelian logic. No, I assure you that I'll not give up  
Watching movies or TV series, reading books  
Listening to songs, each in Chinese though I hate them  
For being too low & vulgar. I was born to eat dumplings  
Doufu, & thus fated to always prefer to speak Mandarin  
Though I write in English. I assure you that even if I am  
Newly baptized in the currents of science, democracy &  
Human rights, I will keep in line with my father's  
Haplogroup just as my sons do. No matter how  
We identify ourselves or are identified by others, this is  
What I assure you: I will never convert my proto selfhood  
Into white Dataism, no, not  
In the yellowish muscle of my heart

# Optimism

PETER BULLEN

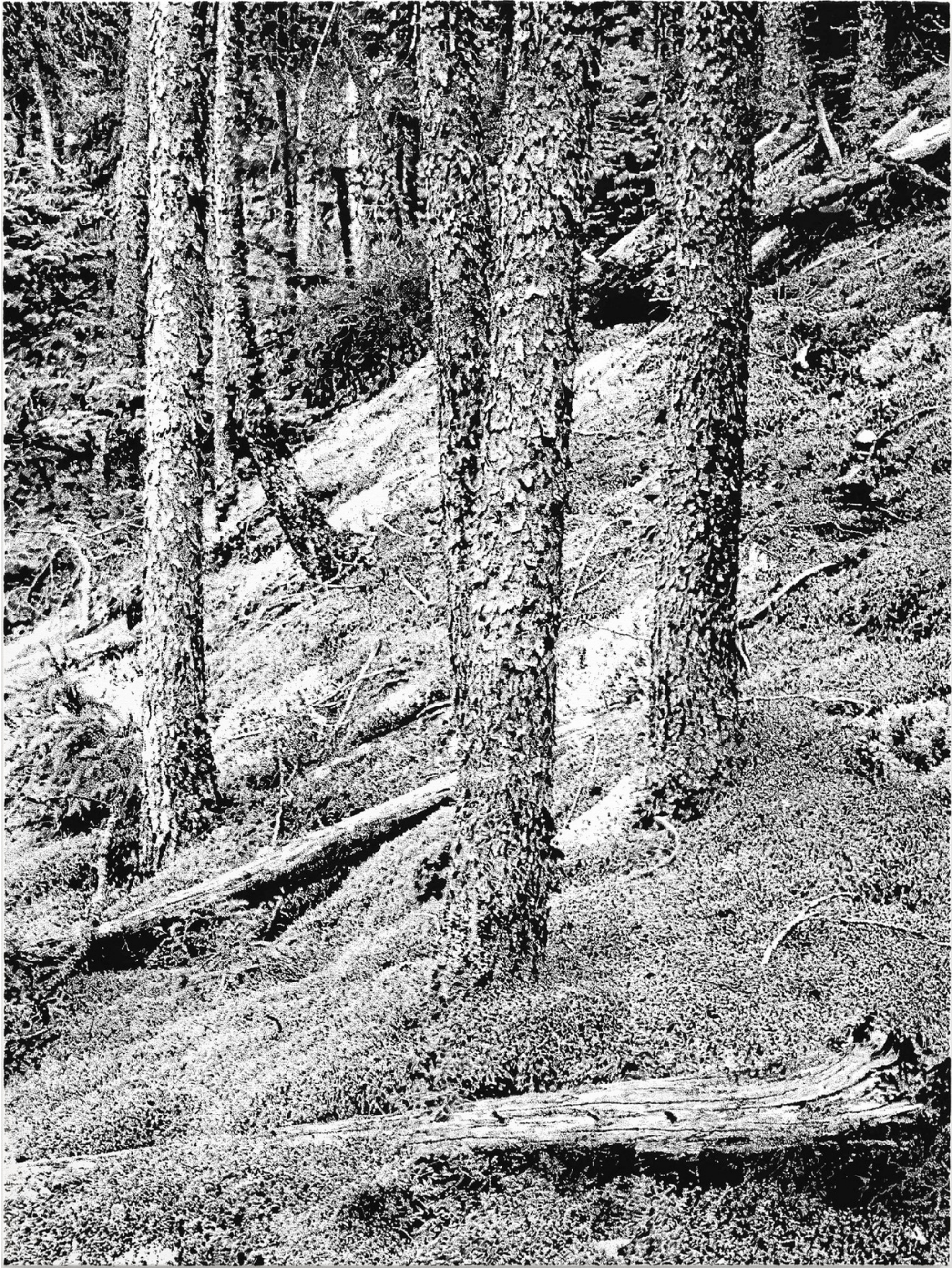
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Do you ever get home expecting something  
From the person greeting you  
And although you don't know what it is you're expecting  
They never seem to have it on them at the time

And so you go to a strangers house instead  
Telling the somewhat startled  
Opener of the door  
That you're expecting something  
but you're not exactly sure what it is

And they smile knowingly  
Confessing that they have much the same problem themselves  
  
Before smiling and ushering you in





*JOLIET 1*  
JAMES CHRONISTER  
COURTESY OF ELI RIDGWAY GALLERY  
2020



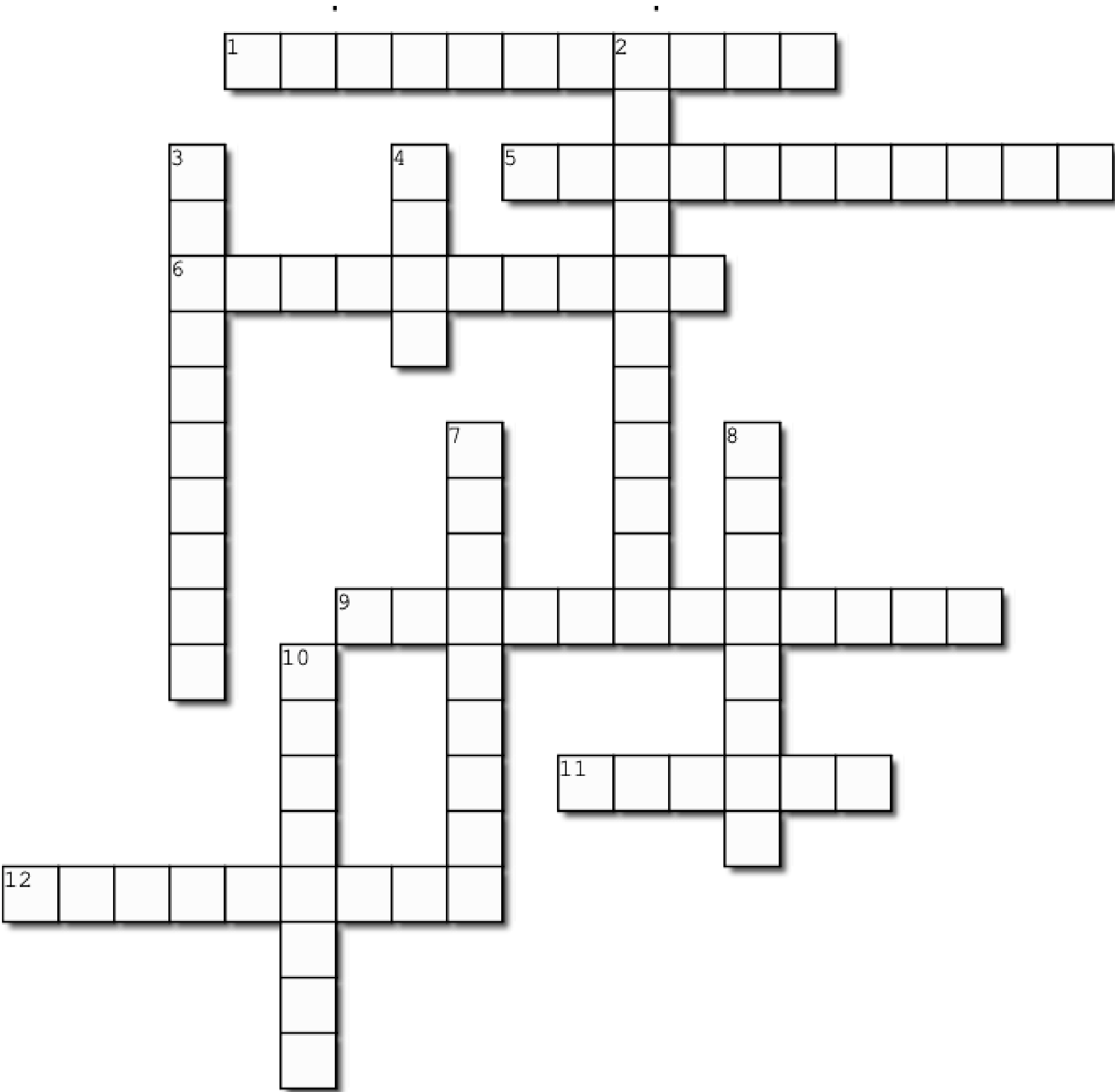
# THE BACK PAGE

BY  
LAURA JAYE CRAMER



# CROSSWORDZ

A CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1. Good food fast.
- 5. It's what you crave.
- 6. For the seafood lover in you.
- 9. The only one for everyone.
- 11. I want my baby back.
- 12. I'm lovin' it.

DOWN

- 2. When you're here, your family.
- 3. Be your way.
- 4. Eat up every moment.
- 7. Eatin' good in the neighborhood
- 8. Live mas.
- 10. No one outpizzas the Hut.



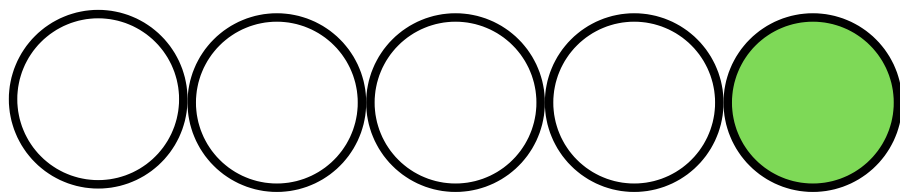
# THE WEEKLY MUMBLE

## WORD STUFF

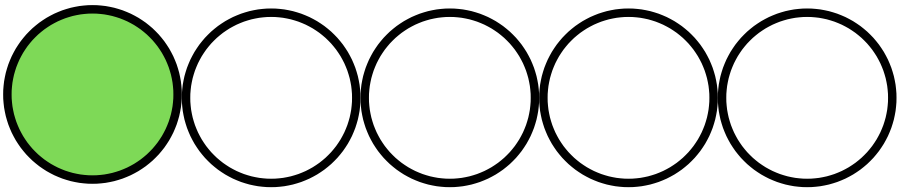
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Unscramble each Mumble to form five ordinary words.  
Then, arrange the green letters in the highlighted spaces to  
complete the punchline.

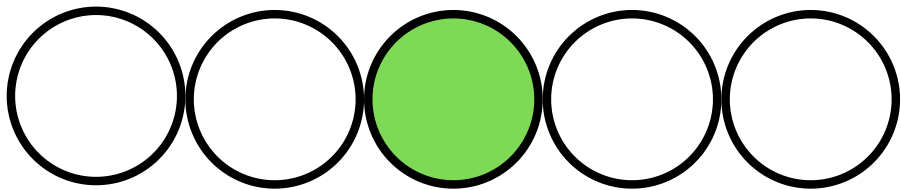
**LFIDU**



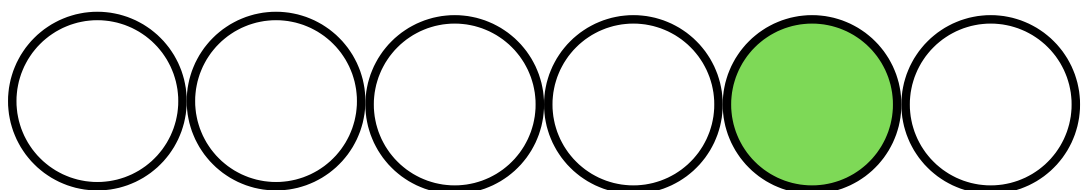
**VGNEI**



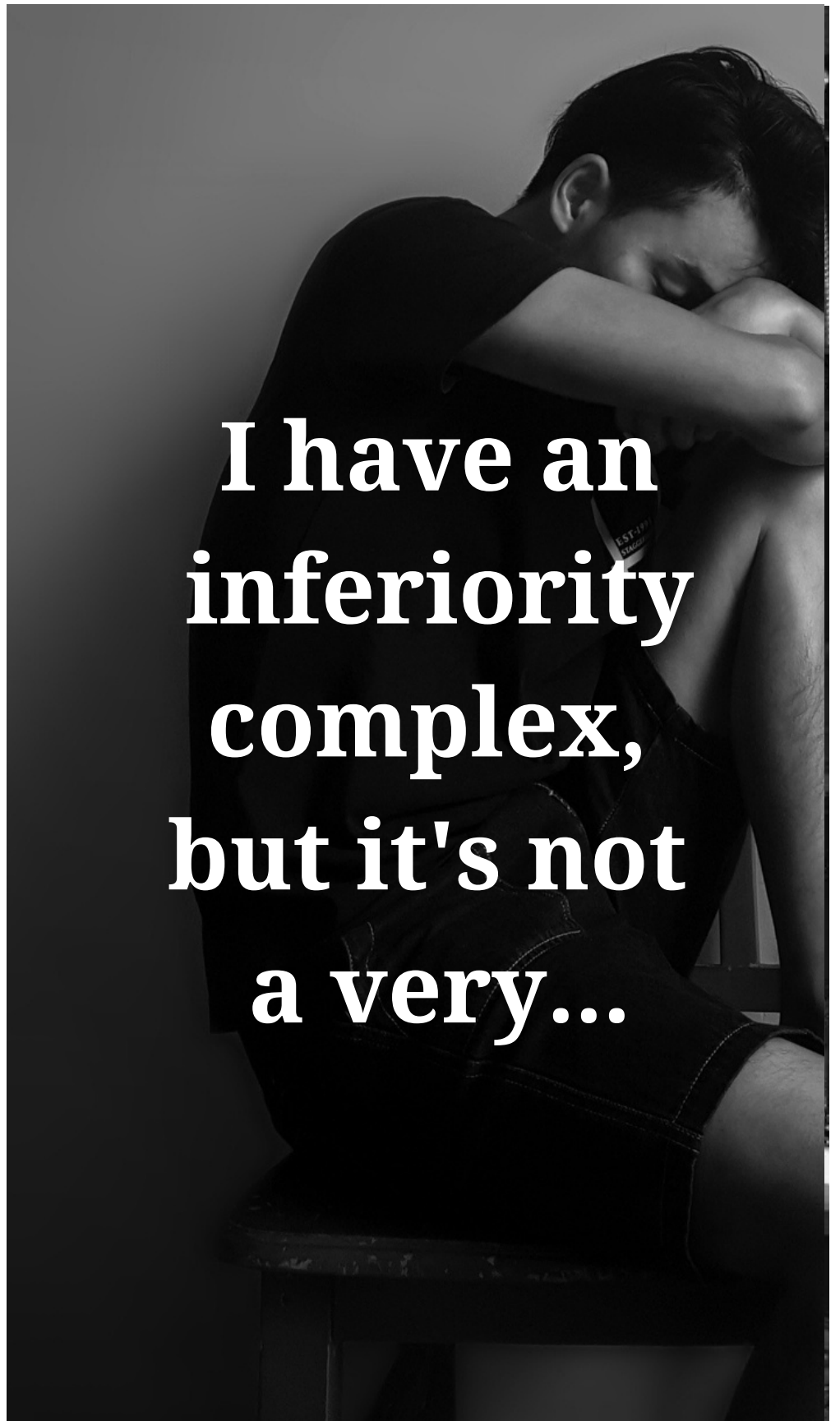
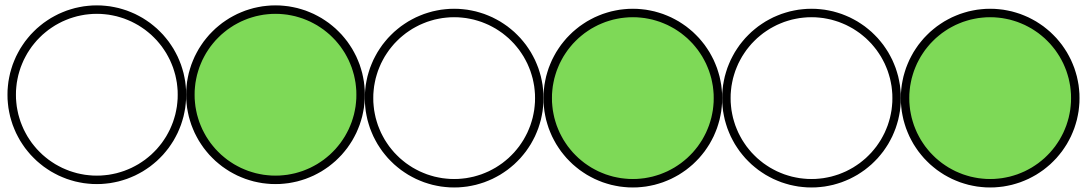
**RUCSO**



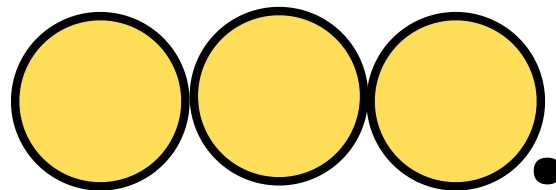
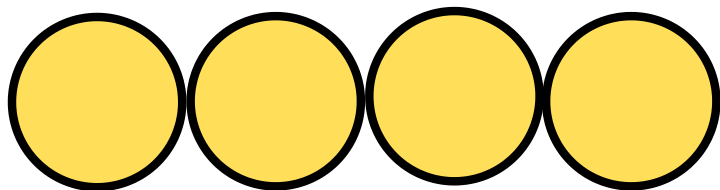
**ANOLSM**



**NEAOBM**



**I have an  
inferiority  
complex,  
but it's not  
a very...**



(Answers next week.)

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Last week's answers:

*DRIFT, TANGY, WOBBLE, SCREWY, BANISH*

Despite removing all the stains, I still lost my job as the church *window cleaner*.

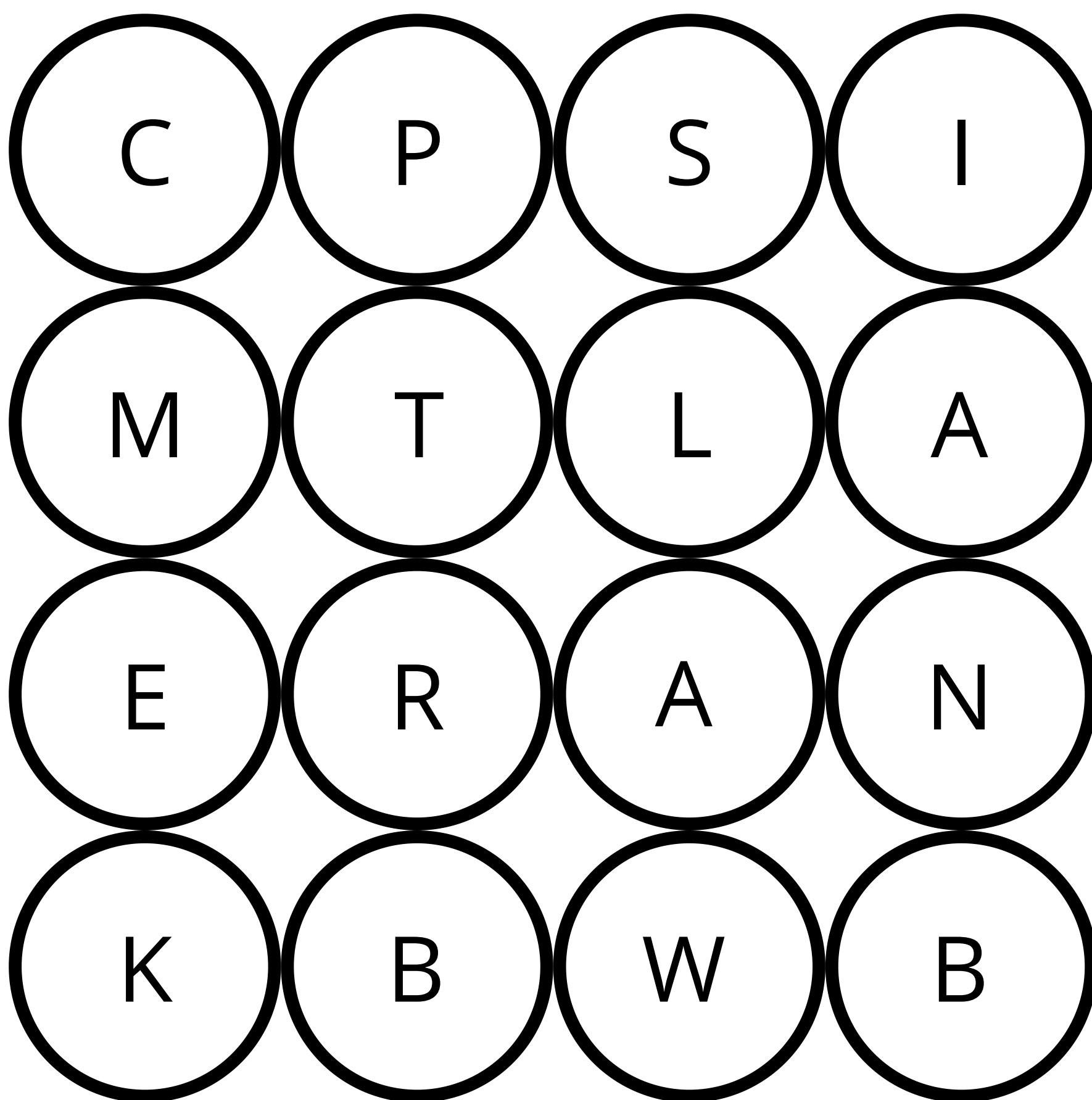


# BONGGLE

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Set a timer for three minutes (honor system!) to find as many words as possible within the grid by connecting letters horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

You know, like Boggle.



SCORING (by word):

three/four letter - 1 pt.  
five letter - 2 pt.  
six letter - 3 pt.  
seven letter - 4 pt.

---

Send your list of words and your score to:  
[theracketreadingseries@gmail.com](mailto:theracketreadingseries@gmail.com)

High score gets a shout out in the next issue!



# BONGGLE

---

## LAST WEEKS WORDS

abb	bito	hob	kesh	out	tush	wist
abo	bits	hobbit	kest	outhit	tusk	wit
ais	bitt	hobbits	khi	outhits	ukase	with
ait	boa	hot	khis	sae	uke	without
aits	boat	hots	oat	sai	ukes	withs
ake	boathouse	house	oath	saith	use	witssite
akes	boats	hout	oaths	sake	wae	
ash	boh	husk	oats	saw	waes	
ask	boho	hut	oba	sea	wai	
att	bohs	ibis	obi	shit	wais	
bat	bot	ish	obia	shoat	waist	
bath	bota	ita	obias	shot	wait	
baths	both	its	obis	shott	waits	
bats	bots	iwi	obit	shout	wake	
batt	bott	iwis	obits	shut	wakes	
battu	botts	kae	ohia	sib	was	
bias	eas	kaes	ohias	sibb	wase	
bib	east	kai	oho	sit	wash	
bis	est	kais	ohs	sith	washout	
bise	his	kas	otto	ska	wast	
bish	hist	kaw	ouk	skaith	wis	
bisk	hit	kaws	ouks	skaw	wise	
bist	hits	kea	ous	stab	wish	
bit	hoa	keas	oust	stoa	wisht	

LAST WEEKS WINNER:  
**Elizabeth Stix**

YES!  
YES!  
A WINNER!

# 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 are you surprisingly annoyed by these days?*

ANNA ALLEN

ROBERT BEVERIDGE

PETER BULLEN

*Given all the inherent contradictions and bewildering aspects of secure shoelace management, how have the damn things endured so long?*

YUAN CHANGMING

*These days I am particularly annoyed by the way Trump is directing the super American power not at the virus at home, but the people in foreign countries.*

JAMES CHRONISTER

*Spending the summer in rural MT and trying to stream podcasts. They work about %80 of the time which is just unreliable enough to drive ya crazy.*

DS MAOLALAI

*I'm not annoyed by anything - no, I'm cool as shit.*

ALANA PERINO

LEONARD REIDELBACH

NAY SAYSOURINHO



**THE  
RACKET**  
WEEKLY



**THOUGHT / PROCESS**  
**W / MAW SHEIN WIN**

+

READERS  
TO BE ANNOUNCED

**THURS. 8/27**  
**7PM / ZOOM**

# THE RACKET

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## PATREON

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## WEBSITE

WWW.THERACKETSF.COM

## NEWSLETTER

WWW.THERACKETSF.COM/  
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## INSTAGRAM

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## SUBMIT YOUR WORK:

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**AND  
THAT'S THE  
BUZZER.**

