

THE RACKET | 45



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THE RACKET

Hi.

How is everyone?

I received my second dose of vaccination today (yay) and though I am feeling a lot of things—luck, joy, trepidation, anxiety (always anxiety)—I can't say I'm suffused with the overwhelming sense of relief I've heard others talk about. I mean, yes, the quiet din of fear that had settled in as near permanent background noise for the last year has somewhat quieted. And, yes, it is reassuring in a way I can't quite put into words that my chances of getting very, very ill are now very, very remote.

I have heard people talking about breaking down in tears after receiving their second shot or feeling a sense of overpowering alleviation as the unrecognized burden that had been resting on their shoulders for so long suddenly vanished. Which is great, but honestly I can't say I'm having a similar experience.

In the wake of receiving my second dose I have to admit I'm still worried. And if I really look deep, really pull the curtains back on my fears I think I might be even more worried than I was before.

Chalk it up to the poorly understood variants raging across the country or the steady increase in cases across the globe or the one-third of citizens in the United States who actively proclaim they won't be getting vaccinated for *whatever* reason, but yeah, I'm still squinting my eyes warily at the future. I am still concerned about just what happens next.

We are in this moment, this transitory period where, we hope, the worst of the pandemic is behind us and the "end" of it seems near. To me this seems the time to focus on buckling down on safety precautions and doing our universal best to get every human being inoculated. Instead the slightest glimmer of admittedly, much needed hope has acted like a battering ram against whatever thin barrier of sanity we'd propped up between the virus and our social lives.

Don't get me wrong, I want life to come back online. I want to feel safe being inside. I want to interact with other human beings and not worry when I accidentally brush against them. But, man, there are so many unanswered questions and even with a vaccine coursing through my bloodstream, I can't help but think we're jumping the gun just a bit.

We continue to exist in this world where a central hub of information regarding this disease and the variants, let alone the vaccine, isn't readily available. We are bombarded with unsubstantiated truths and opinions cast as facts and a cast of politicians and "journalists" hard pushing them for their own selfish reasons. We are still in the midst of chaos, but it doesn't it suddenly, disconcertingly feel like we've collectively shrugged our shoulders and said we're ready to move on? And I guess I'm just not ready for it.

I don't know what it's going to take for me to feel safe again. Maybe there's some illuminated, scientific *deus ex machina* that will appear and cleanse me of my fears. Maybe the slow crawl of time will do it. Or maybe, what we'll come to learn, is that the gnawing sense of dread never leaves us, we just get used to it.

Whatever happens, I feel lucky right now, happy even. And I think I'll just let that sink in for a bit.

'Till next time.

-N

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

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<https://www.saveourchinatowns.org/>

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<https://blacklivesmatter.com/>

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Wide open spaces.

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WE HAVE A PATREON

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

45



BLUE VAN
JONATHAN CROW
2020



GLORY DAYS
JONATHAN CROW
2021

on another Zoom meeting i plot my exiting

PAOLO BICCHIERI

I miss the kind of people who smoke
in cars with the windows up, and, of course,
not because they smoke in cars with the windows up

I miss the way they walk
a shamble / a staggering /
a deluge of footfalls with a
spine straight like I don't need nobody's help
mother fucker, and of course, they don't

I miss the ways
they'd sit at the heads of tables
like kings of beasts / old lions /
with bottles of Carlo Rossi
who ate of courses made from 3 am McDonald's dollar menus

I miss the people whose sounds are both soliloquy
and ecology, professors practicing penance at El Rio
queeraoke nights, who learned off courses of Kerouac and June Jordan

I miss them because I've found a spot East of Eden
to call my own Salinas, a King City where I can match
thunder for thunder in a hard wood bed, where myself
as a child never believed I'd really find any good rest

I miss them because I rode
in those cars that smelt of cinder
& divorce, that reeked of Die Hard quotes
and river canoeing



MEN WITH GUNS
JONATHAN CROW
2021

Family Tree

ERIKA ECKART

I. Fairy Tales

I was too young when I arrived to remember how I got there, but I hoped my grandmother stole me. A stolen child was pined for, loved. Someone came back for them. In the stories grandma read me, stolen babies were the dearest currency and the old women looked like her: babushka, skin crinkled, deep valleys like a relief map, curling in on themselves, drawn back to the earth's core. These ancient women were either wicked witches preparing children for the oven, or mothers of last resort, swooping in to feed and cradle the swaddled leavings, making the sallow parcel pink again. Was a woodsman going to swoop in and save me? Was I to be restored to my rightful kingdom, having been missed all this time? Or was she the latter: a savior, a salvager, nursing me with an almost-milk porridge that wasn't mother's but would nonetheless fatten me. She dipped me again and again, a wax child, almost identical to a one raised by its mother. And with each dip, with each day as no axman or mother arrived, I learned I was not stolen. No one was coming for me. She made me as best she could: a little misshapen, bangs at a diagonal, reeking of cabbage and ointments. She dressed me in anachronistic clothing brought from the eaves, like all the other children, but not. My play involved no mothering and no baby dolls, just action figures with pregnancy as a plot twist, divorces, betrayals, secret twins, just like in the stories my grandmother and I watched in the afternoons where I learned the word she used for my mother was an insult. I had a story, too: I was special. I was saved. I was left. When irritated, she reminded me of my story: not only was no one coming for me, but there was something terrible locked deep inside of me, under the milk and wax and hair and wool, deep down at the core. And so I walked myself to school and put myself to sleep and wrapped the terribleness tight like a stone baby, knowing that real grandmothers could feed you and eat you, too.

II. Boogieman

I remember the cadaver-colored yellow-green of the linoleumed hallway, the day I sat a step below my mother who came to warn me of the Boogie Man. She was enormous, her strawberry blonde hair swinging out from a center part, Jordache jeans painted on her thighs, the effervescence of tic-tacs and snapping mint gum. It was on the news each half-hour, this man picking off little girls. I hadn't seen her in weeks, months, and I hung on her booming voice when she told me that Stranger Danger, when he inevitably arrived, would be middle-aged and moustached, dirty fingernails sliding open a van door, to show me the glistening candy wrappers. He'd instruct me to "come here little girl." "Are you getting this?" she begged while she grabbed me at the thick of my upper arm with both hands, each finger leaving a mark. She taught me a secret password to use if I ever needed to and when she left an hour later, I whispered it like a mantra: "Cadillac, Cadillac, Cadillac." The words filled the air of the lizard-lit house otherwise still and quiet, empty except for me and grandma now, all the windows and doors double-locked because you never know what's out there.

III. Branches

The girl on the radio talks about being left behind. Her parents had no choice, she says. She forgives, she says. But she can't help being angry and sad, even now reunited with them for a decade in the US. The girl on the radio says during one particularly rough patch in her adulthood, they took a photo of her brain which revealed blank spaces where the tendrils must have blinked, paused, too busy surviving to develop synapses. The doctor had told her a child abandoned by their parents develops a brain that looks like a tree without branches, nothing but a trunk reaching up for air. I wonder if mine is branchless too, gasping, or if it is like a wild oak, with gnarled grandmother's hands for branches, articulated, hinged, zigzagging, bent into whatever space is available, plunging earthward, before rising again, fingertips to the sky.



MINI 5
LINDA SIMMEL
2019



MINI 4
LINDA SIMMEL
2018

g r o u t

MADISON YOEST

you will love me when I'm lying in an empty bathtub at 2:30 in the morning. my scleras will be the same shade of red dawn— one that makes sailors tie extra knots in frayed rope anchored to doc. the boat, my eyelids, bump against irises, sway with the tide of pulse. they will not move from the collision, but hold their gaze to a polished silver faucet.

you will hold my hand while I can still feel your touch. my wrist will balance itself atop the bath wall on a protruding bone once hidden behind ligaments thick with life. rolling from the weight of fingers, palm now exposed, see black hiding between red skin and yellowed nails, five coral snakes. do not let them entangle your fate lines with mine.

you will give me a pillow when my neck gives out. when my head hits porcelain, you will hear the hollow *thud* of space once home to hippocampus. it will echo the voice of a parent present only in body.

you will braid my hair when I cannot tell hair tie from tourniquet. swim your fingers through grease and weave whispers into brown algae, drape them over patches of land.

you will lay with me. climb into this casket. tuck my spine into the bed of your chest before my vertebrae become bruised.



ALL THE MONEY IN THE VAULT

DEVIN BEGGS

Kenny awoke to an empty bed. On Alice's nightstand were signed divorce papers with a neon-pink sticky note indicating where he should sign to end their marriage. There was also a handwritten note, which said: "Tired of being broke. This is over. I'm taking Ellie. I'm taking the house."

He agreed with Alice's first sentence. He was tired of being broke, too, but he didn't see why they couldn't continue to be tired and broke together.

He went to Ellie's room. Her tiny mattress was empty and so was her chest of stuffed animals. He opened the top drawer of her clothes cubby, and that was empty too.

Sitting at the kitchen table, Kenny cut two holes in his San Francisco Giants beanie with dull scissors. Then he tossed the beanie in the passenger seat of his Impala, in a heap with his windbreaker and the wooden spoon he used to stir his spaghetti.

The Impala pattered into the parking lot of Prestige Bank. He got out and zipped up his windbreaker, put the wooden spoon in his pocket, and pulled the beanie down over his face. He couldn't see, so he twisted the beanie around every which way. The eyeholes didn't match up with his eyes. He looked sideways at his reflection in the bank's glass door. His reflection looked back at him cock-eyed.

Kenny went inside and waited in line.

One teller, a thin old woman with thick glasses, smiled and said, "Can I help you?"

He walked to the counter. "All the money in the vault, please. Give it to me. Please. I have a gun."

They both looked at the wooden spoon protruding from his pocket. "Certainly, sir." Her knobby hand reached below the counter.

"Please don't press the button," he said.

She pressed the button.

Confetti fell from the ceiling, party poppers popped, and airhorns blew. She reached across the counter to put a colorful party hat on Kenny's head. The other tellers applauded. A pair of models in bikinis stretched a banner between them that said, "World's Best Bank Robber." A third model brought him a massive blank novelty check and a TV crew materialized, cameras rolling. The old teller reached below the counter, brought out a microphone, and said, "Congratulations, sir! You've won Best Bank Robber. What's your name?"

"Kenny," he said, leaning forward to speak into the microphone.

They filled out the check: *Pay to the order of: Kenny. Amount: All the Money in the Vault.*

"How do you feel, Kenny?"

"Pretty good."

"Where will you go next?"

"Home, I guess."

The check wouldn't fit in his Impala, so Kenny walked home with it tucked under his arm. *I should have deposited it while I was at the bank*, he thought.

Then he stopped abruptly on the sidewalk, his mouth hanging open. He was standing in front of his house, or rather, where his house used to be. In its place was an empty dirt lot. The front yard and the cracked path bisecting it remained, as did the weed-sprouted driveway and oak tree with its dust-coated tire swing. But the house, from its foundation to its shingles, had vanished.

He hadn't believed Alice would really take it.

He dialed her cell phone. "The number you're trying to reach has been disconnected."

Kenny sat cross-legged on the sidewalk, balancing the novelty check across his knees. For a long time, he watched the empty expanse in front of him like a drive-in movie screen. Then he drew the wooden spoon from his pocket and twirled it like a gunslinger. He laughed. Ellie would laugh with him if she were there. His smile faded as he thought of her.

He put the spoon in his mouth and pulled the trigger.



UNTITLED
MICHELLE SIJIA MA
2020



UNTITLED
MICHELLE SIJIA MA
2020

**THE
BACK
PAGE**

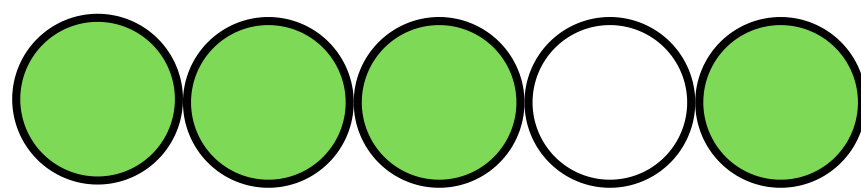
BY
LAURA JAYE CRAMER

THE WEEKLY MUMBLE

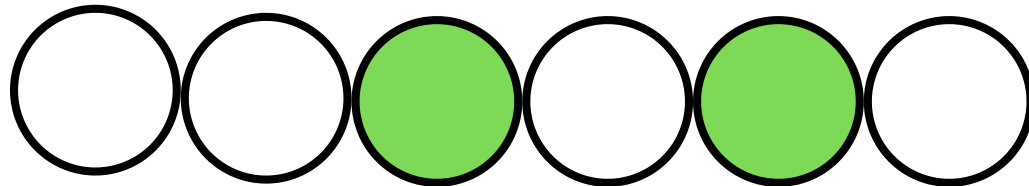
WORD STUFF

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

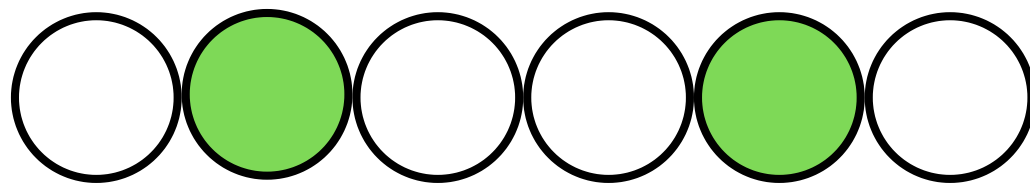
AOGRC



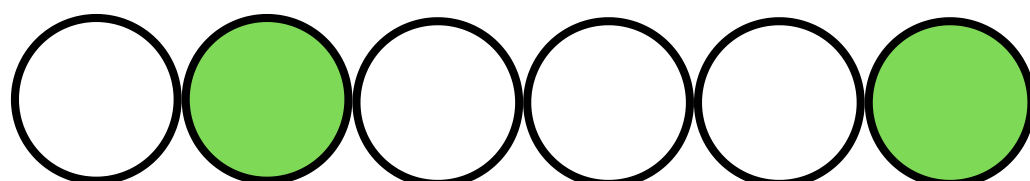
SEIMUS



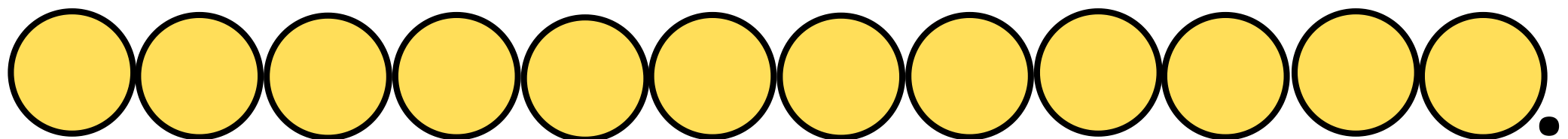
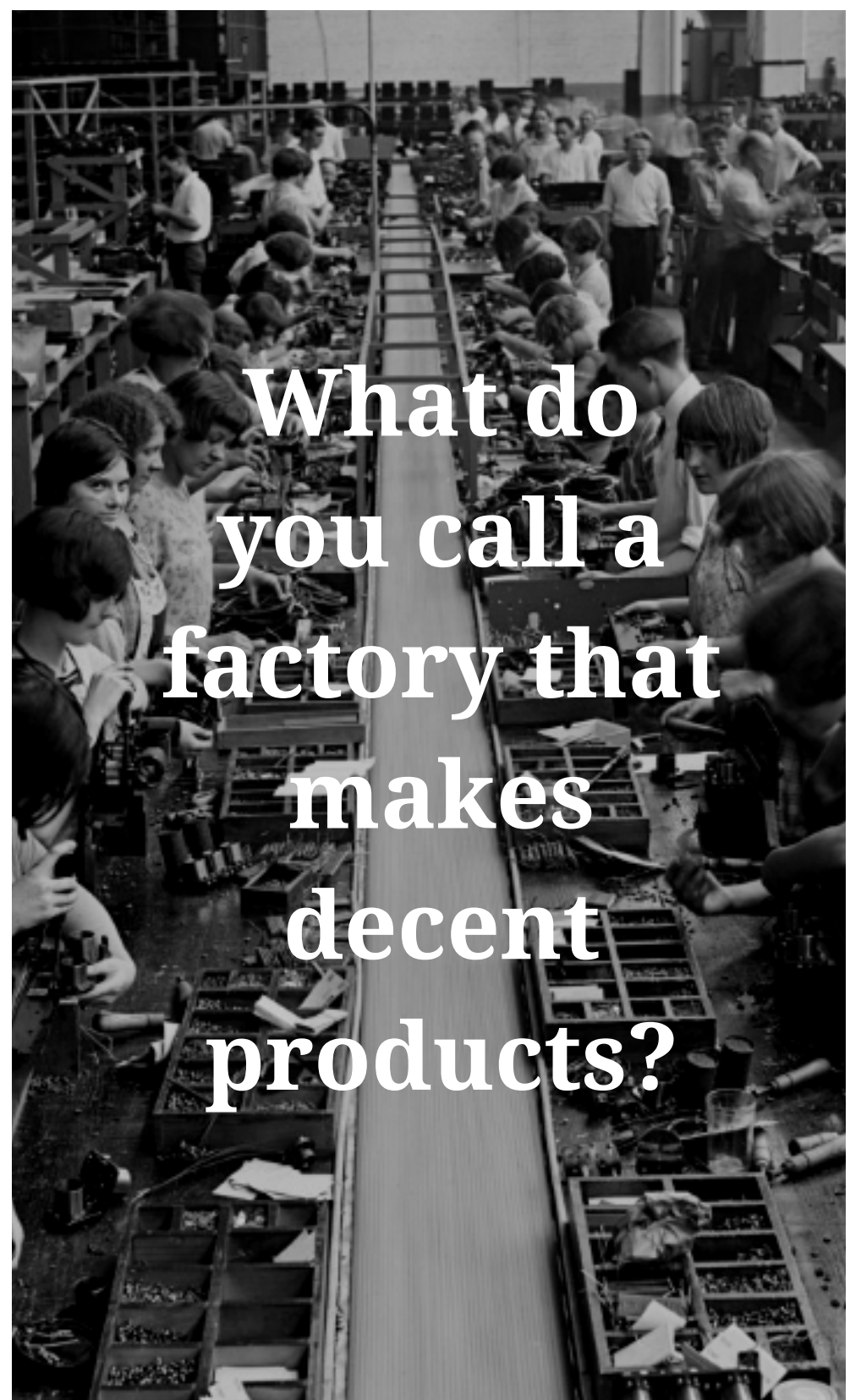
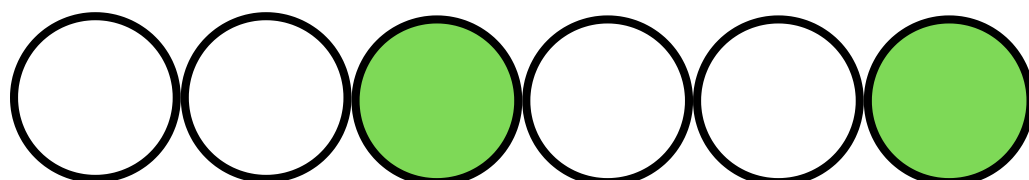
BDHYIR



TAACVN



NFITAN



(Answers next week.)

Last week's answers:

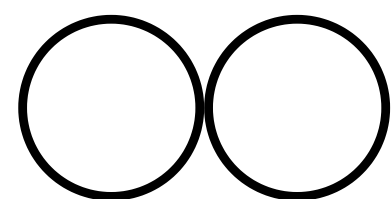
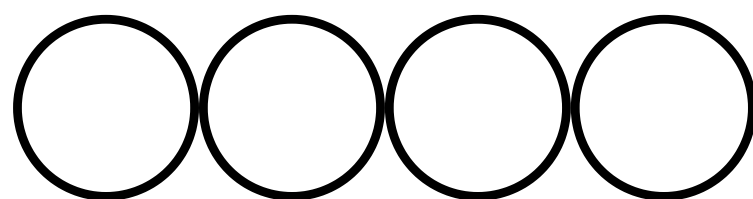
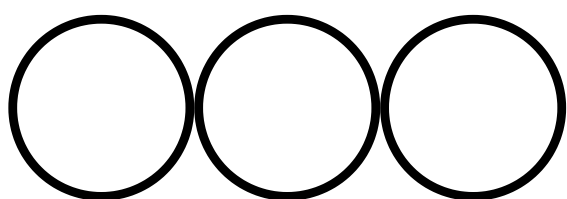
MIMIC, PLUNK, CAMPUS, SMOOTH, CRUNCH

If you drop a pillow from the top bunk does it get a *concushion*?

HUSTLE & REBUSTLE

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

~~CORNERS~~



LAST WEEK'S ANSWER

get over it

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THE RACKET

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**WE APOLOGIZE
FOR THE DIN.**

