

THE RACKET | 75



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Hey.

In our newsletter a couple weeks back I wrote about football. I don't want to get too deep into it, but the gist of it was football is bad, everybody knows football is bad, but because we just like it so damn much, we keep telling ourselves it's not that bad.

In the wake of two mass shootings in California in the last seven days—each and all of the victims from underrepresented communities—I can't help thinking that there's some connective gristle between our country's white-knuckled clutching of football and our strange, societal obsession with guns.

The connective tissue is selfishness.

Or more so, the overwhelming societal atmosphere in America these days, is selfishness. Swap out gun control and football for a crumbling infrastructure and spiking poverty rate—or any of the other systemic maladies eroding our foundations—and the link between the two stays the same.

We are a country drowning in our wants and needs. Hell, capitalism—the economic system that we cling to—is defined by selfishness. Pull up your bootstraps, fight your way to the top, and once you're there do anything in your power to anyone who gets in your way to stay there. The American Dream is pretty much "Do what you want to get what you want." This concept of freedom that we seem to contort ourselves tighter and tighter around every day might have once been a beautiful idea, but now it's just a smoke screen for people who want to do whatever the hell it is they want to do.

We still have mass shootings in this country because a healthy portion of Americans like going to the shooting range and blasting targets with AR-15s. Sure, call your gun collection a "safety measure" or paint gun rights with a thin veneer of nostalgia and tradition, but at the end of the day, in the face of more and more horrific situations like what occurred in Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay these last few days, guns still exist because people don't want to give them up. Innocent people lose their lives on an almost daily basis because an antiquated culture refuses to let go of what they love, even if it hurts so many other people.

Climate change, the unnecessary deaths of millions of people from COVID, the opioid crisis, the staggering increase in the number of unhoused

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people forced to live on the streets with little to no services—the list goes on and on and on, and if you track them back to the source, you'll find the problem is connected to the wants and needs of small group of people, maybe even a single person.

Though I do think there's a conservative movement in America that's particular ripe with this strain of selfishness, we're all a touch guilty of choosing ourselves over the greater good. We all make decisions based on our own personal needs regardless of their greater consequences. It's a part of life, I understand that. We just need to start recognizing it, to start seeing that our selfishness—big or small—has repercussions. Even just becoming aware of this, well, that's a step forward in the right direction. And nowadays, moving at all is a victory.

'Till next time.

-N

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

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ALAS HALF MOON BAY

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Website: www.instagram.com/0chinerero
IG: @0chinerero

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Tragedy upon tragedy.



WE HAVE A PATREON

We aren't in this for the money.

But 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.

THANK YOU TO THESE FOLKS

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LAUREN C. JOHNSON
ANGIE MCDONALD
QUYNH-AN PHAN
SPENCER TIERNEY
ALEX MACEDA
DAVID SANDERS
SARAMANDA SWIGART
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EROTIC GARDEN (ROSES)
MIEKE MARPLE
2021



EROTIC GARDEN (TULIP)
MIEKE MARPLE
2021

Every Day is Fresh and New and I Don't Remember Anything From the Day Before

AMY MIDDLETON

It smells watermelon, but there aren't
any around. I'm a fool because
I still like to daydream. My right foot
has a bruise on the heel so it aches
to walk. I sit in the grass- sweating
and drunk- I still don't have a job.
The machines around me beep
and whirr (rubbing it in my face.)
I might be jealous of the mailman
because he gets to see me everyday,
unkempt. I might be jealous because
his car isn't broken. The same girl
keeps showing up in my dreams
but I am afraid to tell her. The ground
only quakes beneath me. I don't
understand why they can't feel it.
Summer lingers late into the night.
I have sunburn, but only on the
backs of my legs. Every day before
going to sleep I pull all the thoughts
out of my head with a fishing wire
and collect them in the back of my closet.



INDONESIAN FAMILY PORTRAIT #3
AKIQ AW
2017



INDONESIAN FAMILY PORTRAIT #12
AKIQ AW
2017



INDONESIAN FAMILY PORTRAIT #1
AKIQ AW
2017

THE STATUE OF LIBERTY.

BILLIE CHANG

I thought I saw Duke yesterday. There is a permanence to him that I think will never leave, because I saved him that time there was a fight and he saved me that time there was another. (Times Square has a lot.) Duke used to station himself down by East 35th and Park, not because he got the best business there (he didn't) but because there was a street vendor he admired who sold hot dogs and pretzels and sometimes (but not always) would give him slices of pineapple. Duke costume-d as Spiderman. He shot webs at people's feet and laughed too hard and posed upside-down on a loud and obnoxious street in front of loud and obnoxious buildings surrounded by loud and obnoxious people. I once asked Duke why he chose to be Spiderman and he took one look at me and said he didn't – that in fact, Spiderman was a coward: he doesn't show his face like Captain America or Iron Man or Wonder Woman. I was going to mention that all superheroes did in fact have secret identities (for protection!) and thus, none of them “showed their faces” either (and wasn't Iron Man in his little suit all the time, with his face covered?) but I left it alone because I knew Duke would shriek and gawk and make that weird sound that he did – almost like a cross between a leftover sneeze and a choke – when he was frustrated. Duke was my only friend. I wanted him to like me, so bad and so much that I would take his side in almost everything – even if he was vile and mean-spirited and sometimes said things about our work and the world and his place in it that I knew could never be taken back.

He never fully explained why he chose Spiderman. He just did. The two melded together so that I couldn't see one or the other without seeing both. I told him that made him an artist. He told me that made him pitiful. When he finally left, after years of hints and threats and wanting, it tore me apart. He told me... well, first, he told me not to ever ask for pineapples from his street vendor (that was his thing). But, secondly, he told me that I should remember that sometimes, there is purpose in leaving for greater things.

I work primarily in Times Square. Always as the Statue of Liberty. I pose like this, with my torch up. Or like this. Sometimes, but only when my back doesn't hurt, like this. And when I'm feeling fun, like this. You get the idea. There is something thrilling

about it, putting on this costume and asking – no, demanding – no, wanting – no, needing – to have people take pictures with you. Ones that they’ll hang on their walls or put in their wallets or fold up in their pockets and crease. I like knowing that I represent something sacred and special and so solid that no one will ever dare move me, not in a million years, not when the sun falls into the Earth and burns us all, not when I leave this place forever. Maybe it’s the heat, the fact that I had placed that little cat figurine – the one that Duke gave me when he left – onto the warm windowsill and watched as it melted and pooled into a glob of pink plastic. Or maybe it was the fact that I know there isn’t much better than this: that who I am when this mask is on is someone with a history, someone true and willing and free and necessary. And that the person I am when the mask is off is no one: someone ignored and pounced upon and seemingly blamed for everything. Alone, I am not even a withered branch or a curled piece of air or the leftover tang from a piece of salt. I am not important, though I try to be.

Yesterday, before I thought I saw Duke, I checked the mail for the first time in a while. I haven’t touched paper in months; I don’t believe in it anymore and anyways, everything is electronic and things buzz and who even cares anymore? But yeah, I checked the mail yesterday. It had been so long, that expectance began to take form — as though I knew there would be something waiting for me. When I opened the slot, there was only one letter. Just one. You should know that there is a fervor to which I open every bit of thing that I receive. I have no keepsakes, no evidence of my time spent as this person. I always think, somehow, a crinkled piece of picture or a torn polaroid or a note of thanks will make its way back to me. It’s dumb, I know, which is why I stopped checking the mail in the first place and believing in it all.

I know you’re wondering, so I’ll read the letter now and that’ll be that.

It reads: “Happy Birthday. We hope you had a good one. From your friends at Grossman’s Dental Care. Please come in soon for a cleaning.”

This is the only letter I have received in months.

There was a review in the local newspaper a few years back that had described the restaurant down by the theater as serving food that was “inedible, grey, and ultimately pallid.” Harsh, I know. But then, it said that the food was – nonetheless – “necessary to experience by oneself, before opinions should be made.” I have never eaten at the restaurant down by the theater, but I like opinions more than fact, like them for their pliability – they’re flexible like a piece of warmed, sunny plastic that curves inwards at the touch. I read that review once, twice, three times. Out loud, in the mirror, sitting

down, standing up. I wish I could go back and read it again. But, like I said, I don't believe in paper and I remember most of it. Isn't that enough?

I think... I think I will try to contact Duke and ask him how he's been. I will send a picture. I won't be wearing my mask, but I will inevitably regret it later and wish I had (though I am working on it). I will be dressed simply, posed in my simple apartment on this simple road in this simple city. I will be smiling. I hope he can tell what a life I have lived. I hope he can tell what a life I will live. And I hope he will reply, and tell me what else there is.



WELCOME HOME STRANGER
REBEKAH GOLDSTEIN
2022

Modern Architecture

ADAM STUTZ

The modern architecture of a traffic accident begins w/
speaking past the collarbone
of your adversary towards a vanishing horizon straining
to circumvent
the disturbing undulation of a new relationship It's all
a simulacrum for animals in headlights— eyes glistening
in shades of green & white in the midnight throat of a dark
highway In all too present nausea at work
the bodies become questions: What the fuck is the stratagem?
The means? Pick your own poisonous adventure
In the chain of negotiations amid bloodletting for sustenance &
a grocery trip gone haywire the fractures of
conversation sour into teeth & melt into the specter
of aggravation/fear/assault The debt comes down to the test—
a slurred Wednesday night & a blinking knuckle



SORRY NOT SORRY
REBEKAH GOLDSTEIN
2022

CONTRIBUTORS

AKIQ AW
BILLIE CHANG
REBEKAH GOLDSTEIN
MIEKE MARPLE
AMY MIDDLETON
MARK OCHINERO
ADAM STUTZ

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by Josh Riedel



"...a gripping literary thriller that forces us to confront our complicity in the technologies reshaping human connections, and it asks how far we will go to maintain those connections."

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**FROM THE
FRONT TO
THE BACK.**

