

THE
RACKET

QUARANTINE
JOURNAL

NO. 1

15

**THE
RACKET**

**Q U A R A N T I N E
J O U R N A L**

N O . 1

THE RACKET

Hi.

How are you?

My name is Noah Sanders and I curate and host a monthly reading series at Alley Cat Books called The Racket.

Or I did up until the world went into hibernation.

Putting on The Racket - showcasing amazing writers, giving back to this wonderful Bay Area community - is one of the great joys in my life and I miss it dearly.

What you are looking at on your digital device of choice right now is my effort to fill this temporary void in my life. To keep giving back and to keep supporting great writing and great art while giving back to the community that has done so good by us.

This is our Quarantine Journal.

A weekly selection of poems, prose and art we hope will help tide you over, keep you sane and remind you what'll be waiting for you when the lights come back on.

We hope you enjoy.
And we hope you come back to enjoy the next one.

That's all I've got.

- Noah Sanders, The Racket

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CONTENTS

| | | |
|-------------------|--|----|
| KAR JOHNSON | Magdalena | 1 |
| MIAH JEFFRA | Otherwise | 2 |
| CHRIS DANZIG | Air Travel | 5 |
| ARI BIRD | Crunchy juicy eating sounds | 8 |
| ARTHUR KLEPCHUKOV | Glimmering Sidewalks | 9 |
| ANNA ROTTY | Transfer of Power | 11 |
| BRITTANY ACKERMAN | Expressing Your Relation to Eternity | 12 |
| KAR JOHNSON | Untitled | 23 |

CURATED BY
Noah Sanders

QUARANTINE JOURNAL

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MACDALENA / KAR JOHNSON / 2016

Otherwise

(after Joan Brown's "Noel in the Kitchen")

MIAH JEFFRA

You can only see a childhood when you pull as far back as the years of it. Otherwise, it is all feeling: the texture of a dog's fur, the fine grain of checkered linoleum, butter on a plate, a chip in the Formica.

Time provides a frame, borders nailed into right angles, suitable for hanging.

A story. A photograph. Clear lines making memories with beginnings and ends. Enter mother, exit brother. Enter father, exit the bedroom door. Frames. Angles. A different vantage.

The more you stare at something, the more its shapes flatten with the background.

I'm sure my father had a texture. His hands would scoop me by my armpits and up onto his motorcycle. His coffee-laden tongue would lick my nose. His breath grazed my face when he laughed silly in front of the barbecue. He must be holding me to be so close to his breath. But I feel none of these things. I just can't feel them.

The more you stare at something, the less real it seems to be.

The weight of a window. The impossibility of a TV. Marbles on the carpet, and I wonder where my brother has run off to, now. I wonder if he's running, even as he sleeps. I would reach out to touch him, but I'm afraid I wouldn't feel the thing. I'm afraid my fingers would slide right through.

A bedroom. A closet full of records. My older sister hides underneath the sheets, behind her hair, hides. I could brush the hair from her face, and perhaps, just perhaps, I would see what it looks like. A viscera. The bottom of memory, particles that can float. Watch how they dance in the light coming through the blinds. They glint, but never graze the palm of my hand.

The more you stare at something, the more you feel it was never there.

The lightness of a door. The probability of a radio. The corners of a house bleed into blur, and my mother is the only thing with a clear line, in fine grain. The center of the frame. The years of it. Her ice blue eyes, a vantage I will always wonder. So much feeling. Otherwise, a childhood.

A kitchen. A water-stained counter. A sleeping dog lying on linoleum. I could place a marble on the floor by the stove, and it would roll steady to the back door. A long line. The bottom of a frame. A story. A photograph. This one tells me I'm allowed to feel exactly one thing. What would I choose? Is that a choice any of us can make?

Air Travel

CHRIS DANZIG

I took a shower
Thinking of how much ground you covered
While I stood in my kitchen
Making breakfast
Sunrise crept her warm honey fingers
Through the blinds
I put my socks back on
Because my floor is always cold
Bacon was in the oven
As I recently discovered, it tastes better,
Crispier that way
The earth was quiet, and the coffee steamed
Swirling away like cigarette smoke
Or a dream

How bad was the airport coffee?
Did you pay nine dollars for a papery cheese
Danish and bitter French roast?
Or are you holding out for the free stuff in a
Styrofoam cup
Unsatisfying in every conceivable metric
A la temperature, color, scent,
And the aforementioned steam spiral

What a modern wonder
That a few hours ago you were in my arms
Talking in your sleep
And presently you're in a different time zone
Eating your second breakfast at McDonald's
(Don't be so ashamed that you enjoy
Those McGriddles, I get a kick out of how wide you
smile
From such inconsequential luxuries)

Meanwhile I still am not wearing pants
The bacon still isn't finished
The eggs are frying; they sound like Saturday,
And I figure I should shower at some point
But I'm not there yet

You're checking into the hotel early
Looking in the mirror, psyching yourself up
For the cavalcade of handshakes,
Hugs, and introductions to those new relatives
You never had before your sister
Decided to get married.
It's a thin line between fun and exasperation,
Sometimes it seems you don't know the difference

But I'm still in the kitchen
Picking out hot sauce for the eggs,
Which I've finally —
I wish you were here to see it—
Fried perfectly over medium
I'm not planning to do anything today
But I might not tell you so,
Because I know you'd be jealous.

It's raining at your party, which is a bummer
Because shouldn't the desert
Be warmer than here?
There's a lot of food and drinking;
It's a cacophony and a cornucopia, literally,
I know you know you'll hurt tomorrow

By now it's almost lunch time
I've been reading stories
About Oakland on the sofa,
Still lacking my pants
I suppose it's time to start the day,
As my father used to say,
So I turn on the faucet, light a candle
Step in the tub, and inhale the steam —

And I think about when I was a snotty kid with a
cold,
Lying on the bathroom tile
While my mother waited patiently by the sink;
And I imagine myself as a Russian mobster,
Covered in tattoos, scheming the next heist
At the bathhouse;
And I think of you and me, in the back of your car
On a dark road somewhere in the hills
Hiding from the police and inquisitive neighbors.

Hurry up and get back, won't you?



CRUNCHY JUICY EATING SOUNDS / ARI BIRD / 2019

Glimmering Sidewalks

ARTHUR KLEPCHUKOV

Once, on a bright June day that freed us to shed our usual jackets, I snuck out of work to meet you. You, in an azure dress like a clear sky glimpsed through sunglasses. I found your smile on that teeming downtown boulevard, glistening light on a cresting wave. Your kindled fingertips danced up my forearms and tickled into my shirt sleeves. I spun you in a hug that lasted three years, only three years.

When you landed on the ground, we strolled in all directions—toward my home, then yours—never intending to arrive. Along the way, I aimed my chin skyward while yours settled down to our path. And you found sparkling sidewalks where our sun bounced off a cocktail of glittering rocks in concrete shades of gray. Your tickling fingertips pointed them out on each block in our surround. The glimmer transformed the mundane journeys of my neighborhood forever. A smile in every step. A shine from below until our feet eclipsed the light.

Walking the path—covers the path and conceals a perfect dream with reality. Reality, she with her finite sidewalks and her dead ends and her flattened smiles. Sunsets concede to stars.

I can't remember when I last found your azure dress in that stretch of downtown, but you covered our city in sidewalks for me to discover. I retraced them in the chirping mornings, the blinking nights of honking traffic, in our separated moments—reminding me of you.

Blinks divided into years.

I glance down at the stars at the edge of the Milky Way, whispering goodbye to our galaxy from a fishbowl window on a mammoth ship. Once again, my feet eclipse starlight.



TRANSFER OF POWER / ANNA ROTTY / 2017

Expressing Your Relation to Eternity

BRITTANY ACKERMAN

When I was seven, my older brother let it slip that someday the world was going to end. He was building his version of a LEGO Empire State Building. We lived in Riverdale, New York and had a view of the Empire State Building from our apartment. It was all the way out there in Manhattan, but we could see its tower lights change with the seasons; green and red for Christmastime, yellow and white during springtime. We were moving to Florida soon, and the project was his magnum opus.

Doomsday was the word I'd heard him say that I'd never heard before. I repeated it over and over in my mind, a day of doom, it sounded like. He said he knew when it would happen, but when I asked for the day, the time, he said to trust him. He was thirteen.

My brother draws a chart for my mother, a chart for when the pandemic will start to slow. My brother lives with my mother and father. He is thirty-six. I live in Los Angeles with my husband. We listen to podcasts while we cook. We go for hikes up in the Verdugo Mountains. We have been trying to live simply amongst the chaos that has encompassed our world, to fight the pain and panic with optimism and reminders of love.

My brother calls the morning my school is shut down. He's trying to help my mother find toilet paper in a Walmart over 2,000 miles away. I imagine him in all black, scanning the shelves, cackling at the craziness, maybe truly worried inside but never letting it show to our mother as she holds the shopping cart, pushing it behind him. I hear her laughing too. They do not find what they are looking for.

All my classes go virtual. I did not sign up to be an online teacher, but online I go. I record videos for my students to watch while sitting in bed. I try to fluff up my hair, cover a pimple, but in the end, it doesn't really matter. They most likely, will not watch.

I tire of the way people have found peace during this time. This peace, it's not for me. I don't feel a FaceTime or Zoom hangout can replace the tender moments between people in person. Even my therapist admits to me, over the phone, how she is a better therapist face-to-face. "A lot of therapy is based on body language," she tells me, honestly.

I feel less and less like texting friends. I'm told I'm selfish for missing my hikes, for missing the great outdoors, for missing getting a coffee with a friend, for missing working in the library among others who write and study, for missing the lingering of a student after class to shoot the shit, for missing a glass of wine at dinner, for missing going out to dinner at all, for missing and missing and feeling lonely. So many people seem to have

had a profound experience, a spiritual awakening of sorts, a realization that society is but only a façade, a construction. But maybe it's a construction I need. I need to tell myself stories every day in order to survive. I need the stories of books, movies, television, yes, but I also, so much more deeply, need the opening of a door by a stranger, the meeting of someone new while having lunch, the friendly banter of the cashier, the recommendation of the waiter, the compliment, the joke, the love, all the love.

Social distancing does not allow me to express myself in any real way. It only offers a façade, a construction.

I miss my brother. I miss my parents. I hate not knowing when I will be able to see them next. I hold my husband close each morning, afraid to face the day, better with him there, a constant force of love. He wraps me up in that love, but still, the outside world I miss.

My mother cries in the aisle of Walmart when she finds the toilet paper there, freshly stocked.

Maybe the day of doom is the day you lose hope. It hasn't come yet for me, as I still hope, forevermore, I suppose. A flaw of mine, a thing I've constructed to survive.

Another thing to do, I guess, is keep writing.

But how do you express feelings of love in words?

I will cherish you. I want a lifetime with you. I adore you. I am better because of you. I need you by my side. I cannot stop thinking about you. My love for you is unconditional.

untitled

KAR JOHNSON

I saw the face of god today.
With blues I have seen
before but I haven't seen today
And it was actual divinity
the way each cliff turned by
age into the faithful, into an apostle
that is both worthy of worship
And devout unto the earth itself
nothing makes me more grateful
to be among age, to age,
to see waves break like dawn over and over
a thousand times each day

My life is peopled and good.
It's peopled with the gods i have chosen to call my
family
We were birthed into a landscape of chance
with arms like everything
Holy embrace

We are a benevolent god.
I see no wrath here
Only in the cruelty of precarious rocks
which can't hold on for another millenia
Only in the sand and its longing

But from the vista, the present protects me.

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:

Describe quarantine in one sentence.

BRITTANY ACKERMAN

Still too anxious for a Zoom happy hour.

ARI BIRD

CHRIS DANZIG

There is no such thing as too many margaritas.

MIAH JEFFRA

Quarantine is discovering that your several-day un-showered self reminds you of a diner entree from your childhood.

KAR JOHNSON

Outside it is spring, inside still winter.

ARTHUR KLEPCHUKOV

This is a bridge to you from me that's at least six feet long.

ANNA ROTTY

Quarantine is a clear but dirty barrier, like a window made of old glass, or heat coming off of pavement in the distance.

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