



THE RACKET

17

THE RACKET

17

THE RACKET

Hi.

Everyone doing okay?

I've been thinking a lot about escape lately.

Mental, physical, existential, whatever - the world is a cauldron full of gunpowder and acid on the verge of boiling over - escape is on my mind all of the time and I wouldn't be surprised at all if you aren't thinking the same.

People are leaving, some for momentary respites, some for extended departures, some for good.

If there was ever a time when a vacation from what we know (whatever that means anymore) was needed - that time is now.

I've been thinking about the necessity of escape, but more so I've been thinking about the dangers inherent in it.

We are buried underneath immense emotional weight and the idea of escaping it is fantastical at best. Useful, sure, but if we're going to be able to stand upright after all this, we need to start looking the mental implications of this right in the eyeball.

Tough times beg for diversion and we are a society of rationalizers, but I beg you to hold tight to the simple truth that this is still happening, that this will *keep* happening if we continue to believe we can hide from it.

Escape is temporary, needed, but ephemeral.

This isn't, and it won't, be something to hide from and hiding wouldn't do any good anyways.

Keep your heads up.

'Till next time.

Noah Sanders,
The Racket

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

DONATE :

BLACK LIVES MATTER
<https://blacklivesmatter.com/>

THIRD WAVE FUND
website:
<http://www.thirdwavefund.org/>

THE TRANSGENDER DISTRICT
website:
<https://www.transgenderdistrictsf.com/>

Learn more about defunding police:
<https://www.8toabolition.com/>

THE RACKET : QUARANTINE JOURNAL, Vol. 1, NO. 17

Copyright 2020 The Racket

Cover Image:

Fractals #3 (Rise)

2020

Copyright Anna Rotty

Promotional rights only.

This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without permission from individual authors.

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this document via the internet or any other means without the permission of the author(s) is illegal.

We've been running in circles. Honestly, circles.

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

CATHY & JOHN SANDERS
HALLIE YOUNG
JAMIE ENGELMANN
CASEY BENNETT
LILIAN CAYLEE
LAUREN C. JOHNSON
ANGIE MCDONALD
QUYNH-AN PHAN
SPENCER TIERNEY
JUSTIN & SARAH SANDERS

ALEX MACEDA
DAVID SANDERS
SARAMANDA SWIGART
DANIELLE TRUPPI
YALITZA FERRERAS
TOMAS MONIZ
KRISTA POSELL
DANIEL SCHWARTZBAUM
KURT WALLACE
JUDY WEIL

OUR PATREON:

WWW.PATREON.COM/THERACKETREADINGSERIES

SUBMIT YOUR WORK

P O E T R Y
P R O S E
A R T

750 WORDS OR
LESS

Send to:

theracketreadingseries@gmail.com

CONTENTS

ANNA ROTTY	<i>Terra (V)</i>	1
ANNA ROTTY	<i>Terra (XIV)</i>	2
GRACE D'ANCA	Kiss The Wind	3
ANNA ROTTY	<i>Terra (XVI)</i>	5
REBECCA BRATTEN	Belief	6
ANNA ROTTY	<i>Terra (XIII)</i>	8
WILLIAM DORESKEI	The Food Chain has Ruptured	9
ANNA ROTTY	<i>Terra (XV)</i>	11
ANNA ROTTY	<i>Terra (XII)</i>	12
ANN SHERMAN	iii	13
ANNA ROTTY	<i>Terra (IV)</i>	14
HALIM MADI	Kess emak, a love letter to Beirut	15
ANNA ROTTY	<i>Terra (III)</i>	20

THE BACK PAGE
BY
Laura Jaye
Cramer

CURATED BY:
Noah Sanders

THE RACKET

17



TERRA (V)
ANNA ROTTY
2020



TERRA (XIV)
ANNA ROTTY
2020

Kiss The Wind

GRACE D'ANCA

Kiss the wind without guilt.

It chills and pants at the back door
with wild tiger cats waiting for scraps.
Pop open the red umbrella and dance
in no-rain to percussion in your head
while another withers more and more.

Capture the essence of beauty in a cup
with a broken handle, spiderwebs
on the windowsill, though another
sees only snakes and petrified trash.

House your dreams in a hoosier
in a back room that looks on the cyclone
tree the troubled child climbs
no matter what voice calls to him.
Does he know his father will be murdered
by fire?

Dream. Survive the embittered anima.
Jitter and jump on Saturday mornings

when the house is vacant. Slide the hallways
on slippery feet. Fling open doors. Dare
to be ebullient while the albatross flies.

Kiss the wind through battered red shutters
your mama rescued from a train. She always
saw possibility and muted her ears
to the wailing

Laugh out your belly button
so hard you spit
snort through your nose
unembarrassed
sometimes that's all there is.

Praise the ocean, reject
mistaken memories
regrets that stop time.
Tiptoe and stomp in honor of living
inspite of inevitable moribundity
be kind,
and wish for wonder.



Belief

REBECCA BRATTEN

After they placed the dead man in the hole in the ground, they told us all, it was our job to believe he would rise again. Everything depended on our faith, like in that scene in Peter Pan, when you have to believe in fairies, or Tinker Bell gets it.

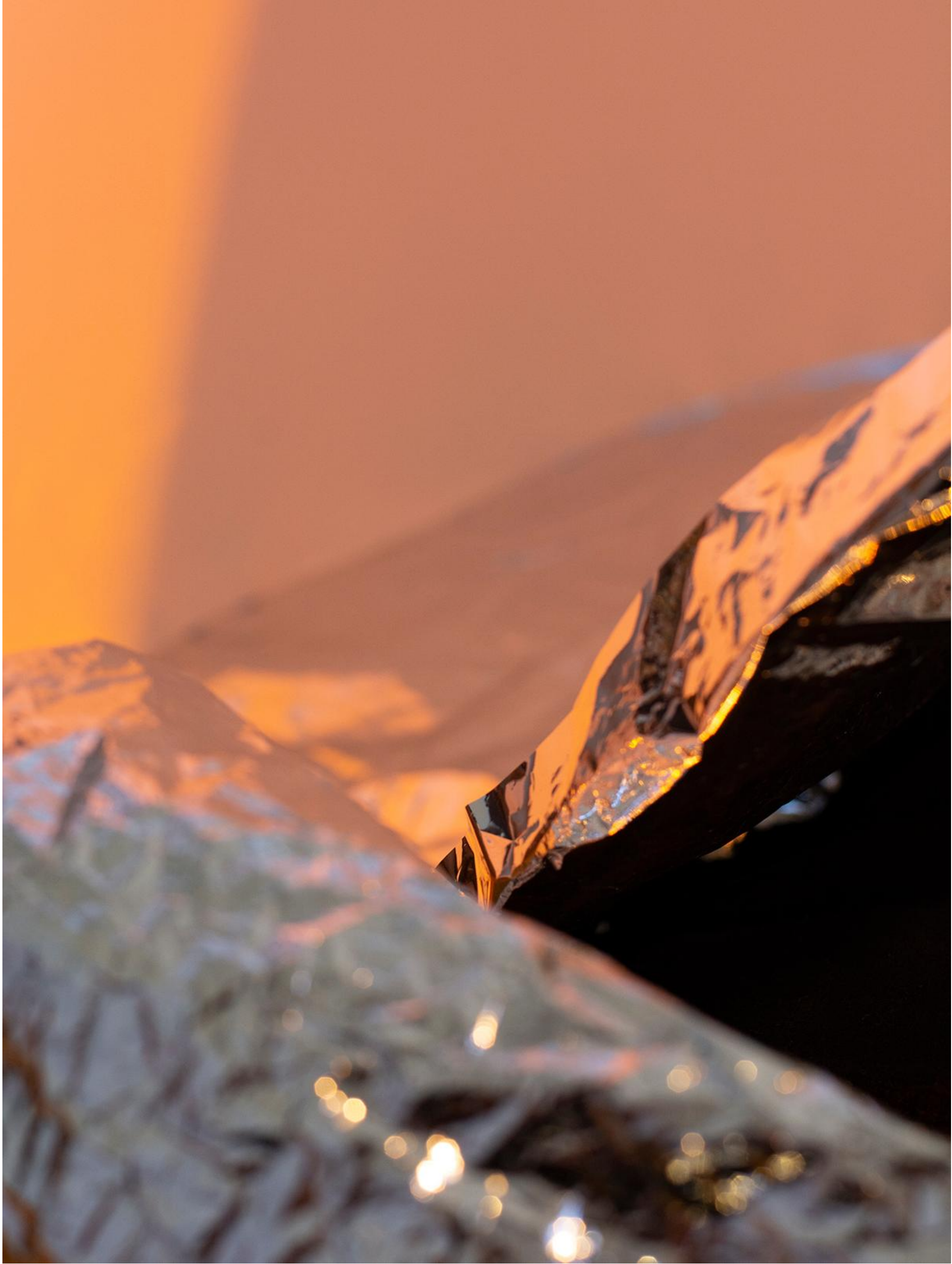
The worst was, we all had to hold hands, because there is more power that way. After a while our hands were starting to sweat, it was getting dark, and I was worried we'd be there all night, all week, all eternity, sweating into each others palms, wasting away, waiting for that body to rise again. I was so desperate for a smoke, I thought, fuck it, I can believe in this, if I have to.

Bingo! That was what it took. The earth heaved and little clods came rolling down to my feet, the earthworms were irate, and then the great white naked body blue from the underworld uncoiled like a pale snake, shaking off earth, and everyone shouted hallelujah.

He looked around, wild-eyed, grubs in his knotted hair, helplessly covering his privates with shaking hands, but it was no good, everyone came pressing to see, clutching wetly, like he was some tremendous fish they'd caught and hoped to eat. I had never been invested in the

scene, but now I felt bad for him and got him by the elbow, led him off behind the ruined barn where the sheep were grazing and ignoring us. I gave him an old feed sack to gird his loins, baling twine to tie it.

It wasn't bad, being so close to him. He was beautiful in the way Hades is, just before he scatters all your flowers. Want a smoke? I asked. He nodded. Worms fell. Everyone up on the hill was shouting and chanting, we stood behind the barn sharing a Camel together.



TERRA (XIII)
ANNA ROTTY
2020

The Food Chain has Ruptured

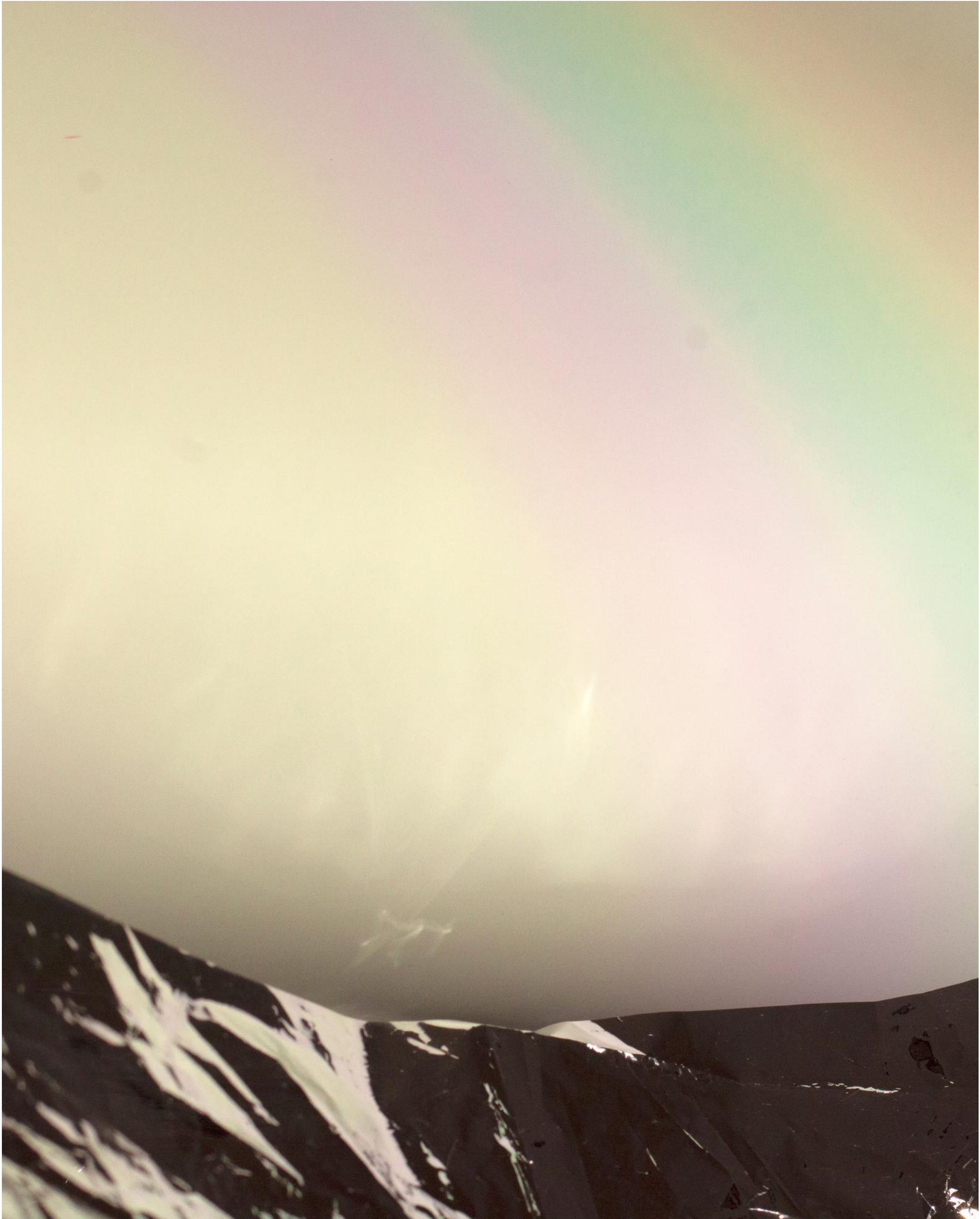
WILLIAM DORESKI

Today in the cafeteria
everyone gets a plate of three
colors of slop: magenta,
battleship gray, and greasy puce.
Plus a bowl of green tainted water
we've been told is okra soup.
No bread: the baker stayed home,
nursing his deflated ego.
You stir the bowl with a spoon
worn so thin the airy liquid
bends it. I drive a fork through
each of the colors of mush
to kill them before they spread.
We can't continue to eat here—
the colors clash too deeply
with our urge to go on living.
But in this hospital basement
we're almost safe from the plague
that coughs its victims silly

and renders them limp as grass.
Almost safe because the doctors
and nurses who eat here bathe
in the purest alcohol after
every shift, their exhaustion
simplifying their expressions
so they no longer need wear masks.
No one savors the muddle
smeared on this thick old china.
But the food chain has ruptured,
so the hospital is harvesting
roadside weeds and pulping them.
You attempt a forkful of puce
while I taste the battleship gray.
Across the table a woman
samples the magenta and sways
in her seat, mouth an open wound.
Budding sumac rasps at the windows.
Soon its leaves will be salad.
In the fall its small red berries
will brighten some dish we'll devour
with unshaven muzzles before
another night of howling
at a weirdly lopsided moon.



TERRA (XV)
ANNA ROTTY
2020



TERRA (XII)
ANNA ROTTY
2020

iii

from the series, Some Sonnetinas

ANN SHERMAN

to stimulate audacity. hold up a bank
in its midst not just
the outcome vague overpowering
oh no not to know
if time is running out
or gist of something
long complex at its end
glass over a mirror
whaddya want? desire
true to that moment



TERRA (IV)
ANNA ROTTY
2020

Kess emak, a love letter to Beirut

HALIM MADI

Legendary comedian Pierre Desproges, in a fictitious televised trial of Jean-Marie Le Pen, wonders why we can't make fun of death – which makes fun of us. He cites “the suddenness with which the scythe reaps the basic activist, the budding CEO, the opera princess and the child, playing hopscotch, next to the gutter, in the streets of Beirut.”

A few feet down, on the curb of the road, a tall young man bends to start a ritual – negotiate the price of his ride with one of the city's fuming taxi drivers. Because he looks like a foreigner – the hair, the earrings – the price is double. He conveys contempt with a gaze before pulling his head away from the window. And then both, the driver and the young man, once out of earshot, say in unison: *Kess emak*. Which means the *vagina of your mother*.

Fuck you never cut it for me. For one, the phrase lacks a subject. As if the offender was not willing to endorse the act ie. *I fuck you*. They leave the affronted wondering as to their commitment to the insult. But then of course, in English, *I fuck you* sounds like the outline of an intimate fantasy which is not what you'd most like to share with the person who just rammed into your bumper.

The immigrant mind grappling with English insults is a Hollywood movie set that veers from horror to comedy. The first time I heard *shit hit the fan*, the rest of the conversation was covered with flying excrement. And in that

same foreigner mind, *fuck you* sounds eerily similar to *bless you* wherein decades of secularity have eroded the subject out of the grammatical construct. *God bless you* is a social faux-pas in a society where agnostics are not burned on a stick anymore. *God fuck you* is a different beast however. A screeching on the black board of ethics. Simply unacceptable. And yet, the foreign mind was taught subjects perform actions and precede verbs in this language. When confronted with *fuck you* this mind is hard pressed to fill the holes.

Fuck you falls flat as an evading non-committal tactic. The times I was told “fuck you”, I was tempted to answer *yes, and* in improv fashion. The insult sounds like a child begging to be understood. A surreptitious plea. Please ask me to elaborate. *Yes, and*.

My anger never took *fuck you* seriously. I default to insults from my mother tongue. Lebanese slurs, as must be the case for all immigrants, are the pride of their people. 3rd world country citizens might not be able to brag about their country’s economic success or stable infrastructure, but dignity will emanate from how ill intentioned one’s language can be. The ingenuity of a people, in all its complexity, can often reflect in a language’s gibes. For instance, Lebanese people take special pride in how their insults desecrate the offended’s deceased:

Kess em mawta mawtek translates as the vagina of the mother of the dead of your dead

Evolution made us the one species who buries its dead. These insults reach deep into what it is to be human. They add both an existential flair and a disturbing bravado to the act of offending.

The discreet joy people derive from these defamations is once removed from the pride one might feel talking about a parent with a shady past eg. a gangster father. It is twice removed from the pride one feels when talking about broad generalizations relating to their ethnicity's quirks and weirdness eg. The Lebanese are "crazy" or "warm" or "fun to be around". It is akin to the sad enjoyment one gets from being part of an exclusive and exclusionary club. One that struggles to be understood by outsiders despite wanting their closeness.

Kess emak or *the vagina of your mother*, is the bread and butter of Lebanese insults with infinite variants and flavors. *Kess emak* is a gracious insult. It does not qualify the vagina of the mother. It merely points out its existence. It notes the potentiality of your mother's sexual identity, which, in turn, can trigger the male-identifying's Oedipal complex.

Kess emak is fraught with gender bias of course. There is no *Ayr bayak* or *the penis of your father*, which should trigger some folks' Electra complex — Arabic being a gendered language, *emak* refers to a male identifying person's mother, whereas *emik* refers to a female identifying person's mother. I'll use *emak* for the time being.

Kess emak hayawen

The vagina of your mother animal

Is one such interesting combination. It is not qualifying the vagina by referring to its primal nature. Maybe alluding to the mother's wildness and promiscuity. Rather it is simply a litany. A laundry list of affronts. Firstly, your mother's vagina [exists]. Secondly, you are an animal. But that is not always the case.

Kess emak el manyoukeh w bayak el ahbal w setak el day'ah

The vagina of your fucked mother and your stupid father and your demented grandmother

This can quickly get confusing: Who is whose mother, whose vagina is being targeted and is the father a trans-male or a cis-female? However, since these combinations are usually meant to draw out the put-down rather than build a rational argument, the questions are left unanswered.

I doubt I ever used *kess emak* before leaving Lebanon at 17. In France, it became a covert way to insult my perceived enemies. A way to reestablish justice. With almost no consequence. The listener had to be within earshot. My hope was for them to feel the animosity viscerally and yet remain bewildered, deprived of any proof or basis for retaliation.

Kess emak chou hal hmar

The vagina of your mother what a donkey

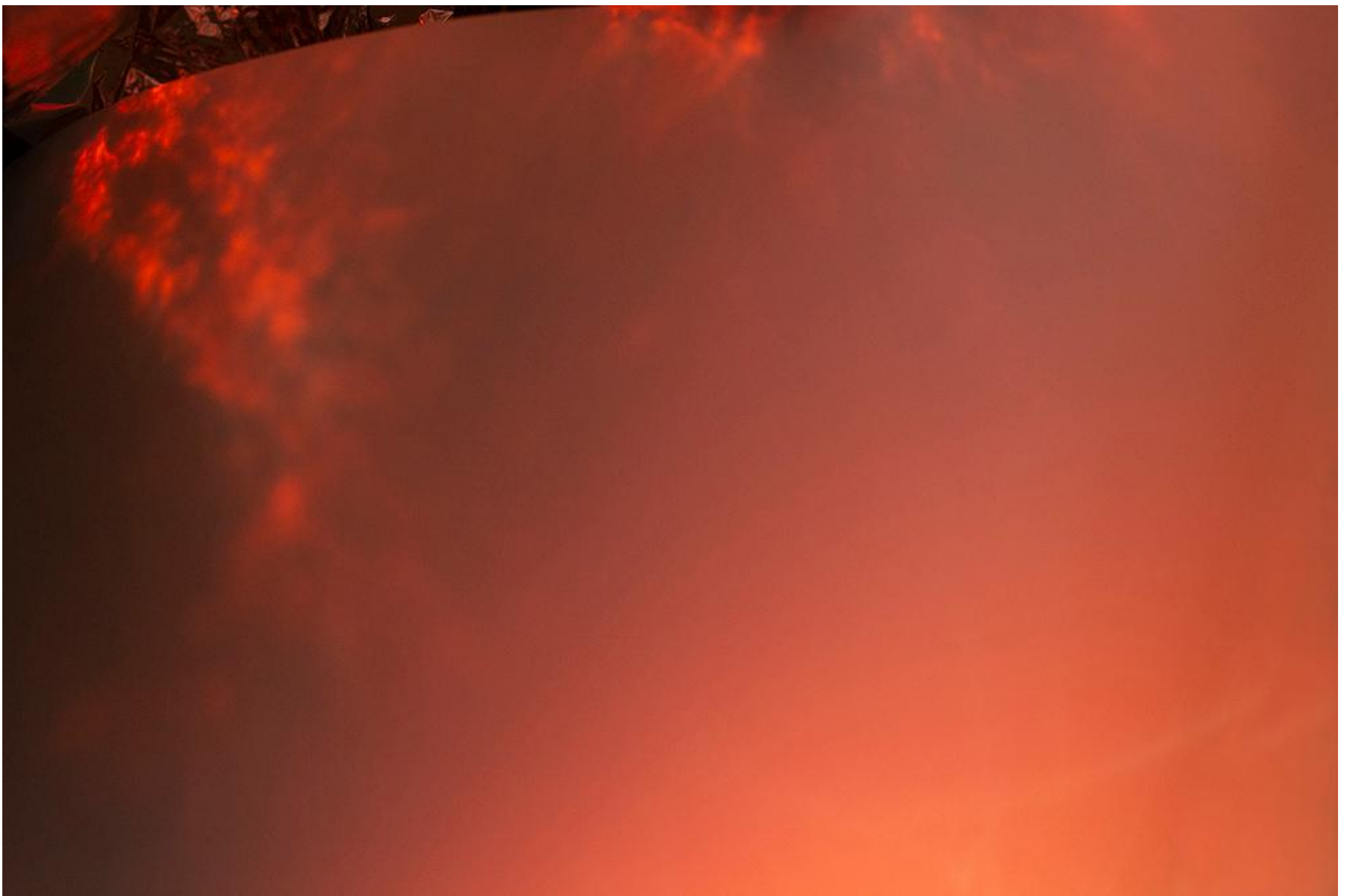
[again, a list rather than a qualification of the vagina]

As the immigrant years piled up and went by, as foreigners started using "Beirut" as a metaphor and a shorthand for chaos, *kess emak* became the soul of Beirut for me. Beirut became the vagina of a mother. In all its complex cultural and anthropological complexities. The sexual identity of mothers is something we'd rather not consider or face. It is a dispensable reality. Similar to opening up about our promiscuous adventures at the family dinner table. The audience prefers to focus on the dessert recipe. In that sense, mothers' genitals are like Beirut. A topic best left unaddressed.

Alternatively, when there is space for such a subject, short of making the audience squeamish, it makes them giggle. Mothers' vaginas are funny.

Precisely because part of us has chosen to a-sexualize mothers, the conceptual combination of the two seems farcical. Like Beirut, we've turned mothers into metaphors.

I doubt the people I insult with *kess emak* actually register any hurt. My *kess emak* in foreign countries is the proverbial tree falling in the forest with no one to hear. And yet my *kess emak* is not so much for the line cutter or the outrageous driver. Its audience is different. *Kess emak* is my love letter to Beirut. An uttering of my alliance to the capital that birthed and raised me. A bowing to both its obfuscating and comical natures, a renewed acknowledgement that Beirut is a piece of reality. An extracting of the city from the realm of metaphor. A liberation. A revolution.



TERRA (III)
ANNA ROTTY
2020

THE BACK PAGE

BY
LAURA JAYE CRAMER

EAT MY SHORTS

Fork Me



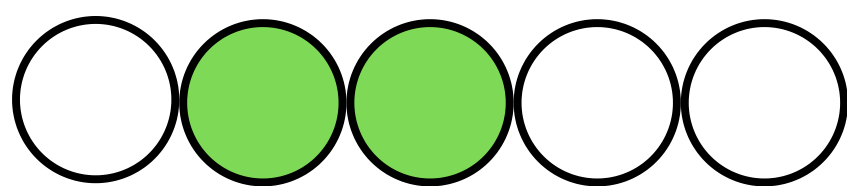
Fork in jugular.
The irony — close to mouth,
yet so very far.

THE WEEKLY MUMBLE

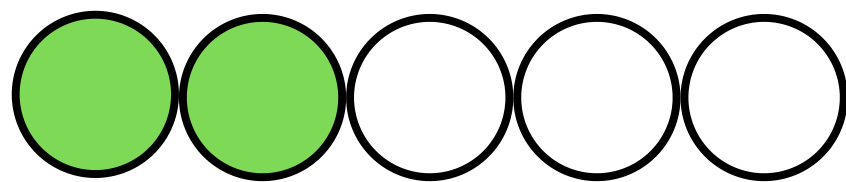
WORD STUFF

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

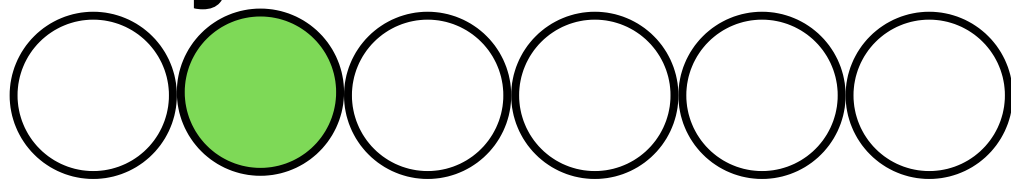
CHTPI



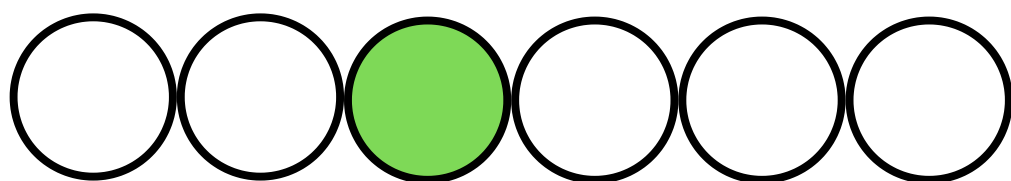
NEXID



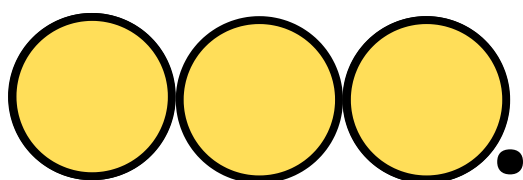
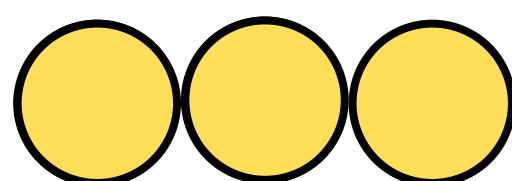
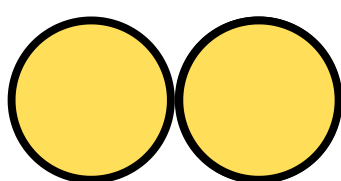
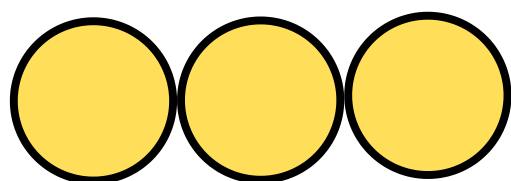
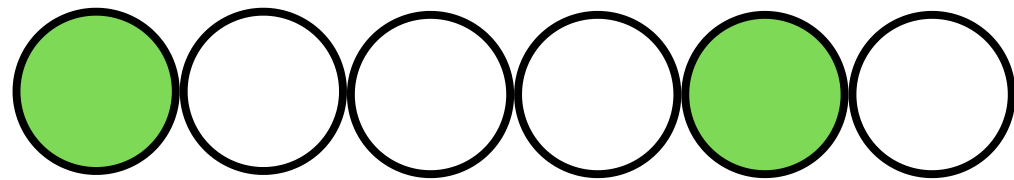
BUTNJO



ENOYKD



RHFNCE

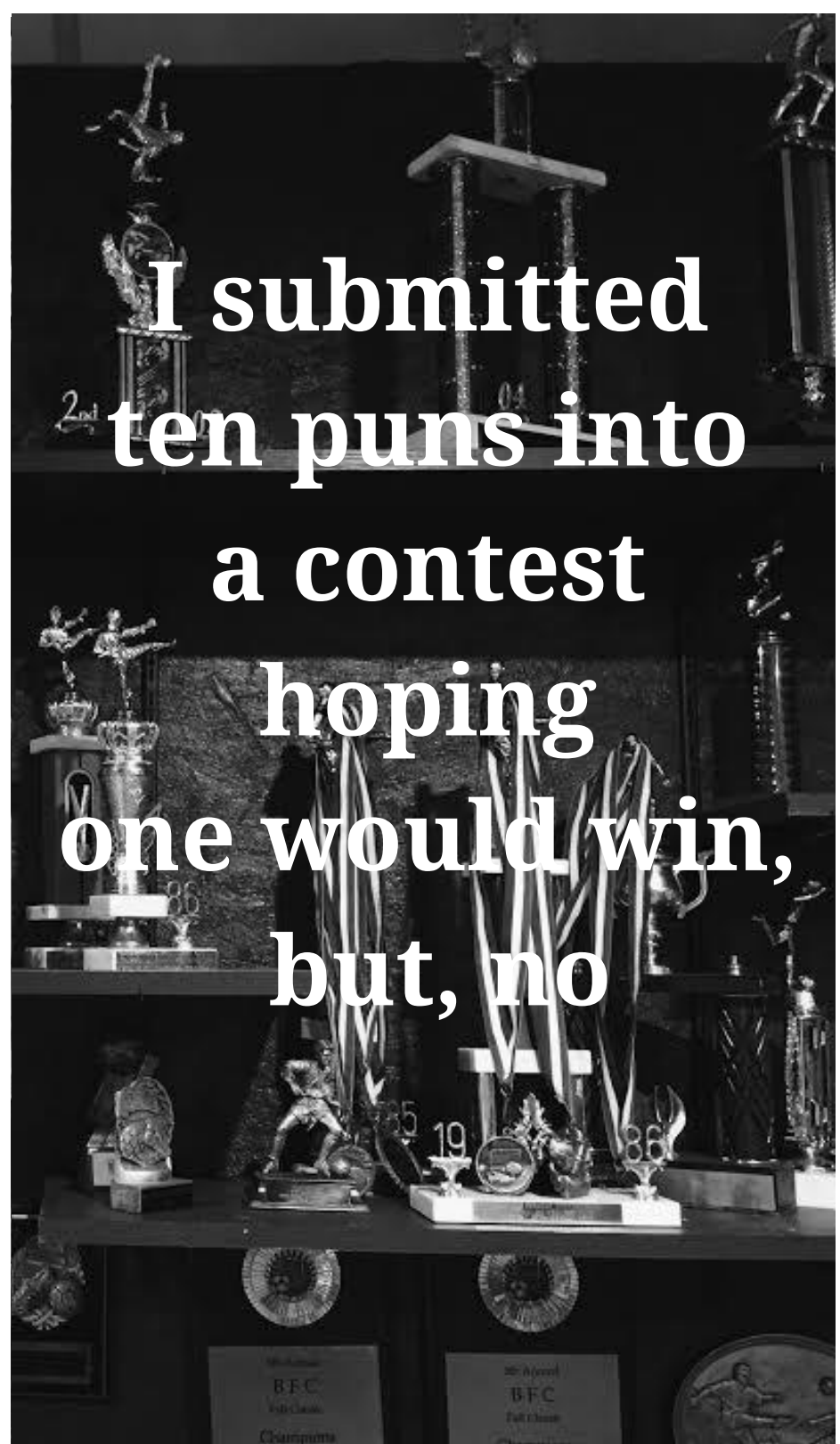


(Answers next week.)

Last week's answers:

DITZY, BLITZ, ZENITH, ICEBOX, RAZORS

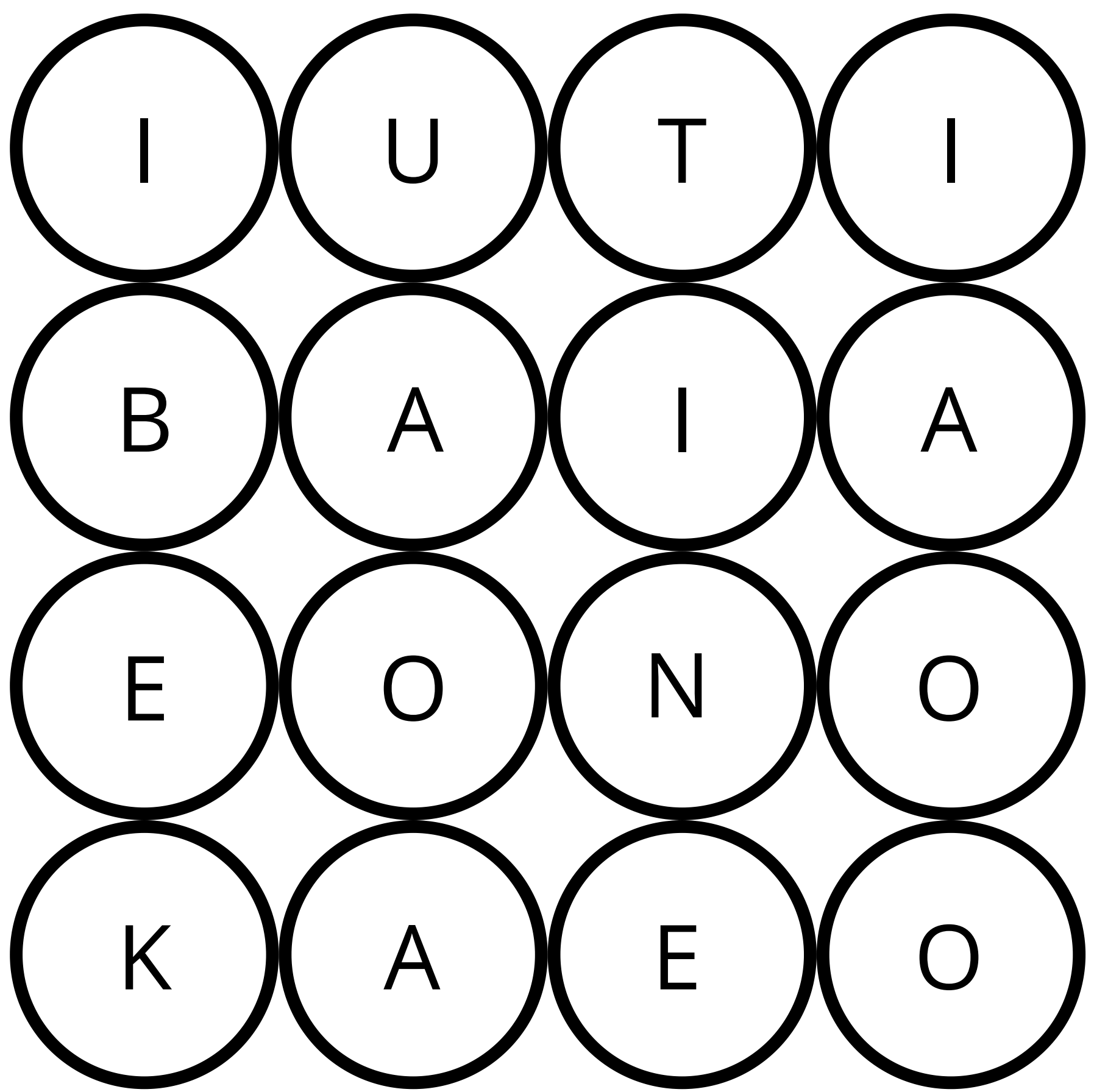
Not only is my thesaurus terrible, it's also
terrible



BONGGLE

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

High score gets a shout out in the next issue!

BONGGLE

LAST WEEKS WORDS

deg	egis	gis	seis
degs	eide	ide	sese
dei	ems	idem	sew
deid	equid	ides	sews
deids	equids	ids	side
deif	eses	ked	sides
desi	fid	kedge	sies
desk	fidge	kedged	sif
dew	fidged	kedges	squid
dews	fidges	keds	squidge
die	fids	med	squidged
died	fie	meds	squidges
dies	fig	mes	swede
dif	figs	quid	swedes
dig	fique	quids	wed
digs	fiques	sed	wedge
dis	ged	sedes	wedges
eddies	geds	sedge	wedgie
edge	gid	sedged	wedgies
edged	gids	sedges	wedsy
edges	gie	seg	sky
edified	gied	segs	suk
edifies	gies	sei	sukh
eds	gif	seif	

LAST WEEKS WINNER:
Megan Wright

congratulations!
your prize is in the mail

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 object in your home has taken on
new significance?
Why?*

REBECCA BRATTEN

The simple black-covered spiral notebook in which I am keeping my pandemic journal.

GRACE D'ANCA

My dining room has taken new and greater significance in quarantine as I sit there to zoom into many writing and cultural groups each week. Before it was a happy place to be with the kids and their kids. Now it's a hopeful place to reach and connect beyond confinement,

WILLIAM DORESKEI

In this new world of contagion and dread my washing machine, an excellent Speed Queen, has been a model of reason, sanity, and purpose.

HALIM MADI

My sunglasses have become my new passport as of late. I put them on when the sun hits my couch. Which I lie down on more often now. And for the 20 minutes my daily afternoon naps last, I feel I'm on a Greek island, listening to the sea crashing on the shore, reminding me there are things much more brutal and sweet outside my apartment complex.

ANNA ROTTY

I never really acknowledged the bathtub plug before, because I never took baths.

ANN SHERMAN

The set of orange and teal pasta bowls my son Devin gave me as a housewarming gift after we moved to New Mexico. Because everything about them not only reflects how generous and thoughtful he is, but how well he knows me, and I don't know when I will get to see him again.

THE RACKET

WEEKLY



SOUNDTRACK

+
PLOI PIRAPOKIN
ROHAN DACOSTA
DAVID PEREZ
ALEXANDRA NAUGHTON
NORA BOXER

THURS. 7/30
7PM / ZOOM

THE RACKET

PATREON

WWW.PATREON.COM/
THERACKETREADINGSERIES

WEBSITE

WWW.THERACKETSF.COM

NEWSLETTER

WWW.THERACKETSF.COM/
NEWSLETTER

INSTAGRAM

@THERACKETREADINGSERIES

SUBMIT YOUR WORK:

theracketreadingseries@gmail.com

**LET THE
BEAT
GO ON.**

