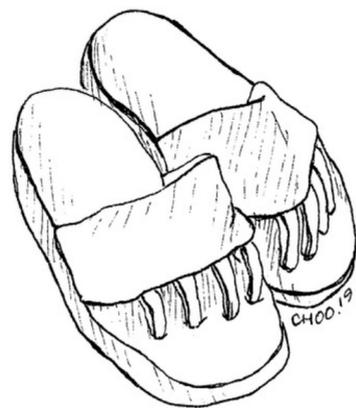
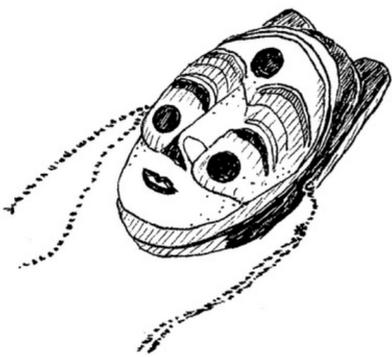


# THE RACKET | 39



# THE RACKET | 39

# THE RACKET

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Hi.

How is everyone?

Let me say this: it's been a hell of a week around of these parts.

This pandemic and this quarantine so often make it feel like time has slowed to a thick porridge and we are all collectively dragging ourselves from moment to moment. To compensate we have mashed the slo-mo button on the major moments of our lives as we attempt to wait out the very worst of it. Our trips and our jobs and our weddings and our educations and our thoughts about making families and all of these foundational "adult" junctures - all of it has been put on a sort of slow hold as we just try to survive.

On the other hand there's this feeling like the steps towards adulthood have suddenly become a lot shorter. Like in this last year as time has crumpled around us the barriers - mental or otherwise - between myself and adulthood have become infinitely more porous. As if all of the fear-based hemming and hawing I've been doing internally about moving forward in my life, all the excuses I've lined up to let myself safely exist in this liminal, thirty-nine year old space between the past and the future have vanished.

All of sudden, being a functional, responsible adult doesn't seem so tough. It doesn't feel so impossible.

Part of this stems from what quarantine has done to all of us - it's stripped away spontaneity. It's removed, at least in my case, the ability to just up and do something - to grab a drink at a bar, to meet friends, to smoke a cigarette on my front porch. It has made the interior of my home a safe place and everything else strikingly tinged with danger. I am a homebody regardless, but quarantine and pandemic have necessarily eliminated the distractions of the outside world and in their place left, well, domesticity.

The elective parts of my life - culture, window shopping, paying too much to see a shitty band - have been sanded down to nothing and though I miss them, I've also realized not having them isn't the end of the world.

Rather - it kind of rules.

Spending a Sunday preparing food for a week or an evening helping my fiance clean out the pots in the back yard or entering every book I own into Goodreads or taking the dog to the same park on the same trail every, single morning has become more than just an enjoyable routine, it's become everything. It's become the structure that keeps me afloat when I truly have no clear idea of what might happens next. You could say that my options have become limited, my choice of path relegated to only a few, but I'd like to think the cobwebs draped across my brain got cleared out and the best choices become a whole lot more apparent.

The bigger steps in life have just seemed, well, easier, like all the little things that had been holding me back up until this point had fallen away and scared as I might be I knew I could and needed to move forward.

While we've all been kvetching about everything being the same all the time, myself included, the restriction of existence has somehow freed me up to make some big life changes.

So yeah, this was a hell of a week. In the very best way.

'Till next time.

-N

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

---

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*It's a largish, small town.*

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# 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're working on some special rewards. And we know you love special rewards.

## THANK YOU TO THESE FOLKS

MATTHEW CARNEY  
CATHY & JOHN SANDERS  
HALLIE YOUNG  
JAMIE ENGELMANN  
CASEY BENNETT  
LILIAN CAYLEE  
LAUREN C. JOHNSON  
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# **THE RACKET**

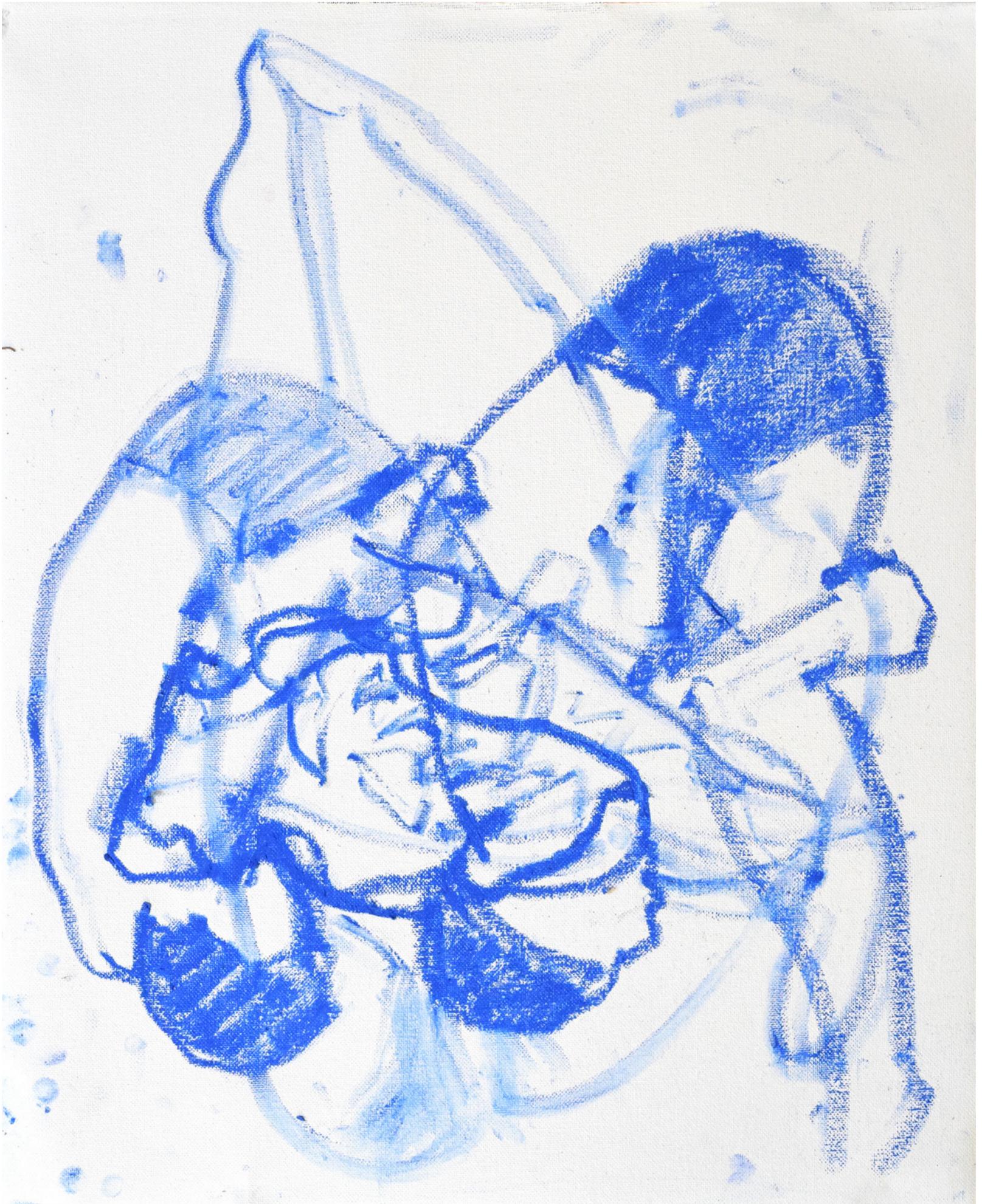
**39**

# Grief for the Living (II)

ABIGAIL BYRD-STAPLETON

---

Brother calls at night,  
remembering: he taught you  
how to hold a gun.



SYNCHRONIZED DIVERS  
TYLER PATTERSON  
2020

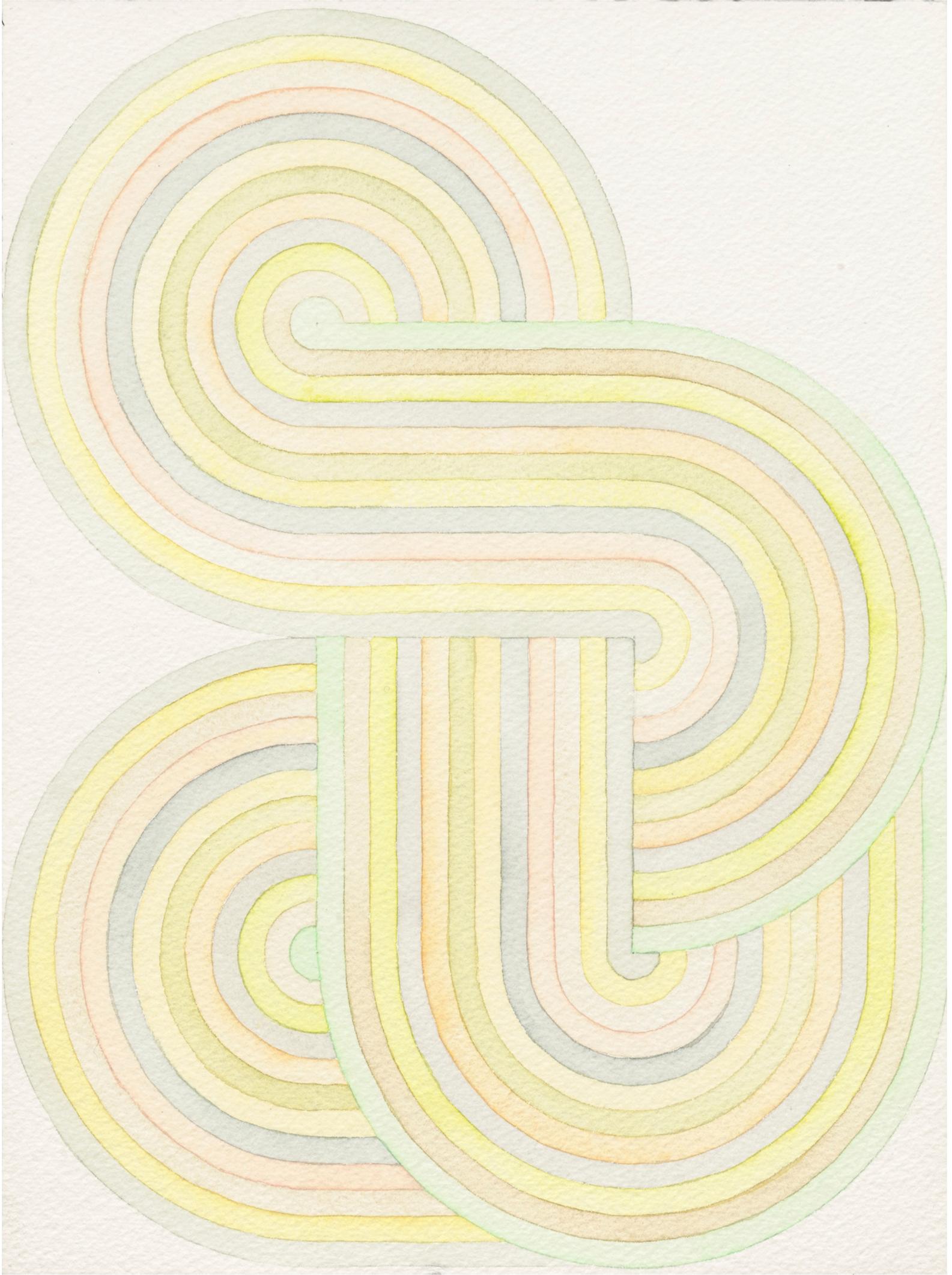
# Am I doing enough to keep myself living?

ALEXIS OLSON

---

1. Castle street. Beds of bright zinnias.
2. Monarchs fluttering between.
3. A man wearing green gloves and sun hat, holding a hose
4. hands me a sweet potato.
5. I choose to think it's a metaphor for how sweet I am.
6. The body wins. Always. You have no control over this.
7. You can think Stop. Stop. Stop. but your baby teeth fall out anyway.
8. The body is a store. Its hours are: OPEN.
9. What weekend? What smoke break?
10. When you're asleep, passed out or still as dried wax,
11. your body is doing its jobs.
12. Bodies are always growing: fingernails, toenails, hair, skin—
13. you can lose your own borders.
14. Become a question to yourself.
15. All bodies are questions.
16. Note their curves, the dots in their eyes.

17. Got called a boy once by a woman in a hospital elevator.
18. I was twelve still wearing my brother's old clothes.
19. The fuzz of a fleece zip-up suddenly wrong against my borders.
20. Too many sheep noses, cold and nuzzling, against my flat chest.
21. I didn't correct her.
22. The first time I slip my fingers in
23. is not because of a boy's text.
24. It is because I am learning pleasure. Learning
25. how to give my body what it wants. To satisfy my own need.
26. I do not text the boy things I want him to do to me,
27. repeat words I read in women's magazines.
28. I do not feel the grime of shame, the want for a hot shower.
29. Relief that my own fingers were the only thing that touched me.
30. My mom said that it was okay to feel the folds of myself.
31. God is not a woman. She'd have made orgasm easy.
32. I wish I was made more like a lizard each finger and toe
33. less goddamn precious.
34. Only takes sixty days to regrow a tail.  
sixty-one  
sixty-two  
sixty-three; a baby's arms and elbows.
35. Between birth and death we lose a hundred bones.



UNTITLED  
SERENA MITNIK-MILLER  
2015

35. Lose our soft spots.
36. My blood-wiped toilet paper floats in the bowl.
37. A pair of dead veil tail goldfish.
38. I watch their variegated red and white swirl away.
39. Reminders that this egg didn't take.
40. To be thankful my IUD is working.
  
41. I am most aware of my body
42. when it wants something from me.
43. What does it mean to ask someone else for pleasure?
44. It has something to do with peaches & syrup.
45. The thick sweet that comes from sucking.
46. But it doesn't have to be a peach.
47. It could be a bit of spark against concrete.
  
49. How many beds have I slept in my life?
50. How many other people have slept in those beds?
51. Studies show the human brain can only handle so many meaningful connections.
52. We cannot hold every person we meet.
53. I still haven't cooked that sweet potato.

54. I want to be soft, but
55. cut if you touch me wrong, like a blade of ryegrass.
56. My blood type is B positive. I try to make it a motto for myself.
57. I try not to be sad so much.
58. All living things produce a biological glimmer.
59. Inside you, free-floating radicals meet proteins and lipids.
60. Right now, I am glowing. You just can't see it.



# We Member No Body

EILEEN T. WINN

---

you covered your eyes with look ma both hands  
when you wouldn't see what's gone  
wrong though you did it  
you little look ma no eyes never did

made mom spit:

*lies flow from your mouth easy as water*

she said           so I say brother

*I am thirsty*

pour a story remember

like little look ma no cold eggs tucked in shoes

under pillows hidden breakfast never ate it

like no hated dress never did like it

lifting prickling lace hem no shame never could shame

you shake your blue-faced brain

in your shorn skull under great liquorish rain no shame

like look ma   a big black eye

and one stranger

to call an ambulance

so mom drains a story           says



DISAPPEARING  
TYLER PATTERSON  
2019

*what am I supposed to do with all you girls*  
makes us say            *look ma no girls us*  
never was never did don't want

“her”

on us cold as an egg with no  
chicken with no  
meat with no  
backbone

so I say            *okay brother*

see how the unicycle shares  
one wheeling eye so hungry  
for uncommon understanding  
balancing shell on tip end standing?  
look ma no lie inside you  
never was never  
saw one so seen



TALON  
MARY ROLL  
2015

# Telemetry

MATT FOWLER

---

Tanner bounces about in the creek bed pretending he's an aneurism, the bulge in the front of his pants is exaggerated by the stretched fabric of his cutoff dickies. He's clutching the back of his head and smothering something hot, or wicked, or flammable and the insides of his blown-out redwing hiking boots are filling all the way up with mud and water. I can hear the loud slopping and sloshing of his saturated Hanes socks against the bare feet they've wrapped up, against the sole of the boot and when he acts this way I can tell he doesn't want to be my friend anymore—he puts distance in between the two of us.

Tomorrow at school the older boys who work with their Dad's on their farm shoveling cow shit, horse shit, goat shit, other shit and planting corn for the rural county people will lasso me again when they find me in the halls skipping history class. They'll do their best to push me hard against the blue lockers that trace the hallway, the way a block of cells trace a prison line, or the way rowhomes hug the block in Baltimore, their rough hands on my neck, their denim-covered thighs against my denim-covered thighs. faggot.

They'll laugh at me, and the prettiest one will say he'd like to kill my Mother for making me; the joke being that she had died a lonely overdose death in Hesperia a decade earlier without either of us knowing.

I'll think about Tanner in this moment. I'll think about the way I think about him and about all the time we spend mouthing every part of each other between the black wool blanket and the dirty beige carpet in his room.

*I can't see*—he screams that a lot of times without pausing.

And I can see that, and I can hear the wet sloshing of his frantic footsteps still, and still, he is ambulatory. He walks like an overdose in the forest, bracing himself against the nearest tree; Eastern White Pine, Virginia Pine, Eastern Hemlock, White Oak, Northern Red Oak, Silver Maple, Sweet Gum.

His vision comes trudging harshly back and he watches the water and mud force itself from the top of his boots like an enema, he sees blood on the palm of his hand when he opens his soft, terribly wide eyes.

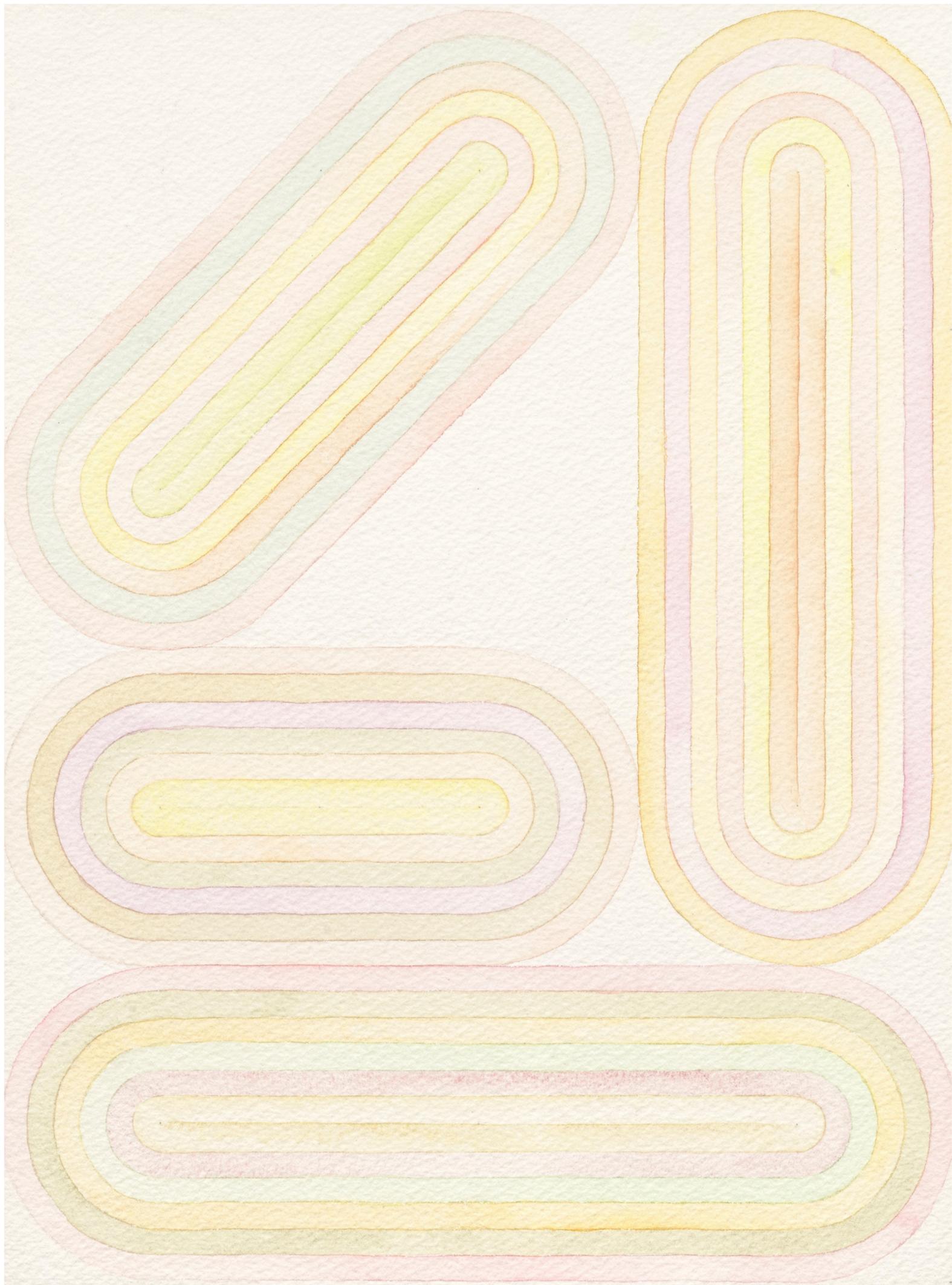
Caleb says *this way I'll know what to do with a girl*, before he undoes his frayed nylon belt. He pulls it quickly through the loops of his Dungarees like he's embarrassed of it or something. I know he already knows, and I know I'm the only person he's comfortable asking, but after thrusting awkwardly between my parted lips for five minutes or so he's too embarrassed to come in my mouth so he runs into the bathroom down the hall, and finishes where he thinks I can't hear him, and he punches the wall with his stubby dry knuckles and I fall asleep on the military cot he set up for me in his bedroom in the time it takes him to work through whatever weight he has to carry now.

When he returns and closes the yellow bedroom door behind him I stop sleeping and just stare at the inside of my eyelids.

A decade passes. When I ask my parents about Tanner they say his mother doesn't want to talk about him anymore. He's a drug addict. He's moved back home, he can't take care of himself anymore, something's happened and something's wrong; they're dealing with it, thank you. One night I leave the city and go back to the county, I go back to see Tanner because his parents are out at Chili's getting a 2 for 20 meal, movie after, date night.

I'm an alcoholic now, I was an alcoholic then, I think back to when I had to complete drug rehab before the high school would award me a diploma, when it came in the mail it was rolled up in a small cardboard tube. I bring a twelve pack of National Bohemian to Tanners' and we drink and look at the little cartoon face on the front of the cans and don't look at each other directly but Tanner has always been good at feigning interest and breaking the silence but now he only talks about what pills he likes:

*Hydrocodone, Roxycodone, Norco, Percocet, Oxycontin, Vicodin, Dilaudid.*



UNTITLED  
SERENA MITNIK-MILLER  
2015

I head home to the warehouse in Station North where I live and where Caleb is shooting tar heroin in his room next to mine with the heavy wooden door closed like he still needs to hide it. We've been friends for years—

When the rock leaves my hand I remember wondering why I threw it, why it looked so angular, what it was made out of; igneous, sedimentary, volcanic, I have no idea. Tanner had no idea. My hand is covered in the filth of rural Maryland, wet, and peat, clay and rock. I feel the wholeness of weight but don't understand it, I threaten him if he ever tells his parents.

I watch numerous friends get lost in the myriad of blue lips, and the still of eyes rolled back all the way; the Baltimore patchwork. I see them transform into plots with soft, awful, new grass growing, young and light in the slow biting of a Mid-Atlantic autumn, blotted out in the middle of it.

I think about excess, about the concept of exercising, all the blotting and biting, biting in the middle of it.



SWIMMERS  
TYLER PATTERSON  
2020

# Toxic & Masculine

SOPHIA TARIN

---

You've got great hair & you hold doors for all the girls, the way you tip your head, submissively. You did a gypsy dance outside the bar & spoke quietly to the woman next to you, which bothered me for far too long. I told you to speak up, but I didn't know how to turn you off, my eyes roll with your off-colored jokes, your mother must not have done a good job washing you with soap before sending you out into the world. I'm not trying to be relevant when I say the words toxic & masculine in the same sentence, I was on your side & you weren't on mine. Blame it on us being born on opposite sides of the country, on geography but I don't find that to be factual, I can't find it on a map. You got a sensitive kind of meanness, a rational kind of anger, or a violence that can't be grasped. They say that a western boy is a keeper, I put my Barbie next to Woody, a child's fantasy of running away with a cowboy, I'm coming up with a deep origin story for Bonnie & Clyde, he's the hero until someone says stop & she's gonna give him some advice & he won't like that but she'll stay, she'll be hanging onto his smile. You act like a character from a

Sam Shepard play, unintentionally, a true son of the wild west, I actually pity the performative part of personality, you make confidence look like narcissism, a weird concoction of speech that sounds like you're waving a gun or something lower & smaller. People say, "He looks really shy & awkward" & I would agree. "You know he's gonna break some hearts," I agree, but intentionally. I make vegan pancakes in the mornings & I think they're pretty good, but you're really good at finding faults, a women's liberation post pops onto your phone & you like it. I jump up to grab my phone & post a picture of our last breakfast & you say it's too basic to like & I finally find the nerve to shout.

**THE  
BACK  
PAGE**

BY  
LAURA JAYE CRAMER

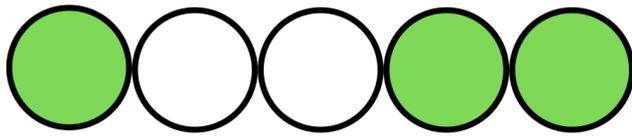
# THE WEEKLY MUMBLE

## WORD STUFF

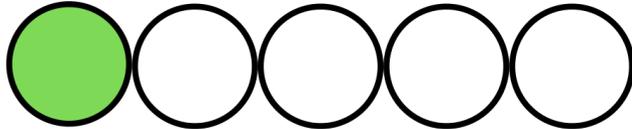
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Unscramble each Mumble to form five ordinary words.  
Then, arrange the green letters in the highlighted spaces to  
complete the punchline.

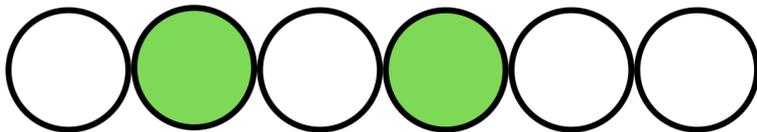
**ESBOE**



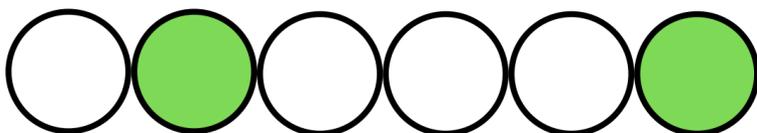
**USROC**



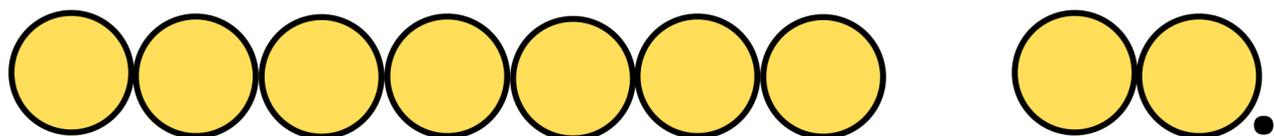
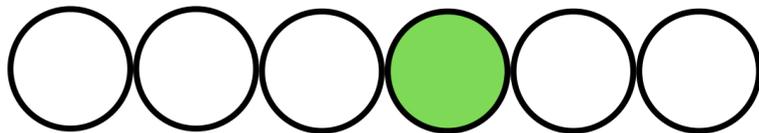
**HLECCN**



**DIARSU**



**EIGGGL**



(Answers next week.)

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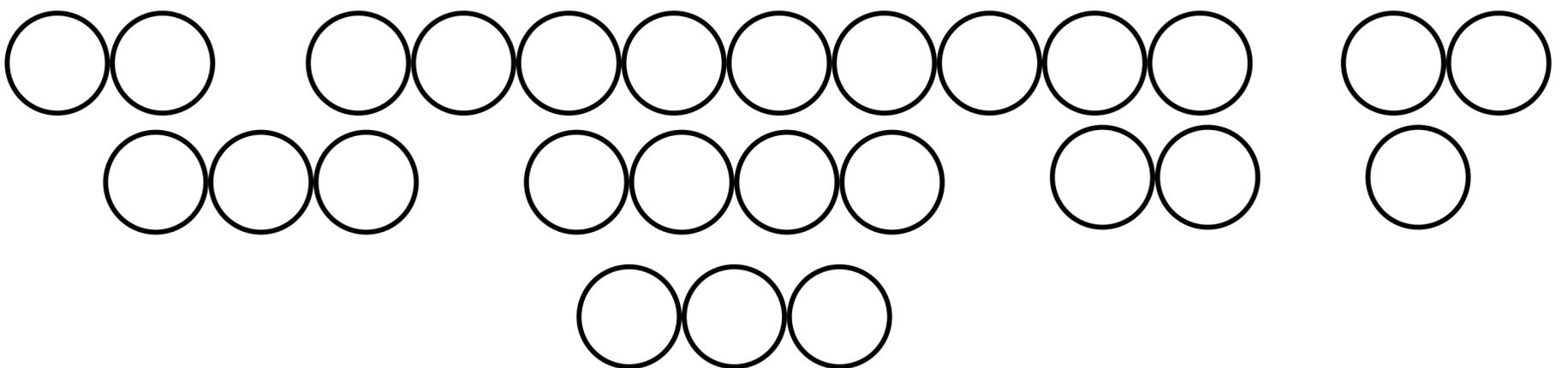
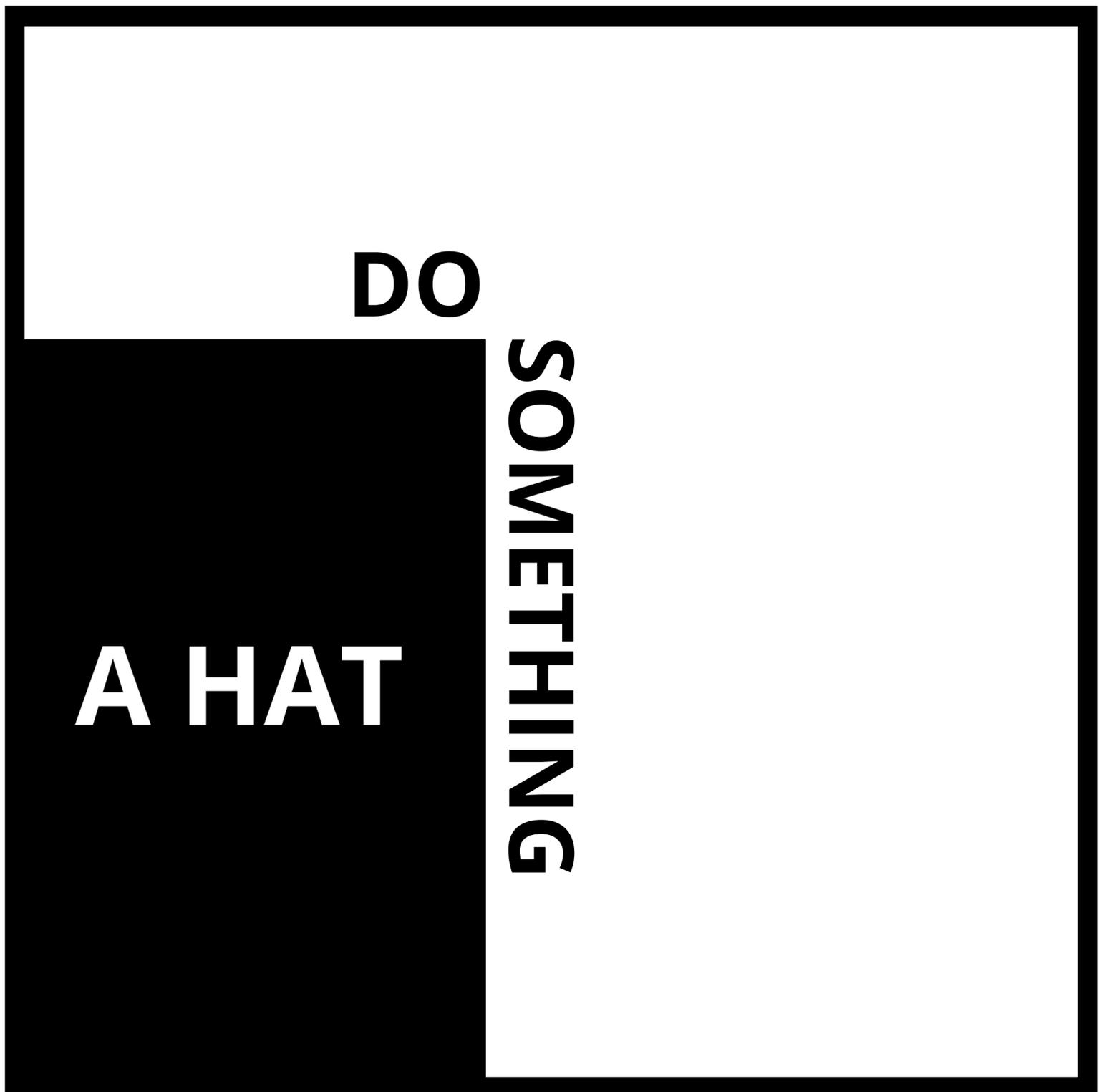
Last week's answers:

*PANTS, TROLL, HECTIC, IGUANA, WINNER*

I broke my finger last week. On the other hand, *I'm okay.*

# HUSTLE & REBUSTLE

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



**LAST WEEK'S ANSWER**

*under the weather*

# CONTRIBUTORS

---

ABIGAIL BYRD-STAPLETON

YERRIE CHOO

MATT FOWLER

SERENA MITNIK-MILLER

ALEXIS OLSON

TYLER PATTERSON

MARY ROLL

SOPHIA TARIN

EILEEN T. WINN

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EMILY PINKERTON

**2/25**  
**7PM**  
**ZOOM**

**WELL, THIS HAS  
BEEN A WHOLE THING.**

