

A tall palm tree stands against a textured, orange-brown wall. To the right, a portion of a modern building facade is visible, featuring horizontal bands of color and several windows. The palm tree's shadow is cast onto the wall behind it. The overall scene is lit with a warm, orange glow.

THE RACKET | 67

**THE
RACKET | 67**

THE RACKET

Hey there,

And after a considerably longer time than I imagined: we're back.

To explain: I took a brief break in May after realizing that the weight of The Racket, having a 40-hour a week job and planning a wedding was probably too much even for these perpetually overworked shoulders. I thought, I'll come back from honeymooning in mid-July and jump immediately back into The Racket and all its sundry parts.

And then I got COVID.

While wallowing in my own fever sweat, a seemingly endless stream of Stranger Things episodes playing in the background, the break got a little bit longer. And then work got busy and I decided buying a video game system was a good idea and the garden needed a lot of work and the break just kept growing and growing.

It's funny to be writing about a "break" because as much as it was a break in the classical sense of relaxation, it was more so a break in that I allowed myself to become completely disengaged from the day-to-day details of The Racket. I was living my life with only the smallest tickle of thought at the back of my mind about The Racket. And it felt, briefly, fantastic.

As someone who struggles greatly with the act of turning my brain's incessant grind entirely off, it's a relatively big deal to allow myself any space where I'm not battling the guilt of not doing something I've arbitrarily decided is "worthwhile".

It isn't a space I excel in. I don't consider myself ambitious but I'm a person who loves doing. Maintaining "free time" in my brain is comparable to a psychic fight between the part of me that immediately fills the open real estate with new, time-consuming ideas, and the part that really just wants to wile away hours immersed in a book or a movie or a video game. It's enjoyable but not necessarily comfortable. There's always a lingering feeling that I'm not doing something I need to do.

Simply put: if I'm not creating something, I don't feel great. And with The Racket Journal and The Racket Reading Series and the website and the newsletter floating in the void, I felt adrift and anxious and, finally, eager to get back to this extended conversation between art and writing and with you folks kind enough to keep tuning in each issue.

To tie off a long ramble with some level of succinctness, I couldn't be happier to be publishing this issue.

And the many more issues to come.

'Till next time.

N

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Maybe it'll last this time.



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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.

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CONTENTS

ZANE PRATER	<i>Sol</i>	1
ZANE PRATER	<i>Creation Myth II</i>	2
GIOVANNO LOMANTO	facts about me	3
ZANE PRATER	<i>Abstrct2</i>	4
A. MARTINE	Coda III: Father Figure	5
DAN NELSON	<i>Gelk</i>	7
DAN NELSON	<i>Recks On</i>	8
DAN NELSON	<i>Jatevee</i>	9
JULIA HALPRIN JACKSON	When It Comes	10
MAYCE KEELER	<i>Even the flowers are laughing</i>	13
KENNETH J. PRUITT	Ode to Phoebe Bridgers' Performance on SNL (ft. Borges)	14
MAYCE KEELER	<i>Michael slaying the dragon</i>	15
MAYCE KEELER	<i>Untitled (Green minotaur and me)</i>	16

THE RACKET

67



SOL
ZANE PRATER
2019



CREATION MYTH II
ZANE PRATER
2019

facts about me

GIOVANNA LOMANTO

for the first time, my hair is long.
mama wants me to cut it again.
instead, i wore piercings in my nose.
it's like i set fire to the shack out back,
sat back in a rickety lawn chair to
pretend it was a woodwick candle with the crackle,
sipping a cup of earl grey tea all the while.
sugar, i say—sugar would just stoke the fire,
stroke the hair in candied strands.

people tell me that i am chaotic good,
that my long hair tangles and that the
fire will heat inspiration into my mind, but i
think that internally i am just chaotic,
given that i wake up intermittently.
sleep doesn't fit me, and neither does
the cold of a nightmare fit with the sweat.

and i think about the blunt bob i boasted
in every year before last. how i wanted to be
old. how i wanted my silky ancestor's sheen
glaze over indonesian locks. they fall down
my shoulder now, and i let them grow.



ABSTRACT2
ZANE PRATER
2020

Coda III: Father Figure

A. MARTINE

on day two of the weeklong refresher driving course, i learn that what i mistook for sagacity is actually a dormant tendency to go for wackiest impulses. i press, too hungrily, the accelerator to match the flow of traffic — the straw breaks, the camel's back protests; i am told off for my so-called lead foot.

a__'s test drive tricks circle us magpie-like, we circle private neighborhoods on day three; on day four we argue, he tautly casual, me with derision that takes me unawares, about whether or not he is an alcoholic. i slip back into my pseudo-therapist role, we check off troubling idiosyncrasies he tries to embroider with levity, when everything points to...

veering through foreign alleyways, alive forever and feeling like i've been here + seen it all before and already: denials and revelations do to me what i've done to my thoughts all my life, the density like taking gasping mouthfuls of stupor again, again.

it goes like this:

c__ in nouakchott takes the lid off my insanity, we do powerslides and donuts in reverse, lift the desert sand up to high heavens

f__ calls me good girl although i screw up parallel parking, i screw up a little more emphatically each time

g__ puts the top down, we mosey through a flash storm, shooting the shit about his hangar in canada

r__, with a wink wink, says i should ditch cars for motorcycles and cities for my country soul
e__ cocky, steps in to save the day when a__, 3 sheets to wind, splits at the hour of the driving appointment

all the men who taught me how to drive also taught me how to talk in circles, and favor the standstill wall;

it's why i get cerebral, so unlike myself behind the wheel, wander into discourses where what i've always thought plays tug of war with things i would never otherwise say,

gives voice to the reckless part of me that rationalizes one useless thing, philosophizes another idle one.

i put a poetry collection together with love on my mind, i sought out to write about music and the body, got strikingly aware of how far i steered in the other direction, 8 and 4, hand over hand like my father showed me;

i chose distance, like how she sometimes writes in the second person because it offers her more room to breathe.

a fool

peddling lightfooted wisdom

when she, as ever, favors the lead foot.







JATEVEE
DAN NELSON
2020

When It Comes

JULIA HALPRIN JACKSON

Dazzled at sixteen years old. The first summer of the new millennium I was dancing on the top deck of a boat in the Mediterranean Ocean, surrounded by hundreds of other sweat-shining teenagers en route to Haifa. We had spent three days crossing the blue humidifier that is the Mediterranean, reenacting the exodus of our ancestors who fled Nazism. That afternoon on the third deck we were bathed in music, Hebrew and English and Arabic melting down our forearms like sweat. We danced Israeli-style, the Americanized “grapevine” with laurelled feet and the rising of arms to the sky like we wanted to reverse rain, as if by spreading our arms we could make room for both Israel and Palestine.

We tasted some kind of ecstasy when we first spotted the port, feeling the fabled milk and honey in the air like thick sunshine. We all sang the same song, “Od Yavoh Shalom Aleinu,” a long song with a handful of powerful words like a pomegranate containing a few precious seeds. The song is in both Hebrew and Arabic:

עוֹד יָבוֹא שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כּוֹלָם

סְלָאָם, עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם, סְלָאָם.

Od yavoh shalom aleinu v'al kulam.

Salam, aleinu v'al kol ha'olam, salam salam.

Until peace comes upon us and everyone.

Peace (in Arabic), for us and all the world, peace.

The summer after my sophomore year of high school, thousands of miles from my home, I felt like Earth’s most peaceful warrior. The questions I had about God swung in the back of my brain, an accidental pendulum. *Are You There God? It’s Me Margaret* by Judy Bloom was my Bible. Religion was matzo ball soup and lighting Shabbas candles every Friday night with my family, dirty Yiddish jokes I didn’t understand until fifth grade sex ed, and talking to myself because God (if one existed) seemed too big to address.

I completed my confirmation class because I didn’t mind spending my Thursday nights after rowing practice with the bearded rabbi and a handful of kids. Judaism felt more important that year because it was not unlike rowing: no matter how much strength we had, the boat refused to move if we weren’t balanced on the water. Balance

was a constant ebb and flow on the water and off, especially after the father of the first boy I ever kissed was diagnosed with skin cancer. Eli was in my confirmation class and rowed the same seat as me. His dad went to grad school with my mother and I remember overhearing him say once at a regatta that of all the novice girls, I was the “pick of the litter.” For a girl just shy of 16, words like these make up the great replaying record of the mind.

His dad died one day after Eli’s boat won second place at Southwest Junior Rowing Championships. Our tradition was to throw the winning teams into the river. That evening we rolled in the muddied waters of the Feather River and the sunlight seemed too perfect. One week later, we had a memorial service at the congregation. Three weeks later, we had our final confirmation service, where the rabbi presented us scholarship certificates for our first pilgrimage to Israel. Eli and three of our other temple friends had already planned to go with the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). These were kids who grew up dreaming of going to Israel. My great-aunt had lived on one of the first kibbutzim in Israel in the 1920s, but again I wondered if the God that I had never quite met would guide me.

I decided to go one Sunday night after Eli and I had volunteered as dishwashers for the congregation’s annual fundraiser. I was wearing my new pinstripe slacks and was perfecting the skill of flirting. Eli never talked about his dad; his eyes had just grown a shade darker and his skin seemed all the more pale in the June sunlight. I felt like we were marionettes, tied together by some invisible, unspoken thread. His father’s melanoma was his life’s first Trojan horse, cancer led in through the open doors of a life too young. In a little less than a year, my adolescence would be muddied with the weight of my own Trojan horse, and I would feel that strand between us thicken and snap, the umbilical cord we nursed after suffering our own small defeats.

Salam, aleinu v'al kol ha'olam, salam salam

Eli and I dazzled on the roof of the boat that hot summer afternoon two months later. The sun was dripping energy on the boat like water on a frying pan; we were the sparks that leapt up to greet it. The melody was weighty; all that passion poured out in one throaty chord. For some, the song was about God; for others, it was about homeland, an escape, a haven. The Orthodox kids who never unpinned their yarmulkes said the song was about the divinity of the Jewish people, the chosen. I understood the song to be the connection of what is sacred with what is real. I felt like an insertion in my family’s ancestral DNA, an altered gene rearranging its nodes to better understand the whole.

There was no grander smile than Eli’s that afternoon on the boat. We felt we were touching a peace that was genuine. I wondered if all of Israel was dipping our fingers in this rainbow, twisting and turning and clapping and shouting with a faith I had only

read about. It didn't matter that I did not know God. All that mattered were those indefinable strings of connection that threaded us all together; not just me and Eli, but all of us American Jews, and hopefully someday, the people living in Palestine and Israel.

On that same trip we spent one day wandering the streets of a Christian Arab neighborhood, one of the few places in Israel where we felt that "normal" minority status was relegated to Jews. Kids played on scooters, teenagers drank Cokes on street corners and fixed cars, dads mowed their lawns. I stopped in a small soda shop run by a young Palestinian man. He was studying to be an engineer, engaged to a beautiful woman, but could not visit his family who still lived in occupied territory. He gave me free Fanta and extended hands to me like I was not American, not Jewish.

We were led into Israel as the joyous warriors of our own generation, Trojans staring in bewilderment at the horse upon their shores. We danced on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem just weeks before the first of many suicide bombings. Four weeks after the trip, I got an email from my Israeli counselor Nir, whose brother had been shot while walking down a road between a Jewish town and an Arab town. I was dazzled by Israel, by its mystic scent of my own blood, the spell of temporary peace, the holy aura in everything. This was the *Iliad* of my adolescence, ten years of hard fought battle crammed into one indelible year. The sixteen-year-old's epic: life, death, lust, pain, joy, divinity.

Every year at Passover we conclude the seder by saying "Next year in Jerusalem," as if by simply willing it, we can achieve peace everywhere. I knew it then, and I know it now: when it comes, peace will be dazzling.



EVEN THE FLOWERS ARE LAUGHING
MAYCE KEELER
2021

Ode to Phoebe Bridgers' Performance on SNL (ft. Borges)

KENNETH J. PRUITT

The facial expression version of a deadpan tweet with no caps or punctuation combined with a grin that I can't tell if it's ironic while performing the whole song was how I knew it was coming

The record—my this is one of the only days of the week when I can be certain what day of the week it is record—skips a bit during “Halloween” and loops a spooky backwards sound I imagine sampling for a song I'll never write so I return to laptop groceries imagining the skip as an aleph as in “The Aleph” where a dot in spacetime holds everything else inside of it and perhaps I have one on my turntable on my Ikea bookcase is what I'm saying

Once I pulled up Punisher on my phone in the car to drive and feel sad and saw a new Christmas EP with updated lyrics for “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” and goddammit it was all *next year all our troubles will be out of sight next year all our troubles will be miles away* but next year is already here and all my troubles are in my mouth when I try to sing along to sad music because we're still in the middle of all this

But the moment in “I Know the End” where she actually did scream like on the recording and real life speed looked like slow motion the way Borges might imagine what it feels like bumping into an aleph she broke her aloof chic and seemed really angry and I felt angry and she calmly smashed her guitar the momentum of her swings coming from the center of her body so slowly despite the violence as I lay on the rug in my living room instead of the couch for no specific reason



MICHAEL SLAYING THE DRAGON
MAYCE KEELER
2021



UNTITLED (GREEN MINOTAUR AND ME)
MAYCE KEELER
2019

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BACK AGAIN.**

