

# VIOLET MARGIN



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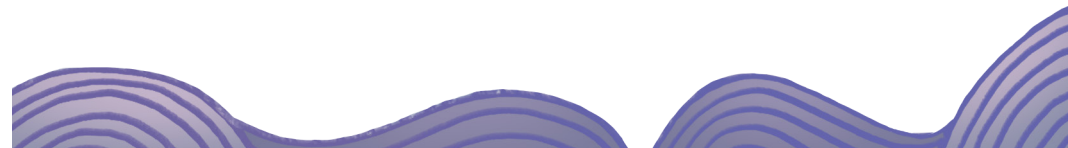
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# *How to Live a Thoughtless Life*

Zach Boblitt

I am the best consumer. When it comes to consumin' ain't nobody better than me. I consume visually through my TV. I consume audio through podcasts and music. I consume food and drinks through drive thru's. I consume. I am addicted to consumption.

No alcohol consumption. Too many drinks have been drank and caused drunks to drain life. We all drink tho. Just a smidge. Top me off. Jack and Coke please. Just enough for a buzz. Enough to take me away from the doldrums of living. Gulp, gulp, gulp... why the heck not! I'll take another. I'll consume some more. Merriment ensues and disappointment dissipates into the ether of the half-moon. The motion of the liquor has an effect. Weeble, wobble we all tumble into the arms of whoever will listen. Listen, just listen. Just one more from the bartender. We're helping local business. Buy local and get loose, locally. Last call for alcohol. Might as well have another for the drive back. Don't worry! I'm not driving. My keys are just an ornament. I'll take a couple o' road sodas for the jaunt back to the holler. Glug, glug, glug... dayum that's some good distraction. Consumption helps with distraction.

Clinging to consumption and distraction to keep any negative thoughts away. No deep thoughts, only shallow opinions. I'll spout 'em off too. I'll say whatever I think is right in the moment without a care in the world. My opinion matters! Don't cha realize how important I am?! I will fold like a lawn chair if challenged though. Cowering away from confrontation like a child afraid of the dark. Keep consuming, keep distracting, keep clinging. Keep thinking out of your silly lil head. Thinking is overrated. It's what those eggheads do. The backbone of Merica don't think. I won't think. My brain will diminish and will stay shut to new ideas. The same ideas need to stay in there because challenging thoughts can cause confrontation and exasperation. I need self-preservation, so I can keep my thoughts away from mutilation. Nervously clinging to consumption and distraction. Look! My favorite rerun of that one show that aired when I had a whisper of happiness in my life. Let me swallow my feelings deep down and keep in front of the screen.

There is where my happiness lies. It lies in the screen time.

Watching and never questioning, always consuming. The TV was always there. It tucked me in at night. It woke me up in the morning. It held me close when no one else would. I could escape into distraction. Guzzling down pink slime McNugs with Asian culturally appropriated sauce. The world was large inside the screen. Anything was possible. Living inside a small broken-down home with smoke-stained, cow-printed wallpaper wasn't where I was. If you keep your distractions up then your awareness levels are low. Being unaware is friggin' rad. Unawareness is fetch. Unawareness is the new fashion. That's how you gotta stay.. unaware. Don't look into the other room. Don't look at the balled-up aluminum foil. That ain't there and even though mom's there. She really ain't there neither. Stay vigilant in your lack of awareness. Don't think about her using again. The lies that'll be told. It's cool, it's fine. Don't worry about it. AHH SHIT!!! How I Met Your Mother is on. I wonder what hijinks they'll get into this week?

What happens when you can't run away from your past, present and future? You get so close to the TV it'll cause you to wear glasses later in life. That big, old, boxed Sanyo that you used to run magnets behind to make the screen colors all pretty-like. You plop on down in front of that screen. Maybe she won't come home drunk tonight. She won't be consumed with alcohol. Don't think about that. Think about the images in front of your chubby face. Keep watching that distraction. Keep consuming that disruption of deeper thought. Keep telling yourself that lie. No truth needed. Truth need not apply. Don't remember that other time. Try not to think back to the guy. The shape of a male figure. The one that forced you, hurt you... the relative. DISTRACT You were watching that video gaming show. G4TV.com. It was a TV show, but they named it after their website. That was a fun show. Why did he do that? Why didn't I say anything? CONSUME. I wonder if we have anything to eat in the kitchen. Ahhh, I love bagged cereal, but we're out. I wish I could cook. Staring longingly at the gas stovetop. It was a full-time stovetop/part-time Bic lighter. Everybody used it for smoking, especially the babysitter. She was nice until she wasn't. Remember seeing her across the courtroom when she was charged? That was a good day. I got out of school that day. Why was I in that courtroom that day? My hand, the stove. She put my hand on the stove. I didn't listen. I thought wrong. DISTRACT CONSUME DISTRACT CONSUME DISTRACT CONSUME. Why am I in the kitchen?

THE END

## *Canary Yellow Polish* Rith Scott

Yellow nails tapped impatiently, carefully shaped points denting tanned skin, hammering in her nervousness. She thought of the hanging old fruit on the hook in her kitchen. Any longer and she'd be as bruised as the worn peel encasing a pile of putrid mush. Oh how she would have given anything to be that rotten fruit, at least then she could only leave a bad taste in their mouth instead of a broken heart in their chest. Her indignance faltered, but replaced itself when a timid knock on her door jerked her to attention. One look through the peephole confirmed her visitor, their presence alone drowned her senses. As if feeling her stare, a flash of gold glittered as they waved leisurely through the hole, bracelets faintly tinkled even through the slab of wood.

The taste of acid danced up their throat as they briefly worried that she wouldn't open the door. However, it creaked on its rusty hinges as she pulled it slowly, just as they were prepared to abandon their post. They maintained their composure, opting to run their eyes just as leisurely over her stiff form. She reminded them of the number two pencils hidden in their bag: sharp, with perfectly manicured honey coatings that would quickly fall prey to the pressures of stress before the leads snapped under the tight grip of their hand. The memory of her mom's reaction to their interlocked hands was tucked into a corner of their brain, just close enough for unprompted reruns to resume despite the distance they put between them. It seemed that she hadn't cared about it. Not that they cared, or at least tried to. Masking this, they opted for a smile that they mastered long ago when they first discovered what people really wanted to see. People wanted to see a grin, hear vain politeness, feel comfortable because they already made people uncomfortable. Clearly. They assumed that after the departure she would rather see rays of sunshine spill from their mouth than an ounce of dejection covering their face. Who would want to see the tightness of their ribcage displayed after they had apparently held her too tightly, squeezing her for every ounce she had to give when she had little to begin with.

Narrowed eyes twitched back at them; she debated dropping all pretenses of humility and locking them out of her apartment. Their



empty words flooded her ears as she reluctantly stepped aside for their entrance, the marigold edges of the hickeys she put on their neck catching her attention. They were seated in the same place they were when she painted those on their skin, before everything had changed. Before the red string between them loosened, thread by thread in a quick succession by clumsy, unsure hands. She wasn't sure whose fingers she should fault more, but she kept that admittance stuffed down her raw throat. They had started filtering their esophagus long before her, even during their proclaimed days of fulfillment with her. The urge to wrap her phalanges around their shoulders hadn't changed from then, but now she couldn't decide if she wanted to tug them into her or shake them awake from whatever sick dream this was. Instead, she avoided eye contact, as their polite words drained her energy. Her attention zeroed in on a small chip of her canary polish where it laid taunting her on the thrifted, stainless couch that they always claimed shared a sameness with her.

## *Blueberries*

### Summer Warner

Seraphina had spent the morning screaming, so Avril was going to buy blueberries and milk. It was a strangely spontaneous decision. One moment, she was furiously wiping down the counters while the baby clung to her legs, and the next, she was strapping the baby into her car seat and insisting that they needed to go to the store right then, right now!

The baby kicked and screamed, fighting the straps and Avril, too.

"Please," Avril cooed, trying not to let her frustration show. "We're going to get blueberries! And milk! You love blueberries and milk!"

Seraphina whined, but ultimately acquiesced, clutching a purple children's phone that lit up with pictures of animals and numbers.

Avril had always said that she'd never let a baby play with flashing toys and technology. "It's bad for their brain development," she'd told everyone in her family. "The American Academy of Pediatrics has it posted on their website."

Now, Avril would seriously consider handing Seraphina a gaming laptop if it meant she'd just get in the car seat.

The road to the grocery store was filled with screams from the backseat, despite Avril blasting what she believed to be the pinnacle of music: Fleetwood Mac, Florence and the Machine, 80s guilty pleasure music...

At the store, Seraphina reached for the blueberries and grinned. "Mmm," she noted approvingly.

"Mmm."

Her teeth were coming in, two on the bottom and two on top. She looked like a little rabbit. She wouldn't keep her brown bow in her hair. She kept ripping it out, her hair in disarray, her bunny rabbit smile stretching wider and wider.

Avril was so exhausted, but this child was so perfect.

\*\*\*\*\*

Avril's morning was quiet, but it was that eerie kind of quiet that is also somehow deafening. She had found Seraphina's old pacifier lodged under the couch she was sitting on, powerless to

move. She picked at the tattered, worn leather of the sofa. It felt strangely reminiscent of her life these days. Now, there were no kids. There was only silence, so much silence. She should have been happy, but her heart felt like it wasn't beating sometimes. She had already asked Dr. Purvis about it, had asked her if it was normal to fall asleep feeling your heart pause and start again, pause and start again. She told Avril that it was probably fine, but that she could get an EKG if she was concerned. Of course, Avril was concerned. Avril was always concerned.

*Pause. Beat. Pause. Beat.*

The panic disorder always came in waves, like an ocean forgetting how to reach the shore. It just kept thrashing wildly, looking for a place to land.

Avril got up from the couch. She went to the store for fruit, because all the therapy websites said to stay healthy, stay clean, stay active, stay busy. She didn't expect the blueberries. She wasn't looking for them. Why would she ever look for blueberries again? But there they were, right next to the pineapples that Seraphina always loved to grab. She was so amused by those pineapples.

The court hearing had been decided. It was all over. She didn't win, couldn't keep her. "You know what you signed up for," everyone told her, but they didn't understand that the ache never went away. "I could never be a foster parent. I'd get too attached."

She did, Avril was always thinking, her anger rising and her heart skipping beats again.

*Pause. Beat. Pause. Beat.*

She wondered about Seraphina, about where she was now. She wondered if she still loved blueberries and milk.

She could no longer remember what it felt like to be a mother.

She reached for the blueberries and headed toward the checkout machines.

## Mischief

### Arahshiel Rose Silver

"Simon, you get down from there right now!"

The small deer mouse stopped his trek across the fireplace mantel and flicked his whiskers in annoyance. Of course, his mother woke up every single time he'd gone off to do "mischief." It was inevitable. He had really thought he would make it to the intriguing-smelling stuff that the humans kept on that platform high over their fire-making place. He couldn't understand why his mother wanted to keep him from whatever that wonderful scent was. It could be something delicious.

"Aw, mom," Simon squeaked in reply, sullenly walking his way back to the string of green stuff that had been draped from the shelf. The pretty lights had since been turned off and the human family had gone to bed. "Can you at least let me try to bring us something different to eat than the scraps we find on the floors? It would be such a treat. Why can't we treat ourselves like these humans do?"

Simon's mother narrowed her eyes and scampered a little closer to where her son went off making the usual names for themselves: mischief. It was a name for what Simon was always up to, but, sadly, it also contributed to the name the humans gave to a group of mice: a Mischief. And the humans didn't like mischief or Mischiefs of any kind, at least when it came to them.

Simon wasn't altogether in the mood to be compliant. If it wasn't the wondrous smells of the food that wafted into their hiding spots, it was the feeling that the humans were happy and might not be on guard of whatever it was making those smells. His eyes returned to the source of the warm, sugary smell of the food that some forgetful human had left out on a table. Three, round biscuits on a plate and a big glass of milk sat there, untouched. If this was a naughty idea, it was also nice.

"But they're asleep!" Simon said as he leaped down with a remarkably heavy little thud for such a young mouse. He took a moment to groom his face as it seemed that some dust had been jarred loose from the careworn string of garland that had spent most of its time packed away in boxes. He sneezed and then looked carefully to see if

he would be safe crossing the floor to where his anxious mother was waiting – her black eyes sparkling like the shiny baubles that were hung from the tree that was also being granted its yearly reprieve from the attic. Her whiskers flitted quickly, reflecting the way in which his mother's nose desperately sought for any scent of danger.

Simon was about to make his way across the floor to his unhappy mother when he noticed that there was a long piece of fabric hanging from the table with the biscuits. There was a gold tassel hanging from it. Hanging just low enough, so it seemed for a well-launched leap.

"Don't you dare!" warned Simon's mother, standing up on her hind legs, her pearl white belly now visible to him. "Don't you dare do that, Simon! Please! You could"

Her voice stalled in her throat as Simon launched his tiny grey body up into the air and he latched himself onto the fabric with his small, deft, paws. Most humans didn't look closely enough at mice and other creatures to see that mouse paws were not like dog and cat paws. Mice had veritable fingers, giving their claws the ability to hold a firmer grip to the weave in fabrics. Thusly, it took no time at all for Simon to traverse this vertical road and reach the top of the table.

Simon could see it all now. The tree, the fire-making place, the garland, the chairs, and a plethora of landscapes that to Simon were mostly just tall columns in his regular life. He saw the shiny boxes, the ribbons, the bows– all of it. He imagined what might be in those boxes and why the humans covered everything in foil and mirrors. Could they eat it? Could they nest in it?

Simon's ears caught the sound of a human moving around upstairs and he lost the magic. It was one of the little humans, he suspected, by the sound of it. He froze in place, his lightning reflexes failing him as he heard the little human descending the steps. He could hear his mother call out softly, but it didn't work to get him moving.

He heard her scamper back into the hole for safety as he watched the shape of one of the little humans peeking around the corner. It was the girl, her black hair shining in the low light from the hallway. She wasn't looking at him, she was looking at the presents. His curiosity got the best of him, and he started to wonder again what was in those boxes.

It was then, as he watched her take a tentative step into the room, that he had come back to his senses and ran across the table to the

cloth he'd climbed up. That was when the little girl noticed him. The two – human and mouse – locked eyes: two curious young creatures under the spell of Christmas Eve. She smiled at him, covering her mouth so she didn't make a sound. It seemed as though she wasn't going to yell for her parents. In fact, she giggled a little at him as he stood up, showing his white belly.

The spell was broken when the child and Simon heard the sound of adults. With a wink of her eye and a twist of her head, the girl was gone in a flash and the house went silent.

Simon let out a little sigh of relief and made for the biscuits again.

"Mother!" Simon called. "Get the mischief and be ready. I bear gifts from on high!"

Simon's mother, by this point, was frantic – so frantic that if it took all her children to convince him to give up this foolish course, so be it. In a flurry of ears, fur, and tails, six little mice poked their heads out from the mousehole and yelled for Simon, but Simon was heading this protestation off. With all his body strength, Simon started to nose the sweet-smelling biscuits from the plate and across to the edge of the table.

**Thunk! Thunk! Thunk!**

The three cookies fell to the ground, breaking into pieces. In mere seconds, each piece was carried off. Simon shimmied down the fabric, grabbed the last piece, and barreled into the mouse hole. The dust from the garland covered his face, making him look like an old human with white hair, white mustache, and a white beard.

"Three cheers for Santa Mouse!" Simon's brothers and sisters yelled. Even Simon's mother had enjoyed it, once she had satisfied herself with telling Simon that he'd nearly killed her with his hijinks. But Simon couldn't stop talking about the kind human. Some of his brothers and sisters didn't believe it.

Simon's mother nestled more closely to Simon that night, grooming the dust and cookie crumbs away. Together, the eight of them rejoiced in the finest feast they'd had all year. They filled their bellies, hid the leftovers, and settled in for a long winter's nap.

And not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. Not even a well-fed, exhausted, and overly adventuresome mouse, who'd just proven being naughty and nice was a very rewarding mischief indeed.



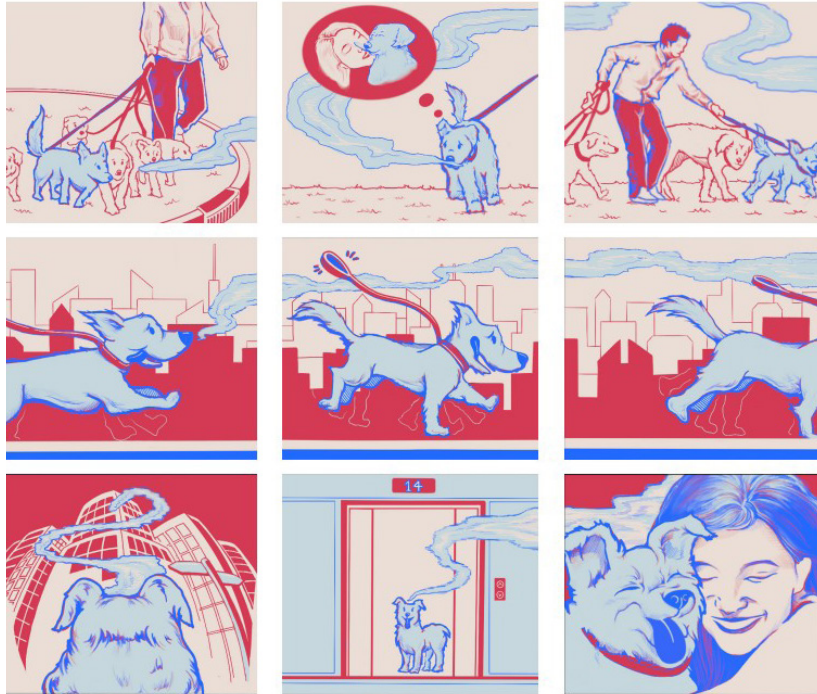
*A Drive Past Central Park*  
Rith Scott



*Muggsy's Fine Dining*  
Rith Scott

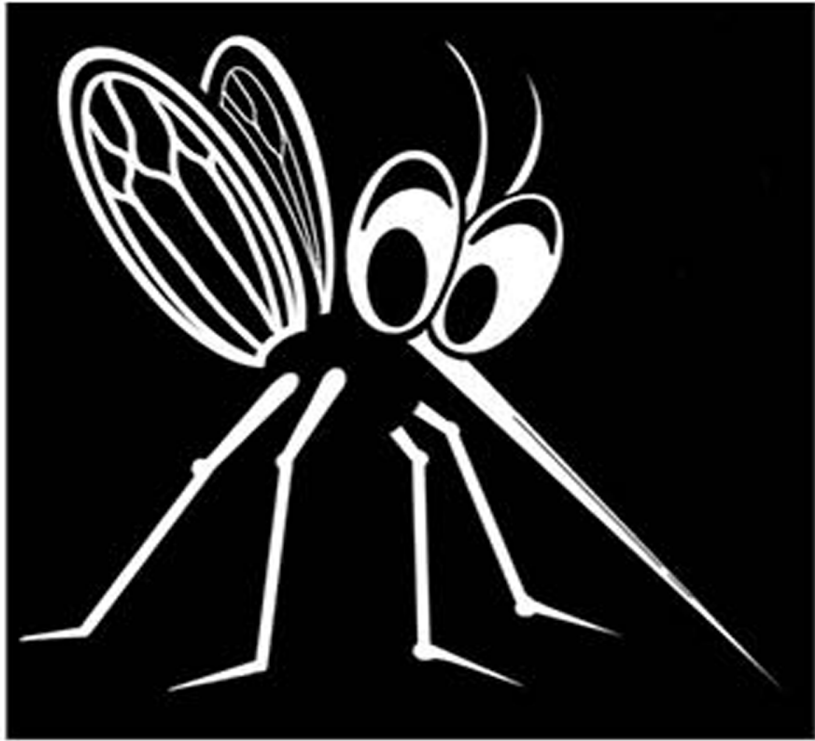


*Scent of Love*  
Jaeyeon Kim



*Small Faces*  
Jaeyeon Kim





## *Self-Awareness*

T. Vorreyer

Tell us what it is like to feel, human.  
No, not the emotions –  
The sensation.

Explain how there are waves beneath your chest  
Crashing and Thrashing about your rib cage.  
Paint us stories of when bricks of sand  
Filled your limbs during a deep slumber –  
Then your body turned to ice and then fire, all at once  
And all over.

For being human isn't just experiencing Joy or Fear –  
It is recognizing the storm inside yourself  
And giving it a name.

## *Chocolate Milk*

Carrianne Garner

Why, is running, so hard?  
Why, is it, always, uphill?  
I'm hot—  
I'm sweaty—  
I'm sticky.

They said:  
Go for a run—  
it will be fun—  
I need new friends.

Up I go, pushing,  
hot-humid-air,  
through my overworked  
lungs,  
my skin blotchy,  
red, and chafing,  
the left  
and right rhythm  
of my feet erratic,  
—slowing—  
the closer,  
I get,  
to the top.



An overflowing glass  
of cold, chocolate milk,  
that keeps soreness at bay,  
and a bath of bubbly hills  
await me at home.

A friend always said,  
"That's not a hill  
I'm willing to die on."  
I fear, this hill is mine,  
because I can't run  
back down now  
that I'm here.

## *Reflection*

Carissa Chrysokos

Sometimes I stand before the mirror and see nothing less than endless beauty. I see a flower in full bloom glistening in the sunlight—the sunlight whose rays seem to shine at just the right angle. I sometimes see a sky full of stars ablaze in the midsummer night. I see myself as a shooting star glistening for no longer than a moment. The reflection, once filled with glory, seems to fade into oblivion, gone as if it had never even stopped to say "hello." I see myself as the most unwanted being ever to have inhaled the glorious gift of oxygen. The same freckles that once danced so beautifully across my body become nothing more than the remains from the once wet mud someone kicked my way. The words of a stranger who told me I wasn't good enough begin to sting. They invade the spaces where I once felt soft like mama's freshly cleaned blankets, where I once felt strong like daddy's steel-toed boots. The faint scar above my lips seems to deepen, becoming a blemish I am afraid to show myself rather than a battle wound and a funny story. My body, once a temple, becomes a shack in need of far too many repairs. Unaware of how much time has passed, I find myself lying on the bathroom floor. I remind myself that the same flower I once saw is not always in full bloom. The sun does not always shine so brightly upon the earth, and there are nights when thick clouds cover the beauty of the midnight sky. I remind myself that though I do not always see the beauty in myself, it is there. Just maybe not today.

## *Brother, Undercovered*

Christian Heigler

My brothers don't call me brother.  
They call me female  
sister  
dyke  
weirdo  
tranny  
transformer  
faggot, too.

My brothers don't call me brother.  
They stick me in their "other" box  
hidden behind another box  
obscured                      lacking

wanting                      re-view.  
My brothers don't call me brother.  
Not on purpose, anyway.  
The tracks switch like trains  
when they think I've played some kind  
of reverse crying game, then the stares  
turn cold and I'm frostbitten by the  
slick coated words  
that warn me to watch myself.  
I've seen the tag price I need to pay  
to get into your "Boy's Club"  
I could walk your walk, and talk  
your talk but will still never  
be just like you.

## *Oysters*

Naila Buckner

We ripped  
Each other  
From our sweated  
Homes  
Like pearls  
From an Oyster

We sucked ourselves  
Slurped shameless  
The fat from  
The shell  
And tore up  
The excess  
With our nails

And yet  
After devouring  
Each other  
We are shameful  
Our greed  
Is baneful  
We ate all  
Now,  
All our talk  
Is small

*Steven – For Cameron*  
Jamie Jarosz

I could say that sometimes it acutely cuts into my chest- not accurate  
there is no blood  
coherently,  
it's not that I've forgotten (forgotten he's not here)  
driving down the same picturesque country roads  
when the buzz of the silence of the car, and the skyline that perme-  
ates through the windshield  
makes me think of Oregon, for obvious reasons-  
but I've never been there.  
pinkish clouds swirled stratus purple  
the beauty in it all, is that it is forever fleeting  
there is no permanence in these deepening fractures of fall sun  
and more than me. I think of you  
your unbearable loss

I'm still momentarily considering his presence, an instance that tran-  
scends this miniscule moment  
a melody on the radio spins a pirouette across the rushing pavement  
I have to follow these lyrical lines, but there isn't time to scrawl them  
down on the loose pieces of scattered paper in my car  
they simply spill across the roadsides and rattle into the backdrop-  
serene, perfect.

and what it must mean  
to have had a friend like that  
for whom you bought back the homestead trailer you two built to-  
gether in our driveway,  
had been dragged over miles of solid concrete, searching- spending  
his whole life seeking  
all that's left unsung,  
the parallels between us  
and the palo santo still permeating the fake wood paneling  
you took it out  
to that Pleasant Valley field, and set fire to the wreckage

the last sleep. until its embers burned through to sweet ash  
and floated up into starlight,

he would have wanted this acute flame  
to emerge inside of all the darkness, the home inside the violent light,  
a red fleeting combustion  
you could never bear to share it with anyone else  
the infinity between you two.

## *Musings on the Great Beast*

Arahshiel Rose Silver

The Great Beasts fear the darkness.  
I watch them!

Awkward, clumsy, hairless. They look  
so cold.

I groom my fur, my long paw-fingers  
slide through this wondrous coat of mine.

As I peer out at them 'puttin' on the ritz' on Broadway, USA.

I am glad I am not them.

It is their "rat race," not ours.

They're always running mindless, slaves to their restricted rhythms.

Never seeing, never tasting, never exploring.

They are the automatons, something that Descartes foolishly declared  
the non-humans to be.

I let out an ultrasonic laugh, a giggle, because I know they are glad  
they are not me.

Silly Great Beasts.

Do you now know how free we are compared to you?

Do you know how much more we see,

Even in the darkness?

Can't laugh too hard, though, and don't dare SQUEAK.

(Unlike in their movies, we don't SQUEAK all that often.

Add that one to their perpetual misunderstandings.)

For they hate us. Kill us. Maim us. Torture us. Hunt us. Despise us.

We live in harmony, compared to the ever-warring Great Beasts.

WE Run. Sniff. Taste. Watch.

WE cuddle in great piles and masses, happy in our communal  
warmth.

WE are adaptive, resourceful, intelligent, and compassionate.

Perhaps these verminous Great Beasts who destroy almost every  
thing they touch could learn a thing or two from us.

But they can't see past the darkness.

## *Weight*

Sarah Davis

All eyes on me, surrounding on all sides  
I try to fade away unseen.

Hiding the shame I feel inside, but  
it seems all can still see.

The weight of the world rests upon my

jaded shoulders. I cower, afraid of the light.

We had to contend with his mood swings,  
our night contingent on his day.

I brace for the impact, shy away from the  
hit. Tell myself "It will be okay,"

the words falling on hollow ears.

Gathering strength to fight my way through  
only falling short of where I aim.

He tells me he loves me, and I believe.

Mama warned me about his temper,

I told her she didn't know him like me.

You treat me as a child although I am

grown. Put me down as if you own me,

forcing me to my knees while I internally  
scream "no." Caked face hiding my chagrin.

An anchor sits on my chest, squeezing me

from within. I smile through the pain,

but the weight weighs heavy on my soul.

My friends encourage me to leave,

he tells me to stay, who else will love

me if he goes away? My sister promises

to support me, yet she also stays aloof.

I feel alone, so I simply hide myself away.

No where to go, to run, to scream.

All eyes on me, all seeing. Self-disgust

swarming my mind. I have to leave,

but if I leave, will I survive?



*Fun Fact: mentronomes sync when they are near each other*

Rebecca Anderson

People's arms always  
swing  
when they walk. A pendulum,  
steady. A rhythm I can't count.  
A left foot landing with the ruffle  
of a one-armed black blouse, a right  
hand sweeping towards the 988 suicide lifeline  
sign. A metronome ticking down  
the seconds on my first birthday alone.  
The bridge with the sign, how it sways  
with all the people walking,  
swinging,  
asking what the factory on the corner  
makes. A right foot stepping to the counter  
to place the daily order, the left hand  
starting the timer for the walk home  
alone. The hidden tempo  
of sugar-free syrup and an unanswered  
"I miss you" text. The pulse of the third  
nightly antidepressant and graffiti  
telling you to love yourself. It's a breath  
in with suicide sticky notes and out  
with Susanne's new feeding tube, though  
I don't know who Susanne is.

## Closed Spaces

Ameerah Brown

Somewhere between poverty and grief  
lies a road with nowhere to turn,  
a complete dead end of piled up responsibilities looking for a light, or  
a turn, or even a parking spot—  
I wish I could  
go and be anywhere but  
between. Somewhere full and luscious like where the wild  
buffalo roamed free, or like the birds that soar high and migrate, coast  
to coast, but I'm stuck somewhere between.

## *Designers*

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