## Feeding the Dog:

It was another Tuesday night. The dog needed to be fed, the house vacuumed, and dinner made. After that would be an hour-long session of watching the news and then going straight to bed. The daily monotonous tones of the full-time worker were getting to me. Each day you woke up, you knew exactly the list of tasks that would be awaiting you. You could probably write it blindfolded. As each day passed, the faraway childhood dreams were evaporating. It was going up in a wisp of smoke, and you just had to let it happen.

I was on the tram, waiting for the 40-minute journey to finally start. The man in front was sky-high tall, so his soaked-through armpits were towering over me. Sweat was wafting from them in a poisonous cloud everyone could escape but me. I was the martyr pushed up against him, the chosen tribute. You would think people would send sympathetic looks at the very least, but they were all captured by their phones. The universal numbing agent.

The tram moved with a jolt. My hand tightened on the bacteria-filled hand grip, drowned in the essence of numerous souls before me. The place was packed to the brim. It was clogging up my nostrils. Those who were lucky enough to get a seat were sitting as largely as they could, ready to protect them with their lives. Each one of them was dressed immaculately, not one strand gone loose, reading classical books in the most pretentious way possible. They didn’t have to stand in a puddle of someone else's sweat, feeling it add onto your own. They didn’t have to suffer, with the knowledge of knowing your curls were coming undone into a frizzy bush. All because they had the privilege of the first stop. And that was no accident. They were the managers, the businessmen, and the doctors, who had the money to buy a car and petrol but still chose to haggle the government for their prime stop. It was just a bit of fun for them —an exciting adventure. All the while leeching off our hard-earned cash and using it to fund their latest trip to the Swiss Alps and leaving us in the dust.

The tram jostled, and with a crack and a curse, the sky-high tall man dropped his phone. He began reaching down to get it, pushing further up against me. My sacred bubble of personal space had already been squeezed to the limit, but now it just popped. This wouldn't do. I backed up behind me, bumping into someone else. They glared over their spectacles, just like the librarians at my high school. I had no care for them so I just smiled, delicately, and squeezed through the gap next to them that had enough space for my bubble to reinflate. The guy next to me still managed to elbow me in my recently undislocated shoulder. He didn’t even notice. He was absorbed with his phone, clutched tightly to his ear, with sweat droplets sliding off the tallest finger.

I leaned into his pitchy voice, coming out in a slow crackle.

“There’s going to be something else. We’ll find a way.”

A pause. His finger tapped on the skin just below his nose.

“I’m not going to let them sell our house just ‘cause we’re late on a few payments! This is ridiculous.”

He finally noticed a new person was touching his bubble, and our eyes met. His were a rich chocolatey brown with a hidden secret in its depths. There was a frightful spark, desperate to leap out of its trappings. I would’ve liked to look at them more, but he shifted his eyes robotically to the motionless sea of people and fired more thoughts through his phone. Then he snapped it shut, and curled his hands into a fist. I caught another glimpse of the eyes. They seemed to be like volcanoes, ready to burst and turning redder and hotter by the second. Only one more stone would be needed for the spark to explode free.

Every day a new person was losing their house, car, or something like that. It was nothing new, just a symptom of the times. The people on the seats wanted perfect workers with perfect minds and perfect attitudes they could shape to become even more perfect. And if you couldn’t do that, and swap your heart for another brain, then it would all be your fault. It was too suffocating, too restricting. And it wouldn’t be long until a blowing crater erupts.

The volcano would be like the ocean, crashing wave after wave on the mountains of wealth they hold so dearly. It’ll chip, carve and take out all the dull spots. It’ll refine a new ecosystem, one where we didn’t have to slave all day for a single coin. We would no longer protect the mountains hidden under rainbows for rainy days. We were a school full of fish. The sharks may be more powerful, but they were outnumbered.

The monotonous announcement voice broke through the static and called out my stop. I squeezed through the sweaty bodies, using handles and hand grips as anchoring points. I got to the door, waited for it to open and began the fifteen-minute walk home.

The cold was biting my bones. Each step seemed to be getting slower and slower. But up above were stars, glimmering with reflected sunlight and lighting the way home. There was still hope. Even with all the expanding smog, they found a way to shine through it all. I fished my keys out of my bag and opened up my front door.

The living room smell was itching my nose. A hint of sardines was creeping into the air. It was probably the neighbours again, who had the laughable belief that they were the only ones in the apartment complex that mattered. I’ve tried to argue with them before, but it was futile. I hung my keys off the wall and slung my bag on the couch. It was time to start my list;

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I grabbed the can of dog food from the highest cabinet. The can opener was in the sink, under the impression it would finally undergo a soapy wash. There was no time for that. I snatched it out of the sink and pried off the lid. It wasn’t a pleasant smell. I went to close the cabinet, but something caught my eye first. It was a flyer.

I grabbed it. It was coated with dark, shiny red paint. The suggestive kind you’d find in Hollywood red lipsticks that seemed to mind control men. In thick dark letters, it laid its case down flat. It was going to make change for the people, for the workers of today. It was going to make waves. All for the small price of spending your public holiday at the parliament house right at the crack of dawn. There was no time for that. I needed to fix up a report before my boss got on my case.

I scrunched it in a ball and aimed for the bin. Then, I grabbed the dog bowl and poured the food inside.