

Subscribing to Circles

I hate circles. I hate them because they're the weakest shape. I hate them because they're hard to draw. Mostly, I hate them because I cannot escape them at all.



I like commitment. I like subscribing. It's enjoyable and it keeps me busy. This year, I'm committed and subscribed to eight cocurricular activities and thirteen YouTube channels.

Amongst other things.



When I succeed, I don't collect trophies or ribbons; I collect invisible strings, which plant their roots deep inside my head and strangle every inch of my body. They take different paths.

Some slowly slither down my throat and strangle my vocal cords before resurfacing to tie knots with my tongue. Others shoot to my eyes, jumping ^{up}, ^{down}, ^{up}, ^{down}, ^{up}, ^{down}, like fleas, before racing out my eyes to resume their explosion of energy.

Eventually, these strings find comfort around my neck and wrists, weaving languid coils before stretching, pulling themselves taut, and shutting their eyes. These strings multiply with every thought I have, every word said about me. They despise stillness and the mundanity of my everyday mediocrity.

Some strings occupy themselves by becoming mirrors, ceaselessly reflecting the chasm of my heaviest thoughts. Others whisper to me the jeers of society which my ears cannot detect.

Carmen Maria-Machado once asked, "*What's worse: being locked outside your own mind, or being locked inside of it?*" As the strings gash my brain and occupy my thoughts, my head spins, and my mind spirals.

These strings warned me about *Him*, so I have run from *Him* my whole life. I didn't fail my Grade 4 ballet exam because I quit before I took it. I haven't had any big fights because I comply with others if it means they'll like me more. I sacrifice sleep if it means I will be smarter. All my life, I've been chasing to prolong the ephemeral warmth of validation whilst running from *His* bitter touch. Now, I see truth in Haruki Murakami's words,

"When someone is trying very hard to get something, they don't... when they're running away from something as hard as they can, it usually catches up with them."

I remember helplessly watching the warm pool of success trickle through the cracks of my fingers until all I held was the chilling promise of *His* hands.

Still, I refused to be caught by *Him*, so I built circles around me.



I constructed a concrete wall around my emotions, so I wouldn't be vulnerable. An army had thrown stones at it for a while, but it crumbled in the library last year, at recess before my final math exam. The stone that broke my wall was shaped like an impossible logarithmic question.

My wall shattered, and my eyes began leaking. Everyone noticed.

I grew a hedge wall, with pure white lilies, sweet pink roses, and cheerful daisies, so people would like me. Flowers were taken day by day until only one remained. It was taken by a friend who asked me my idea for an assignment. When I told her, she said it was "cringe", so I changed it.

She plucked my original idea, taking my final flower with her.

I weaved a wall of letters and numbers and knowledge to be *smart*. It held strong until this year when I failed an exam for the first time. My wall was reduced to 48% of its original size.

I built and rebuilt walls only for them to fall again and again. I agreed to dance with *Him* before I even knew *He'd* caught me. Amidst the destruction, one wall remained unscathed. I've had it forever, but I only noticed it a month ago.

Ocean Vuong described it to be the cruellest wall of all because "it is made of glass". I was immediately transported to the tormenting agony of seeing, but not reaching beyond my limits.

However, my glass wall isn't like this; I cannot see beyond or through it.

It is a mirror.

When I looked in it for the first time, I didn't see my face; I saw my *invisible* strings burning with an incandescent glow. They circled my wrists and climbed upwards, reaching above my elbows. They orbited my neck, suffocating it, saving no space for my own skin. I closed my eyes and wondered how this had happened.

I opened my eyes. My jaw dropped.

My mouth made a circle.



I chased success and validation, but I was captured by these invisible strings. I ran to avoid *Him*, but my image of *Him* was wrong.

He and I were bound.



I've not yet managed to escape the strings—and sometimes new ones arise—but I'm learning to notice them and slowly slip them off one by one. Similarly, I can feel *His* bitter grip loosen, joint by joint, day by day.



My mum thought overcommitting was driving me insane, so I told her about my subscription to circles and the discovery of my cruellest wall.

She asked me, "What were you before finding this wall?"

I said, "Bound; tied by thousands of little strings."

"And what are you now?"

"Rope."



I hate circles. I hate them because they're the weakest shape. I hate them because they're hard to draw. Mostly, I hate them because I'm subscribed to them through my deepest, darkest flaw.