

Dear S.

The older I get, the more hemmed in I seem to be.

People say this is a matter of mentality. Decisions. What you make of it and all that. And yes, it is of my own construction.

In truth, I can walk out the door on days when my time is my own. When it hasn't been purchased—but we'll get to that. Sometimes, I'm so in the habit of being hemmed in that I forget I can go anywhere I'd like to on these days.

When people are paying me for my time, there is the expectation that I won't walk out the door whenever I see fit.

In reality, I could walk out of the office door during these paid hours if I wanted to, but I imagine there would be some sort of consequence, like a stern discussion. If I made a habit of it, I imagine I may be told not to walk back in through their office door ever again.

But, I never walk out the door. I rush in panic to the office to ensure I'm there on time, and glance anxiously at the clock at the end of the day, to make sure I meet my quota.

In the morning, I look out through the silence of glass to the neighbour's garden. Their two little dogs run after rabbits, sniff about the garden and then run after small birds. There is something deeply depressing about this. No, melancholic. No, nostalgic. Sad? No. There is something about this that is incredibly numbing. Am I suppressing an inner urge, S? A desire. Or witnessing stiflement? I always feel this way when I see animals from afar, perhaps on a hillside, hemmed in by a fence in an open field. There is just enough area to roam, to have security and routine, some small detail to uncover each day, a new small detail in a plant that has grown, a stone that hasn't been turned over in a while. Yet, there is a boundary. It is visible and it contains those distant animal's lives.

I have seen less fortunate animals contained in boxes as tall and wide and long as their bodies, and that's it. These boxes have been designed to contain them for their entire life and finally their last minutes as they are transported to their death. Their entire lives have been designed within these constraints. To exact measurements. We even do this to each other. Some places are worse for it than others. Some places place boundaries on all parts of life, even on the words that can be used. I don't suffer these containments so much. As they say, I can't complain, (though in reality I often do). I suppose it is my freedom to do so.

One day, in the garden I came across a little dog. It looked lost and confused. I talked to it, but it looked up at me blankly. In time I realised it was one of the little dogs from next door. I didn't recognise it up close, outside of the neighbour's yard. It started off down the road and I followed it, to make sure it found its way home again. It skittered along the bitumen and up the neighbour's driveway. It joined the other dog and sniffed about the garden, then they ran after a small bird together. I went back inside and watched them through the window. They barked furiously at a rabbit, though I couldn't hear them through the glass. I suppose they are happy enough.

Regards,

E.

Emma L Waters has written for music press and her short stories have appeared in various journals. She is an award-winning songwriter, performing under the name EWAH. After half a lifetime in Melbourne, she calls Tasmania home again.