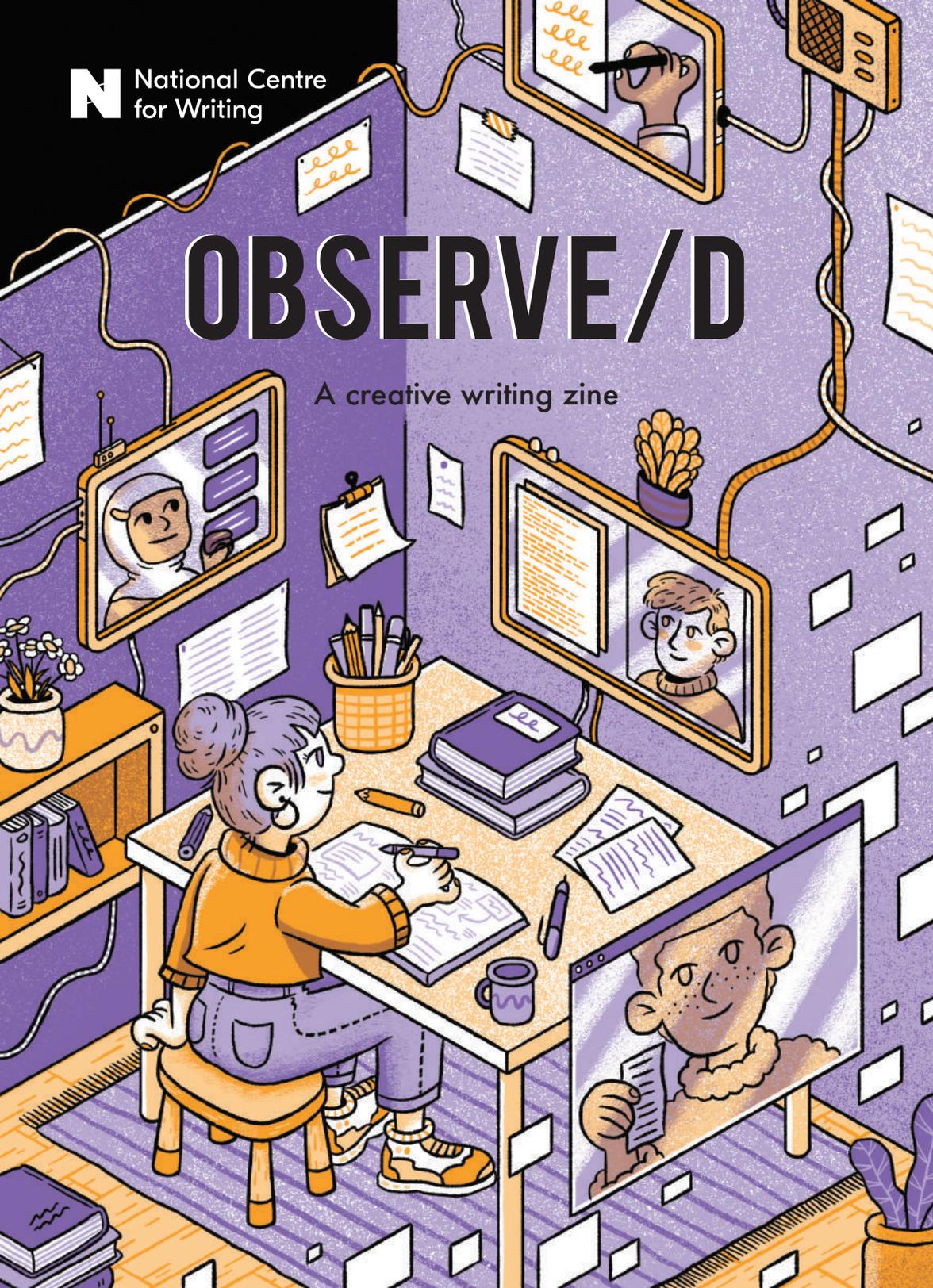


OBSERVE/D

A creative writing zine





This publication is the culmination of Lit From the Inside 2021,
programmed by National Centre for Writing.
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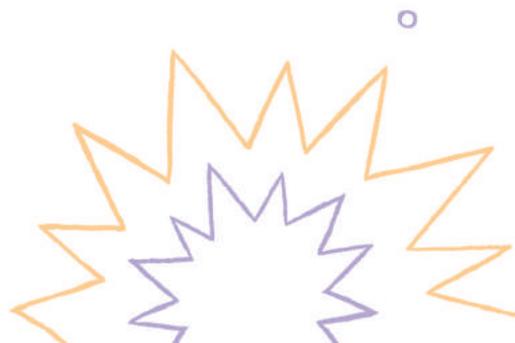
Lit From the Inside, programmed by National Centre for Writing, is a collective of curious, creative, insightful, and adventurous young people who live or study in Norfolk. They have all manner of interests but are united by their love of writing and reading. This zine is a small sample of creative work that our 2021 cohort produced during their time together — both responses to prompts from the workshops they've attended, and work written alongside their participation in the scheme. Each brilliant piece highlights the power of seeing and being seen at a time when having your camera on or off is a deeply purposeful choice. I am so proud to have worked alongside the group and to have witnessed their creativity first hand.

As a group, we thank Becky Demmen, who has been the creative co-pilot of this project. We thank Liz Breslin, Lynn Buckle, Johnny Raspin, and Jess Morgan — whose workshops have inspired some of the pieces featured here. We thank Steph McKenna and Apryl Markham-Uden for their zine-making knowledge, and Kristyna Baczynski for illustrating and designing this publication. Finally, we thank Arts Council England and Anguish's Educational Foundation, for providing the financial support to make this programme possible.

Victoria Maitland
Programme Officer, National Centre for Writing

Lit Insiders

Emoefeoghene (Efe) Akpofure Imoyin-Omene
Sophia Harrison
Sophie Law
Edith Stewart
India Taylor





UNTITLED by Edith

It's the fairy-tale of it all.
The looming safety of the cliffs.
The cocooning darkness made
safe as warm orbs drift

down the brook. It's the
oldies boats hand rowed, their
little lanterns rippling peacefully
on the sleeping river's navy hair.

It's the romantic aroma of evening
pine, the rich taste of homemade
tart, the joyous chatter of fellow
delighted souls, yes, it's the magic that's

close to my heart.

UNTITLED by Edith

Ash trickles from the sky like snow, like
The hand of death or a charcoal vulture
Incinerating my father's house, its swift bite
Swallowing French books, history, culture.

Notre Dame. Thrilling fire. Beautiful fire.

Archangels flee the armageddon
Choir sheets flying in their weeping wakes
Ironic, no? Those most suited to heaven
Their ember feathers rest on sewage grates.

Notre Dame. Holy fire. Bright fire.

Gargoyles with torn filthy faces scream
As they are scorched alive, crisping stone
Writhing in sin thrashing claws hit a beam
And it comes crashing down. They are home

In Notre Dame. Hell fire. Dark fire.

What is a small person like me to do?
Let the fires of Hell burn before you.

WEBCAM SONGS by Sophie

I've got so many songs that I love to play.
I sing and dance
through the webcam, while
they shout and scream at me.
I ignore their thrashing and bashing, going back
to a peaceful place in my mind.
Wishing one day that they will stop calling me
a maniac.
I continue to act like everything
is okay, even though I hide.
The webcam scares me, yet
it calls for me to come.
I held out my hand, and I hope that it clings on.
Through the webcam, I made
them see, that they are not so different
to you and me.
I've got so many songs that I love to play,
and through the webcam, you can
dance and sing with me.



ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE by Efe

Aaliyah – A scene from a movie

Bustling. Warmth. Coarse skin rubbing against me. Rambunctious and powered on his hands softly slipping in mine. Cobbly. We strolled hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes. Floating on ecstasy. Soaking in the scorching sun, blessed to be freed from the shackles of isolation. Nothing could top this. He cradles my face in his beautiful hands. We visit shops, buying too much. Then we set up a picnic, aim berries into each other's mouths, miss and laugh because we're deliriously happy. I can imagine us being dual protagonists in a romcom. Jaunty music playing during our adorably awkward moments, soulful pop music with a splash of jazzy riffing sound-tracking our most heartfelt ones. I can't tell where his delicious cacao skin begins and where mine ends. We lay facing each other, giving me the opportunity to admire and investigate his purest, rawest and marvellously unrefined face of pimples that align like a constellation on a beautiful night. His confidence is what makes him alluring and irresistible to the swarm of fans, sycophants and amateur groupies that stalk him across the hallways, like his every post and comment thirsty emojis. I have nothing to worry about, he reassures with his signature confident tone, yet that's all I can do when I cross-examine the ambiguous signs of his dissonant eyes and watch them peering over to his phone. He performs an effortless chuckle I could never evoke. Under his deep brown eyes, he has an icy cold undertone or is it a rich mahogany that is striking and effervescent? With him, I always feel like he is purposefully obscuring the boundaries of the personal and performance. He's like a magician. It may just be the perfect illusion or an allusion to my insecurities, but he feels so real against my beating and aching heart. 'Hey.' He smiles casually with a rich and buttery smooth tone. The picnic I prepared of ham and cheese sandwiches, vegetarian wings and nuggets and crisps and berries disappears in no time. 'Hey.' I beam gleefully, my feet wagging. When he smiles at me, I light up.





ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE by Efe

Rodney – A scene from my nightmare

I can see the way she lights up when I look at her. I love that feeling, I devour that feeling, I crave that feeling and I'm insatiable for that feeling. I've had my fair share of relationships, flings, sloppy and drunken hook-ups, and I've even been the object of obsession for three stalkers; no one has looked at me with the admiration she does. I'm afraid if I tell her this feeling will vanish. I was tumbling and turning last night from all the haunting my guilt was inflicting on me. My nightmares were experimenting with scenarios. Suspenseful music plays as Aaliyah snoops through my messages, she sobs uncontrollably, I rebound with a rotation of indistinguishable bodies, I feel empty, self-medicate until I'm an empty pit of drugs and depression and finally, my destiny is carved in stone for all to mourn. Alternatively, and worse, she forgives and never forgets. She loves me passionately, holding me out of fear I might stray again.



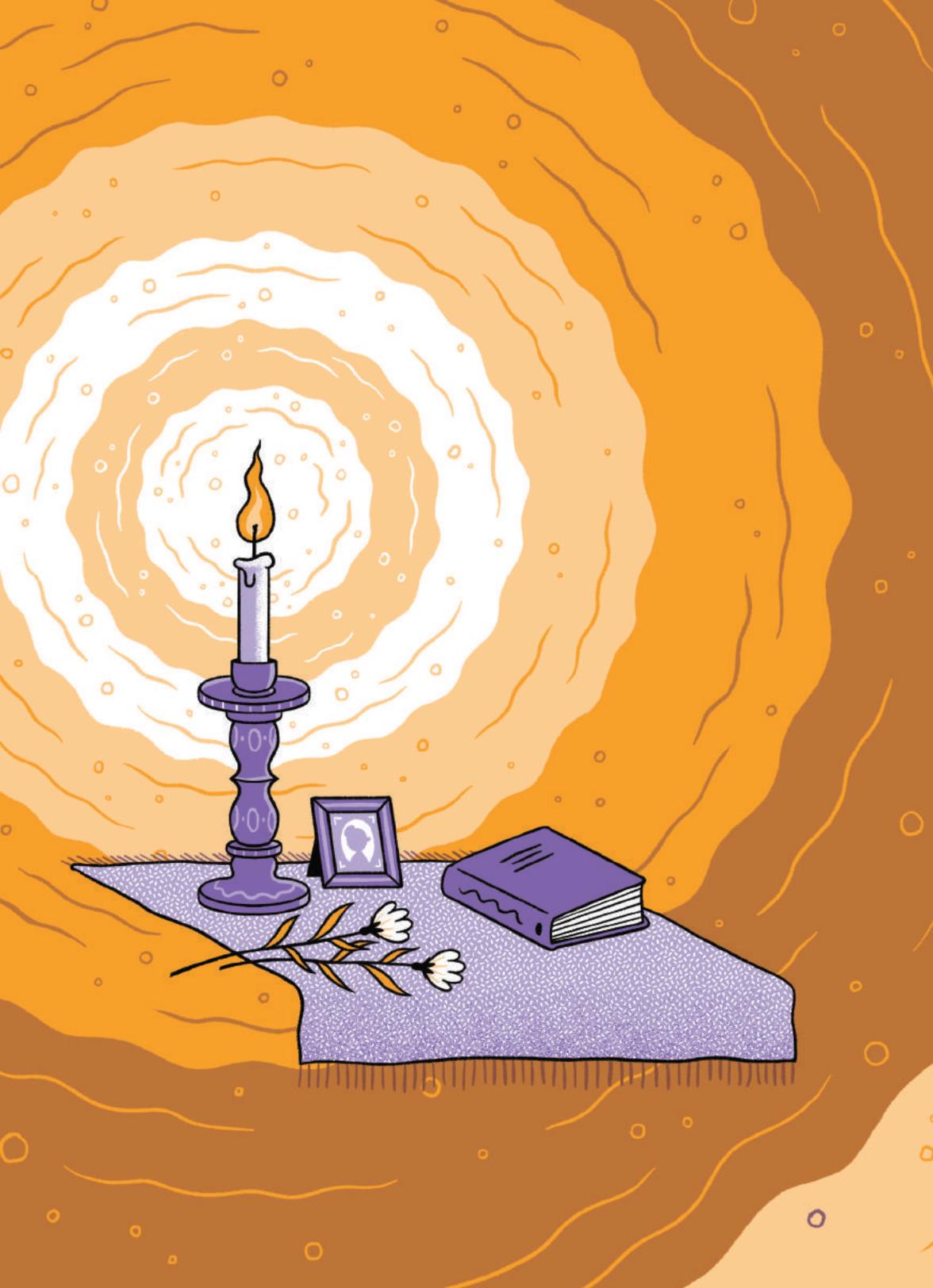
ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE by Efe

Wonder What She Thinks of Me – a Chloe X Halle tribute

They're posting constantly, inundating my feed with their lavish life, romantic getaways, and powerful popularity. And where I am I? In the shadows, curled up in an uncomfortably hard bed next to the only source of warmth in my life, shrouded in darkness, knowing before Aaliyah there was me and during their sham there's still me. Not much of an empowered feminist aye? A man's three year off-and-on side-chick? I can advocate for marginalised women by marching and yelling and starting petitions, but I can't stand up for the one woman everyone says I should love the most.

Read the full piece at nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/lit-inside





SEXUALITY WITHIN GOTHIC NOVELS AND VICTORIAN LIFE

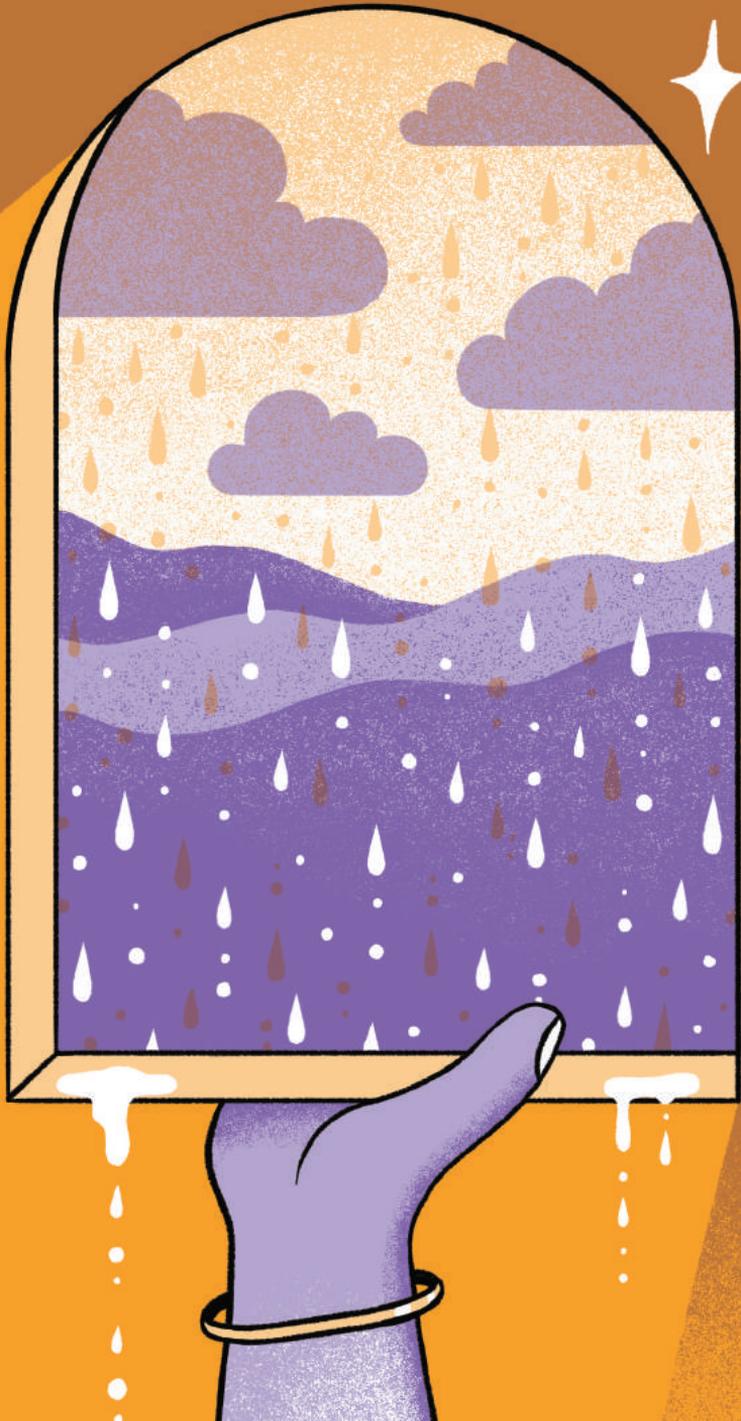
by India

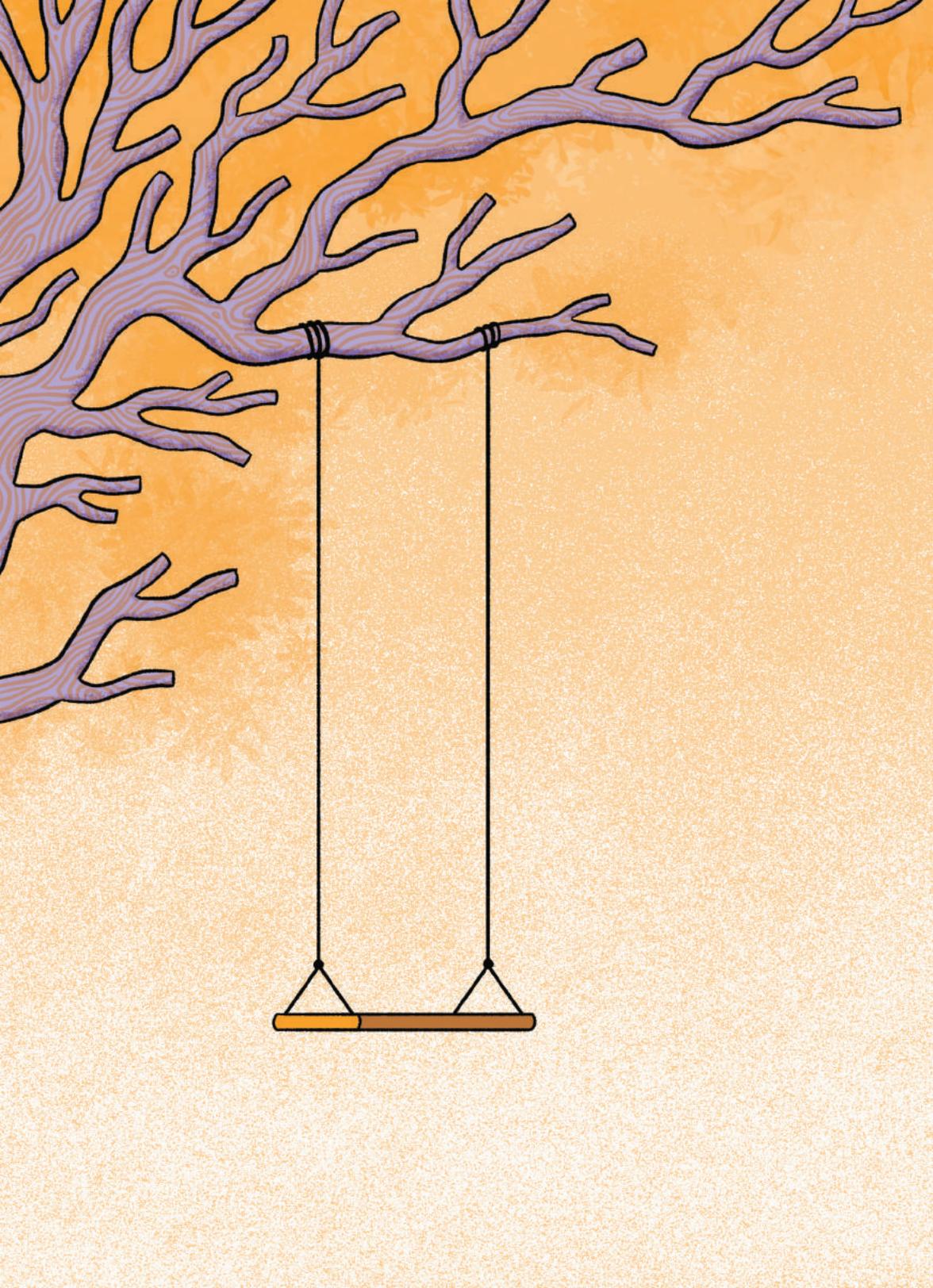
In many Gothic novels, the authors will adopt the hetero-normative ideology that women are supposed to be feminine and delicate young ladies that are saved by charming and intelligent men, and they subsequently fall in love with each other. This trope has been used in novels such as *Wuthering Heights*, *Northanger Abbey*, and many other Gothic novels. However, in many instances, there are homoerotic undertones within gothic literature that will challenge the taboos of sex, homosexuality, and gender norms. This taboo of expressing your desires and your curiosity could arguably be one of the biggest influences on Gothic Literature. While we cannot ask these writers their beliefs on the taboos of sex and sexuality, we as readers of these novels can assume that from the graphic and scandalous interpretations that they had written, they were very much open-minded about sex and even homosexuality. Those that were taught to suppress and hide their desires from others will have often sought safety within Gothic novels such as *Dracula* to connect their desires that were considered unusual with the authors and the characters.



THE UNKNOWN REALITY by Sophie

I cry out in pain,
I want to feel the love that they feel.
Don't go. Please come back.
Don't leave me alone again.
Is it something I said to make you leave?
I wish you would forgive me, just like the day before.
All I wanted was your love, mind, body, and soul.
Why was I such a fool?
It was hopeless from the beginning for you to try and love me.
My distorted mind races between us like limbo, scaring you off.
For now, I see the reason why.
I can only race after you, hoping you want me when you didn't want me
Love me so I have something to gain,
Again I cry out in pain.
Yet, you come back and I see you cry.
Why must you be like that my darling?
I love you so much, your warmth makes me happy.
I hold you close.
We share the same pain. The comfort is like a limbo of sorts,
Somewhere in between that is both beautiful and sad to see.
We forget our problems and hold hands over the horizon, looking
Out into the far distance before us.
We jump, we are gone before we know it.
We no longer cry out in pain.





HELP ME by India

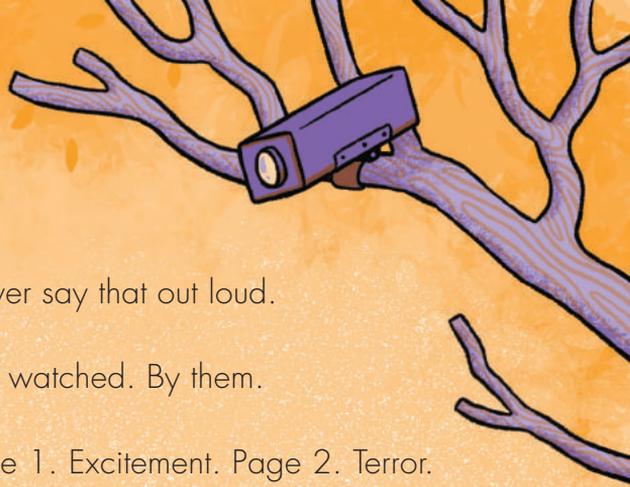
Hellish and cold. We could never say that out loud.

Everyone is being watched. By them.

Looking through the album: Page 1. Excitement. Page 2. Terror.
Please, anyone, let us free.

My body is malnourished. Skin, clinging onto my bones, begging to stay.
Everyone is being watched,
they are always watching.

Help Me, help Us.





GAMESHOW by Sophie

It's only a gameshow, I'm scared and don't know
what to do. They tower over me and glare.

I don't want to be in this house,
yet it's only a gameshow.

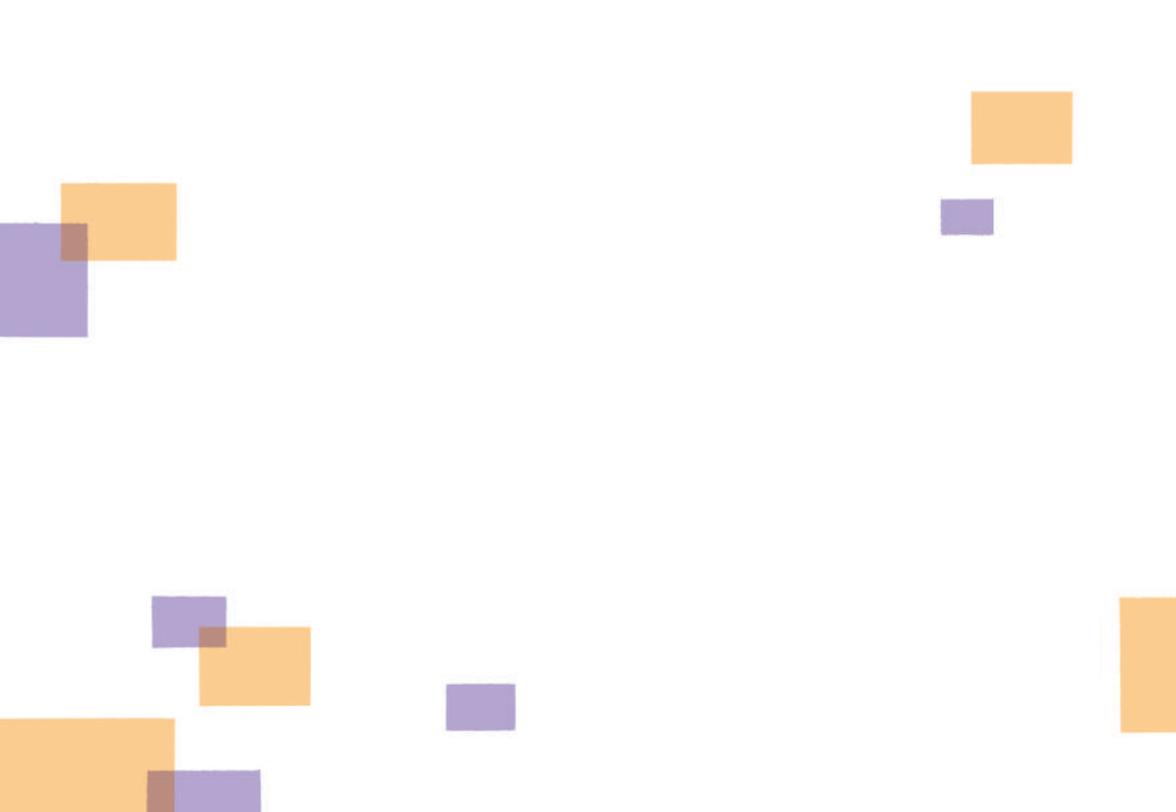
They're fighting and causing drama in the house,
I just sit and butter my bit of toast,
yet it's only a gameshow.

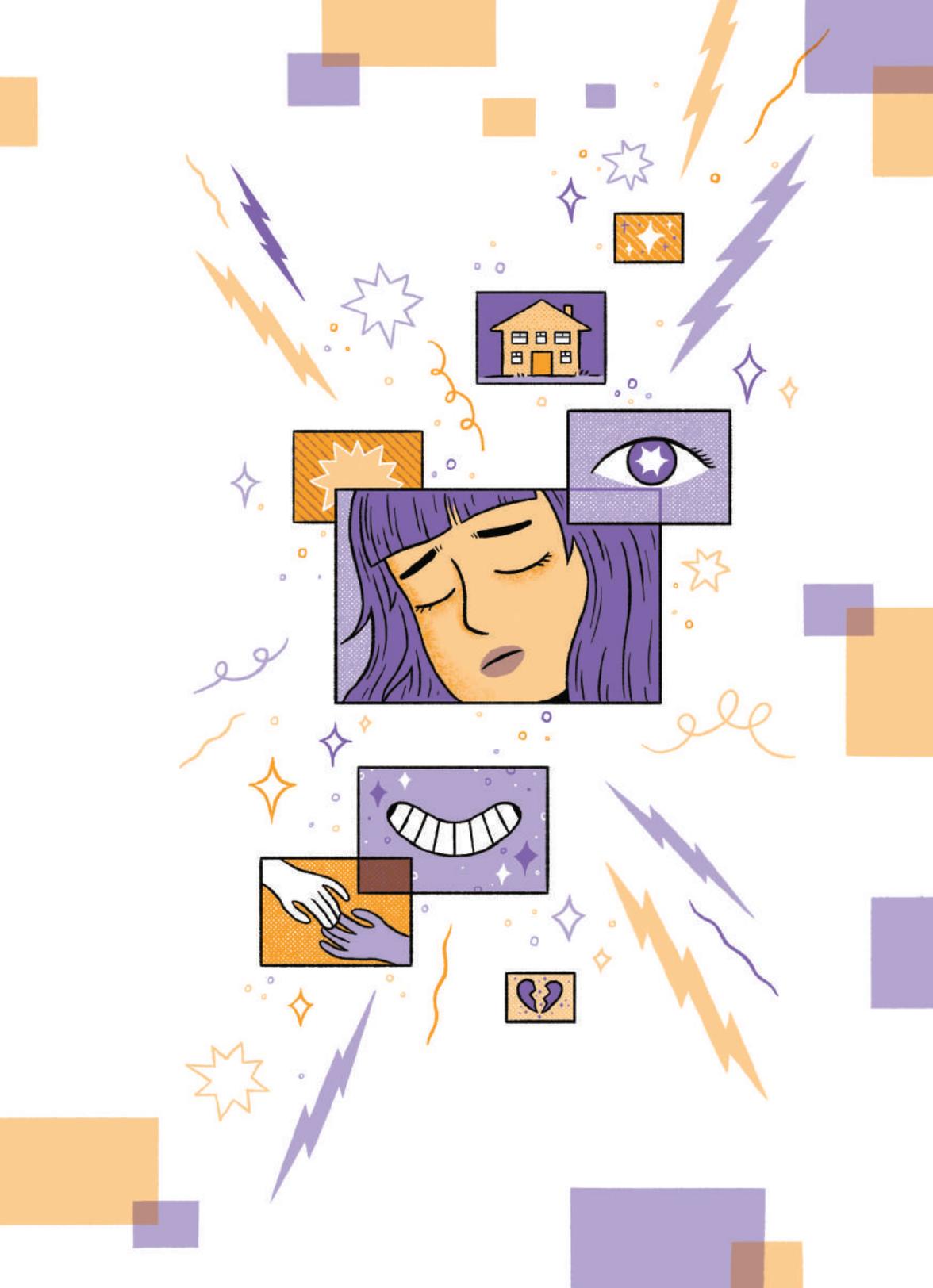
I get into bed next to everyone else's and dream I'm back at home.

I feel someone I call a friend next to me. They seem nice,
yet there's a burning passion in their eyes which I can't shake from my head.

They scream and shout at me, and I'm alone once again.

Yet, it's only a gameshow.





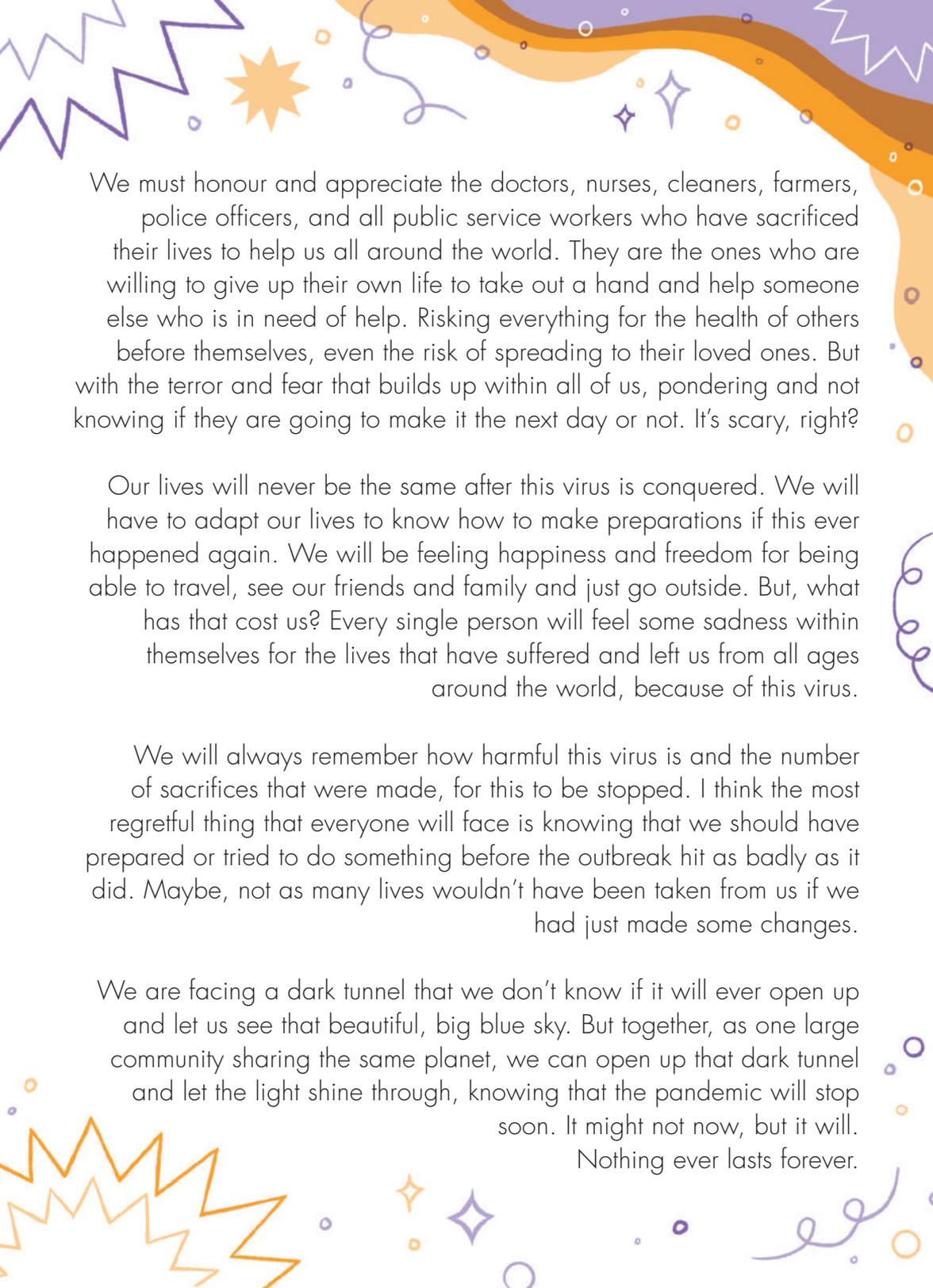
NOTHING LASTS FOREVER by Sophie

The first ever souls of Covid-19 had been taken from us all in China more than a month or two ago. What we all thought was a contained yet controlled virus within the outbreak country, has now spread around the world. Killing off other countries as it pleases, causing a global pandemic and lockdown in most countries around the world. As we speak, there are more than 20,000 deaths from Covid-19 in just the UK alone, with over 207,000 deaths worldwide.

The oppression and cruelty that some people feel, due to the lockdown and having to stay inside and only retreat to the outside world for food or 30 mins of exercise a day. But some people think this whole virus is 'stupid', 'an economic stunt' or even 'fake', because the Government are supposedly trying to get rid of the older generation, or trying to hide up the people who are dying of other illnesses instead of Covid-19.

A lot of people don't listen to the rules and do what they want because they think that they know what's right and that it won't happen to them, just because it's not in that 'area'. It's hurting everyone. We are all puppets to the Covid-19 puppeteers who are pulling at our strings, ready to pounce. This isn't a game that should be played, we all have to listen to the rules being set for us so that you, your family, or even your friends don't get this virus.

However, in this dire time, we need everyone to come together. Become one with each other and help each other to push on forward with what we have been told to do, in order to stop this pandemic as much as we can.



We must honour and appreciate the doctors, nurses, cleaners, farmers, police officers, and all public service workers who have sacrificed their lives to help us all around the world. They are the ones who are willing to give up their own life to take out a hand and help someone else who is in need of help. Risking everything for the health of others before themselves, even the risk of spreading to their loved ones. But with the terror and fear that builds up within all of us, pondering and not knowing if they are going to make it the next day or not. It's scary, right?

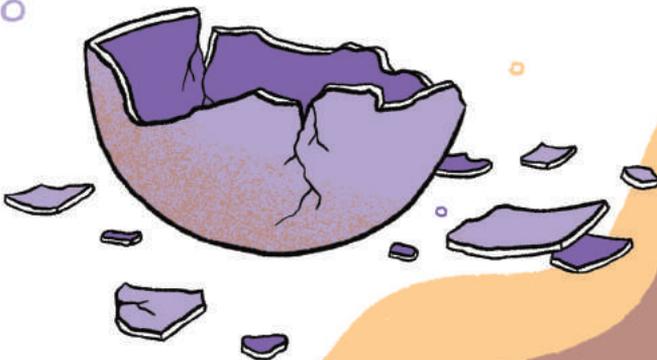
Our lives will never be the same after this virus is conquered. We will have to adapt our lives to know how to make preparations if this ever happened again. We will be feeling happiness and freedom for being able to travel, see our friends and family and just go outside. But, what has that cost us? Every single person will feel some sadness within themselves for the lives that have suffered and left us from all ages around the world, because of this virus.

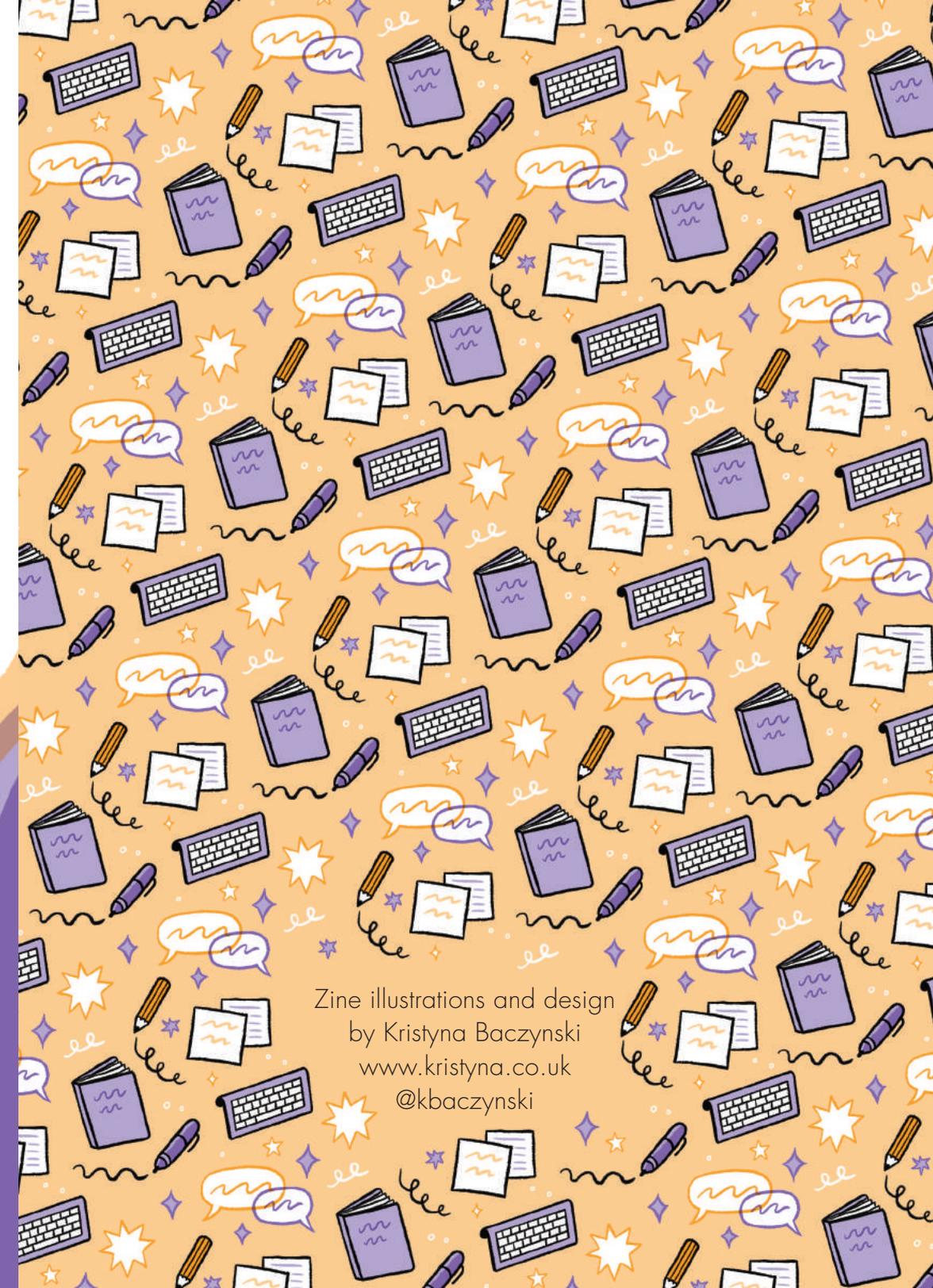
We will always remember how harmful this virus is and the number of sacrifices that were made, for this to be stopped. I think the most regretful thing that everyone will face is knowing that we should have prepared or tried to do something before the outbreak hit as badly as it did. Maybe, not as many lives wouldn't have been taken from us if we had just made some changes.

We are facing a dark tunnel that we don't know if it will ever open up and let us see that beautiful, big blue sky. But together, as one large community sharing the same planet, we can open up that dark tunnel and let the light shine through, knowing that the pandemic will stop soon. It might not now, but it will.
Nothing ever lasts forever.

YOU by Efe

You continue to shed your whole being for an incomplete person
You continue to choose labour over levitation
You continue to settle for HIS stagnancy over limitless elevation
You cannot go higher rooted on HIS ground
You permit HIS actions, you promote HIS inactivity
You look in the mirror, wipe away the tears his disloyalty orchestrated
Who do you see? Not the You I once knew





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