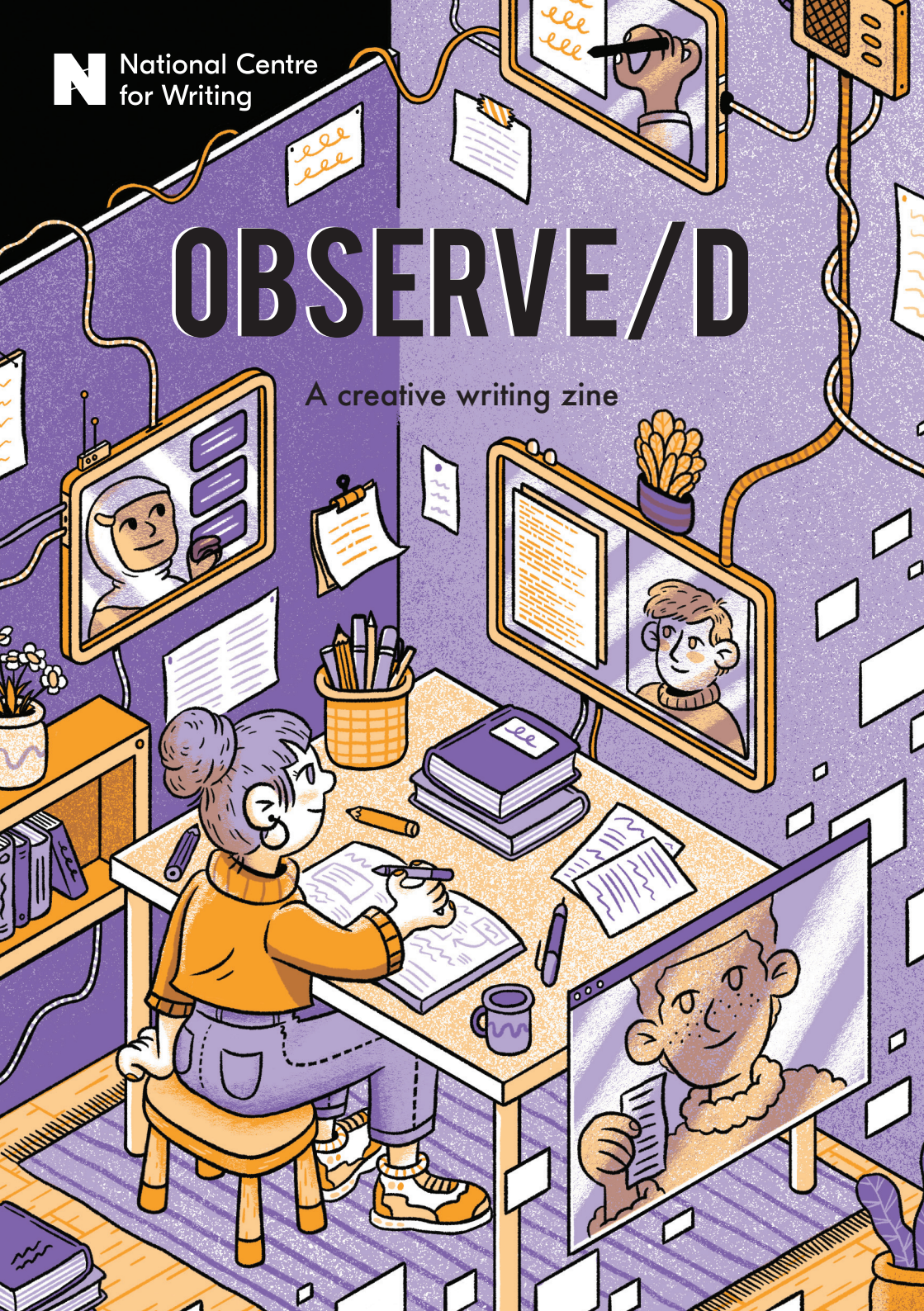


OBSERVE/D

A creative writing zine





This publication is the culmination of Lit From the Inside 2021,
programmed by National Centre for Writing.
It is supported by Anguish's Educational Foundation
and Arts Council England.

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 Rospin, 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
Irony, 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.



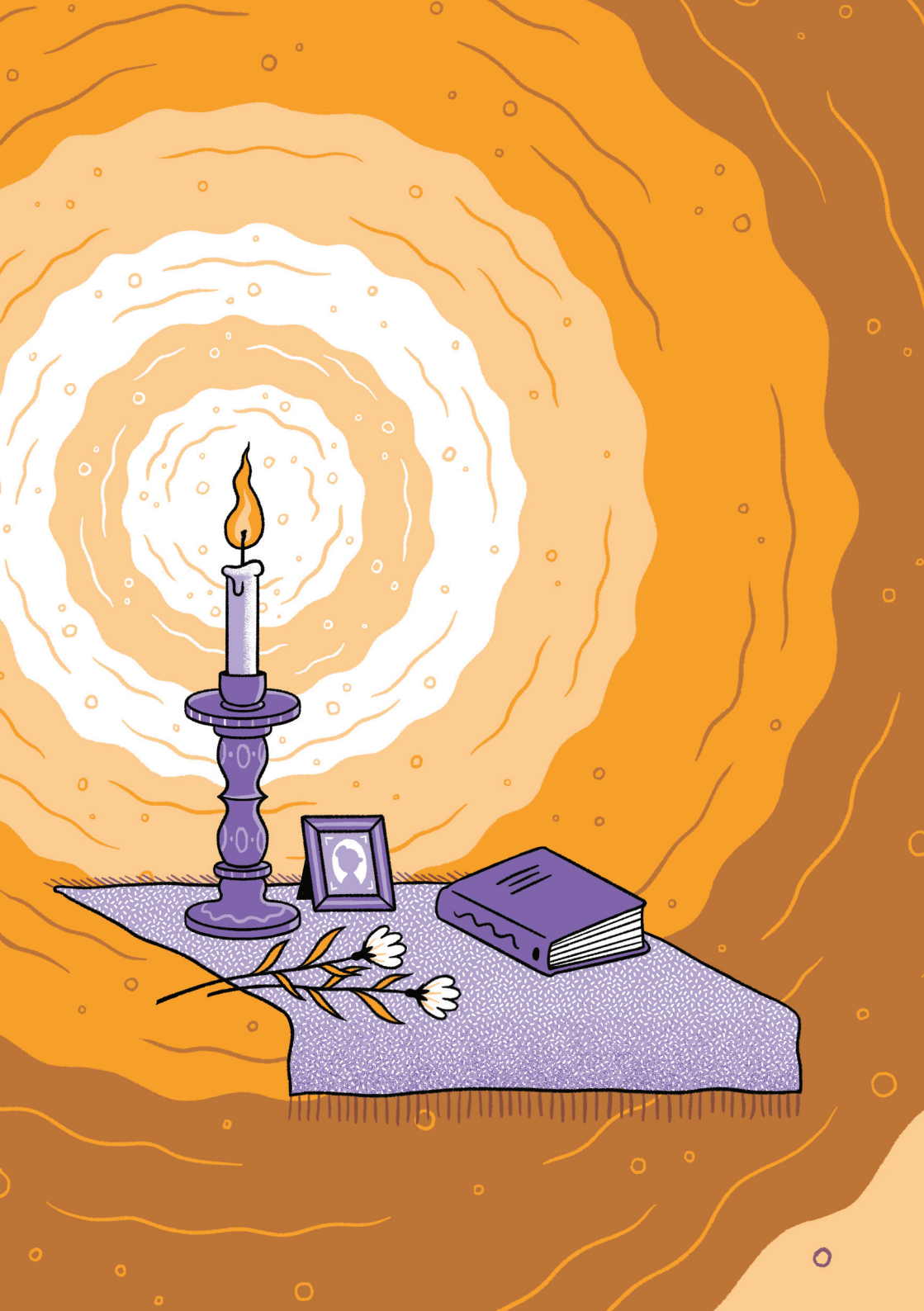
ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE by Efe

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

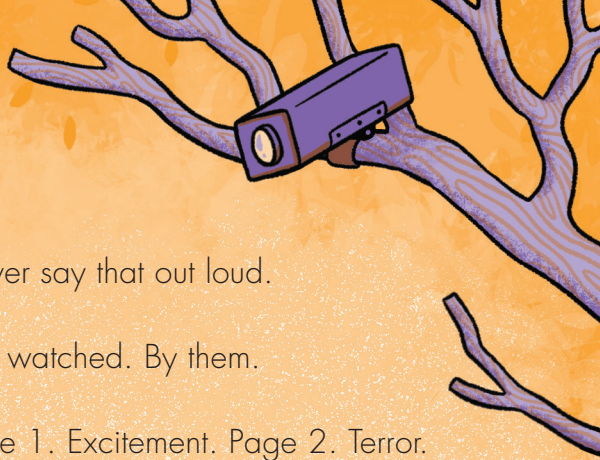
Hellish and cold. We could never say that out loud.

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.

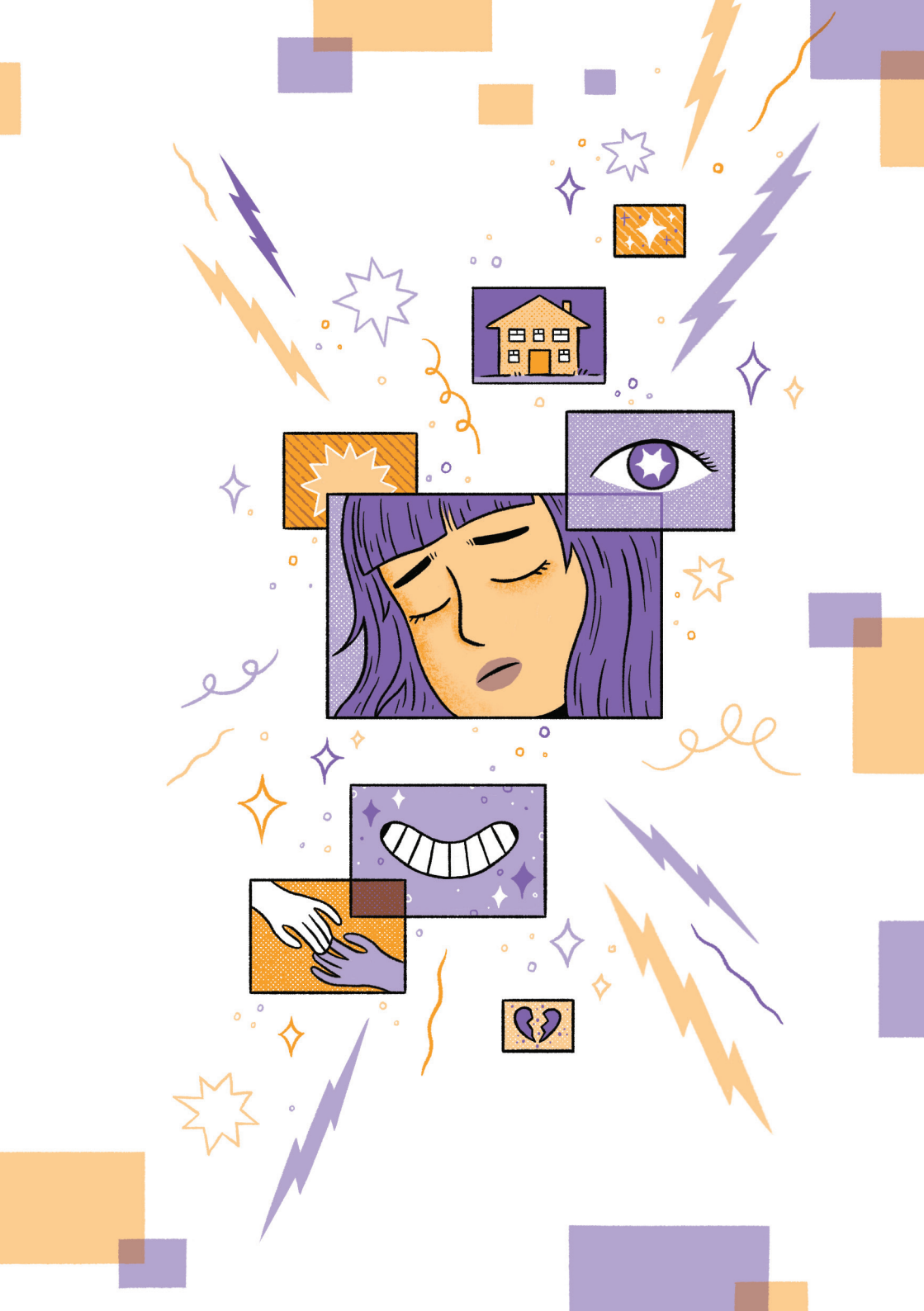
I get into bed next to everyone else's and dream I'm back at home.

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 outbroken 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.

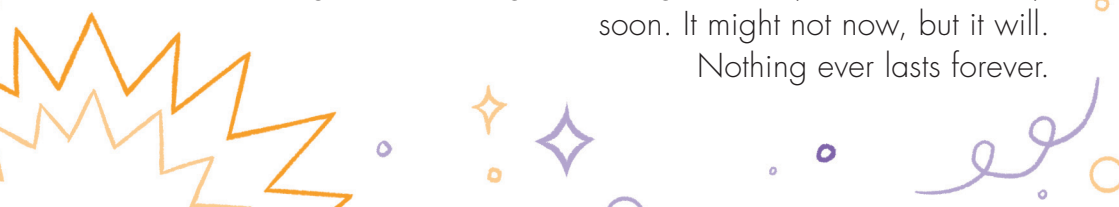


We must honour and appreciate the doctors, nurses, cleaners, farmers, police officers, and all public service workers who have sacrificed their lives to help us all around the world. They are the ones who are willing to give up their own life to take out a hand and help someone else who is in need of 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.

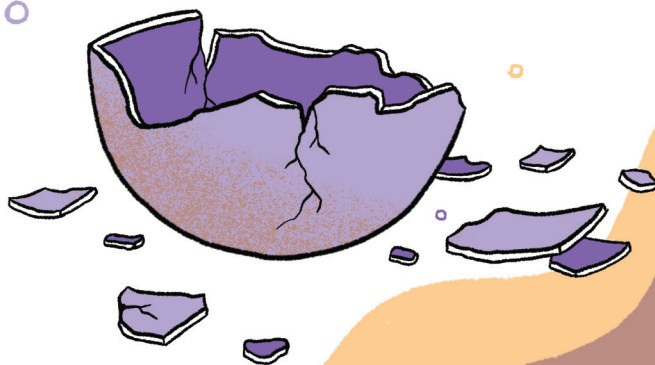
We will always remember how harmful this virus is and the number of sacrifices that were made, for this to be stopped. I think the most regretful thing that everyone will face is knowing that we should have prepared or tried to do something before the outbreak hit as badly as it did. Maybe, not as many 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





Zine illustrations and design
by Kristyna Baczynski
www.kristyna.co.uk
@kbaczynski



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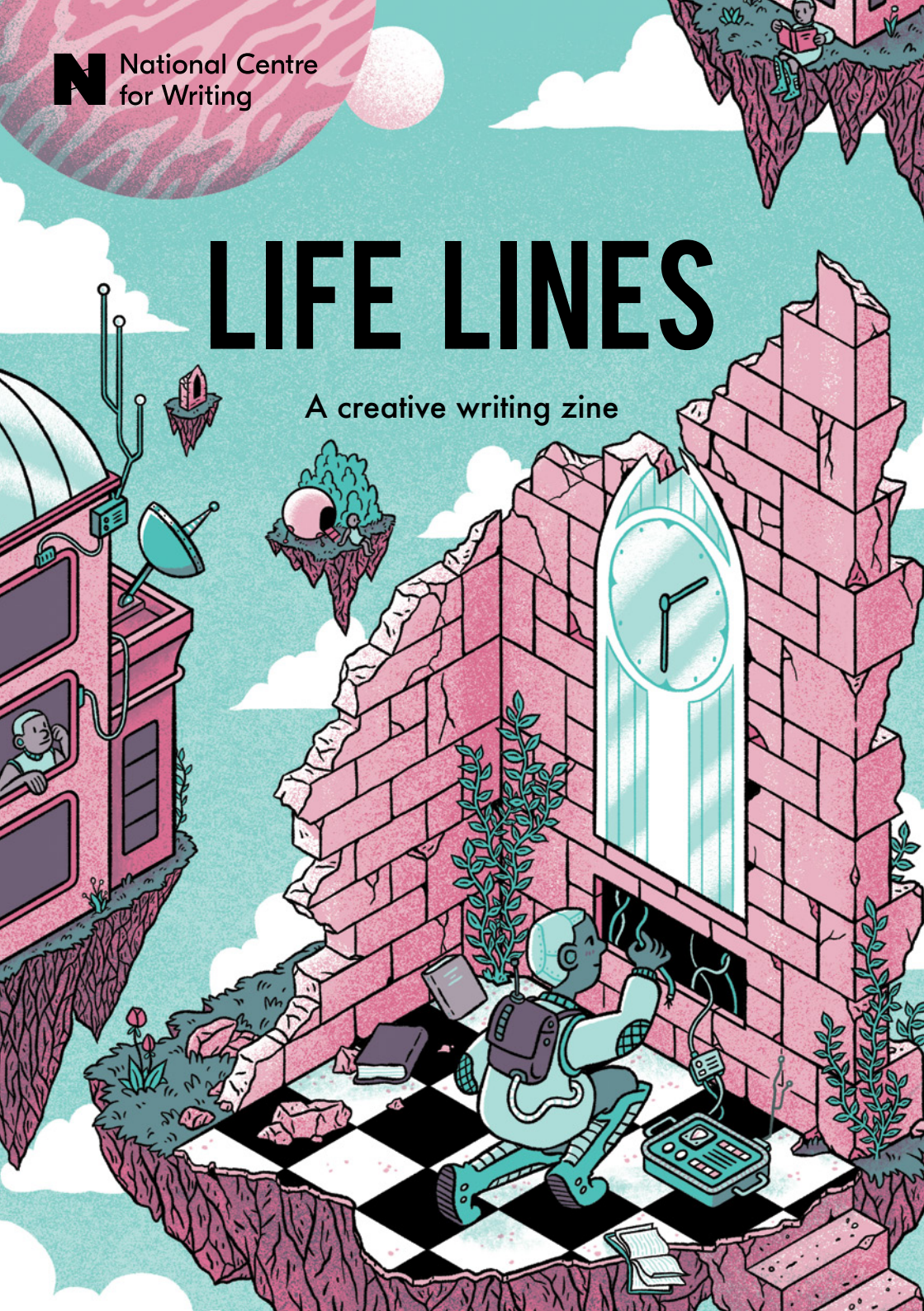


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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

LIFE LINES

A creative writing zine





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The pieces in this zine are connected by time – a line of words from the fictionalised historical past that winds its way through present current affairs and off into an imagined future world. It includes poetry by writers who had never considered themselves poets before, stories by those who previously struggled to share their work, and non-fiction by the journalists of our future. I feel very lucky to have witnessed this group develop as writers and people over the last 12 months.

As a group, we thank Becky Demmen, who has been the creative co-pilot of this project. We thank Els Beerten, Sylvia Marie, Daisy Henwood, Jen Dewsbury, Hannah Jane Walker, and Chloe and Jane of Tombola Theatre – whose workshops have inspired some of the pieces featured here – 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

Emma Ayers
Neo Cannon
Ryan Comyn
Ella Coulby
Lilly Cousens
Holly Debbage
Thies Dervedde
Laycee Ellis
Kyriel Fynn
Sophie Hough
Sonny Hutton-Woolford
Tanvi Karé
Daisy Keddie
Abbie Mears
Otto Moore-Fuller
Sophia Needham
Dhara Ranavaya
Ellie Smith
Sydney Wylie



A THOUSAND WORDS by Sophie

Time is fleeting.

How many thousand

intricate words

How many thousand

delicate hesitations

How many glimpses of my dreams...

I wonder how many will unfurl their wings

And I wonder how many

will never take flight.



Excerpt from ***NORTH BROTHERS*** by Ella

You'll never be a warrior. You're weak. You'll get left behind.

Those were the words that echoed around Cralto's head in a cruel, relentless taunt as he sat on the edge of the ridge trying to find peace.

The daylight was fading fast, the sun bleeding into the horizon and the snow-capped mountains across the valley. With winter coming, it seemed the days were getting so short, they were over before Cralto even finished his dinner. He could hardly imagine what it was like on a battlefield, when fighting stretched into the dark hours and the comfort of a fire and a bed were mere wisps of hope too far away to grasp.

Of course, he might never know what that felt like.

Cralto shifted in the grass. The thought was a blacksmith's hammer; relentless and harsh. Maybe it was all the talk of the raids, all the talk of this being the last summer raid before the village set sail for England.

Maybe it was the fact that Finn was so eager to go fighting and join the warriors, when Cralto was still too weak to fight the village boys, let alone a man.

Let alone a warrior.

He could still hear the hearty laughter and the clinking of metal, the rowdy conversations and faint music of the camp through the trees behind him. He knew every man and every woman in that camp, he'd known them his whole life. They were kind to him, pitiful. No matter how many times Cralto insisted that he wasn't sick anymore, that he was strong now, he could still see in their eyes those same words: *You'll never be a warrior.*

The wind was bitter and cold as it tossed his hair about his forehead, all signs of a gentle summer breeze lost to the coming winter. He pushed his hair off his forehead and wondered if he should've let Finn braid it earlier. It was getting too long now. The last time he remembered taking a knife

to it was a year ago, back home, when the older boys had insisted he'd look more like a man if he shaved the sides. He'd hated it. Instead of looking more like a man, he'd just looked like all the other boys desperate to become warriors and fit in.

Isn't that exactly what you are, though? A cold voice sounded in his head. *You're just as desperate as all the other boys to become a warrior and train for the raid next year. Except the other boys are actually strong enough.*

He slammed his eyes shut, desperately trying to achieve the peace he'd come here for.

The sun was bright and warm against his eyelids and he could feel the bleeding orange glow across his face, like some kind of distant fire stripped of its heat. The thrum of crickets chirped somewhere nearby, too late in the year for their summer buzz, and the grass absently swept across Cralto's ankles like thin twigs. He didn't even remember the green grass turning yellow.

Maybe one day, he wouldn't even remember being left behind.



A MYTH SHAPED BY CONQUERORS by Dhara

'History is a myth shaped by the tongues of conquerors.'
— Roshani Chokshi.

History is *almost* tangible in this room. A faint presence both heavy and light; momentary ghost-quiet before the crackling thunder, consuming the room like a storm devouring a sky. My restless fingers prickle, itch to run through the smooth, intricately carved sandstone before me, to be enveloped in a world of the past. Ancient myths, stories and folk tales radiate from the stone, stretch over the air like a weighted blanket. Inhaling deeply, a cacophony of sweet, salt and spice fizzes at the tip of my tongue. It leaves a bitter aftertaste.

Sunlight seeps through the giant windows like molten gold, casting the room in a dreamy, honey-like blur. Cloying, thick and suffocating. It acts as a veil, blurring the reality, erasing the edges.

If I am not careful, I too will become intoxicated.

I breathe in dust, parchment and stone. If I concentrate, I am there, presented to the past. Imperceptibly, the air crackles with vitality, the floor rumbles with footsteps of dancers, singers and queens.

Existence.

Warmth blooms within me, swells as my ears fill with the piercing, rich melodies of the sitar and the beats of the tabla. A flurry of movement. Voices. An array of brown, red, orange and pink zooms across my vision: dresses encrusted with jewels, worn by dancers exploding in rhythmic, elegant movement. Mirror sequins in a myriad of colours catch the light and reflect it, creating sparkling constellations on the walls of the palace. The beat of the music pulsates through their bodies, carrying that energy through their arms as they raise their hands skyward. Golden bangles clink harmoniously. Luminosity lines their faces, beaming with expression.

A smile. Step. Turn. Raise of the eyebrow. Step. Turn. Entranced, my eyes widen in awe at their rehearsed precision, struggling to keep up with their movements. My feet are paralysed in place while theirs quicken with the crescendo, then come to a swift stop.

My eyes fly open, heart thrashing rapidly against my ribcage. The absence of the dancers strikes a sudden silence, broken only by the



thudding in my ears. Too soon, the memory was wiped like waves washing away footprints in sand.

Tears burn at the back of my eyes, my throat clenches. Too soon was it all snatched from our grasp.

Stillness.

The weight of the past settles over me. Crimson stains the walls. Artefacts are painted with blood: strokes of violence committed by the cruel hands of conquerors. Carvings, sculptures, jewels, pendants, rings, talwars - flooded in red, and caged behind protective glass.

I want to smash through it – museum security would drag me out the doors, however it is not me they need protecting from.

I glare at the white nephrite jade of Shah Jahan's wine cups, move to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's throne. Next, the silver salver, carved intricately with scenes from the Ramayana. I smile, knowing the art of storytelling has always lived in our bones.

Evidence of existence, that is what these pieces of history are. And to wrench them from their motherland? To wipe history and truth from the surface of this world?

Majestic trees pried from their roots, along with lives.

Anger threatens to burst, and the scene vanishes with a blink. I squint against camera flashes – tourists, who've invaded the museum with their marvelling, curious gaping, scribbling in notebooks. The artefacts remain untouched, unstained, unclaimed.

Sunlight drenches the room, reflects on glass.

True history lies buried underneath deep layers of lies, moulded by ravenous kings and wicked queens, fluent in the machinations of war.



THE GAME by Sonny

He'd spent months training for this moment, but still felt unprepared
As the roaring loudness of the crowd sent echoes through the air
He imagined they were jeering, though could see little but ahead
Through the rounded, heavy helmet that he wore over his head

The scars on his feet twitched painfully, stinging in the sand
His mind raced rapidly and desperately, trying to form a plan
But the shortsword in his right hand just felt weak and ineffective
While the tall shield in his left hand seemed flimsy and defective

The armour on his sword arm appeared too weak to offer help
That wasn't what the lanista had said, but that was what he felt
And although the flanges of his helmet helped to guard his neck
His chest was left exposed, without protection or defence

As he circled the arena, squinting through the limits of his sight
He found himself facing his opponent, who was ready for the fight
The two stared at one another, their intentions both the same
The gladiators raised their weapons, and then began the game





WITNESS by Sophia

Huddled around the screen, wordlessly watching, waiting, listening. The air of quiet expectation, the tension that sparked the air, the hushed breaths. Nobody spoke, nobody moved. As we listened, we grew to understand that this would change everything.

You wonder what it feels like to live through history, and you think it would be exciting, not debilitating. Even sometimes, with the threats looming on the horizon, you imagine it would all be some kind of story, a tale of excitement and victory.

The real truth is far from that. History is not how they describe it. To witness history is to sit in your dining room at 9pm and listen to the Prime Minister tell you you're going into lockdown for three weeks, when you know it will be much, much longer. To witness history is to come out of a work meeting and watch, stunned and silent, as the towers collapse, while nobody dares to breathe. To witness history is to have your mother come over and tell you the news that you pass around the house with quiet exclamation, that the Queen's really gone. Each time it's stated, it feels more like the truth, more like the reality.

History *is* reality, and it's not as rose-coloured as anybody thought. There's no choice but to find out the hard way: witnessing it.

THE WOLFGANGS by Daisy

Mrs Fernsby-Chaucer later recalled the first time she had known her neighbour's truth.

The Wolfgangs, as they were known, suited their name ever so well, and no one knew this better than this brittle widow. The knowledge that she had ascertained remained at the forefront of her mind as she watched the doorstep of her curiosities fill with party invitees.

It was the eldest, Clementina's, seventeenth birthday.

She had been invited to attend the party but declined.

Four months before, *at the funeral of her late husband*, Sir Jeredine Wolfgang had approached to offer his greatest sympathies. Now watching as he shook the hands of his guests, she remembered how the hairs were deep beneath his skin, as if an underlayer. She still saw the glow of his eyes, that were like neon cherries, as he removed his spectacles to clean them.

Of course, those were all suppositions, and were mulled deeply in her mind. Only once had she mentioned it to one of her three sons; he had been ever so dismissive and told her she was simply in shock. Later, she overheard him talk of his concerns over the telephone; to whom, she had guessed was a doctor.

The following day was Halloween. *The Wolfgangs, being the party animals that they were*, were holding yet another celebration for this. The nosy-parker intended on going to this one, but not out of neighbourly spirit. No, she hoped this engagement would confirm her previous suspicions.

Still, her curiosity got the better of her, and, the following day, she marched across the road cupping an ivory comb she had wrapped in a cloth to give to Lady Clementina, and approached their door.

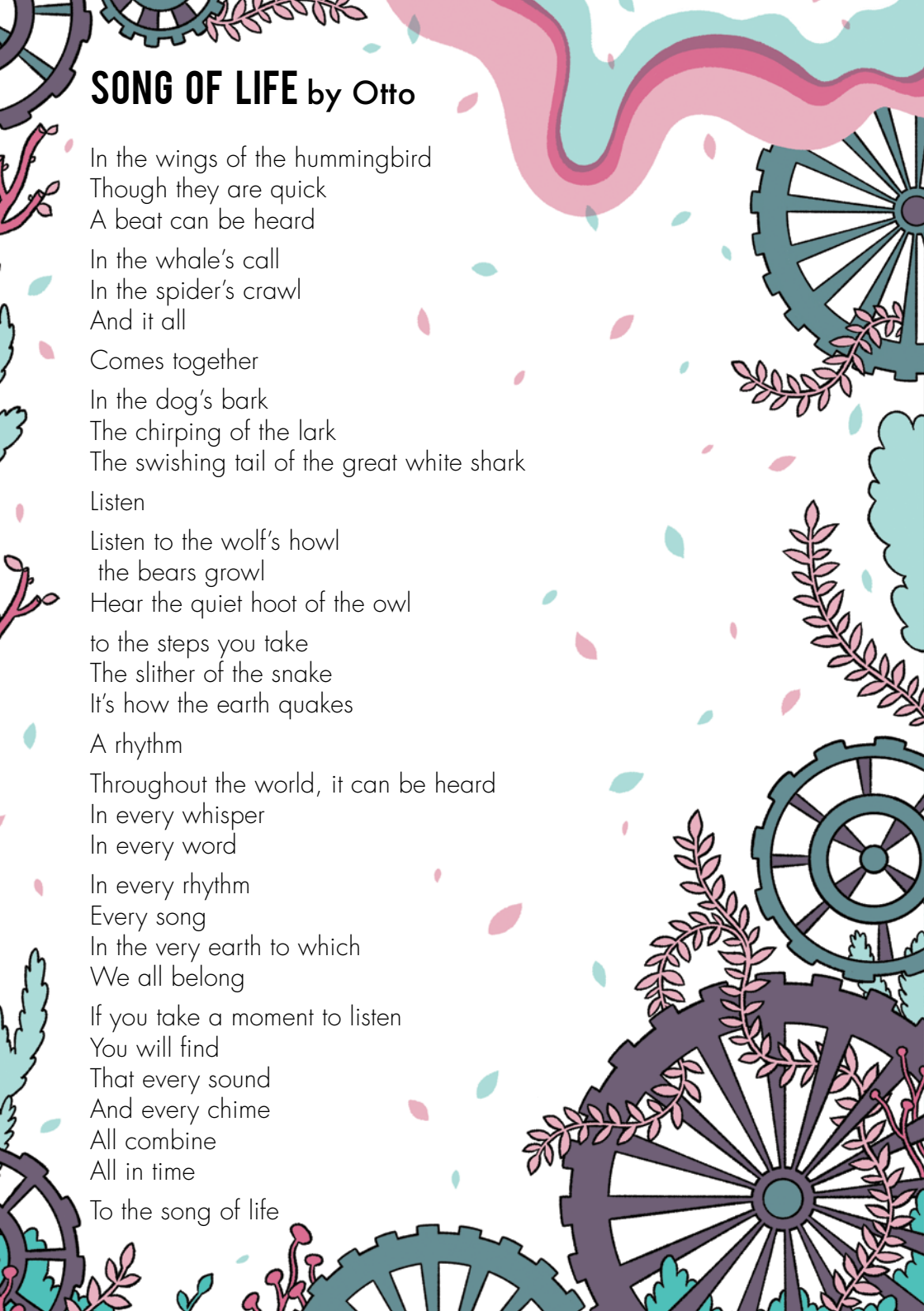
Knocking once or twice, she glanced up at the monstrosity of their home; a grand, Victorian piece with at least ten storeys, and even rooms in the attic. The building was a plain colour, *the shade of rain-pumped clouds*, but it suited the seriousness of the architecture, that showed on the glum faces of the gargoyles which hung from the brick. There were several birds nests in the gutters, and a cluster of frenzied ants on the stair.

Other than their supernatural strangeness, she had always observed their untidiness. It was one of her many aggrievances that they did not upkeep the rich look of the street, as she did. Of course, she had a business to think about; and her perfect hotel was kept spotless. Her back hunched from all the time she would spend scrubbing the floors, and even the pavement outside.

She was deep in judgement when the door opened, and Lady Otilie Wolfgang appeared; by her side, one of her youngest sons, Leopold, stood, thumb in mouth.

'Good morning...'





SONG OF LIFE by Otto

In the wings of the hummingbird
Though they are quick
A beat can be heard

In the whale's call
In the spider's crawl
And it all

Comes together

In the dog's bark
The chirping of the lark
The swishing tail of the great white shark

Listen

Listen to the wolf's howl
the bears growl
Hear the quiet hoot of the owl

to the steps you take
The slither of the snake
It's how the earth quakes

A rhythm

Throughout the world, it can be heard
In every whisper
In every word

In every rhythm
Every song
In the very earth to which
We all belong

If you take a moment to listen
You will find
That every sound
And every chime
All combine
All in time

To the song of life

LIFE LINES by Abbie

I hope I'm wrinkly when I am old,
So people can look at my lines and read them like lullabies,
Like pages of old parchment,
Bound by a worn, cracked spine
That sits comfortably against the heel
Of a welcome and curious hand.

I hope I'm wrinkly when I am old,
So people can stare at them
And reminisce on all they haven't yet lived.
I want fingertips to memorise them,
I want them to know that I have happened.
I hope they feel my age
And know that with it came love,
And that one day, they too will be wrinkly.

I want to be warm with the knowledge that my wrinkles were carved
By all the hands of all the people I have loved.
Every soul that has been indefinitely entwined with my own,
All those I'm yet to meet,
And all those I've already let go.

Each one a mere speck on my skin, yet
A star in my sky.
A wrinkle in my time,
A wrinkle just by my mouth.



STILL ILL - THE SMITHS by Lilly

Soft hands traced broken and splintered frames, delicate but manly, large, compared to the photos that sat patiently upon the windowsill. Dust kissed the surface of the glass and embraced it in between cracks. He winced and drew his fingers back when they hit splinters of glass but continued to gently stroke the frames like you'd stroke a cat's face, thinking of how little it used to be, and how small it is compared to yourself now you've grown bigger too.

Though the covers were broken (as though through impact) the photos were in good condition, dust barely covering them, and the colour was bright and happy. Seeing them alone and not surrounded by chat this time was unnerving, but there was comfort in the faces who stared back at him, despite the absence of their real, breathing bodies. Each face stared with soft grey eyes through blonde or grey half bangs like his own, tied neatly behind them in buns or drapes loosely hung over shoulders; but consistently covering that one eye. He pulled his hair from over his own as he leaned forward to look closer at them, air coming out of his pursed lips that blew any particularly big pieces of dust away. His hand swatted them as they swirled in front of his face. The people in the photos had all the same pale faces, lips and noses the same shape, and heads all held at the same angle – if you ignored the young ones who couldn't quite hold theirs up properly. Some were with children, some were alone, and some were with people who looked nothing like him.

As unsettling as it was to look into seven broken mirrors, the deceased looked back with blank smiles. Some of them he'd never seen in his life, and either was unlucky or lucky enough to never meet before he was old enough to remember them. Some more familiar, and those ones he couldn't look at in the eyes. He instead moved past them, to the very end, where his photo sat clean and untouched, away from the others. He was younger than he was now.

If it had been years ago, he would have been only just tall enough on tiptoes to touch them himself, checking over his shoulder to make sure no one saw. If it had been years ago, his little hands would have been small enough to fit inside the frame, his small fingers tracing over the faces and pointing out the person it belonged to. If it had been years ago, he wouldn't be here alone now, sitting on the bed of the last person alive in those photos.

But, ah well.





TIME STANDS STILL by Tanvi

In my mind, libraries and their general aesthetic have always been appealing to me. However, the incessant 'tick tock' of the grandfather clock crawled into my ears and scratched my eardrums, despite the low hum of the students around me. No matter how hard I tried, it kept worming its way into the forefront of my mind. On the precipice of insanity, I slam my book on the table, earning me a few startled stares. I thrust open the book, almost snapping the spine, and immersed myself into the delightful mysteries of AQA A-level Psychology, furiously refusing to look at the clock on the other side of the library. Eventually, once the slightly off rhythm beat of the clock pushed me to the point of insanity, I looked up from my book. I was caught off guard.

The world was still. The ever moving, hustling crowd of students had stopped, frozen still in the grey of the evening, vaguely giving the impression of wax statues. I too, became one for a short amount of time, before forcing a breath through my lungs. The grandfather clock kept ticking, ticking, ticking, but the hands of the clock never moved. The noise may well be my imagination. Lowering the book in my hand onto the table, I wove my way through the stony statues, not daring to touch for fear of disturbing the strange sensation. I yanked on the half open door, almost falling back in surprise. The door was stuck solid. Out of the corner of my eye I spotted a blurred figure out in the courtyard and promptly dismissed it as a part of the sea of frozen figures. Until it moved.

Forgetting the less-than-perfect predicament I was in, I squeezed past the immovable oak door and out into the main hall with a sudden urge to find this person. One of the doors leading outside was open, held there by a half-laughing brunette with wide eyes, her face caught between shock and mirth, her phone halfway to the ground, suspended in mid-air. I instinctively stooped to intercept its path to the ground and a broken screen, only to realise the phone would not move an inch. There was nothing surrounding it apart from empty air. I cautiously let go and squeezed past the statue brunette. The courtyard was so still the only sound I could hear was my own breathing and my thumping heart. Even the wind was holding its breath.



I slowly walked to the figure in the courtyard. He, I managed to gather as I approached, was not expecting anyone near him. I cleared my throat. He half-raised an arm in greeting then lowered it after noticing the rather obvious state of panic I was in.

'I-' he began, about to say some kind of excuse, then thought the better of it- 'I don't know.'

Silence.

'Did you do this?'

I gestured around us, in particular at the frozen state of Headmaster Michaelson – rather comical if you took the time to realise he was halfway through bellowing at a pair of students.

'Well- I- I- think so?'

'You think' — this was as tedious as watching paint dry — 'then undo it.'

'I... don't... know... how?'

STAIN by Neo

Content warning: abuse, violence

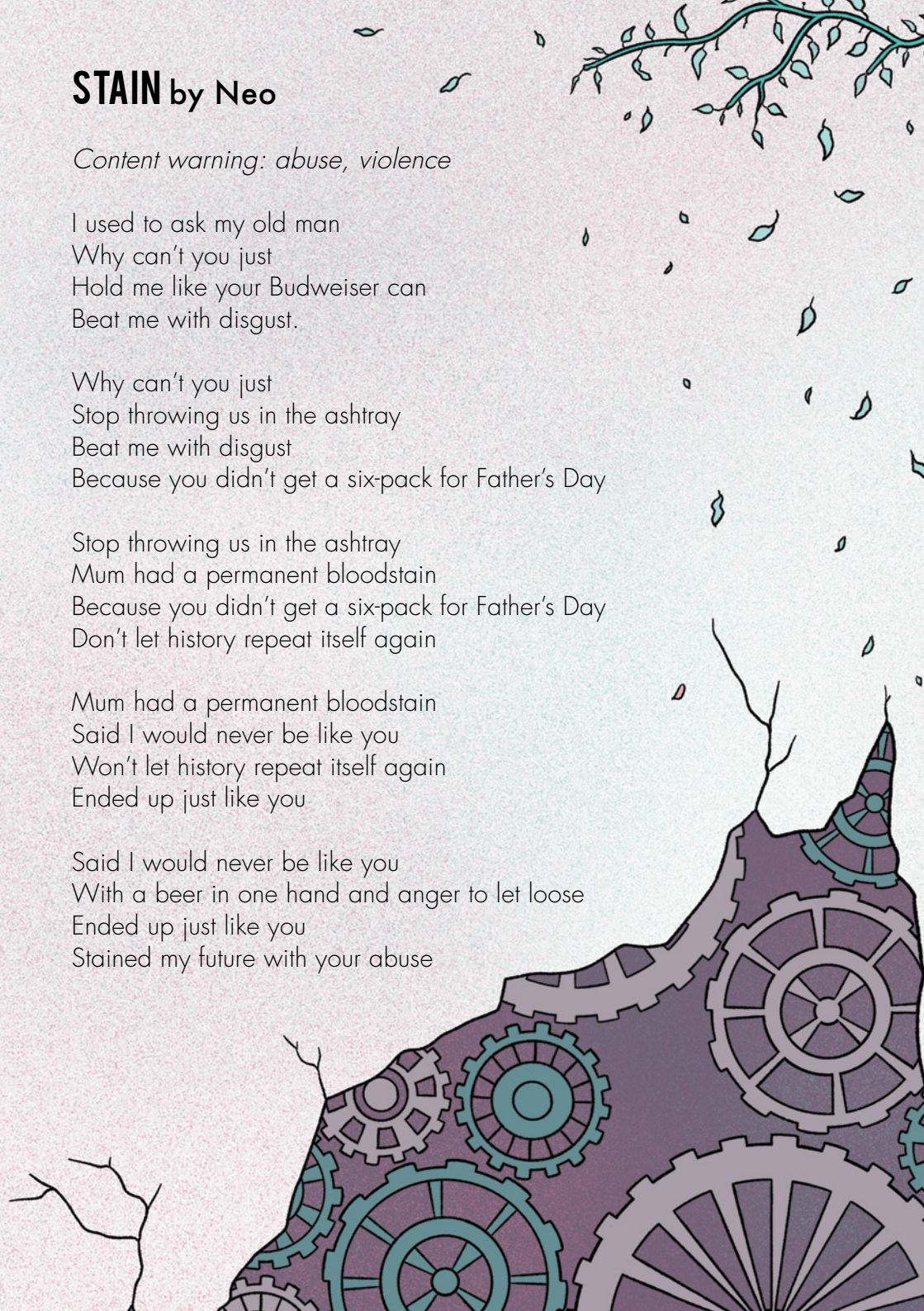
I used to ask my old man
Why can't you just
Hold me like your Budweiser can
Beat me with disgust.

Why can't you just
Stop throwing us in the ashtray
Beat me with disgust
Because you didn't get a six-pack for Father's Day

Stop throwing us in the ashtray
Mum had a permanent bloodstain
Because you didn't get a six-pack for Father's Day
Don't let history repeat itself again

Mum had a permanent bloodstain
Said I would never be like you
Won't let history repeat itself again
Ended up just like you

Said I would never be like you
With a beer in one hand and anger to let loose
Ended up just like you
Stained my future with your abuse



REBIRTH THROUGH TIME by Dhara

Present

A fragment carved from a storm-swallowed sky
Peppered with flakes of snow like constellations of stars
That is what the dreamers and the hopeful see
Cold, unmoving, rigid stone, to others
Another figure in a sea of statues
But the observers scrutinise, notice tiny cracks at my edges
Withering stone, a fading treasure
The seams of my very being unravelling

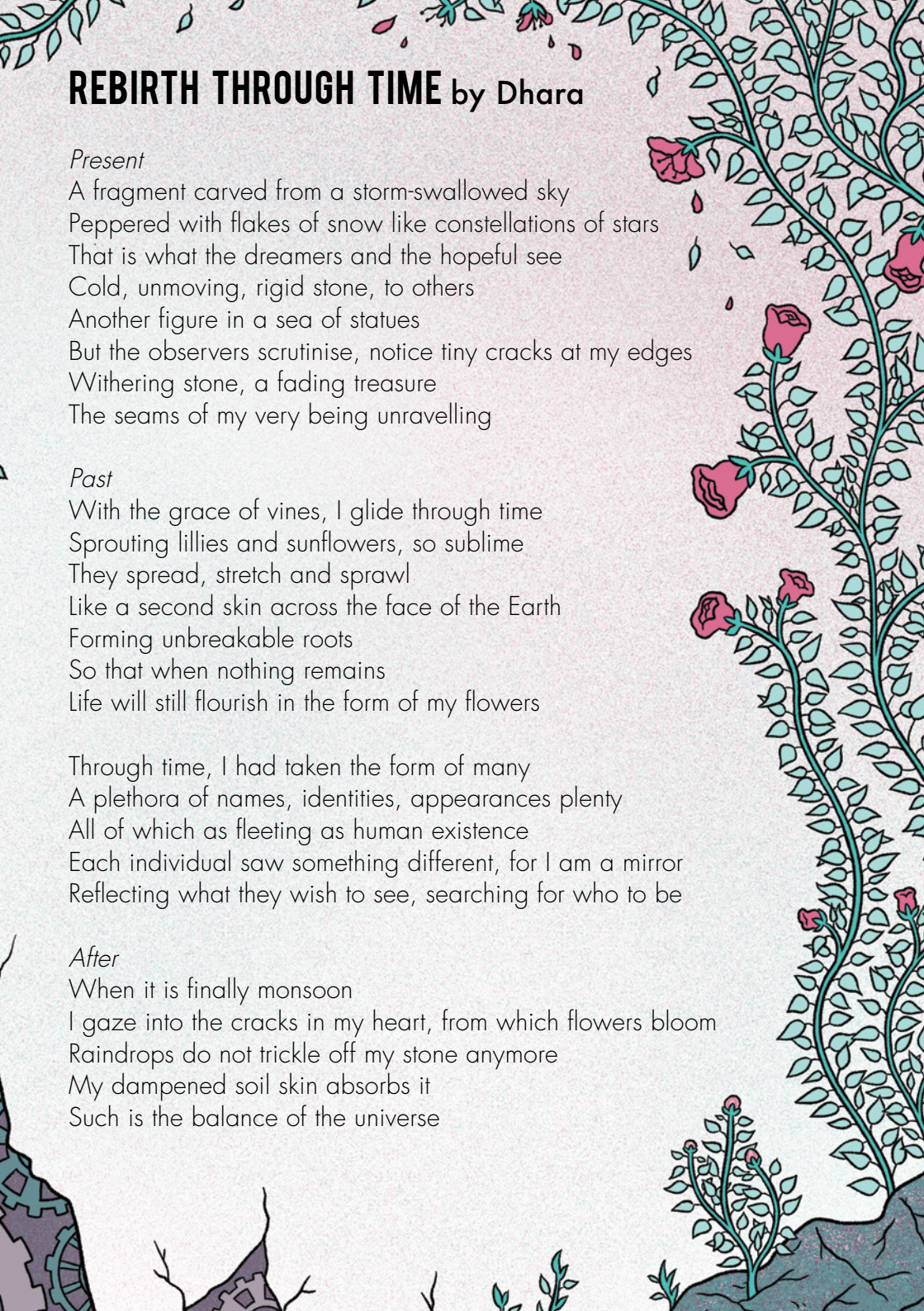
Past

With the grace of vines, I glide through time
Sprouting lillies and sunflowers, so sublime
They spread, stretch and sprawl
Like a second skin across the face of the Earth
Forming unbreakable roots
So that when nothing remains
Life will still flourish in the form of my flowers

Through time, I had taken the form of many
A plethora of names, identities, appearances plenty
All of which as fleeting as human existence
Each individual saw something different, for I am a mirror
Reflecting what they wish to see, searching for who to be

After

When it is finally monsoon
I gaze into the cracks in my heart, from which flowers bloom
Raindrops do not trickle off my stone anymore
My dampened soil skin absorbs it
Such is the balance of the universe



ALBUM REVIEW: **SKINTY FIA** by Sydney

This album by Fontaines D.C. is a masterful work of post punk experimentation and an exploration of chaos, confusion and identity. It follows their incredible rise to success through two similarly great albums but different in tone and execution. This album loses much of their punkier louder thrashes and fills it in with expansive guitars and a slower tempo.

This album is turbulent and full of displaced songs. The song 'The Couple Across the Way' takes the point of view of an old married couple seeing two young lovers move in and wonders what it's like to be them:

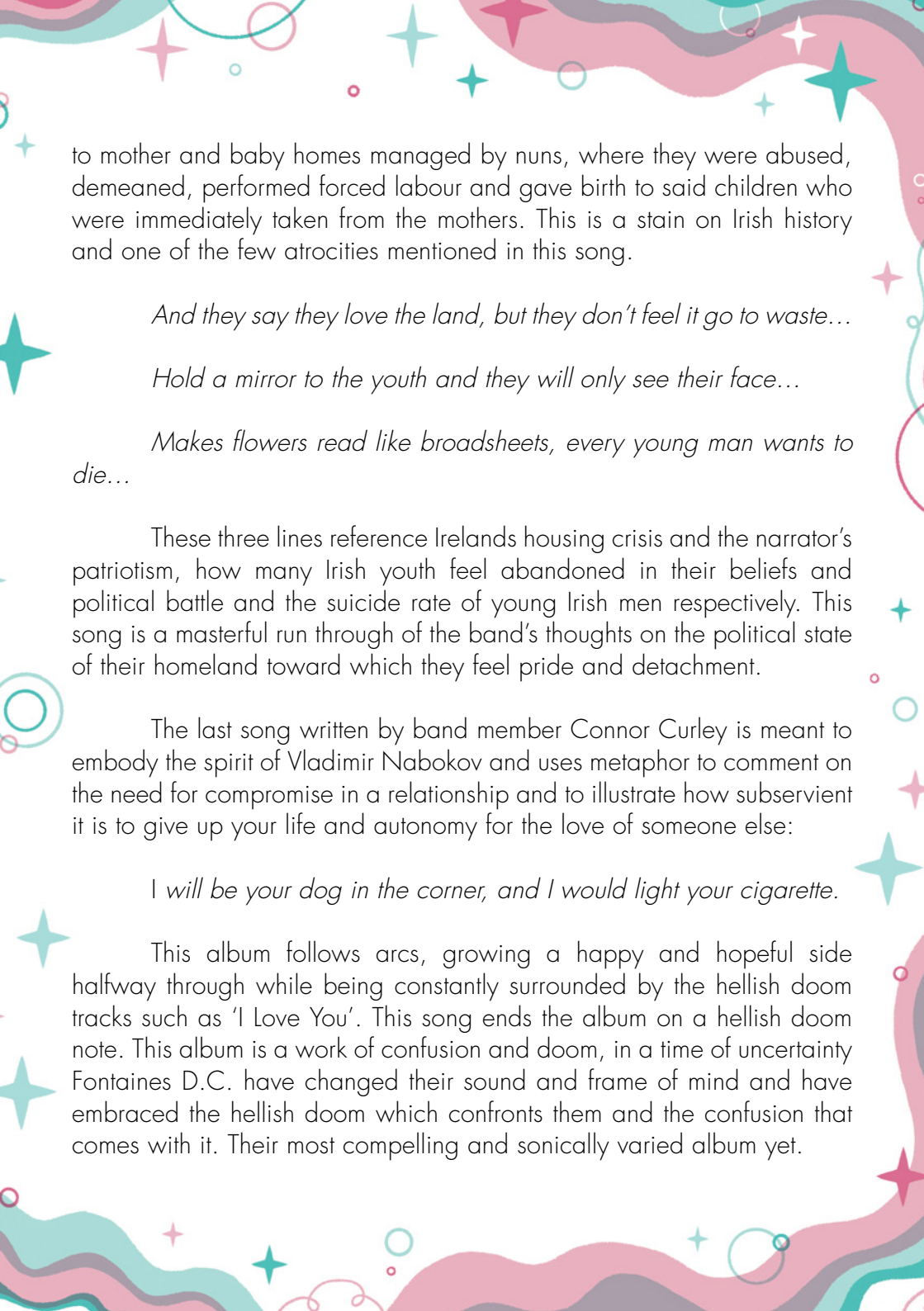
Maybe they look through to us and hope that's them in time

The song ends with this line, which can either be seen as a way of reaffirming that the old couple in reality are fine and in a good relationship or is showing how deluded young couples are to find themselves trapped in relationships like this old couple. Either can fit the album and it's left to the listener.

Another important song to the album is the song 'I Love You'. It is an overtly political song with slow melodic verses and faster intense screaming choruses said by the singer Grian Chatten to emulate the double-edged nature of love. It is a song that takes the perspective of a wealthy Irishman who has moved abroad and who is 'enjoying great personal success and a sense of cultural pride'. It discusses corruption in Irish politics and its hopelessness to the youth with lines like:

But this island's run by sharks with children's bones stuck in their jaws

This references the mass graves found at the site of former Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, Co. Galway in Ireland. The remains found were the children born to unmarried/single mothers, a group vilified by the Catholic Church in Ireland during the 20th century. These mothers were sent



to mother and baby homes managed by nuns, where they were abused, demeaned, performed forced labour and gave birth to said children who were immediately taken from the mothers. This is a stain on Irish history and one of the few atrocities mentioned in this song.

And they say they love the land, but they don't feel it go to waste...

Hold a mirror to the youth and they will only see their face...

Makes flowers read like broadsheets, every young man wants to die...

These three lines reference Ireland's housing crisis and the narrator's patriotism, how many Irish youth feel abandoned in their beliefs and political battle and the suicide rate of young Irish men respectively. This song is a masterful run through of the band's thoughts on the political state of their homeland toward which they feel pride and detachment.

The last song written by band member Connor Curley is meant to embody the spirit of Vladimir Nabokov and uses metaphor to comment on the need for compromise in a relationship and to illustrate how subservient it is to give up your life and autonomy for the love of someone else:

I will be your dog in the corner, and I would light your cigarette.

This album follows arcs, growing a happy and hopeful side halfway through while being constantly surrounded by the hellish doom tracks such as 'I Love You'. This song ends the album on a hellish doom note. This album is a work of confusion and doom, in a time of uncertainty Fontaines D.C. have changed their sound and frame of mind and have embraced the hellish doom which confronts them and the confusion that comes with it. Their most compelling and sonically varied album yet.

CASUS EXSPECTAT by Emma

My grandfather always used to say, 'adventure can be found even in the most boring of places'. As a kid, I didn't really appreciate what my grandfather said or quite understand what he meant. Not until the day of his funeral.

I decided to go and look around my grandfather's attic since I was always curious as to what he kept up there and was hoping to find some nice photos for my family. So, I tugged on the withered cord which connected to the attic ladder. The door opened and I started to climb.

Every rung creaked with each step I took. When I entered the attic a wave of musty air rushed at me. A stream of sunlight poured in through the skylight window illuminating boxes upon boxes stacked all around the room. I didn't know what to look at first. I chose the first box in front of me which happened to be full of many photo albums. I grabbed the top one and began to flick through its pages. There, smiling at me, was my grandfather. And standing next to him was me. I looked through every page. It seemed like I could hear his laugh as I relived my memories with him. But as I closed the album, I realised how quiet it was.

Tears pricked at the corner of my eyes and I couldn't stop them from pouring down my face. I put the album down then slumped onto the floor. I rubbed my eyes profusely but no matter how quick I wiped the tears away they came flooding back. My heart ached like it never had before. I leant back against the boxes behind me but was rather careless because the stack of boxes toppled over. Stuff spilled out all over the floor. I quickly put everything into the correct boxes but as I placed the last box down a flash of silver caught my eye.



I crouched down and reached my hand between a gap and pulled out a silver pocket watch. I held it out into the sunlight and it gleamed. There was no dust on it at all, it was polished and very well kept. On the case, there was a magnificent, highly detailed moon engraving. And inscribed on the back was a phrase, which appeared to be in Latin. It said 'Casus Exspectat'. I pressed the button on the top of the watch and the case popped open to reveal the face of the watch. I studied the hands and numbers for a moment and then started re-winding it to before my grandfather died. But as soon as I finished rewinding the time a luminous blue light began to emit from the watch. It began glowing brighter and brighter. My surrounding began to morph, and a sick feeling developed in my stomach. My vision started to blur; everything was turning black. The last thing I remember was standing in the attic with my grandfather in front of me, smiling...



STAR CROSSED by Ellie

In any universes she'd be my everything. Light years were no time and galaxies no distance. Because in any space, any time past or present, she'd always be mine.

'So, like what's the dealie with this eternal travel through space and time thing?' she asked as we weaved through the people in this infernal medieval town. Even Ancient Rome was cleaner than these dung-filled streets.

I cursed myself on Saturn for whatever sin I had committed to be lumbered with this annoying thing.

'Look sweetheart, you may think I'm your little tour guide on how to live this life but unfortunately this is some big joke, just a way to get back at me, so shoo darling.'

And for all my faults, she wouldn't leave me alone, she was like a wretched gnat, I couldn't cope with the idea of her following me through all space and time. Immortality was meant to be a gift but somehow it came back to bite me.

Abruptly, she grabbed my hand which I looked down at in repulsion. Who did she think she was? She dragged me up to a rooftop, and I scoffed as I remembered futures with clueless teenage dates staring at stars and discussing life's trivial problems, it almost killed me that a girl born into this day and age would bother with something as stupid. Curiosity – my hamartia, my curse – dragged me to lay by her; probably the reason I was so kindly blessed with this gift from the gods. Curiosity killed the cat, and pure sinfulness brought it back. Yep, story of my life.

'Look, I know you're probably lost in some self-pitying thoughts, but all I want to know is why you're acting as though I'm the bane of your existence. From what I've seen, no offence, you're the most boring, self-absorbed person I've met. And I've ever so kindly offered you an olive branch of friendship, in exchange for knowing how to live this god-forsaken life and all I've gotten is the cold shoulder,' that snide voice chided.

I almost laughed; she reminded me of a girlfriend I once had. Instead of answering, I pointed towards a constellation.

'Do you know what that's called?' I asked.

'Orion,' she said simply.

'Well done,' I replied drily.

'You want to say something intellectual and snarky, if I guess what, do I get a try?'

'Sure, why not?'

'He lived in solidarity but was plagued with loneliness and fell in love with the wrong women, until he was killed by a scorpion. He was supposed to be the strongest hunter but was killed by one of the smallest creatures. He never knew love.'

As she finished, she looked straight at me, she knew she was right - about who I wasn't sure.

'Not even close,' I scoffed.

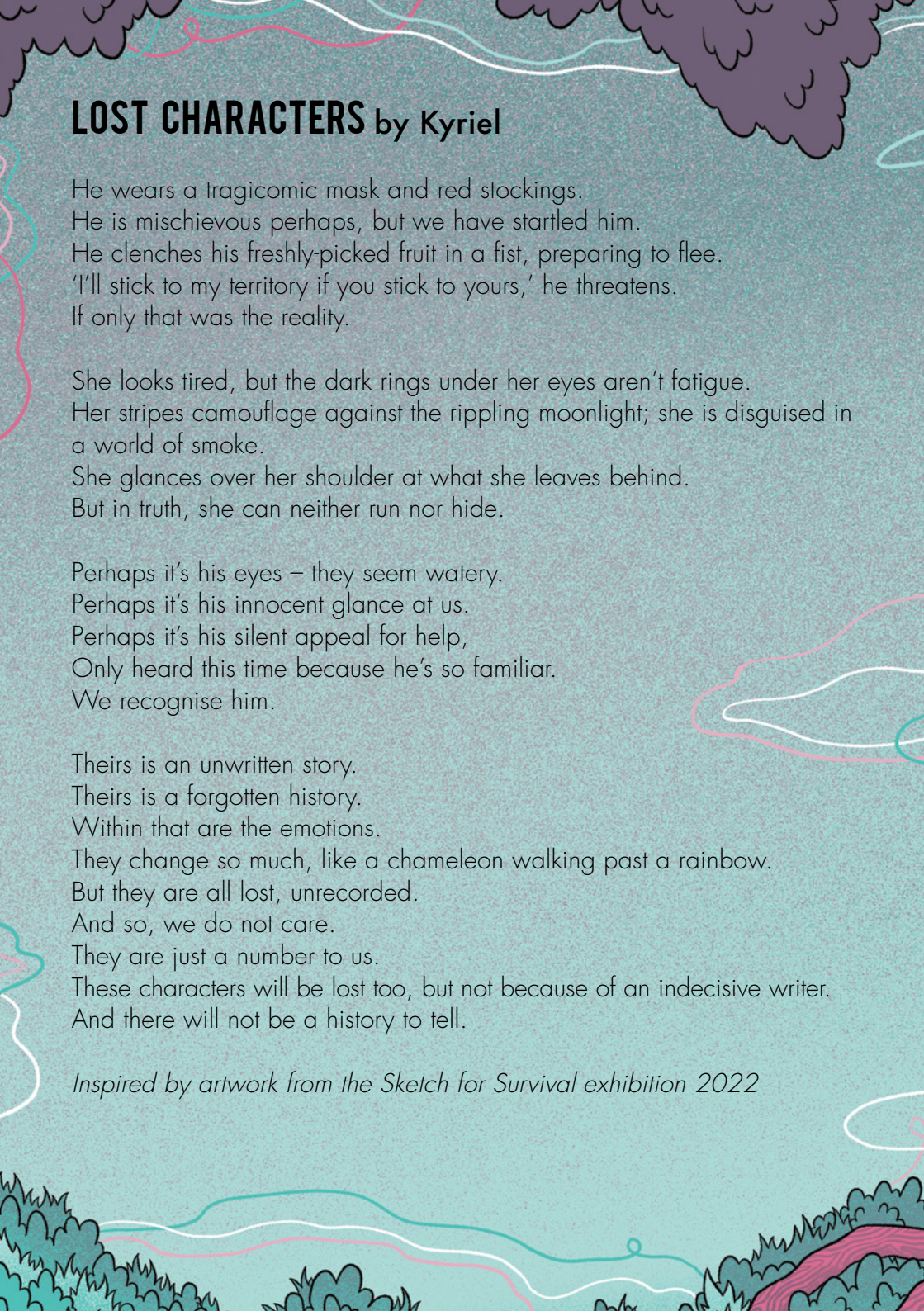
'Really, I thought I got it spot on.'

'For that little story though I'll give you 100 years of my time, just as a little token of my kindness.'

However, the smirk on her face promised me something more.

And as we sat in some unknown nebula at least 5000 light years from then, spending pasts, presents and futures together, I finally knew why she was here. She was sent to be the light in my life, my favourite constellation. Because as Orion had finally collided, crashed, and burnt out, I believe it was our love meant to replace it.





LOST CHARACTERS by Kyriel

He wears a tragicomic mask and red stockings.
He is mischievous perhaps, but we have startled him.
He clenches his freshly-picked fruit in a fist, preparing to flee.
'I'll stick to my territory if you stick to yours,' he threatens.
If only that was the reality.

She looks tired, but the dark rings under her eyes aren't fatigue.
Her stripes camouflage against the rippling moonlight; she is disguised in
a world of smoke.
She glances over her shoulder at what she leaves behind.
But in truth, she can neither run nor hide.

Perhaps it's his eyes – they seem watery.
Perhaps it's his innocent glance at us.
Perhaps it's his silent appeal for help,
Only heard this time because he's so familiar.
We recognise him.

Theirs is an unwritten story.
Theirs is a forgotten history.
Within that are the emotions.
They change so much, like a chameleon walking past a rainbow.
But they are all lost, unrecorded.
And so, we do not care.
They are just a number to us.
These characters will be lost too, but not because of an indecisive writer.
And there will not be a history to tell.

Inspired by artwork from the Sketch for Survival exhibition 2022



A NOTE ON BRAVERY by Sophie

She sat on the windowsill, staring out into the moonless night. The stars had been gobbled up by streetlights and she saw nothing to guide her way. Ahead of her, the long road lay, beckoning.

It is in our bleakest moments that we must focus.

She was frustrated. Longed to explore the world: the wild world, the world that she had been made for. Not this ruined, wasted planet her generation had been handed as if it were a gift. Her desperation filled her up, from her fingers to her toes, a burning desire that gripped her shoulders and shook her heart. The wilderness was disappearing, being swept away and banished to the Earth's darkest corners, out of sight and out of their minds. Her eyelids fluttered closed and images tore at her, grappling for space in amongst the chaos.

Drowning ice caps.

Screaming rainforests.

Blood pounded in her ears. If she didn't do something now, there would be no world left to explore.

She remembered learning to be brave. It seemed like a long time ago now, standing on the street, uncertain. She remembered watching the protestors and listening to their chants. And most of all she remembered the power she felt as she grabbed a banner and joined the march and shouted herself hoarse.

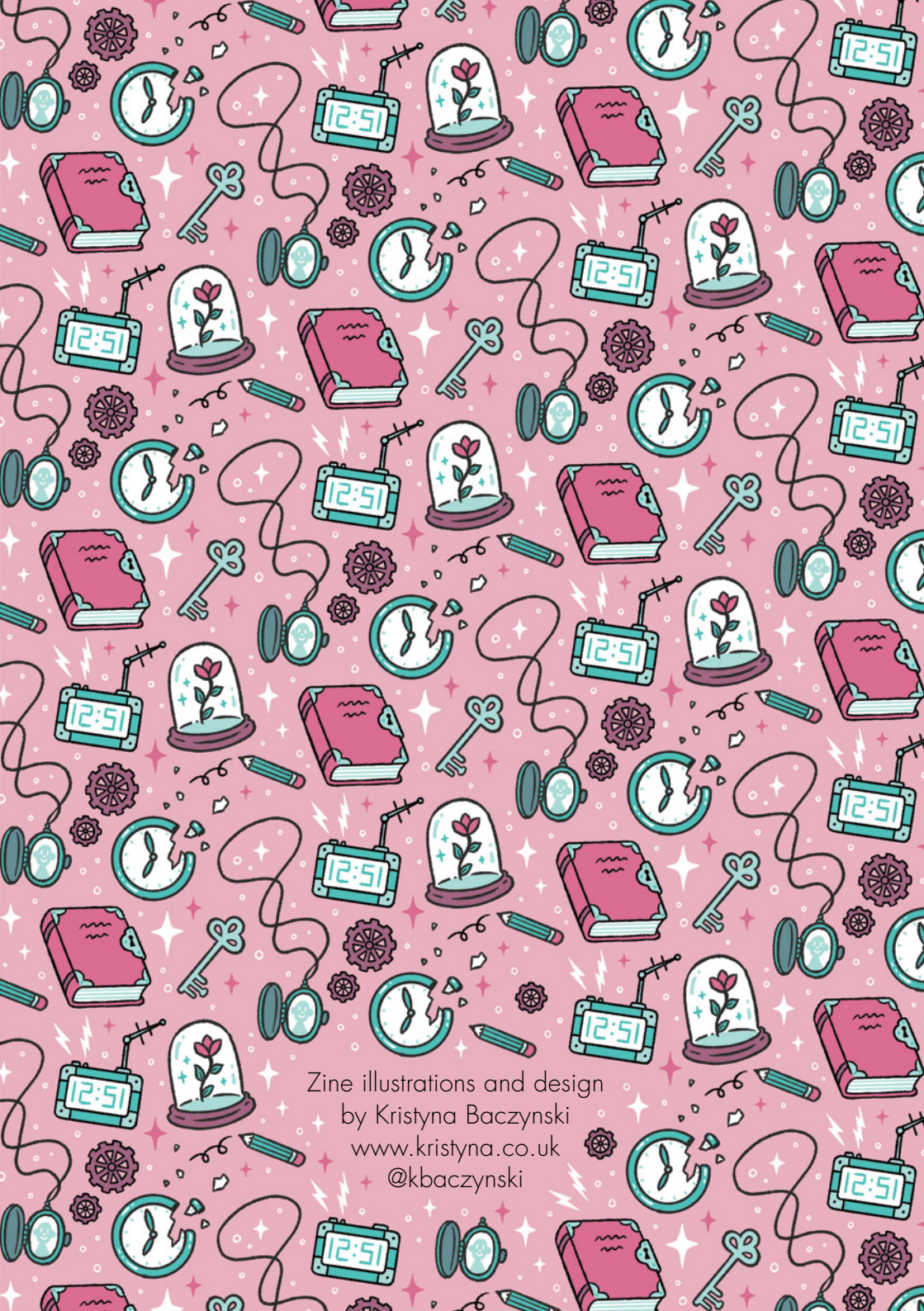
But what if a perfect world can only be found in stories?

This world, however...the real world can be broken. The real world can crumble beneath your very feet until there is nothing left to hold you upright. She had to choose between herself

and the world.

She slipped off the windowsill and tumbled into the night, armed with nothing but her camera and her notebook and her mind.

Time to defend our world, she said.



Zine illustrations and design
by Kristyna Baczynski
www.kristyna.co.uk
@kbaczynski



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