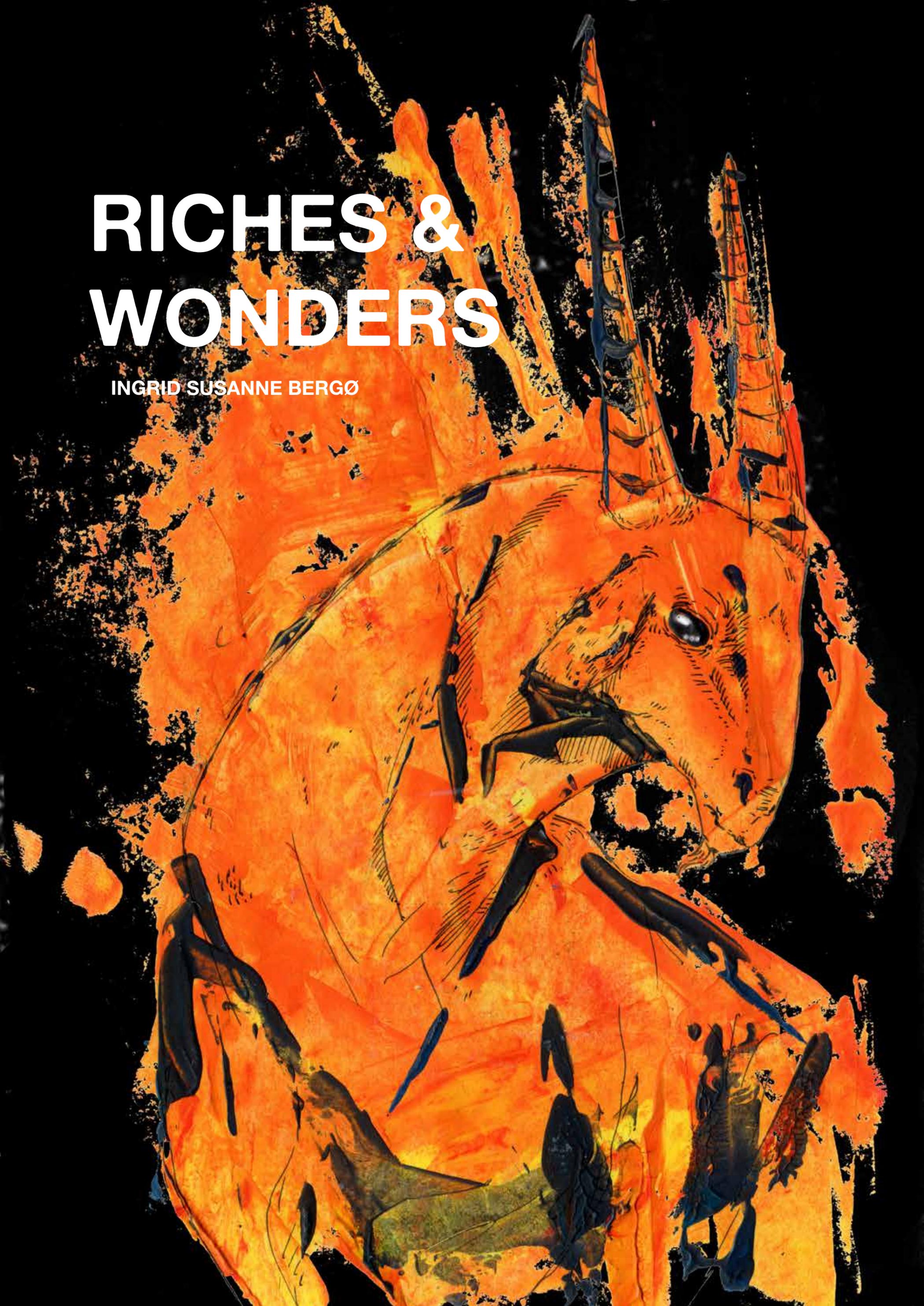
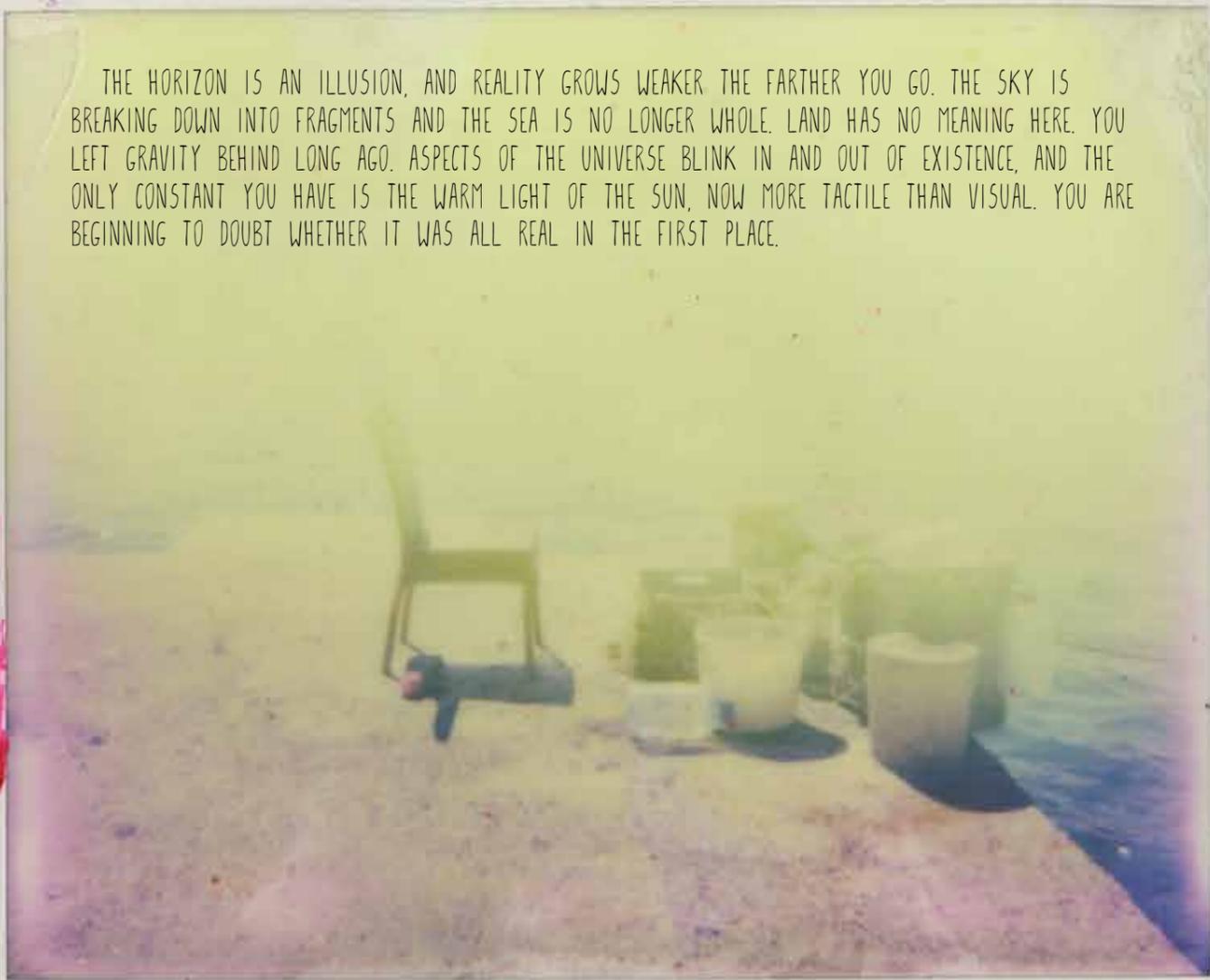


# RICHES & WONDERS

INGRID SUSANNE BERGØ

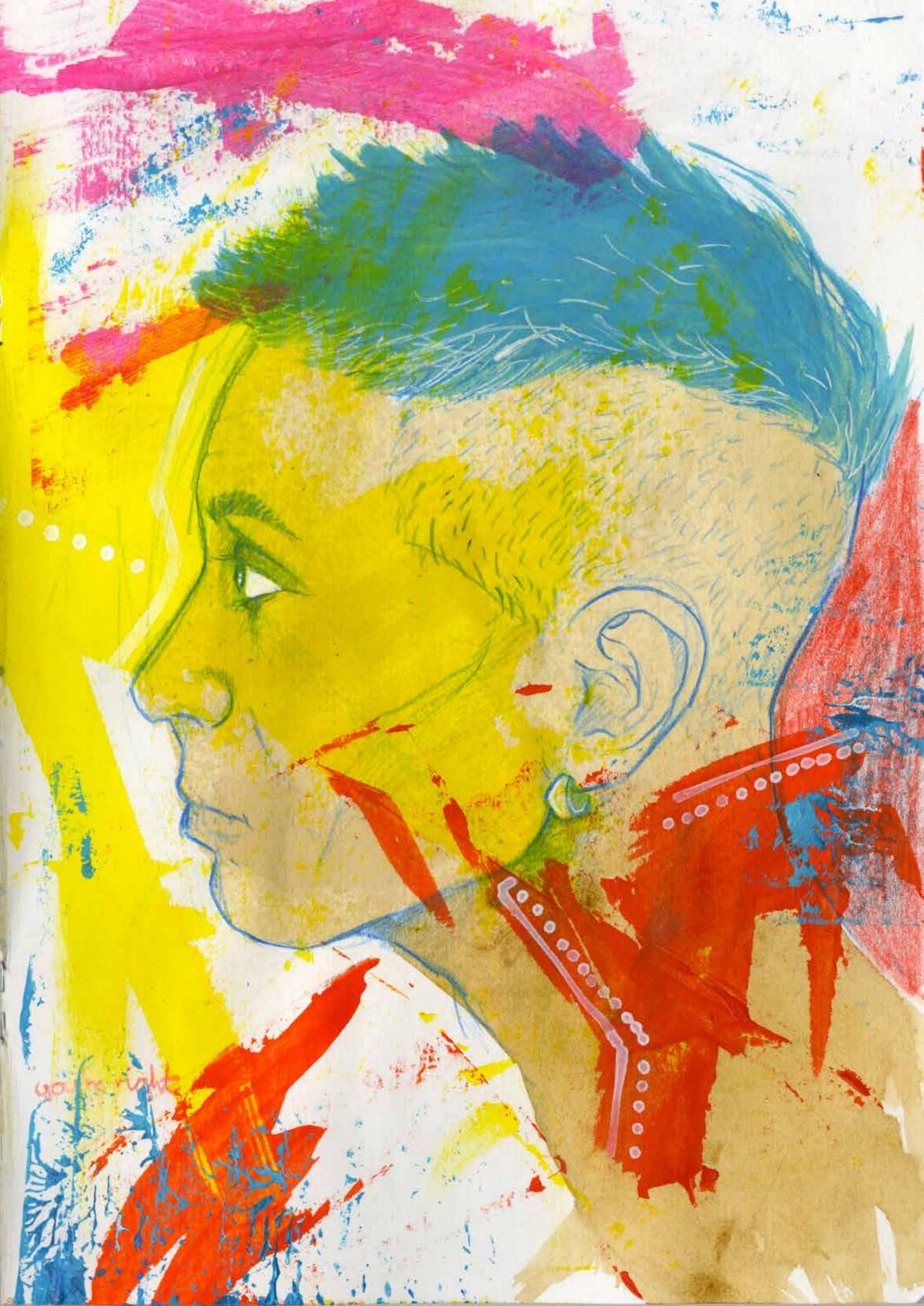


THE HORIZON IS AN ILLUSION, AND REALITY GROWS WEAKER THE FARTHER YOU GO. THE SKY IS BREAKING DOWN INTO FRAGMENTS AND THE SEA IS NO LONGER WHOLE. LAND HAS NO MEANING HERE. YOU LEFT GRAVITY BEHIND LONG AGO. ASPECTS OF THE UNIVERSE BLINK IN AND OUT OF EXISTENCE, AND THE ONLY CONSTANT YOU HAVE IS THE WARM LIGHT OF THE SUN, NOW MORE TACTILE THAN VISUAL. YOU ARE BEGINNING TO DOUBT WHETHER IT WAS ALL REAL IN THE FIRST PLACE.



BORDERS

14/1/2014



go right

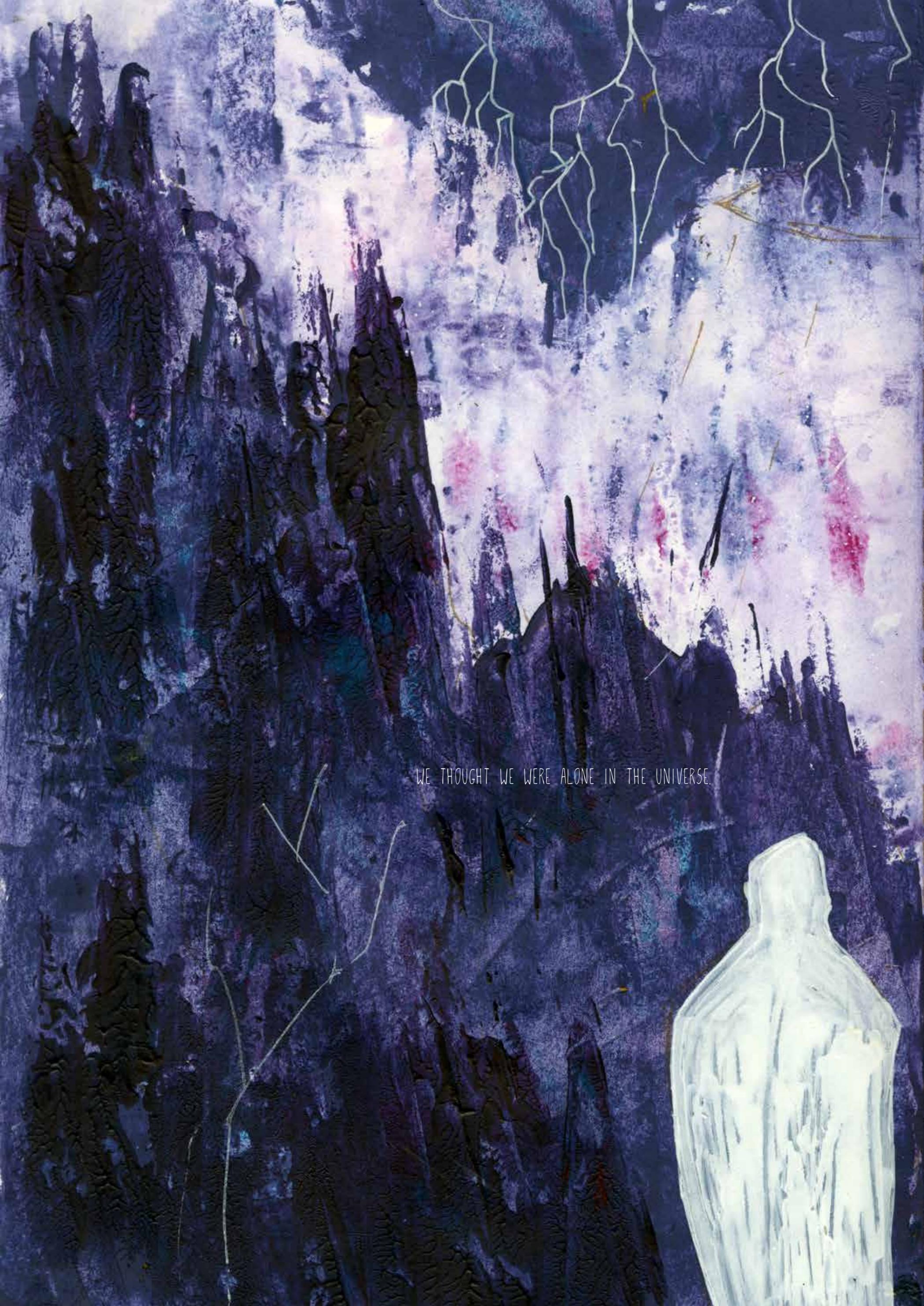


IT TOWERS OVER HER, A COLUMN OF FLESH AND SCALES AND IMPROBABLY LONG SPINES. IT IS TEETH AND GLOWING EYES AND SHE IS TERROR AND TENSION. SHE SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT SOMETHING MORE POWERFUL THAN LANCES, BUT THE TEXT IS CLEAR. THE RITUAL HAS TO REMAIN UNCHANGED. A ROCKET LAUNCHER WOULD BE NICE, BUT THE CARVINGS DO NOT FEATURE ONE, AND SO IT IS NOT AN OPTION.

SHE KNOWS THAT SHE IS DYING. THERE IS ROOM IN THE RITUAL FOR SURVIVAL, BUT NOT IN THE GAPING WOUND IN HER STOMACH. ONE OF ITS FANGS RIPPED THROUGH HER SIDE, AND WHATEVER THE RESIDUE THAT IS CHANGING THE COLOUR OF HER TORN FLESH IS, IT CANNOT BE HEALTHY.



SHE DID NOT EXPECT TO WAKE UP. SHE DID NOT EXPECT EVERYTHING SHE COULD SEE TO BE TINTED YELLOW, EITHER, NOR THE COLD, SLIMY FEEL OF HER SKIN. DID SHE DROWN? IF NOT, HOW IS SHE BREATHING DOWN HERE?



WE THOUGHT WE WERE ALONE IN THE UNIVERSE.



WE WERE WRONG.

SO WRONG.



THEY WATCH US

THE GIANT LOOKS OUT INTO SPACE. THEY ARE MADE FROM STARS AND PLANETS AND DARKNESS. THEIR TEETH ARE ASTEROIDS, GNASHING THROUGH UNLUCKY SHIPS. THEIR EYES BURNT OUT STARS, STILL WEAKLY GLOWING.



THE WIND BLOWS HARSH WAVES ACROSS THE SEA  
SPIKES OF ICE IN THE AIR LIKE DAGGERS  
SAND AND DUST SWIRLING IN SLOW WET PATTERNS  
AND IN THIS CHAOS YOU ARE LEAVING ME  
BLEEDING OUT ON THE COLD HARD FLOOR OF THAT ABANDONED GAS STATION  
GARBAGE SREWN EVERYWHERE, SIGNS OF A STRUGGLE  
GOLDEN HAIR LIKE HONEY, SPOILED WITH ROTTED MILK  
TINY SUGAR PACKETS, LIKE BULLET CASINGS LITTERED EVERYWHERE

WE STARTED OF GOOD LIKE EVERYONE BUT  
IT DIDN'T TAKE YOU LONG TO RUIN ME IN THE MOST  
BRUTAL WAY



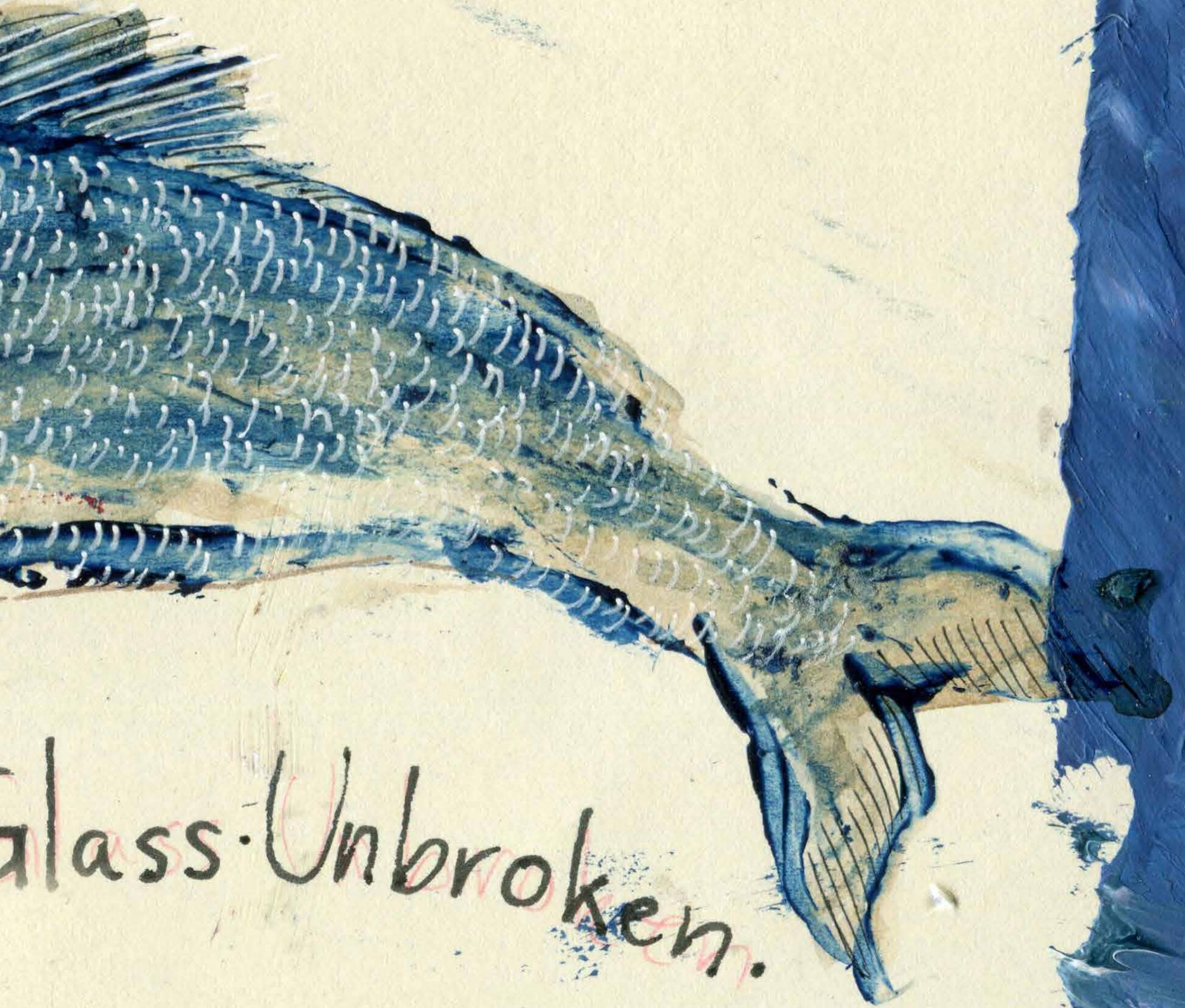


The



.Like.G

Sea.



Salass. Unbroken.





I HIDE IN A DITCH ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN, WAITING FOR DARK. IT'S TOO COLD NOW TO SLEEP BY NIGHT, SO I HUDDLE SOMEWHERE DURING THE DAY, SLEEPING AND RECHARGING BY THE LIGHT OF A SUN LIKE SOME COLD-BLOODED LIZARD. THE SHACK I FOUND AFTER THE LAST CAMP HAD A TATTERED BLANKET, SO I WRAP IT AROUND ME. I CHECKED THE AREA FOR SNAKES BEFORE I LAY DOWN TO SLEEP. THERE WAS ONE, BUT I SCARED IT OFF.





THE SUN IS SETTING NOW, AND I GET READY. DUST OFF MY THINGS, STRETCH COLD AND STIFF LIMBS. I DRINK THE LAST OF MY WATER.

I GO NORTH.



THE FORCES ARE GATHERING.  
IT WON'T BE LONG, NOW.







YOU CAME HERE LOOKING FOR WORK, WHICH ISN'T WRONG, OR WEIRD, OR WHATEVER THEY TELL YOU. BUT IT'S NOT VERY EFFECTIVE THESE DAYS. THE FACTORY HASN'T BEEN OPEN FOR YEARS.

DON'T LET THE SMOKE FOOL YOU, THAT'S THE FIRES DOWN IN THE CELLARS. WHERE THEY BURN THE SACRIFICES. YEAH, YEAH I KNOW. THEY DON'T TELL YOU THAT ON THE WEBSITE, DO THEY? BUT THERE'S NO DANGER TO YOU.

PROBABLY.

FUTURE

PAST









IT'S NOT GETTING BETTER. IF ANYTHING IT'S GETTING WORSE, NOW. WE LOST LOST CONTROL SO LONG AGO, AND NOTHING WE HAVE DONE SINCE THEN HAS WORKED. BUT YOU HAVE IT ALL FIGURED OUT, DON'T YOU? UP THERE ON GLINTING FACADES LIKE ICE SPIRES. I BET IT'S NICE UP THERE. I BET YOU NEVER EVEN STOP TO THINK WHAT IT'S LIKE DOWN HERE.. WOULDN'T WANT TO RISK A FEW MINUTES OF MILD DISCOMFORT.





NEITHER OF US ASKED FOR THIS, YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT. NEITHER OF US WANTED TO BE A PART OF THIS MESS, BUT THIS IS WHERE WE ARE. THIS IS WHAT IS GOING ON, AND I DON'T LIKE IT ANY MORE THAN YOU DO. WELL, MAYBE A LITTLE. PROBABLY MY ROLE IN THIS IS LESS UNPLEASANT. AT LEAST FOR NOW.

DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS THERE IS A CAVERN. FORMED BY SOME FLUKE OF NATURE. IT IS A VAST WOUND IN THE WORLD, WHICH SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOU WHOLE AS YOU GO. IT IS, OF COURSE, WILDLY DANGEROUS, BUT WHEN DID THAT STOP ANYONE, LET ALONE BRAVE EXPLORERS. THEY CARRY THEIR SUPPLIES, THEIR RECORDING EQUIPMENT, IN THE HOPES OF MAKING A DISCOVERY.

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT'S DOWN THERE, NOT REALLY. THERE HASN'T BEEN FUNDING FOR A PROFESSIONAL EXPEDITION, AND THERE ISN'T LIKELY TO BE EITHER, IN THESE TIMES. AND SO MAYBE TWO AMATEURS WITH NO KNOWLEDGE OF CAVES SHOULDN'T HAVE GONE DOWN THERE ALONE, BUT NO ONE STOPPED THEM. SO THEY WENT DOWN AND NOW THEY'RE A BIT EXHAUSTED, WHICH IS FINE, WHICH IS EXPECTED, BUT THERE IS A SEARING BRIGHT LIGHT COMING FROM SOME UNSEEN SOURCE AND THE SPIDERS ARE BIGGER THAN THEY HAVE ANY RIGHT TO BE, AND THE WHOLE OF THE EXPEDITION IS, BY NOW, A LITTLE TIRED.

SO THEY MAKE CAMP. SET UP LIGHTS, ALTHOUGH THE BRIGHT GLOW DOESN'T SEEM LIKE IT'S GOING TO GO OUT. ROLL OUT SLEEPING BAGS, DIVIDE WATCH SHIFTS. THEY DON'T KNOW IF THERE ARE ANY DANGERS, BUT IT SEEMS LIKE THE SORT OF PLACE HUGE BLIND PENGUINS OR MANY LIMBS OLD GODS MIGHT DWELL, SO BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY.

THERE ARE SOUNDS COMING FROM BELOW THEM, SOMEWHERE, VERY FAINT, BUT DEFINITELY THERE. SHE CAN'T WORK OUT WHETHER IT SOUNDS LIKE CRAWLING OR CHATTERING OR JUST ROCKS THAT LOOSENED AND FELL. OR MAYBE, SOME PART OF HER THINKS, IT'S SOMETHING COME TO EAT THEM.

MORNING COMES, EVENTUALLY, SOMEWHERE UP IN THE WORLD ABOVE, BUT DOWN HERE IT'S HARD TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE.

THE AIR GETS WORSE THE DEEPER THEY GET, THICK WITH DUST AND THE SMELL OF SOMETHING DEAD. THEIR FOOTSTEPS ECHO LOUDLY. THERE'S NO SNEAKING UP ON ANYTHING DOWN HERE.

THE LIGHT IS GETTING BRIGHTER.

THERE ARE MOVEMENTS, DOWN IN THE INFERNAL LIGHT, SHAPES JUST BEYOND WHAT THEY CAN SEE, THEIR PASSING FELT MORE THAN HEARD OR SEEN. THEY CANNOT TELL WHETHER THE MOVING ONES MEANS THEM HARM.

THE ROCKS ARE CHANGING, SLOWLY, GRADUALLY, AS THEY DESCEND. THEY FEEL DIFFERENT, SOMEHOW, SOME NUANCE OF TEXTURE, THE WAY SOUND BOUNCES OFF THEM IN NOT QUITE THE WAY IT SHOULD. IT FEELS UNNATURAL.

THERE ARE RELICS OF SOME SORT OF CIVILIZATION DOWN HERE. THERE SHOULDN'T BE. BUT THERE ARE WORN CARVINGS ON THE WALLS, SHAPES THEY CANNOT RECOGNIZE, BUT DEFINITELY NOT NATURALLY OCCURRING ONES. ELEMENTS THAT COULD BE WRITING, OR PATTERN, OR AN INCANTATION TO OLD GODS. THEY DO NOT DARE GUESS AT THE ORIGIN, OTHER THAN A HALF JOKING HALF TERRIFIED SUGGESTION OF ALIENS.

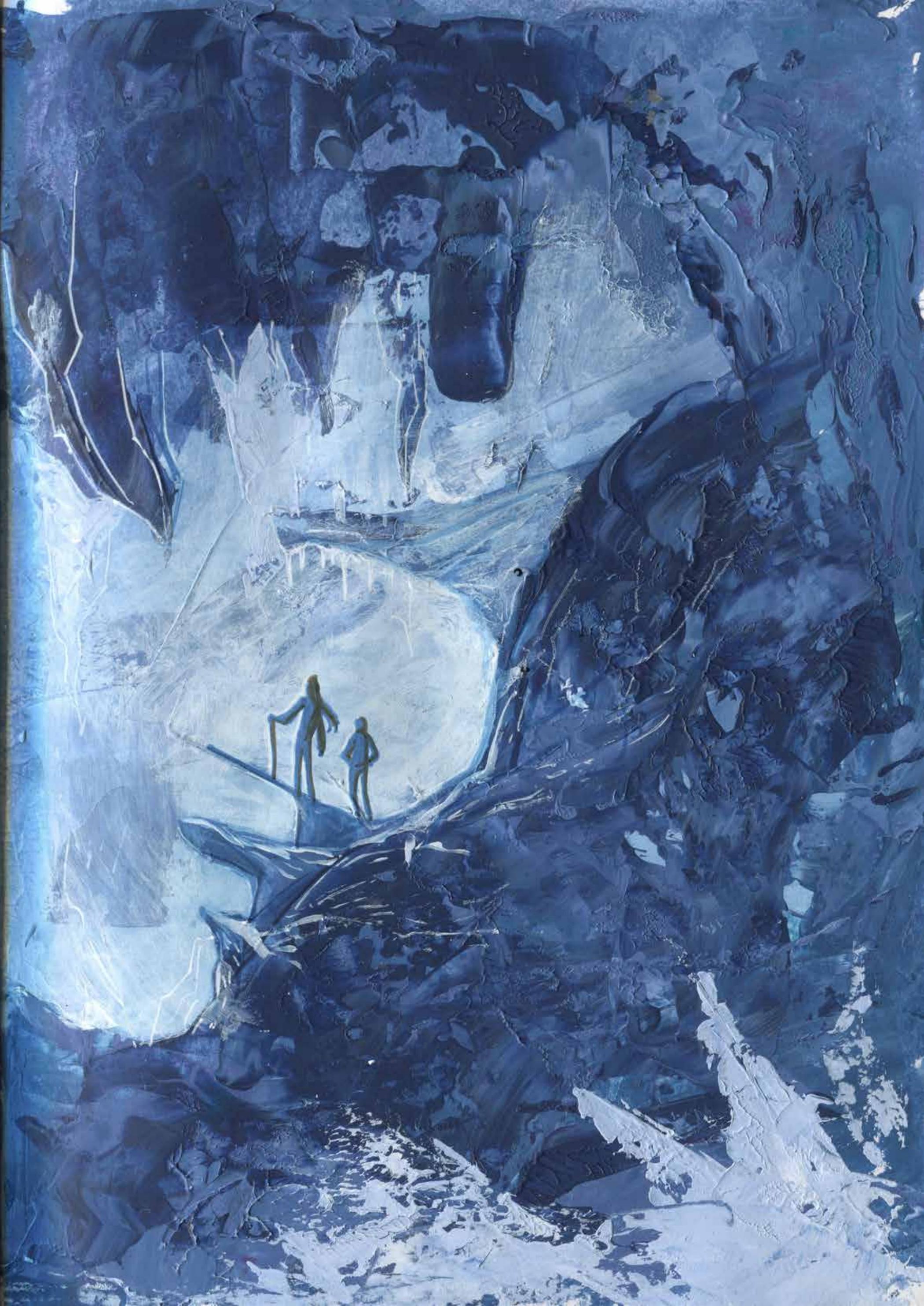
THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW DEEP THEY ARE BY NOW. TWO DAYS WORTH OF DOWNWARDS HIKING, SURE, BUT NEITHER HAS BEEN KEEPING TRACK. EVERYTHING IS TOO UNSETTLED FOR THEM TO FOLLOW, AND THEY RAN OUT OF POWER FOR ANYTHING YESTERDAY. THEY'VE ONLY GOT A MAP FULL OF GUESSES TWO YEARS OLD, FROM THE INITIAL DISCOVERY. THEY NEVER WENT HALF THIS DEEP.

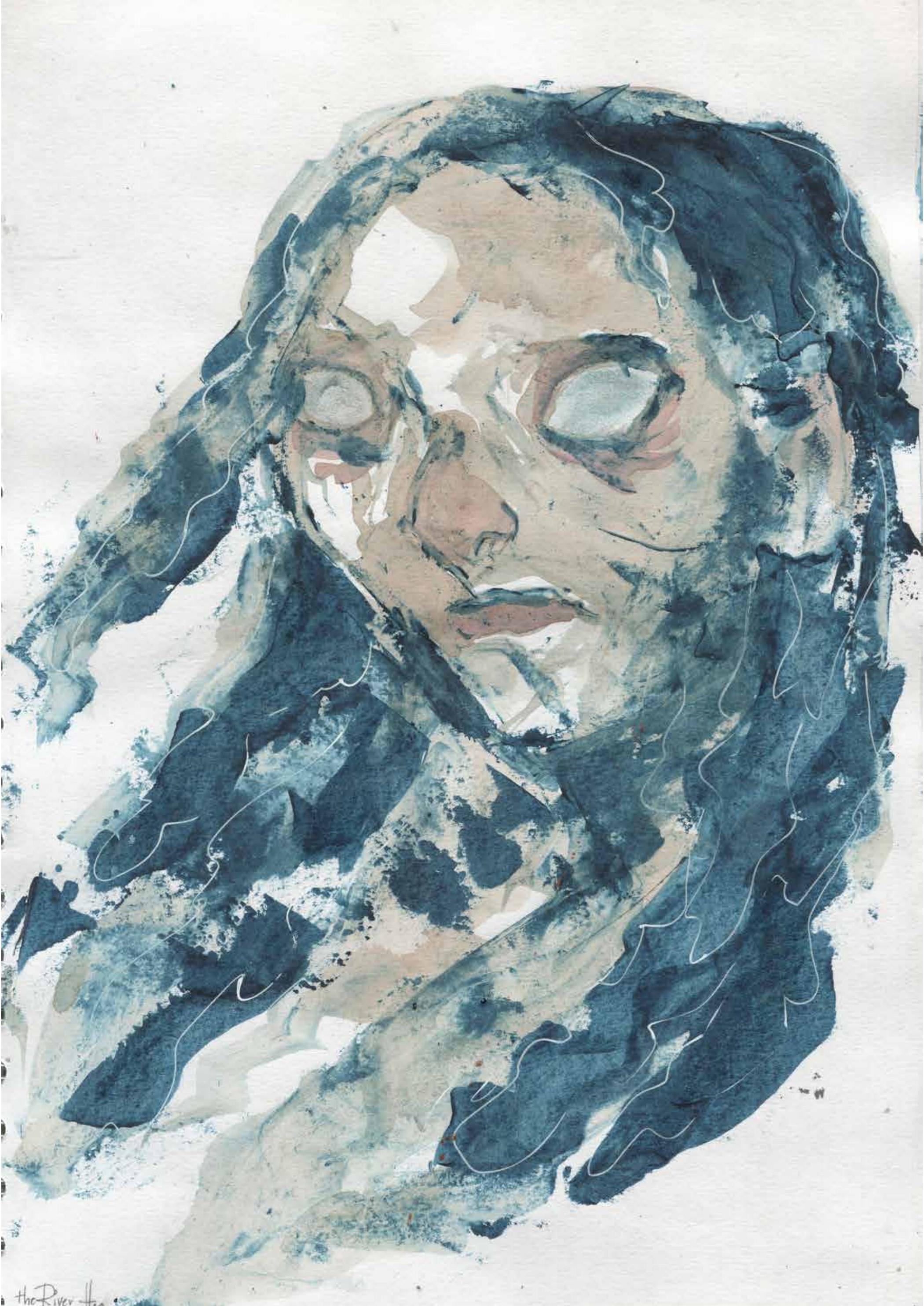
ON THE THIRD MORNING, OR AT LEAST SHE THINKS IT IS, SHE WAKES UP ALONE. THERE'S NO SIGN OF HER FRIEND. ALL HER THINGS ARE THERE, STILL, HER BACKPACK FILLED WITH WATER AND FOOD AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES, BUT SHE HERSELF IS GONE. IT GETS LONELY FAST. IT GETS TERRIFYING.

ALL THAT TALK OF HIDDEN MONSTERS, MAYBE IT'S A PRANK, THINKS THE ONE LEFT BEHIND, BUT THAT'S CLEARLY BULLSHIT, BECAUSE THIS IS FAR TOO SERIOUS, TOO SCARY, SO THE ONLY OPTION IS-

THE ONLY OPTION IS UNTHINKABLE. SO SHE SCRIBBLES A NOTE, IN CASE HER FRIEND WENT BACK, AND WANDERS ON, HOPEFULLY FOLLOWING.

SOMEONE IS WATCHING HER, SHE CAN TELL. ONE OF THE SHAPES SHIFTING FLUIDLY JUST OUTSIDE HER FIELD OF VISION, TAUNTING HER, PROMISING A PAINFUL END, OR EVEN WORSE, SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T. EVERYTHING FEELS WRONG HERE. THE AIR'S NO GOOD, SOUNDS ARE THICK AND FLUID AND HER VISION SWIMS AND MAYBE IT'S THE PRESSURE, MAYBE IT'S THE COLD SEEPING INTO HER BONES BUT SHE CANNOT HELP FEEL THAT IT IS THE INFLUENCE OF SOMETHING MORE SINISTER. SOME BEING WHO WHISPERS IN STRANGE LANGUAGES THAT FLOAT ON THE AIR, BEGGING HER TO TURN AROUND, TO COME BACK, BUT SHE WILL NOT LISTEN TO THE MONSTROUS VOICES, NO MATTER HOW FAMILIAR THEY SOUND, SHE WILL NOT-





the River #2

THE LAST THING HE REMEMBERS IS THE BLOODSOAKED BATTLEFIELD, HOW HEAVY EVERYTHING FELT, THE ODDLY DISTANT PAIN IN HIS HEAD. NOW, HE OPENS HIS EYES TO THE BRIGHTNESS. THERE IS PAIN STILL, A DULL THROBBING ACHE IN EVERY INCH OF HIS BODY. IT DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT. IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE HIS OWN. THE STRANGE DOCTOR TELLS HIM IT WILL PASS.

IT DOES NOT. HE IS NOT ALLOWED A MIRROR, AND HE IS TOO WEAK TO SIT UP, BUT ONCE, WHEN THEY WERE CHANGING HIS BANDAGES, HE CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF SKIN. IT WASN'T HIS.

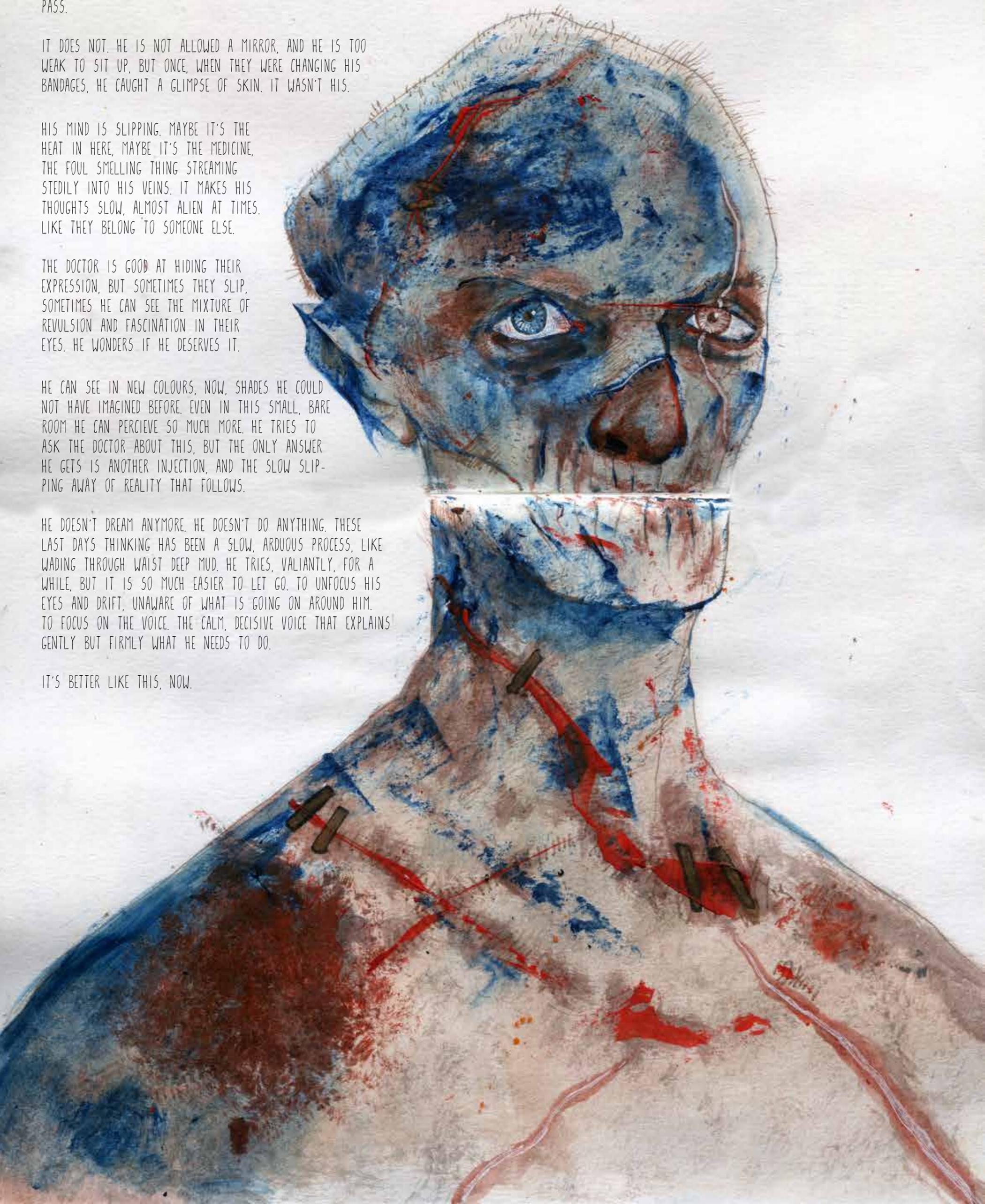
HIS MIND IS SLIPPING. MAYBE IT'S THE HEAT IN HERE, MAYBE IT'S THE MEDICINE, THE FOUL SMELLING THING STREAMING STEDILY INTO HIS VEINS. IT MAKES HIS THOUGHTS SLOW, ALMOST ALIEN AT TIMES. LIKE THEY BELONG TO SOMEONE ELSE.

THE DOCTOR IS GOOD AT HIDING THEIR EXPRESSION, BUT SOMETIMES THEY SLIP, SOMETIMES HE CAN SEE THE MIXTURE OF REVULSION AND FASCINATION IN THEIR EYES. HE WONDERS IF HE DESERVES IT.

HE CAN SEE IN NEW COLOURS, NOW, SHADES HE COULD NOT HAVE IMAGINED BEFORE. EVEN IN THIS SMALL, BARE ROOM HE CAN PERCEIVE SO MUCH MORE. HE TRIES TO ASK THE DOCTOR ABOUT THIS, BUT THE ONLY ANSWER HE GETS IS ANOTHER INJECTION, AND THE SLOW SLIPPING AWAY OF REALITY THAT FOLLOWS.

HE DOESN'T DREAM ANYMORE. HE DOESN'T DO ANYTHING. THESE LAST DAYS THINKING HAS BEEN A SLOW, ARDUOUS PROCESS, LIKE WADING THROUGH WAIST DEEP MUD. HE TRIES, VALIANTLY, FOR A WHILE, BUT IT IS SO MUCH EASIER TO LET GO. TO UNFOCUS HIS EYES AND DRIFT, UNAWARE OF WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND HIM. TO FOCUS ON THE VOICE. THE CALM, DECISIVE VOICE THAT EXPLAINS GENTLY BUT FIRMLY WHAT HE NEEDS TO DO.

IT'S BETTER LIKE THIS, NOW.





• RIDE • • ETERNAL •

The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or fabric, with a central white figure. The figure has a large, stylized eye with a spiral pupil and radiating lines. The figure's body is white and appears to be made of a rough, fibrous material. The background is dark with some green and red streaks. The text is in a light, monospace font.

THE HALLS HERE ARE ENDLESS AND I DO NOT KNOW HOW THEY TRAPPED ME. THE DARKNESS IS THICK, HARD TO BREATHE, DUSTY WITH AGE AND MEMORY, AND IT SWIRLS IN PATTERNS I CAN ALMOST SEE. I REMEMBER FOLLOWING THE CANALS, BRIGHT SHINING PATHS. I REMEMBER THE COLD WET AIR ALL AROUND ME, CHOKING, BUT I DO NOT REMEMBER HOW I GOT HERE, OR WHERE THIS IS.

THE GHOSTS HERE ARE VIGILANT, THEY DO NOT LIKE THOSE WHO DO NOT BELONG. THEIR MILKY EYES FOLLOW ME AS I MOVE THROUGH THE MAZE, BUT THEY CANNOT THREATEN ME NOW.

NO ONE CAN.





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