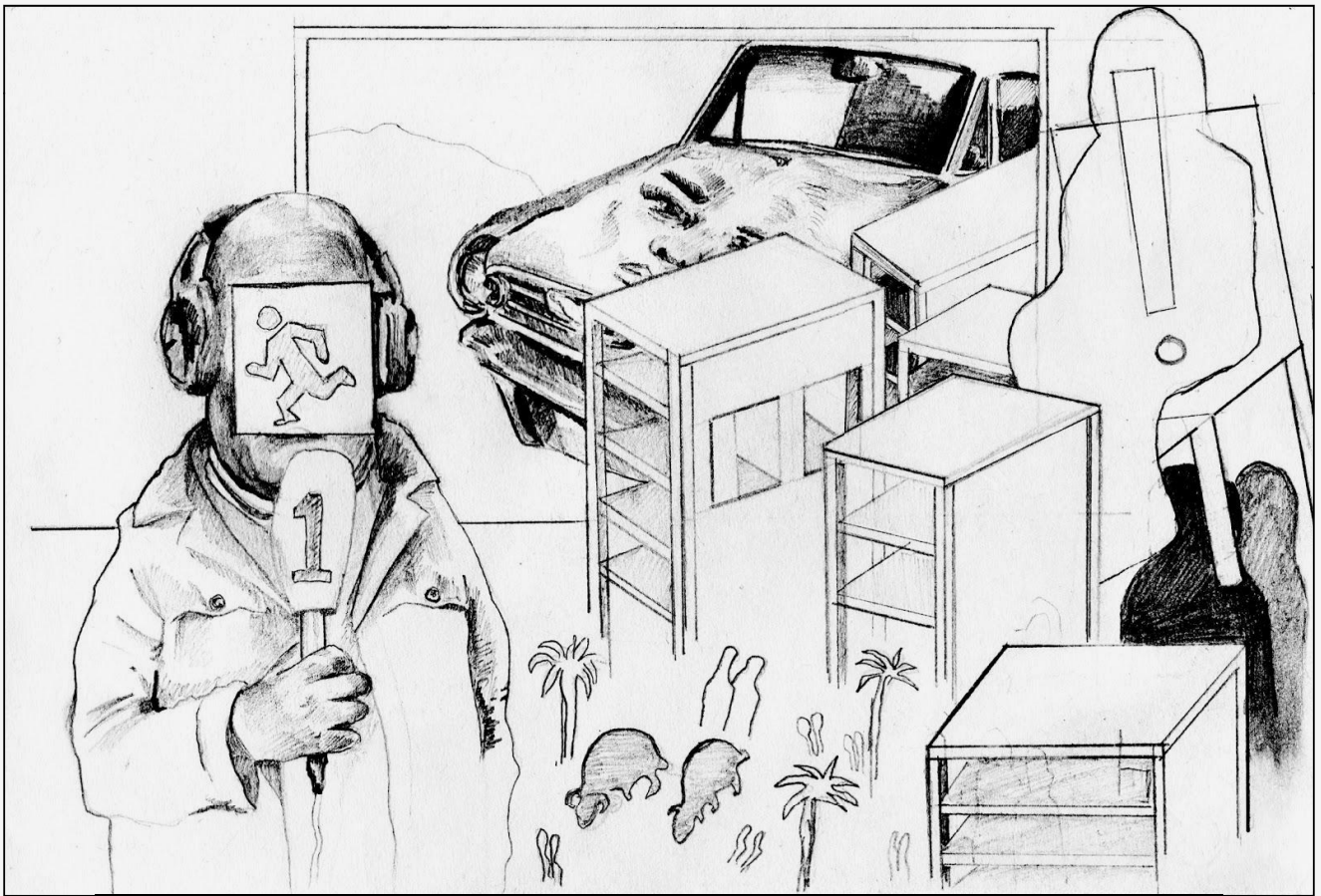


**Chloée**  
**maugile**  
*Enamel*  
*(experiences*  
*of shock)*



Middle-earth is the flea market at the local car park: gridlocked with gnarly hagglers scaling between one another, pools of ramshackle identities congregating in a samba line. Side stepping, chiming and bickering about who gets first dibs over stolen car parts and used dustbins. They're scrappy! Sales-folk are smooth talking as if their mouths are lined with motor oil roaring at auction. Trading bric-a-brac, repossessed homes and lost pets. Real *steals* happen in Middle-earth — deals elsewhere unheard of.

There are groups of youths huddled round an open fire for warmth, mixed with fatigued lovers who stroll with burnt expressions as they fork for a distraction in a pair of hand- me- down denim jeans and soiled tennis shoes. They pull pained grimaces for one another after completing their purchases, as if to say these gifts are trophies of their mundane weekend of stiff loveless embraces. An impassioned exchange is heard between Old Benny and an anxious customer eager to wrangle a bargain for desktop speakers and a keychain (who will buckle first?). Minty the butcher is waving for a chat. He usually ceases any opportunity to hypnotize me into leaving with one hundred out of date tin cans of soft foods and half cow for my arms and legs. I tend to be drawn into the sweet talk of the seller — selling dreams! I'm into it all. My pockets bleed dry just thinking about it. I am in no place for a debate or to be swayed into back alley deals, so I shrug him off. There's an ash cloud escaping from the burger van, billowing like a jellyfish. Its tentacles form a veil of grey to accompany the feverish mood of the moment. Through the smoke, begging salts the air. A strained announcement from a teen doing wheelies on his BMX bike weaving figure eights through the crowd: *Every gang needs a leader! Every gang needs a damn leader!* The skid marks remain hot long after his departure. I bow my head in respect.

Buying time rifling through the t-shirt stall, badger-like and aimless, the saleswoman is carving an apple with a pocketknife and simultaneously nursing a white wine. I watch an old mutt relieve itself onto a pile of toy cars while the saleswoman hauls a t-shirt from the heap; it's frayed, with an imprint of two hands intertwined in an arm wrestle. The logo is that of 'Addicts Now & Then,' a charity which assists individuals worn from their avid search for paradise. The centre of the shirt reads: 'We must begin to organise ourselves in these enclaves of urban terror, lying is indigenous to Briton. Text or call 0799 111 2113 to stop addiction today.' I wonder if they could help a few acquaintances of mine who are hooked on lying. Having reached the point of no return, their daily lives now consist of walking around with their mouths fixed with duct tape in case a lie floats out, infiltrating and polluting whatever conversation they might be having. I could easily ring the charity and put forward their names in the hope that they have space in the wards. *I pray for their reformation.*

The woman clutches the rag to her chest. It resembles a history that is dear to her — she used to flog benzodiazepines to grandmothers and school kids in Hefty Hill and has a guilty conscience. In fact, she has the words 'guilt' and 'redemption' inked on her knuckles. Between two dragons on her fore-arms, her large bosom heaves inside a football shirt. Her hair is slicked back with glue to form a stiff ponytail and she has an eyebrow piercing that hangs loosely in her thin aging skin. She throws the t-shirt back onto the pile and turns towards me slurring *Never forget where you come from I certainly haven't.* I reply: *Spare me the old trip.* When I woke up this morning I believed I was nothing but a pair of eyes staring up at the blank ceiling. I wish to remain so.

Displayed through the windscreen of her people carrier are three tapestries of Border Collies. One lies asleep on its back, paws dangling in mid-air and tongue flopping to one side, looking impish. The second has its backside arched, its head low, gnawing on a Saint George's flag. The third smells the second's derriere. They've been pinned to the vinyl interior as if to reupholster the car seats. Her husband, later identified as Sullie, stitched them with painted yarn, and is perched halfway out of the car rolling a cigarette. Sullie looks like a fistful of smoked-out straw burning on the side of the road. He has a tire-marked face squashed under an unstructured leather hat and is giving me a hardened stare. I feel like handing him some strands of hay to suck on and calling him a hillbilly. We have a stare down until he caves in and beams that the tapestries are forty quid apiece. Sewn from persistent boredom, they are the result of his failed acting career; he says it's a typical story of woe. He enjoys attaching meaning to his creations and says that the tapestries are works of art which keep a mind's eye securely on the island. He takes the opportunity to state that, supposedly, there are roads around this area that have petrol blocking the rain pipes, poisoning the air and manipulating people's principles. These fumes fog thoughts and worry gives him high blood pressure. *You sound paranoid.*

One of the salesmen a few spaces over says he ran a music store for fifteen years. He points and states; *Just over there used to be a housing complex.* Wasted grounds. Neighbourly unrest (a clashing of heads). No milk for babies, nothing to eat but leftovers from the flea market. A forgotten pocket of earth. Weed flowers sprouting through the broken slabs of busted concrete, potholes for roads and not even a corner shop in sight. He said there was immense tension brewing for years — authorities were never welcomed. It's a totally different way of life. At one point, from his shop window,

he witnessed a heavily pregnant woman in her night dress and slippers holding a toddler on her hip clambering on top of a car, refusing to come down. She said she wasn't going to come down until the trouble ends, until she could feed her children properly. The salesman went out to help her, maybe reason with her. Meanwhile someone had crept into his store and threw a petrol bomb in the CD aisles and ran off. The place was set ablaze. He blames himself, saying he got off on the wrong foot with a few of the neighbours and it was his time. He says maybe if he sold different things, maybe it would have been alright. I'm not sure what to say and place my hand on his shoulder. The shop closed its doors. His insurance had run out.

Today, he is skint, and paired with a mountain of CDs, is looking pitiful. The selection includes musicians that produced drowning sounds recorded from their chintzy living rooms. *I beg! Make it stop!* He sprawls the CDs along a fold-up table and on the ground as if he's making a circus display. A sundial, an enormous wire figurine of an elephant, and a flag are all lined with CDs. The man now seems dazed — he doesn't know what day it is. He trails on about his commitment to incorporating bands that focus on messages of unity rather than hate — he is a reformed social scientist. He says that falling from grace gave him an opportunity to make the music he dreamt of but wasn't sure how to verbalize the unique sound, it was still close to heart. He says the night before last he performed at an open mic and was surprised that those in the audience were mostly bi-lingual young men (he fails to mention the open mic night took place at a Spanish tapas bar). He enjoys updating me on his current romantic relationship with a *chocolate man*, which began after his own mother died and how, now, he can finally live his truth — unaffected. He too is fighting against the forces of darkness, so they've bonded over this understanding. He is smug about relaying this information to me, he hadn't revealed this to anyone for a while, he says, and wondered why he had done so, he was taken back with his 'generosity' and honesty. I wonder whether he wants a silver medal for his efforts. *Good luck.*

Braided within the market are erect sculptures the local residents created with the intent to jolt the flea market visitors. It evokes an disorientating element to the car-park. The fruit and veg man pasted courgettes, aubergines, strung cherry tomato eyes stapled and lined a raisin mouth together forming a fragmented face that was either laughing or crying...he turned to me and and said his creation was a stroke of genius as it delivered the perfect balance of fear of an unknown brother and fear of the unknown. I guess he said that because the rotting face was ugly and made out of food attracting flies. Scarecrows moulded out of rubble, fox dung and leggo all lined the empty car park spaces and the tops of the railings to mark the territory (no funny business), some weathered from the elements hang shredded and flapping in the breeze. These figures form a symbolic backdrop for the street pastor who stands on his usual street curb. Holding a plastic cup of dark liquids reciting visions he had seen that morning, stating darker days are here but hiding round the bend but at the same time our world will be flooded with secretions of light. As he pounds the pavement with fantastical and disjointed words, the dark liquid spills from his cup forming a sparkling murky puddle around his cruddy bare feet, his final words clang through my ears *We do not want trouble — we want to exist!*

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The flea market leaves a tangy taste in my mouth I'm still swallowing two hours later at my cleaning job at The Historical Society. It feels like the experience changed my accent. I'm afraid if anyone were to encounter me, I would come out speaking in tongues. At times, the cleaning job does have its perks. Like when I'm Hoovering and interrupting one of the patrons doing a drug deal in the various drawing rooms of the building — it is a private members club by night and therefore a lot of the patrons have attempted to turn it into Spearmint Rhino. The entertainers use the fake branches in The Wildlife Room as poles to dance on, borrow animal skins for makeshift costumes and growl like prehistoric women running through the building. The morning usually involves airing out the strong chemical smell, clearing the party hats and burning the women's underwear draped from ancient ornaments. I've only gone to the newspapers on a few occasions to sell out and profit from these lowbrow exploits, receiving impressive cheques ranging from four to five figures, which means my cleaning job must not be so damning and soul destroying, as you people like to make it out to be.

Cleaning the dump-like storeroom, it mirrors the landfill. Silver crockery engraved with Roman numerals piled next to rusted slave shackles. Thick layers of debris on a whipping post with "1938, Property of County Jail" carved on its side. Slung from an ornate armchair are a couple of stained silk bibs with red silk thread woven with the question, "Am I your friend or am I your pet?", presumably a joke at the expense of a servant, once upon a time. Glued to felt grass stands an Edwardian doll house with a white picket fence. Poorly made ancient brown dolls, one sporting a tiny cane, surrounded by tiny beige and white dolls. Another stray figurine hangs out the window by its ankles, while the rest are in a semicircle with speckled red paint on their miniature faces. Along with the red paint flecked on the walls and the settee, it reminds me of a miniature puking spell (one that a cat bares as it heaves furballs onto the floor), or a small massacre. Somehow, there's wall space for several photographs of brown, solemn-faced nannies dressed in tight pinafores clutching crying babes, and underneath a crumpled white hood with two holes for eyes and one hole crudely cut for the mouth laying at the base of an antique pram. Everything is stuffed into corners or spilling onto the floor — unholy. I imagine a spirit appearing to shame me because their history was spoiled and spread out along the tiles collecting dust.

Most days I'm optimising the enclosure when at work. Catching a glimpse of the monsters that surround. I often think about the girl I knew from the age of nine who freed herself. She was able to split her mind apart — in order to realise that nothing and no-one was going to get to her. Self-preservation. In some cases, you could train yourself to take away smell and sight. I apply that thought when I'm here, normally beginning to re-arrange everything slightly topsy turvy. Tending to unconsciously enter a space where I scream and hit the objects with a duster, no qualms if they break, smash or end up deformed — I don't see these acts as mine. Move objects around, chopping bits up with scissors and throwing them in the bin, I call it 'deep cleaning'. Wanting to take away some of the identity of the place or something to that level. Last time I shook a china doll with extreme force until one of the boneheads frayed at the neck and its glass eyes were in a permanent slant. And then left as if nothing happened.

This evening the patrons are doing blow backs through a flute-like cast in the print room alongside baby seals laying stretched across thickly dressed armchairs slurping on scotch, flopping around,



high fiving as they thoughtlessly lose at black jacks. Taking little notice of me making soapy slaloms over the parkay floor. The suds dry into whimpering smiles marking the floor with grey grime. I never clean thoroughly or well. Or care. This hut is decaying and my little rustle of a mop wasn't going to stop the blood seeping from behind the stolen wallpaper ripped from the walls of ancient kingdoms, now cemented haphazardly with smoke stains and cobwebs.

I overhear one of them begin: *he wanted to be remembered - for once uplift himself above the clouds in which he descended*. I hold my lips firmly sealed — trying to ignore the snigger that wants to bruise the room. The voice speaking is an immaculately groomed waxy man, the curve of his double chin appears smooth and supple through the glow of the oil lamp that lays fading on the side table aligning with his shoulder pads. He struggles to pluck cigars from a silver tin, his hands are weighed down with diamonds and white gold signet rings. The box has the initials engraved on the front. S.S. The smoke burned through the space like the dark clouds of 2008, its presence filling the room senselessly. My head spins. His shoes are polished so well I can see my arched figure stretching to and fro in the bottom right corner as I mop in silence. He turns to stride across the floor soiling my work to gaze into the horizon of nightfall. He stares and says *this evening is something like poetry*. There is an elderly one here propped up sitting on a linen bench. He's at the age when one looks like an old born baby. He looks like a crow has just gouged his head with its beak — he's intoxicated, half holding his malt drink in his papery hand. He's wrapped in a fine cashmere shawl staring into the depths of the framed print that hangs precariously on the wall opposite. Perhaps he sees his mummy in the reflection of the glass? He's half smiling with tears in his eyes moistening his cotton moustache and red chapped lips. I guess when you get to that point, when wealth and endless spare time are on your side, you focus on the simpler things — things like seeing the morning light or the next snow fall makes you crack a dry smile and fills you with warmth and what you think to be 'happiness'. Again, I am doing my best not to let laughter out, since the scene is etched from the street curbs of any city at night. However, these folks are dressed in expensive silks hiding in the railings of an old brick mansion pretending they are more than the eye can see. I wipe down the final decrepit object, and I'm informed I'm to work at The Historical Society Ceremony the following day. *With honour*.

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I take the bus home. The driver decides to exercise his rights. He stops the bus, rises from the wheel, descends from the bus and stampedes a man to the ground. As the driver threw the man to the pavement, his legs swung around him like he's sliding down a flagpole, he's nimble and quick on his feet. He places his boot on the man's chest to pin him down. Driver shakes his finger and says *Now why did you get on and say that? Go one tell me? Why'd ya say it? Say it ain't true?* In the thick of it, the driver kicked him and kicked hard whilst the man was on the ground. From his pocket the driver took out a wad of pound notes and fluttered them on his head, letting them fall like autumn leaves — some fell into the drain, others disappeared in the wind down the road. From in the bus, in silence, the passengers and I wait for chaos to blow over.

Cars screech to a halt to catch a glance at the fist fight. From behind a van appears a ghost-like apparition. Its costume resembles slabs of pillows that make the body and marker pen has been used to dot a pillowcase for eyes. Holding a cluster of multi-coloured balloons — gleaming candy cane wrapped in translucent plastic, the ghost walks with a thick rope that drags on the tarmac. Attached to the crumbling rope is an adult sized baby carriage holding a man child in a white satin bonnet, that shields his eyes as he fake cries outwardly. He combs out his coils creating frizzy spirals that stick out from under his bonnet like static shock. His eyes are blank, he cries. He wants a room of his own! The ghost walks round the corner and out of sight.

The bus driver gets back on the bus and takes a seat in a passenger's chair demanding some other 'dimwit' as he puts it, drives the bus because he doesn't feel like doing it anymore. He starts to laugh and cry as he unfastens his polyester blend uniform. *Let the air in*, a kind woman soothingly states as she offers the bus driver a sip of water. The bus driver inhales and then lets out a large breath. He evaporates into the ventilation of the bus. His tie is left flickering in the vent as the hot air moves invisibly around the deck. We are driven slowly down the main road by a school teacher who follows the bus stops carefully.

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The gothic theatre could have been traced from a clown comic, painted letterbox red. On the roof is an enormous cutout of a woman arching her back whilst blowing a kiss, décolletage exposed and hair flowing in the cool evening air. Inside, a baroque hall lit by candlelight and a haze machine releases fog that creates morbid shadows on the wall. At the bar, champagne on tap can be sipped alongside a shark tank. A sleazy affair for which I had borrowed a suit from my neighbour who was a violinist for the Proms, blending me into the seams of the velvet seats during the ceremony whilst I serve hors d'oeuvres.

Standing at the back of the theatre drinking from the half-open bottles of champagne and sucking on chewing tobacco, I watch the grandeur unravel. The host for the evening trots on stage wearing an embroidered blazer. He has a ferret face and meek brown hair that darts in every direction. Humming his own theme tune, he attempts to create humour but receives zero laughter. The speeches that follow are stuffy and full of nepotism; special guests, clearly dug up from childhood, supply tales of last year's catastrophe (one of the speakers had snogged someone's wife), prompting erratic laughter in the audience. A nightmare.

One of the speakers strolls on stage wearing a thick wool overcoat. He combs his greasy hair with his fingertips then grabs the microphone, presses his lips to its centre, amplifying his wispy voice. *Souls of today, I can't tell you that everything will be alright. I am not a fortune teller. I cannot predict the future. But what I can say is that right now, at this very moment, there is a cow farrowing in some forgotten crate, tirelessly biting on the bars of their tiny prison hoping they will be freed and saved from the slaughterhouse, from the supermarket shelves, from the dinner table. There is a baby pig in solitary confinement that is crying for its mother who never comes. There is a chicken lying in a*

*faeces riddled shack, castrated, slowly dying from organ failure due to the selfish breeding process that has been...* He begins to disrobe, revealing symbols painted on his naked body. From inside his coat he pulls out a pineapple, which he stomps on in fits of rage, screaming, *The tropics! The tropics!* Moments afterwards, he yells into the microphone demanding the Society to stop the promotion of taxidermy in their collection. Through intense sobs he lists the names of the animals that have been poached and displayed in the collection. Thrown down by the security he's dragged off stage chanting, *This is just the beginning!* The audience chuckles. Nothing's worse than not being heard. They assume it's a cheap comedy act or one of the patrons' bastard friends playing a game. They take no notice. I use the activist's wool overcoat to mop the pineapple juice from the stage, it dries sticky. Some moron from the audience heckles *you've missed a spot* and everyone laughs. The joke is old. I give him a leathery smile hoping he writhes in his seat from the discomfort of my sneer lasts a little bit too long. Lingering eye contact.

The queue for the bathroom is a trail of suited penguins at the watering hole. The bathroom attendee uses a black biro to draw vertical lines between the freckles on her forearms to form a constellation of maroon splodges; I doubt she would have batted an eye if pools of water started plummeting from the ceiling, and if I said the sky was collapsing she'd probably prefer to be swept away. As I wash my hands, I start speaking to a man who appears to have gone over his limit in champagne. His sentences form backwards and speak in clucks. Leaning his head against the mirror he professes *Hunger is the closest primeval memory we share with our ancestors, we experience the desire to kill for our meals and eat anything with a pulse! I don't care, I pick what I eat and nothing can stop me on the road to that discovery! Nothing. That activist can't stop me. They can't stop me. Nada!*

His head falls back to one side as he delivers his final statement. *Are you done?* I usher him, sick and staggering, into the corridor. He's soiled his leather brogues with pulp, whimpering like a lame gibleb and beginning to blubber. It's hard to bear. I shouldn't feel sorry for him. I tell him he's being pathetic and demand him to make some sense. *Get the words out!* From what I gather he is to be accepting an award, along with prize money, for his contribution to the historical society. I think he had contributed some objects from his own private collection. Fallen to the floor and cradling my legs, his eyes slowly shut and fall to the back of his head. Dramatically he muffles *I can't go out there! I can't do it.* Whimpering in the groove of my legs, I shake him off.

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The drunkard was the newly assigned foreign secretary and therefore no one had seen him yet. We both agree he's too incompetent to accept the award and cash prize. He hugs me as I fold him into a broom cupboard and I almost whisper goodnight. I borrow his satin smoking jacket, use a broom to practise my acceptance speech in the reflection of a gold vase standing on a chiselled plinth.

After a momentary pause I begin to speak clearly into the microphone: *I usually meet for group therapy on Tuesdays. We use code names to keep the meetings neutral and anonymous. There's Honky-tonk, Zenman, Cornrow, Mute, Roughen, Comfort Eater and me. It's pleasant, we swap notes, chat*



*about the weather. Each session I talk about how I encounter the supernatural, how most evenings I experience ominous knocking throughout my house – how I lose sleep and feel drained each waking day. A new woman recently joined the group. We named her Wide Smile. Wide Smile came to vent, to speak about a happening that has haunted her for the best part of her adult life. When she was a youngster an older child (and family friend) were playing whilst all the parents were downstairs. The older friend wanted to re-enact a recent film. He said he had a costume for it and quickly got changed into a white hood, with two holes for eyes and an opening for the mouth. Then he made her lick him off a bit. She spoke about how his aperture was so raisin-like and small and she began to laugh at the meeting. Comfort Eater piped up – he was angry over the story – he deemed it unrespectable, malicious. Wide Smile said, Yes, you're right, it was malicious. I can be malicious. He stated how the story blackened the space. The woman didn't care. The group grew restless with disagreement; a few were standing and shaking their fists. I attempted to pacify the situation and state that all problems truly start in heaven and therefore this moment was inevitable. Nothing eased. The meeting ended and we went to the carpark where we were transformed into a unanimous uprising filled with hair-pulling and name calling. Mute called his friends, and to my surprise they were all shaved goons that decided without reason I was the root of the trouble. I chuckled in disbelief, threw my hands to the side in outrage. You know when you hear such foolishness that you just throw your hands up in the air? And shake your head? Kept saying things like; Not possible! Just not possible. And classic reactions like; Who? Me? You're joking! You can't be serious! I spat on the floor in an attempt at holding my own. I ended up creased into the back of their car boot as they drove at 90 miles per hour in some unknown direction. All of the while I was banging on the boot saying; You can't be serious! It was beyond a crime as it didn't feel like it was happening to me.*

*When trapped in a tight space the oxygen is limited. You can hear everything. The engine roaring, every bump and dent over every pothole – my head bruising against the metal grooves, my stomach in knots. I heard them laugh about me, high-five and crack open beer cans. They didn't even know me. What was there to laugh about? I began to feel the edges of the car. I found a lever and tugged. It was a release. I fell out of the moving car and began running for my life. If you ever find yourself trapped there is usually an exit in the mess. Accidents do happen – I am here today by accident.*

By Chloée Maugile. Drawing by Conrad Pack. With thanks to Elsa Gray.

Since 2017 Maugile has written and directed plays for institutions such as the V&A, The Young Vic and The Block. She graduated from Slade School of Art in 2019. Maugile currently lives and works in London.