

# Sydenham Arts.

in collaboration with  
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The news has just broken. Prepare for six months. I think we knew it, deep down, but everyone pretended we didn't. It was sharp. It stung. It reached into my chest and threw out the rest of my twenty-eighth year. Maybe we can hope for a better 2021. Maybe that's naive.

We have been given a new set of rules to live by. This is calming. When your life is governed by rules no one talks about and never mentions, being given a set of rules is a blessing. It's simple. Follow them and you will be fine. But they're not clear. They don't make sense. They're contradictory. And no one follows them anyway. Every mask placed incorrectly, taken off when the train pulls out of the station, my stomach clenches. The sick anxiety returns. You remember how difficult travelling was before this happened, and wonder how on earth you managed to survive so long. But a lot of us didn't, that's the point.

My world closed in. The four walls of my flat became a safe haven. That was fine, and comforting, even. You can get everything delivered. No, you can't. We worried about food every day. A shielding one-year-old doesn't have a Sainsbury's account. You've forgotten us - but you weren't really ever thinking about us in the first place.

We fill our bodies to quiet our minds. In a world where fat is bad, we could not celebrate the softness of our stomachs, the cushion of our laps. Our bodies do things to protect us from famine. We were thankful we did not go to bed hungry. But that wasn't enough. Our bodies work in ways we can't understand. But they tell us we must lose lockdown weight. The gyms reopen, and I see the desperation in people's eyes when I'm back. I'm not the only one whose monster has reared its head again.

The eating disorder service finally reopens their books. They hire agency staff to deal with the backlog. They finally apologise. They send me a book. I am trying to be on holiday and I cry when I realise just how much this disorder has taken from me.

A weekend in Brighton. Running on the seafront. Two cocktails, sixteen-year-old drunk. The best food I've eaten in months. On a good day, my enthusiasm for food shines through- it makes me so happy. Maybe that's why the disorder is so painful, because it's taken something so full of joy and bound it with pain and bitterness. Eating in a pub garden for the first time this year. The scraping chairs, the clink of glasses, the chatting, the cigarette lighters, the dogs barking, the shuffling, the laughing, the children, the wallets, the keys rattle; the noises penetrate every part of my brain and makes me wonder how in god's name we did these things regularly before there was a pandemic. But then I have the best naan bread of your life, we order extra chips because you're adults who can do that, and I want to explode with love for the two people sitting beside me who are my chosen family. My eyes are brimming and I'm overwhelmed in the best way, the tears threaten to spill out, I can't

contain the things I'm feeling, and it's good to remember that things you're uncomfortable with can actually be enjoyable, sometimes.

We cannot make music. Not like we used to. We can sing, quietly. As if we are trying to reach out and grab hold of people, and just miss it. We curve in on ourselves. We tried to do it online. On WhatsApp, on FaceTime, on bloody Zoom. People created new ways of making work. But it was too strange. I lost interest. I didn't want to keep trying something that did not work. So I stopped. And I don't make music anymore. There is so much change to my previous normal and it hurts my heart.

I remembered what real life was like. Being in a friend's garden for an afternoon. Ordinary before, special now. It's funny when you realise what you miss.

Through the fence, he could see her. He didn't understand why they couldn't play. My heart broke. Three-year-olds don't understand social distancing.

For a while, London's streets were quiet. Roads were empty. Cars were gone. Everyone bunkered down, indoors. Families crammed into one bed flats. The streets were quiet. London was lifted. I could hear the birds and the leaves and my neighbour pottering in the garden didn't piss me off in the way it did before. It was peaceful. It felt like London had been reborn in the silence, the way it is every year on Christmas Day.

*It's only the elderly and disabled who will be affected by it.* Your only is my world. We are not disposable. My kids are not disposable.

I'm a little bit asthmatic. If I cough, don't be frightened. Now, I cough on the train. I couldn't cope with the dust. People look at me. I had to move. People look at you in an alien way. People are scared of us. Disabled and medicalised bodies - we are still the other. Now that they've seen what it can do to non-disabled people, they fear us. Once, I tried to donate eggs to a clinic. I found out that they won't accept them from autistic people. That hurt. People who desperately want children don't want to risk them turning out like us.

Speech therapists have been taking blood from patients at the hospital.

We are a perfect storm of disability. He loves her very much, but he loves her hard. The first payment covered one month's rent. It feels like we're being culled. As disabled people and as artists.