

First published 2017 as part of *Open: A Toolkit for How Magic and Messed Up Life Can Be*
by Macmillan Children's Books

This edition published 2018 by Macmillan Children's Books
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-5098-7699-0

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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

Designed by Janene Spencer
Printed and bound in China

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I am brave
I am brash
I am bold
I am wild
I love to cuddle
I am loud . . . but
I am vulnerable
I love to smooch
I am serene
I am bored
BUT ALWAYS EXCITED
I am goofy
I am beautiful
Why do I find it so hard to write that?
I am deeply saddened
but at the same time so happy
I LOVE my life and I love the world
I sometimes don't like myself though
I am not perfect
I'm sometimes tired
I am always raring to go

I am as deep as an old well
I am shallow like a lame puddle
I am strange
which means I am normal
I am not preaching
I am a friend
with an OPEN heart

I am me.

WELCOME

Welcome to *Open Your Heart: Learn to Love Your Life and Love Yourself.*

This book is here to be your guide in times of need. Keep it on your shelf and go to specific chapters during those moments in life that mess with your head, or leaf through and devour it cover to cover. By opening this book you have become part of #TeamOpen, and part of the movement for open hearts and minds. There is no one that this book isn't for.

During years of presenting, and more recently with *The Surgery* on BBC Radio 1, I've encountered a huge variety of people who are dealing with lots of different things in their own ways. My own life hasn't always been easy, and whilst I've dealt with some of the stuff that comes up in this book, I'm not an expert in everything – all I can do is communicate openly about what I've been through and be a friend. I've consulted lots of people who are experts in the issues covered, though – along with a list of people and organizations to speak to if you need more information on anything.

This book covers some tough stuff, but there's nothing you wouldn't find in the storyline of a popular soap opera, and definitely NOTHING you wouldn't find within a four-second Google search. *Open Your Heart* is about real life and everything that comes with it.

This book isn't all about me, it's also about you and all the other incredibly clever, brutally honest, brave and awesomely inspiring voices woven within its pages. This book is yours and I want you to personalize it in any way you see fit; to embellish it and make your own mark on the pages. There are no rules. Douse it in gorgeous gold pen, doodle across it with a blunt pencil or a defiant marker pen, or cover it in magical stickers – and whatever your approach, feel free to respond to however the words make you feel.

Just Bee You

DEAR READER

It's only been a year since the original *Open* was written, my blood, guts and pumping heart stitched together in a book – and SO much has happened since then. Time is an oddity when it comes to love and fun. It moves slowly on halcyon days, new surroundings and hazy holidays, or when you're waiting for the clock to move quicker and are looking forward to seeing someone or doing something in the future. But time, when it comes to love, can flip fast too. I look back breathlessly at this year and realize that love can change as intensely as it's created. Love is a storm, a perfect one – crashing, loud, wet, intense, exciting and scary.

Love, love, and all those fish in the sea

Have you ever opened your eyes underwater when swimming without goggles or a diving mask on? Exposed your eyeballs to the mystic scene underwater? Experienced the sparkling swimming-pool blues or those shafts of light that sear through the sea from the sun? It's beautiful. There's a second, maybe two, a few beats where everything feels magic. Then you realize you can't breathe, and that the loveliness has ended as quickly as it began. So you charge upwards to reach the surface again, to grab some necessary air. Once you're back in the air, you breathe for a while, take in what happened down there and bob along the top, kicking your feet, treading water as you go. Love feels like this for me right now. I've experienced yet another heartbreak since writing *Open*. Not only that, but I've cried out old ones too. I'm soaked in all the emotions of break-up and overblown thought and excitement for new horizons, bobbing along on the top, trying to catch a breath, still treading water. Trying to avoid jellyfish of the stinging variety – jellyfish called regret, bitterness, stupid decisions and societal expectation, I'm doggy-paddling to somewhere, where there are lots of tropical and lovely fish. There are plenty of fish in this sea.

I've even found myself reading the Heartbreak chapter of my own book, remembering that this thing called heartbreak, though it can ache, will get better. And at the end of the day, when I was putting my heart on the weighing scales, weighing up being either alone and happy or with someone and sad, I knew I had to take my own advice.

A Volcano Family

I'm not sure how I expected to get away with writing about the importance of 'opening up' without some of my bloodlines and relations doing the same. It's been a heady process – my own family members reaching out to tell me stories, and have important conversations and a bit of emotional grappling. But overall it's been important. I stand by the fact that life's a journey – there isn't one day when everything makes sense and you are protected from how family can bring up ALL THE FEELS. Everything written about my family is only my opinion after all. We all experience life in different ways and nobody is one thing, or one person's experience of them. I've learned to remember that it is never too late to reconnect with those in your family who once upset you or let you down, and to always assess whether raw emotion blurs solutions which might be better in the long run.

We can be whoever we damn well want to be, do whatever we want and change our own mind on whatever we fancy. There ain't nothing set in stone when it comes to our hearts, minds and decisions – not even loved ones.

Naked truth

This summer I took part in an experiment for BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*, with the brief to do less doom-mongering 'stats-based studio chat' and more actual ACTION: to get out there and talk to people on the streets. Two other presenters and I were given three days to come up with an activity or product that made women feel better about their bodies. I learned about the powerful feeling known as 'embodiment' from an expert psychologist specializing in body image.

There is a theory that in order to experience a positive understanding of our body, we need first and foremost to grasp and accept its importance in keeping us alive. My journey to capture this feeling has been both empowering and fun: I learned about the brilliance of life drawing by posing nude for a charcoal-sketching artist. Don't get me wrong, it was mightily strange pulling down my pants in front of my radio producer (I was hoping for a glamorous robe) but I kept on my Converse for good measure! It was fun not to be naked for washing or sex but just to sit with my naked self and let someone get lost in the shapes it forms by simply drawing it. We're so embarrassed by nudity in our culture and society – but I think there could be something in the idea of letting that go.

Just when you think you know everything about loving your life, your friends, your body and yourself, you'll learn a whole heap more. If there's something I'm sure of, it's that I'll never stop learning and I'll never stop loving.

This book is about every kind of love and relationship that might come your way, and what to do when it does.

Gemma

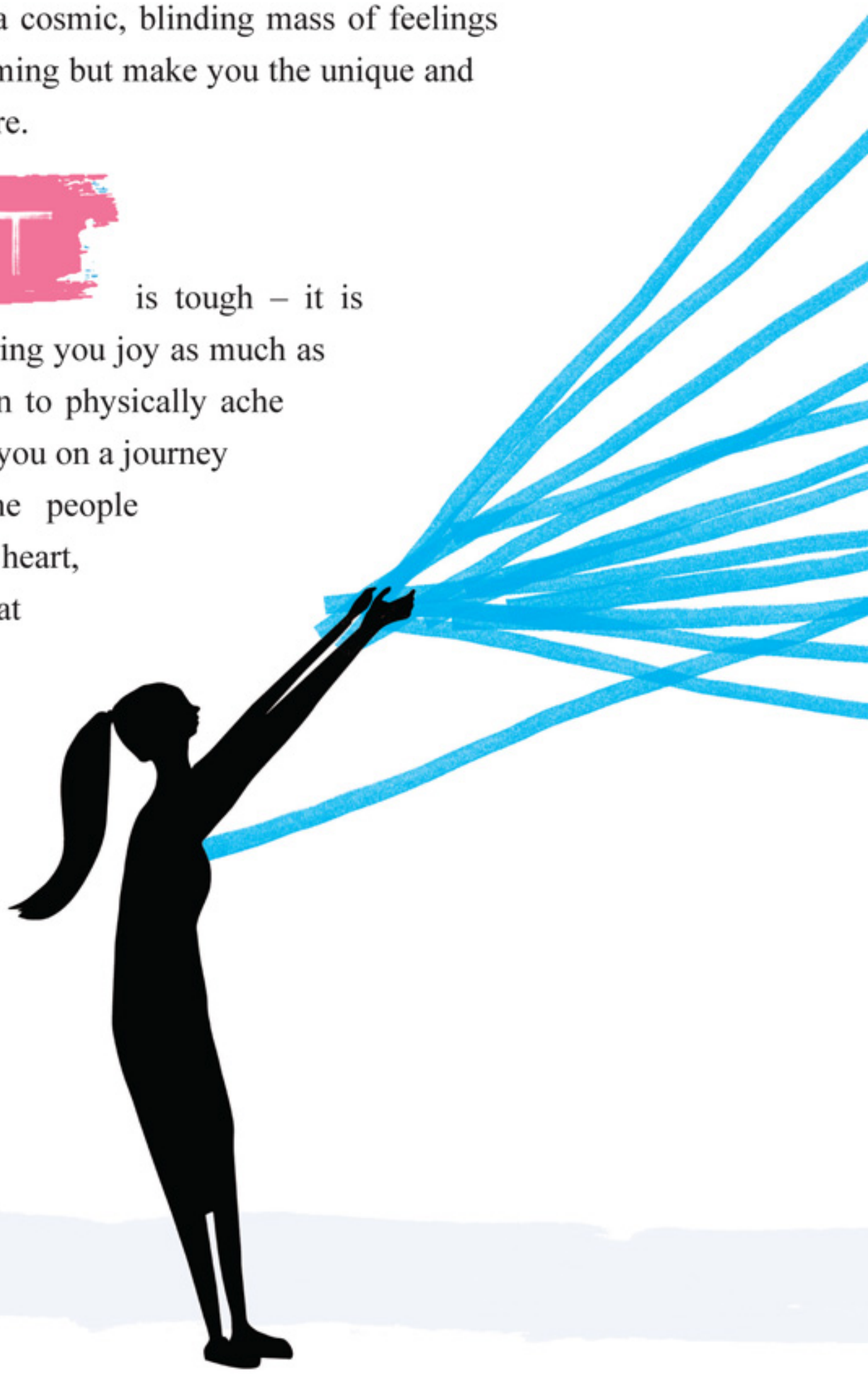

YOUR HEART

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YOUR HEART is precious. It is AWESOME. Not only does it pump blood around your body to keep you alive, but it is the root of your deepest emotions.

YOUR HEART is your Emotional Mothership, your inner hub – the place where you feel joy, happiness, anger, fear, sadness, heartbreak, confusion – a cosmic, blinding mass of feelings that can sometimes feel overwhelming but make you the unique and incredible human being that you are.

YOUR HEART is tough – it is a warrior – it will heal you and bring you joy as much as it will cause you to hurt and even to physically ache sometimes. Right now I'm taking you on a journey through your heart, through the people and situations that touch your heart, that bump it along the way, that soothe it and that make it want to burst with emotions.

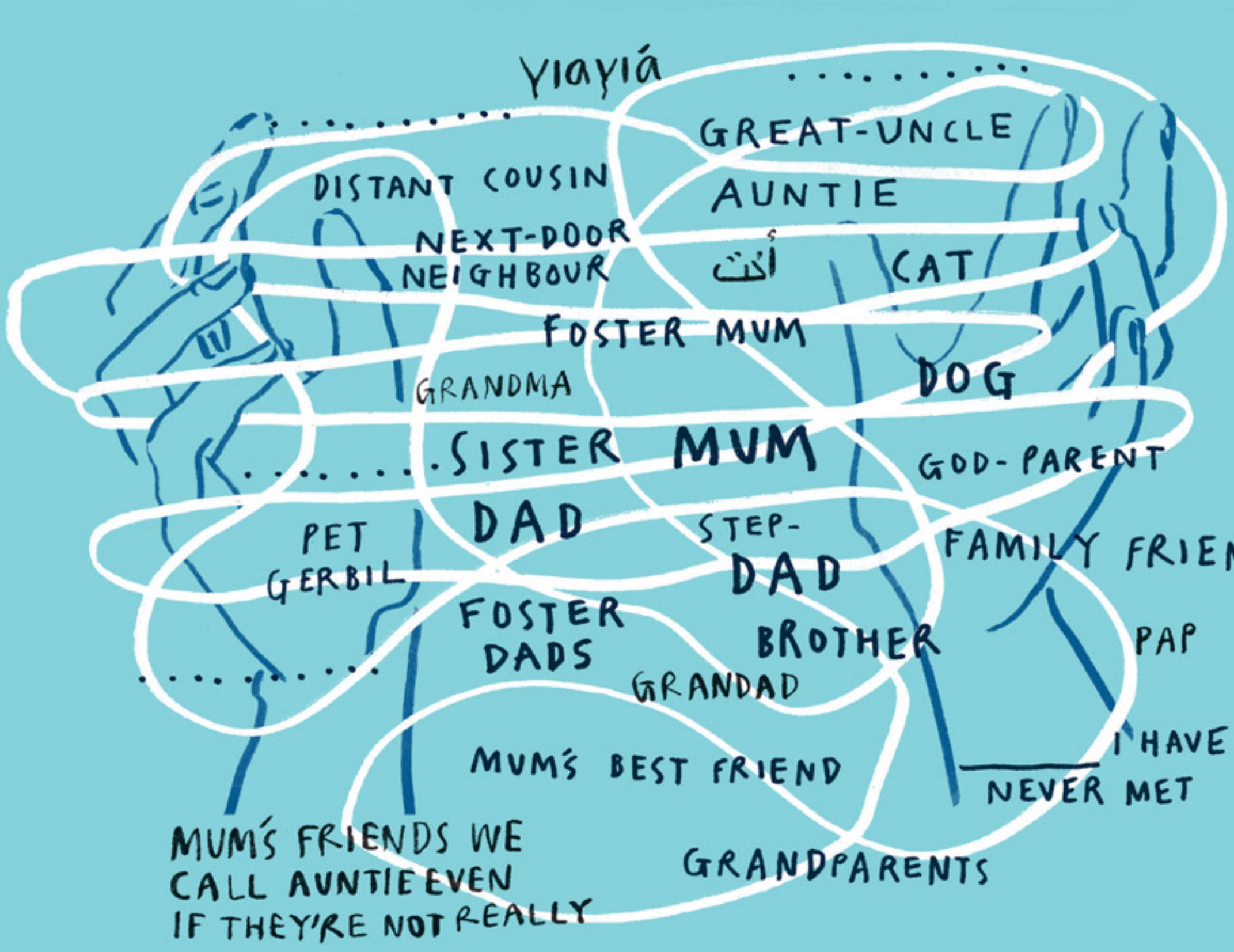


REMEMBER that at the centre of your heart is a wonderful, scary, intangible and dizzyingly powerful thing called **LOVE**.



Love is your greatest ally.
Whether it is for people, music,
plants - or a goldfish,
LOVE ALWAYS WINS.

FAMILY



Families are like balls made up of elastic bands, wrapped and bound and wound around each other, linked by similarities and connections. We are linked to others, but individuals too. The truth is that families aren't perfect, ever. More often than not, families are far from 'conventional'. But these peeps, the ones who brought us into the world, help form who we are and who we will go on to be.

Remember there is no such thing as a 'normal' family.

Let's kick off with PARENTS. When it comes to parents, we love to label them, don't we? There are step-parents, divorced parents, single parents, adopted parents, foster parents, estranged parents, good parents, bad parents, boring parents, uptight parents, possessive parents, depressed parents, parents that argue, so-in-love-it-grosses-us-out-cos-we-hear-them-having-sex-sometimes parents, parents-we-never-see-for-some-reason-like-'they-are-always-at-work' parents, parents who are hard to please, parents who have passed away, parents we miss so much it makes our eyes sting at the thought of them.

Then there are those beings (more like aliens) we call siblings: BROTHERS and SISTERS. When it comes to brothers and sisters, the labels and emotive descriptions come thick and fast out of the box again: step-siblings, siblings you get on really well with, siblings you hate, siblings you envy, competitive siblings, siblings you have nothing to say to, siblings you've never met, half-brothers or half-sisters.

Or of course you might be an ONLY CHILD, or maybe you feel like an only child because your sibling or siblings are a lot older or younger than you and you didn't grow up with them.

IT'S COMPLICATED...

Hand in the air if you can identify with one or more of these families? Millions of us have higgledy-piggledy, eclectic family trees. Some of us have detailed horror stories and fabulous family-specific tales that drip from the leaves too. I do, and so do most of the people I know. Even if we find our personal family patchwork generally OK, at some point EVERYONE FINDS THEIR FAMILY EMBARRASSING.

No one – and I repeat NO ONE – escapes that.