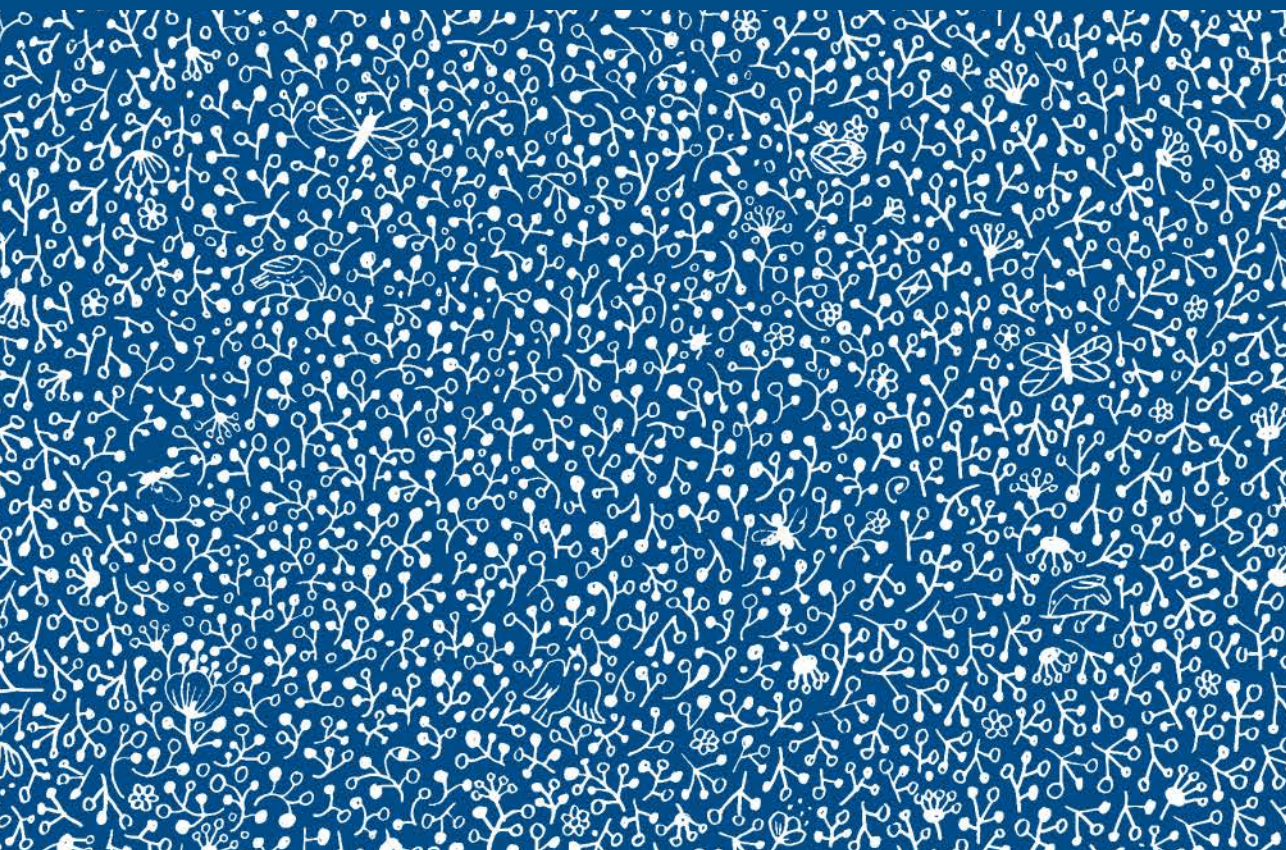
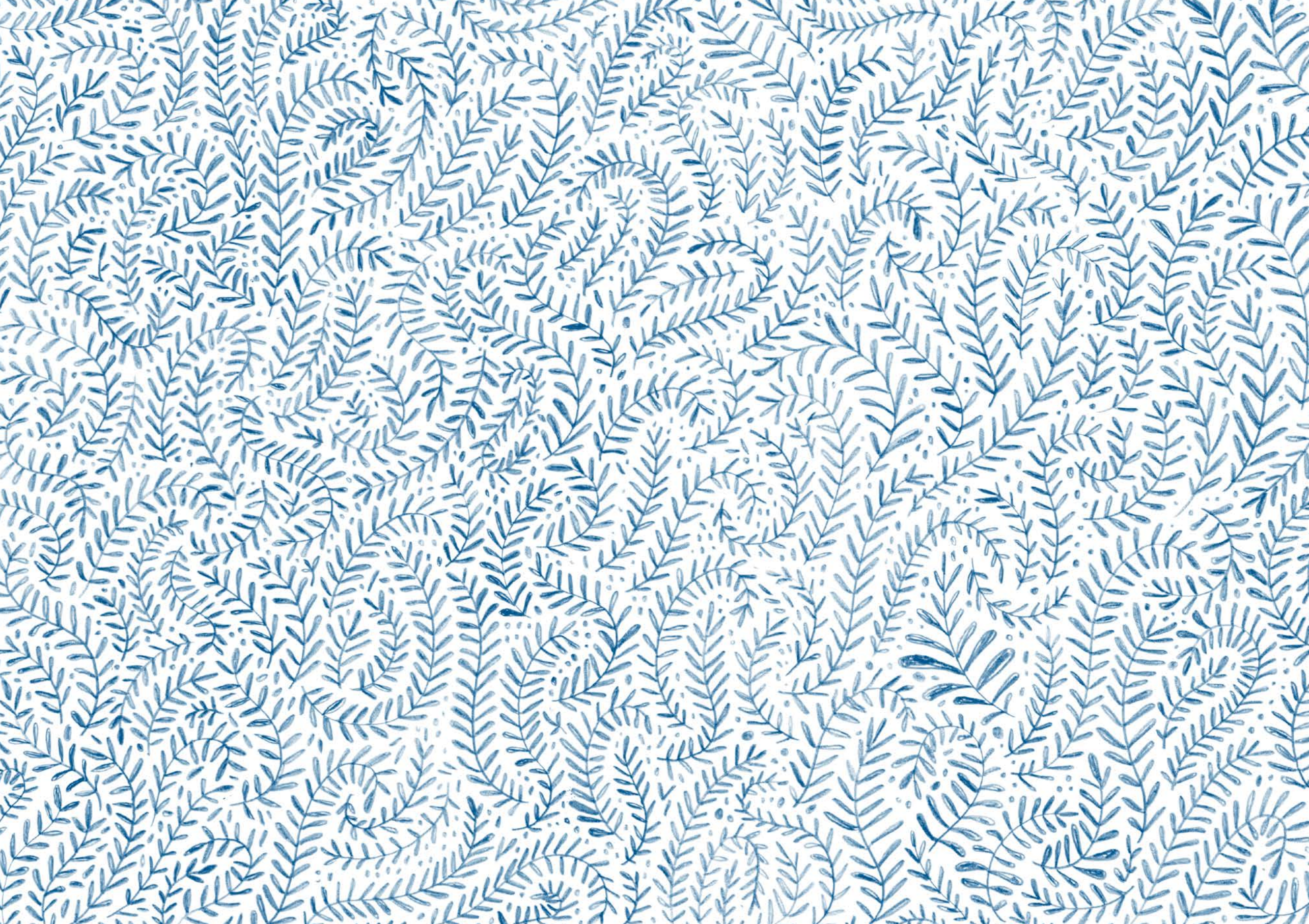




# *My Child*

Hilde Hagerup & Kristin Roskifte







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## MY CHILD

You are mine.  
I am yours.

During the night you come to my room.

You drag your duvet,  
your pillow, your teddy bear.  
At times you come with a whole little bundle in tow.

Then you clamber up,  
crawl in beside me.  
And I'm only vaguely aware of your presence.

Sometimes I don't even notice that you've climbed in alongside me.  
I wake up to the feeling of a foot at the small of my back,  
or a little someone twisting and turning by my side.

Someone with sore toes.  
Someone with nightmares.

And that someone is you.

And I wrap an arm around you and sing in your ear.  
I don't know what I sing.  
I'm far too tired to know.  
I make up melodies.  
I listen to the sound of your breathing,  
as it slows, calms.  
My child.

## BREAKFAST

Morning dawns, bringing bread with jam.  
And milk.  
And an apple, cut into pieces at the kitchen worktop  
as I stand with my back to you, listening to you.  
I listen to your voice,  
chattering all the while,  
and you say some of the funniest things.

Because today you think everything is funny.

‘Can you hop, Mummy? You look so funny  
when you hop, Mummy. Hop, Mummy, hop!’

And I stand at the kitchen worktop  
and cut an apple into pieces and I hop.  
Hop, hop, hop.

But I am so tired.  
I barely slept.  
Just a little.  
And not deeply.

My legs can barely carry me.

And you sit in your chair and drink your milk and laugh  
and clap your hands.

‘Hop, hop, Mummy! Hop!’

You clap, and your glass of milk tumbles.  
There is milk all over the table, and on your chair, and on the floor.  
White rivers running in all directions.  
Dripping and flowing.



Pieces of bread become little boats  
embarking on intrepid voyages.

I tear kitchen paper from the roll and mop up the milk until  
the paper is sopping wet, but experience teaches me nothing.  
I just do the same thing again.

Tear kitchen paper from the roll, get down on my hands and knees,  
and stem the rivers that trickle in all directions, never ending.  
It's not kitchen paper I need, but a cloth.

My legs can barely carry me.

## GETTING YOU DRESSED

'Do you want to get yourself dressed?' I ask after mopping up the floor.  
You shake your head.  
You don't want to get yourself dressed. Absolutely no way.  
If there is anything you absolutely do not want to do,  
it is to get yourself dressed.  
And especially not in your woolly jumper.  
Your woolly jumper is itchy.

'It's not itchy,' I say.  
'It is!' you reply. 'It's itchy!'  
And you are on the verge of tears and I feel my temper flare.  
I've barely slept a wink.  
You're on the verge of tears.

'It's not itchy,' I say, and I take you by the arm, haul you  
up onto my lap and pull the jumper over your head.  
'There.'  
And you wail.  
Of course.  
How you wail!

Immediately I regret it, but I can't stop now.  
I'll have to sit here all day with a wailing child on my knee.  
I'll have to call work and tell them I can't come in today  
because of the wailing. It'll be all but impossible for me  
to go to the toilet because of the wailing.  
I won't be able to brush my teeth and I won't get a single bite to eat.  
And all because of the wailing.  
You wrestle your arms free from the woolly jumper and scream.

And then I feel it as your arm grazes my face.  
I realise that you're right. The woolly jumper is itchy, like sharp barbs  
all over your skin, prickling like a million tiny pins.





I pull off the jumper without saying a word,  
stroke your soft head, cup a hand around your cheek.  
And you stop wailing.  
You just whimper.  
You hiccup.

I can't go to work because of the whimpering and hiccuping.  
I sit with you in my lap as your whimpering and hiccuping eases,  
growing softer and softer.  
Until you are done.

And we are running late.  
And I haven't had any breakfast this morning.  
I didn't sit and eat with you at the table or  
light the candles in the blue candlestick.

The candlestick is on the kitchen bench.  
We hardly ever use it.  
I thought we'd use it much more frequently than this.  
Thought we'd light candles more often.  
Thought we might have enjoyed better times.  
I've tried to do things right.  
I've tried to do all of the things I thought we should do.  
All the things we never managed to find the time for.

I eat my breakfast standing up.  
Lingering by the kitchen worktop.  
I eat my breakfast just as I've taught you that you shouldn't.

I slice off a sliver of smoked salmon.  
Cram it straight into my mouth with my fingers.  
Scoff, scoff, scoff.

I don't light the candles.  
I fold my slice of bread in half.  
Munch on it with my mouth open.



Ten minutes until we need to be out of the door.  
Five minutes until we need to be done in the bathroom.  
I set things in motion.  
Start by cramming my food in my mouth.  
Gulping it down.  
Scoffing away like a pig.

You've found your princess dress.  
'I'll take that,' you say. 'I like it,' you tell me. 'It's not itchy.'  
'And I'll take the crown, please! And the glittery shoes! And the truck!'  
And you grasp your truck tightly and spin around in front of me  
on the kitchen floor, a dance.

'Shall we go to nursery?' I ask.  
You're not supposed to ask children questions like that.  
It's us, the grown-ups, that decide.  
You shouldn't give children options that aren't real options.  
It shows a lack of clarity. It's important to be clear.  
If you are not clear, then you've lost.  
What am I supposed to do if you say no?  
What am I supposed to do if you tell me  
that you don't want to go to nursery?  
But you don't tell me that. Instead you clap your hands.  
'Yes, yes!' you cry. 'Nursery!' you sing, and leap and jump,  
up and down, your princess dress floating up around you,  
and you are no longer a dancer, but a flower in full bloom.

And when the flower settles down it takes a deep bow  
before the audience.  
Which is me.  
The audience claps.  
We have just enough time for a round of applause.  
And then we really do have to get going.



## OUTSIDE

It's chilly outside.

Chilly like only mornings can be.

Grey like only mornings can be.

September.

Rolled out at our feet is a carpet of months that grow darker and darker,  
an ice-cold carpet that stretches through a long, gloomy corridor  
that we have already wandered into.

We've made it out the front door.

And I squeeze your hand extra tightly in my own.

I squeeze your hand extra tightly in my own, and as I do so  
I think about the clothes you have at nursery. Do you have enough?  
Do you have your raincoat and your warm jumper and your down  
coat? Do you have everything you need? Do you have your scarf and  
hat and gloves, and what about your buff, do you have that too? And  
your thermals and socks and underwear?  
What do you actually even have at nursery, I wonder, but the first  
raindrops fall from the grey sky and land on our noses.

And I hadn't even noticed it, but you've slowed down, and now you're  
trailing behind me, so I keep up my pace and pull you along with me.  
Not on purpose.

And I wonder if it's like this for you every day.

I wonder if I tug on your arm every day,

if I'm constantly walking and pulling you along with me.

I wonder if it hurts your shoulder when I pull you up the stairs.

'Come on,' I say. 'You need to get a move on.'

Even though we have plenty of time, even though  
there's no reason at all to hurry you along.

'I want to pick berries!' you say, pointing at the edge of the pavement.



Between the asphalt and the fence, between the grey and the yellow,  
something is growing. Something green and red, something that  
shouldn't be there, not now, not at this time of year.

Large and wet, speckled with water droplets.

Wild strawberries.

I'm sure they must be rotten by now.

They must be rotten by now, I think.

But you throw yourself at them, you want them.

You have to have them.

You want to pick the red berries, heavy with raindrops,  
to place them on your tongue and savour every last morsel.

The wild strawberries disappear in your rosy pink palm,  
mingling with sweat and dirt and breadcrumbs.

Patiently I stand, watching you.

Impatiently I stand, watching you.

I'm not watching you.

I'm watching the clock.

I glance at the time on my mobile phone.

I don't light up a cigarette.

I check the email.

'Do you want one?' you ask.

'No,' I say. 'I don't like you picking berries from the edge of the  
pavement. A dog might have weed on them, they might be dirty.'

Why do I say it?

What am I doing?

Your face falls.

You're made of sand.

Soon you'll crumble and trickle away into nothing.



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