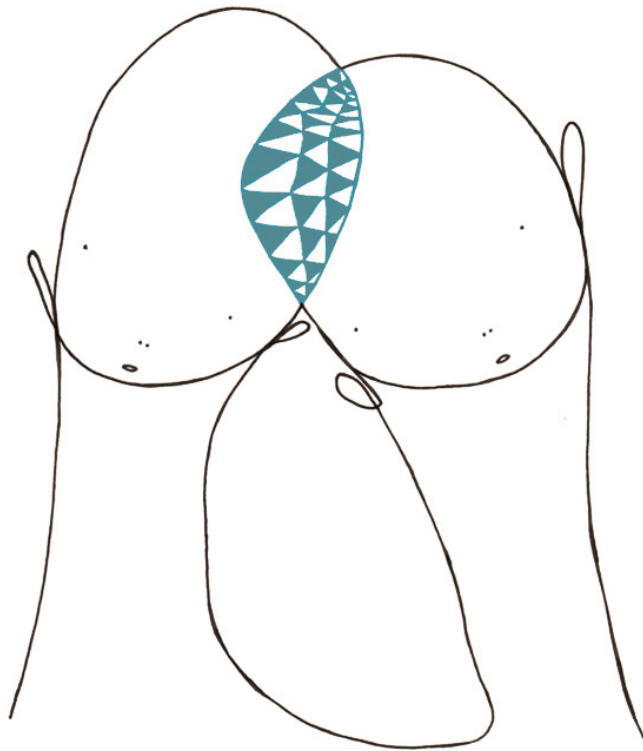


Five Dials



Your Valentine's Day Card

Illustration by SOPHIA AUGUSTA

Future Dating

Sat along rotating pine benches,
we wear scrolling badges that display:
Name; Favourite thing; Emotional state.
I am Joe; Money; Anxious
as Porcia; Old buildings; Extraordinary
swivels into view with art deco
cheekbones, sky-rise posture.
She speaks in intricate structures
with witty stucco asides
and is either marriage material
or a one-off demolition-snog
in a room full of Lego.
I give her green as she dioramas
into Karen; Knitting; Distracted:
her chopsticks clicking
as though making a scarf
from her udon noodles;
our three minutes pass in excruciating
knit one purl one chit chat.
She sucks up her tongue
and draws a frowning emoticon
in the air, before swishing away
as George; The Nineties; Superior
slides over, saying she likes my retro avatar
and it turns out we both still use Mozilla
“Keepin’ it old skool!”
– High five –
“LOL!”
then our three minutes are gone
and I’m thumping green
as Sylvia; Firearms; Impatient
appears: shotgun eyes, fingers twitching,
white gunk at the corners of her mouth.
I smell her feet from under the table:
fragrance of murderer’s glove
and I’m pressing red and red
as Kate; Imperfections; Unclear
pulls up with semi-translucent hair.
I compliment her body, her lips,
the infinite detail of her eyes
but she says she can take no credit.
Then she’s screaming, quietly,
that her battery’s about to die
as she starts to fizz like an unearthed plug.