

# MAP PSALM



## SHEPHERD

There's a picture on my childhood wall that I gaze at before sleeping, on waking, or whenever I'm ill. It's all in shades of blue, pink, lilac sunrise. A tall blonde young man, hair and beard cascading down in enviable waves, dressed in robes that look like my bedsheets, a soft sheep leaning into his legs. He has a kind smile. No wonder the lamb looks up adoringly. But I feel that smile on me, for me. And I always feel comforted, safe. Although I don't know why.

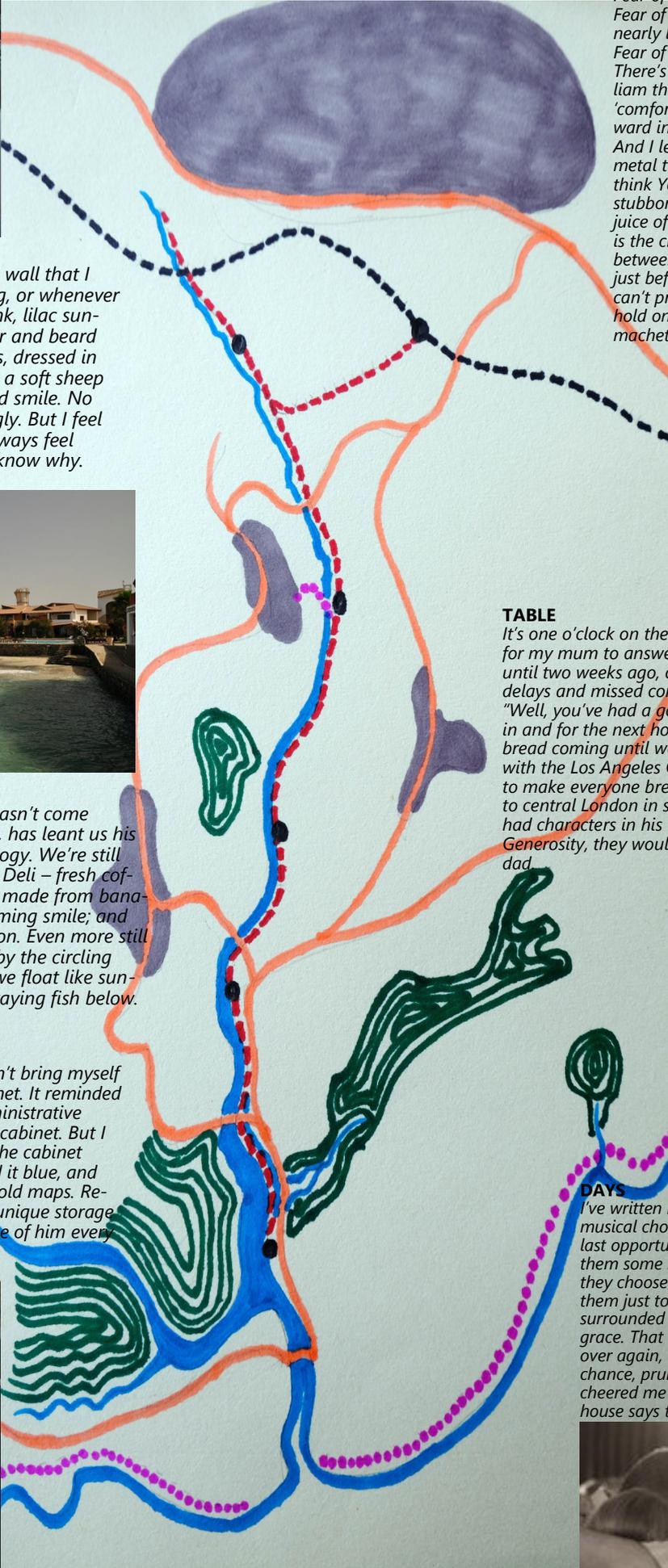


## STILL WATERS

Steve the Fish, whose licence still hasn't come through for our promised boat trip, has leant us his snorkelling gear by way of an apology. We're still full from breakfast in Papaya Café Deli – fresh coffee, mango juice, and French toast made from banana bread; Paterson's always welcoming smile; and the still blue ocean in every direction. Even more still are the turquoise waters enclosed by the circling arms of the Old Harbour walls as we float like sun-baked clouds above the darting swaying fish below.

## RESTORE

When we cleared Dad's flat, I couldn't bring myself to give away his wooden filing cabinet. It reminded me too much of his pride in his administrative skills. We didn't need another filing cabinet. But I removed the metal inserts, sanded the cabinet down, replaced the handles, painted it blue, and decouped the drawer fronts with old maps. Restored, renewed, repurposed into a unique storage unit in our lounge which reminds me of him every time I look at it.



## DEATH

i have walked alongside so many people treading this valley, lending them my strength to lean on, absorbing their anxieties. But when death threatened me and mine, I have been full of fear. Fear of how to live without my parents. Fear of how to take their place in the family tree. Fear of basic failure as a parent when we so nearly lost our son. Fear of the unknown path. Fear of fear itself.

There's a picture on the Bayeux Tapestry of William the Conqueror's Bishop brother labelled as 'comforting' his troops as he pushes them forward into a hail of arrows with his battle club. And I learned recently that a shepherd's rod is a metal tipped weapon to beat away predators. I think You leant me Yours to fight with every stubborn DNA gene in me and every squeezed juice of maternal fierceness. I learned that a staff is the crook used to rescue fallen lambs. And between us, we hooked and hauled my boy back just before he hit that place of no return. So I can't promise to stop feeling fearful but I will hold onto those tools You have given me to machete my way through.



## TABLE

It's one o'clock on the morning, I'm eighteen, and I'm waiting for my mum to answer the door. Six tall young men, strangers until two weeks ago, circle behind me, thanks to transport delays and missed connections. Mum takes one look and says: "Well, you've had a good holiday!" But she welcomes them all in and for the next hour or two, keeps the bacon, eggs, beans, bread coming until we can eat no more, while we catch up with the Los Angeles Olympics on TV. Next day, she's up early to make everyone breakfast before Dad drives the boys back to central London in shifts to catch their trains. If John Bunyan had characters in his Pilgrims Progress called Hospitality and Generosity, they would have looked just like my mum and dad.



## DAYS

I've written my funeral instructions. Several times (my musical choices vary with my changing tastes). It's my last opportunity to boss my family about, or save them some stress, depending how you look at it. But if they choose to ignore me (as if I'll know!), then I'd like them just to remember this: that all my life, I was surrounded by undeserved, unlooked for, love and grace. That God never gave up on me. That over and over again, He picked me up, gave me another chance, pruned and manured me so I could grow, and cheered me on unstintingly. And that the door on His house says this: WELCOME HOME.

