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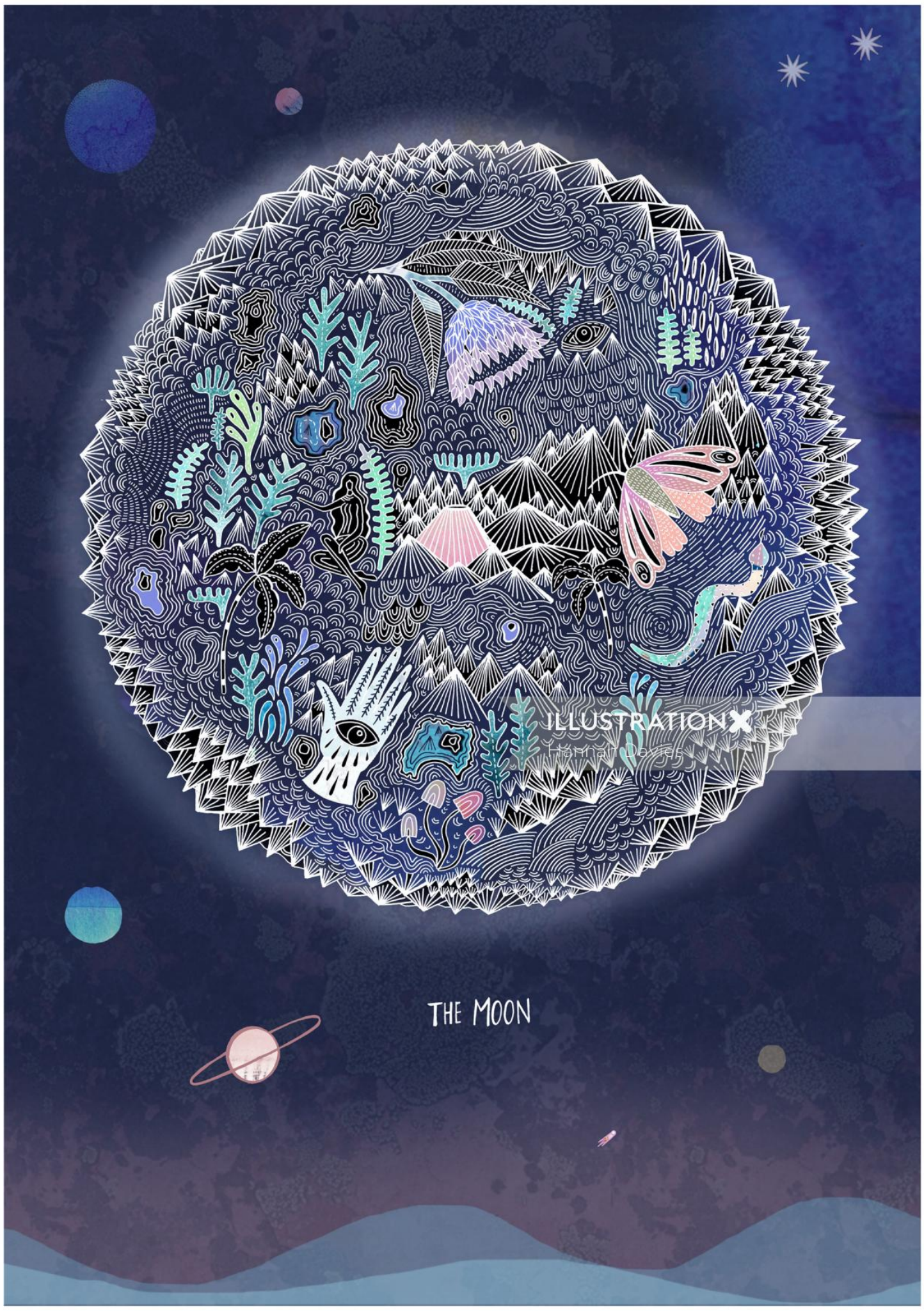

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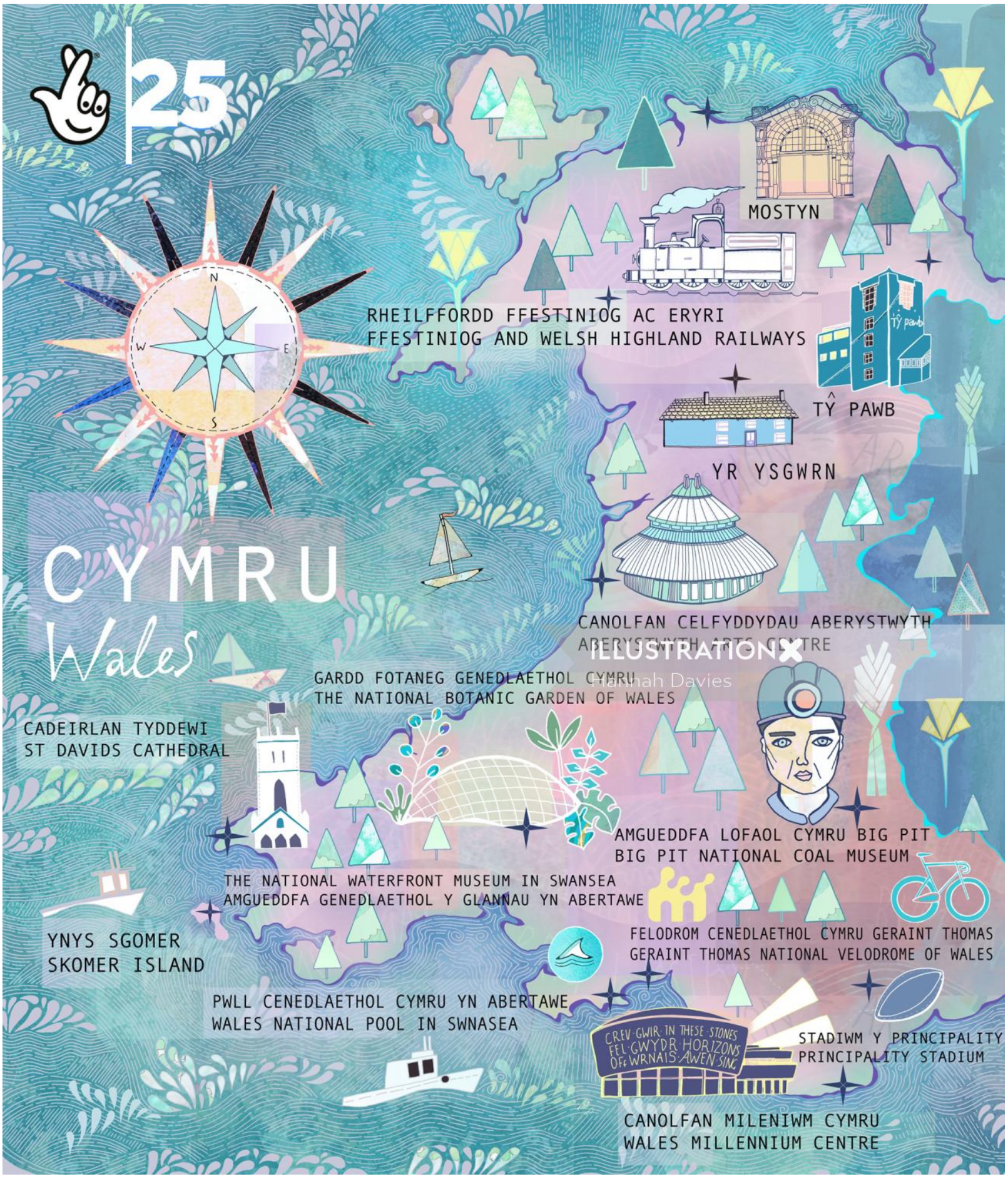

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Wellbeing

The power of dreams

Athena Laz says they can help us tackle issues in our everyday lives. She lets Jane Garton in on the ways we can harness and interpret them

Why do we dream? How do dreams relate to life? Why do some of us dream more than others? And can they help? These are some questions clients bring to counselling psychologist and dream teacher Athena Laz.

"My dreams have always helped me. I've received creative solutions and insights from them in my life," Athena explains. "That's why, after I qualified as a psychologist in my twenties and my love for dreams deepened, I decided to become a dream teacher."

She recalls a pivotal dream she had. "I was unemployed and my life was frenetic. In the dream, I was driving along listening to music when I noticed a jaguar in the back seat. I panicked. Waking up, I couldn't shake the dream, so to distract myself I went to a bookshop. The assistant handed me a pile of books, and on top was one called *Jaguar Woman*. In awe of that synchronicity, I bought it. A jaguar is a symbol of power and my dream helped me put my life in order."

"Many people have become disconnected from their dreams, believing they have no meaning," observes Athena, author of a new book, *The Alchemy of Your Dreams*. "In fact, your dreams help you connect with your inner landscape, providing a link between your inner and outer world. Their purpose is to help you become more aware of your connection to a larger force."

Once you start to be more dream attentive, and jot them down when you wake up, you can explore a deeper meaning. You may see themes, which you can link to daily life.

"I've kept a dream journal for years, and over time I can see specific styles of dreams emerging if I'm dealing with a particular emotional way of dealing with something. Looking back over these can be very helpful," says Athena. "Recurring images, which are there every morning are hard to dismiss, and may be trying to tell you something.

"They may be a sign of things you are trying to avoid that you need to face up to. I used to have repetitive dreams of being on a boat on a very choppy ocean. The experience was petrifying. At the time, my emotions were bubbling below the surface of my consciousness. Those dreams showed me I needed to find a healthy outlet for them."

Those bizarre lockdown dreams so many of us experienced reflect the stressful times we're living through, Athena says. "Dreams reflect life experiences, memories and symbolic associations. All dreams are purposeful and timely – even if they're uncomfortable – and convey helpful messages if you pay attention to them."

We all dream nightly, but Athena sees many clients who say they never remember them. "If you are stressed or exhausted, they become harder to recall. As soon as you start nurturing and becoming more aware of your dreams they get easier to remember. It can help if you set an intention to recall your dreams before sleep," suggests Athena. "Do this every night and you should see an improvement."

> 'All dreams are purposeful, timely and can be helpful'

She wants more of us to harness the power of dreams through so-called lucid dreaming. "Regular dreams are those rich with imagery, symbols and stories – the nightly excursions you find yourself taking – while lucid dreams are when you are awake in a dream although physiologically your are asleep," she explains.

Anyone can learn to be a lucid dreamer, she asserts, although it does take practice. But once you become proficient you can interact with them in a more positive way, and that can help you work through your emotions and actively solve problems.

"Many of us spend too much time looking outwards," she observes, "which can be overwhelming, when in fact the path forward often lies within."

The Alchemy of Your Dreams: A Modern Guide to the Ancient Art of Lucid Dreaming and Interpretation (Yellow Kite) is out now

MAKE A NOTE WHEN YOU WAKE UP

- Keep a notebook beside your bed.
- On waking, write down what you remember about your dream. Include as much detail as possible, noting down any scenery, people or feelings that featured.
- Underline anything that feels especially important to you at the time.
- Every week or month highlight any dream symbols that appear repeatedly.
- Read through these again and see if you can identify an underlying theme to help you become aware of what needs to be integrated or changed in your life.
- The ultimate goal is to use these themes (your dream messages) for personal growth.
- When trying to understand dreams, take into account your own associations to universal dream symbols. For example, we may have an image of the ideal mother but our experiences with our own mothers – who may not have fulfilled this stereotype – will influence how we react to this symbol if it recurs.

READING YOUR DREAMS

Athena looks at some common themes and what they could be trying to tell you

Teeth falling out
Dreams about teeth invite you to see how you are assimilating (chewing-up) or not assimilating (unable to chew) people, situations and emotions. "Are you in harmony or disharmony with elements or significant people in your life?"

Always late
Time is running away from you – or are you running away from aspects of yourself and/or any uncomfortable responsibilities? Such dreams could also be telling you to slow down, enjoy the journey and minimise stress.

[illegible] fantasy
Unless you're an actual pharaoh in need, it could mean you need to find a private space to release [illegible] coming onto. There is usually urgency to such a dream and an underlying sense of embarrassment – so ask yourself, "How can I release any shame or guilt I'm experiencing in my life?"

Flying like a bird
Personal freedom and expansion are around the corner – this is telling you to hold on to good vibrations and emotions.

Being chased
Ask yourself: "What or who am I running away from?" The person chasing you could hold the key to your emotional freedom.

Being trapped
Is there a suffocating person or experience in your life that needs to be addressed? If so, it's time to break free from limitations and open the door to expansion.

Being naked in public
This is alerting you to a situation outside your control that you need to clothe/shield yourself from. It can be symbolic of personal discomfort with intimacy or vulnerability.

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Illustration: Hannah Davies/Illustration X. Photography: Rebecca Douglas

24 HOURS ON MY PLATE

Gemma Cairney

The author and broadcaster admits to an erratic diet but loves her greens, fresh fish and seafood

"Getting up at around 8am, I had a black coffee. I really appreciate the joy of a morning coffee made properly by someone I love – aka my boyfriend Cameron. There was no time for breakfast as I had to do a voiceover for *Landmark*, my new Sky Arts series to create the UK's next major landmark.

"By lunchtime I was ravenous, so we went to a lovely vegetarian café, Roots in Edinburgh's West End, where I had a **Mexican wrap with black beans and vegan cheese, plus a leaf salad with balsamic vinegar and guacamole. To drink I had a tropical smoothie with pineapple, mango and orange, some water and another black coffee. I drink alkalined water throughout the day.**

"I'm recovering from a broken leg, so in the afternoon I saw my osteopath. I had another glass of water. Back home I ate some pastries with Cameron while sitting in the sun. Dinner was leftover lentil soup with couscous and a salad with avocado and greens sprinkled with loads of dukkah.

"I have quite an erratic diet although I am trying to lean towards stuff that makes me feel good. I naturally crave greens, nuts and seeds, but also love spaghetti – the taste, the texture and the gorgeous theatre of wrapping it around a fork. Fish and seafood are other favourites. We recently stayed on a remote Scottish island, and ate freshly caught lobster and langoustines straight from the sea. It was one of my most memorable meals ever."

Landmark, Sky Arts, 8pm on Mondays from 6 September and also on NOW TV
Interview: Patsy Westcott

VERDICT

Dr Emma Williams, Partner & nutritionist, says
"Beans and lentils pack a fibre punch, helping lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers – 30g per day is recommended. Nuts and seeds (in the dukkah) can help top up key nutrients (little powerhouses of nutrition). You exceeded 5 a day, but for more energy, do try to eat something before you leave the house – thus saving on the pastries later! Scientifically speaking, the jury is still out for alkaline water – tap water will suffice (6-8 glasses of fluids).
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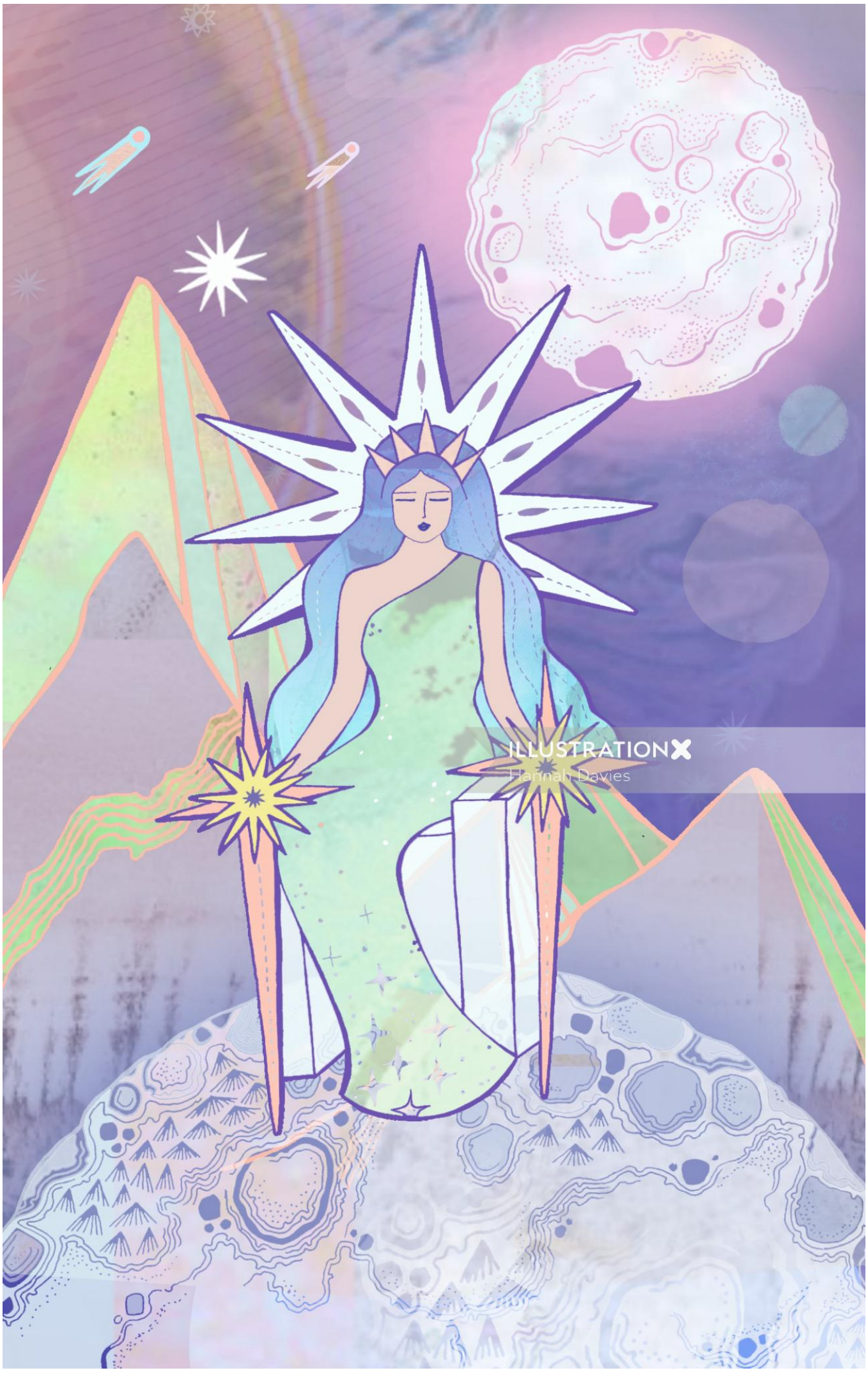

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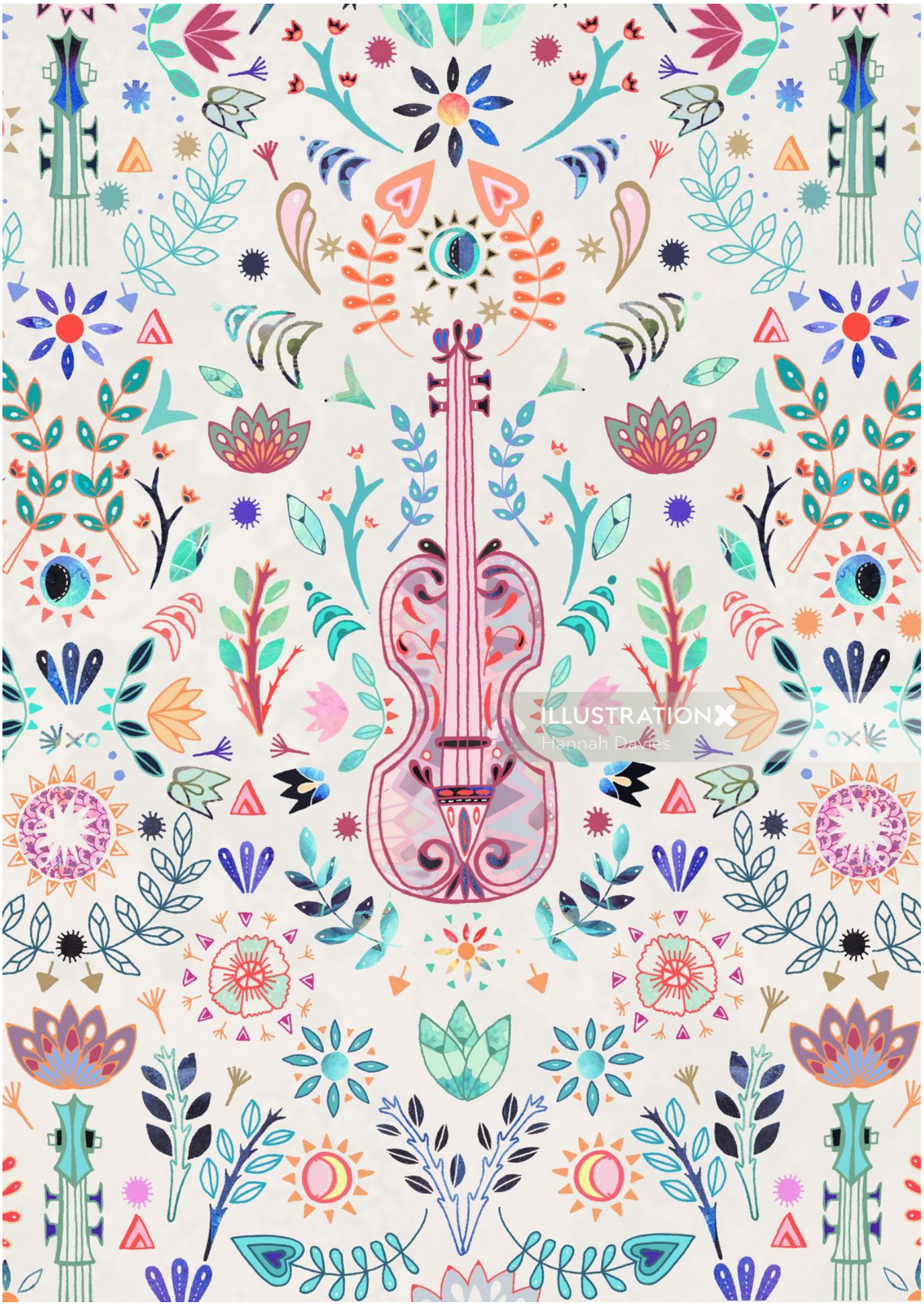

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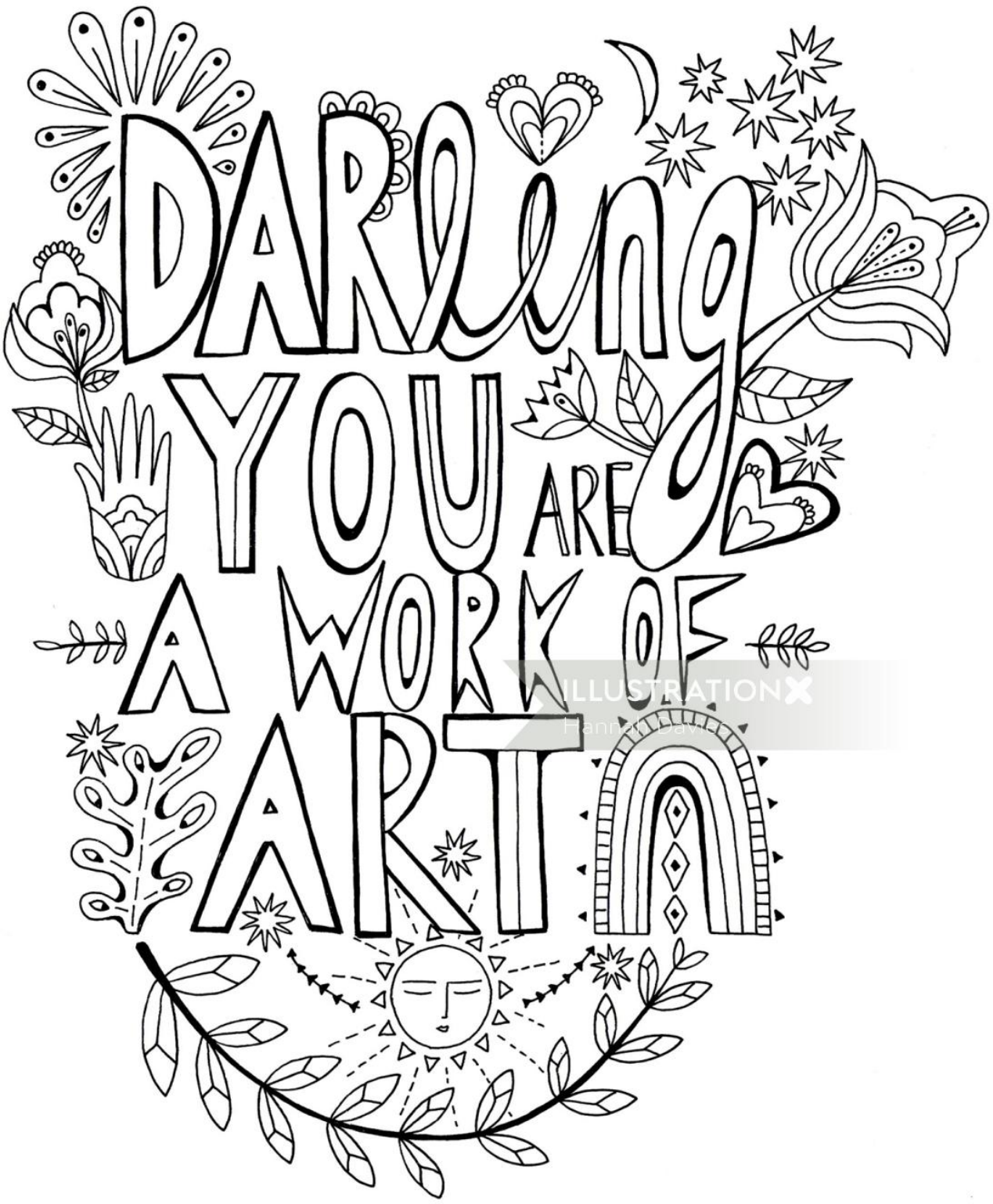

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WARRIOR WOMEN COLLECTIVE

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