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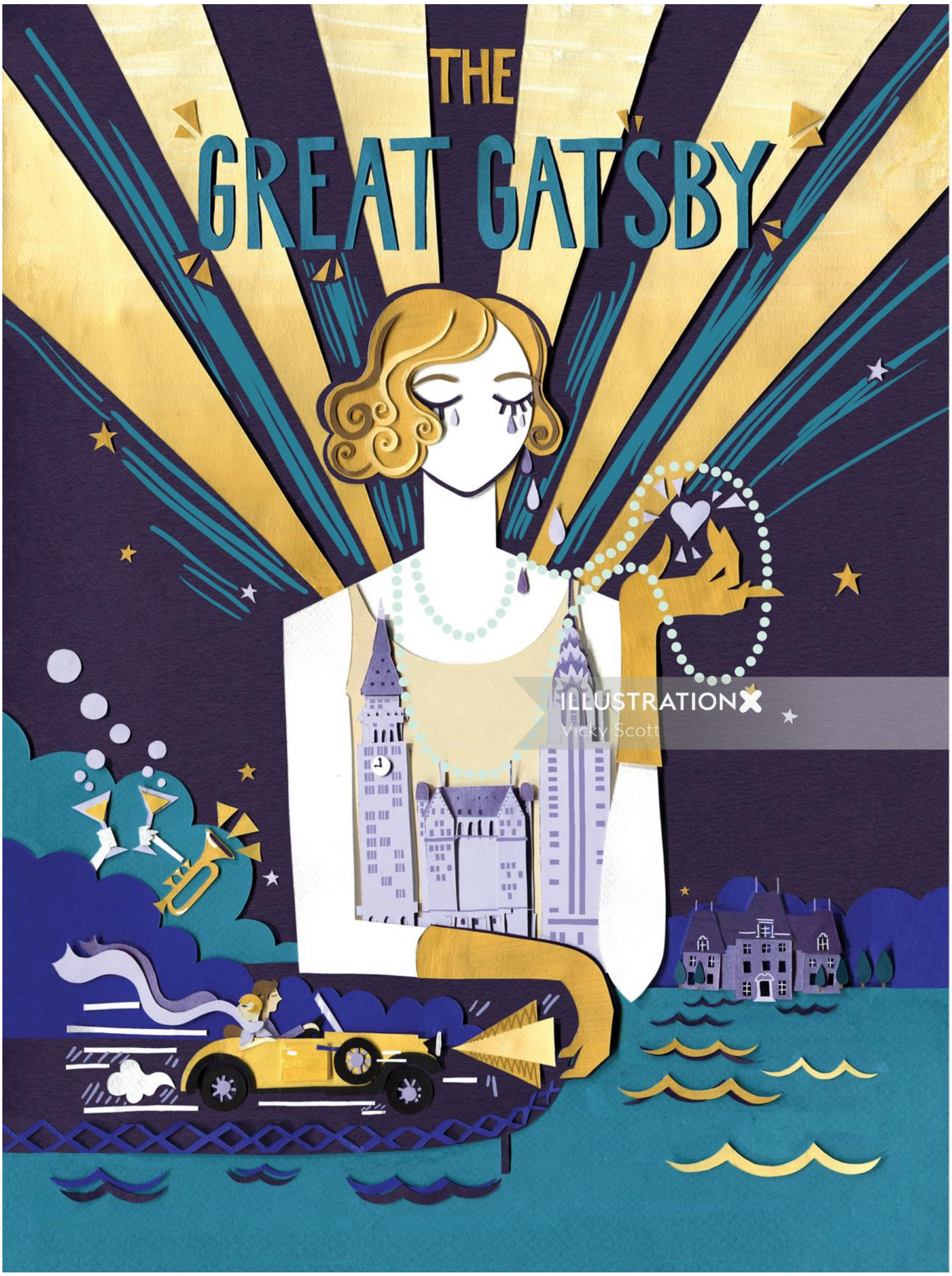

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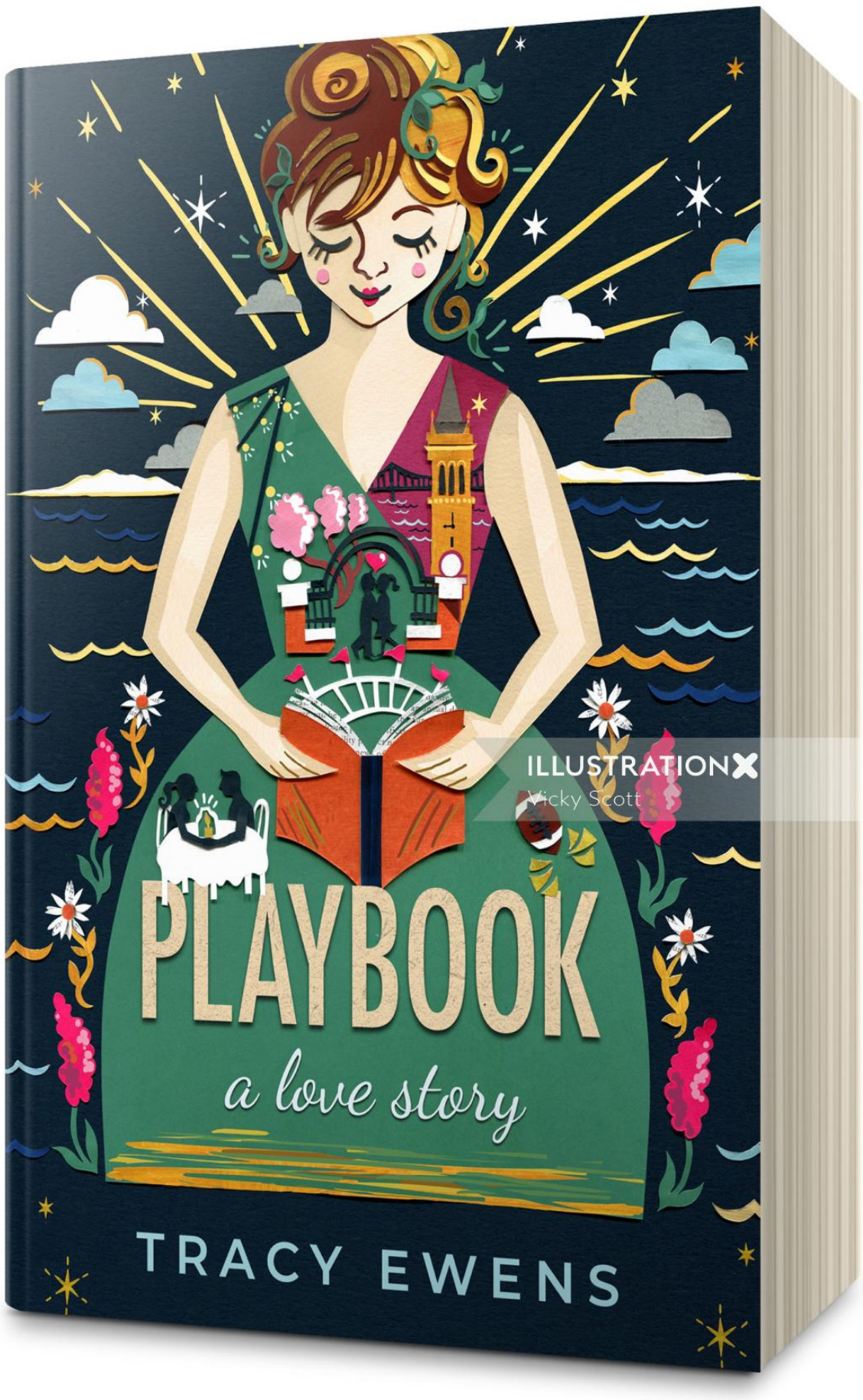

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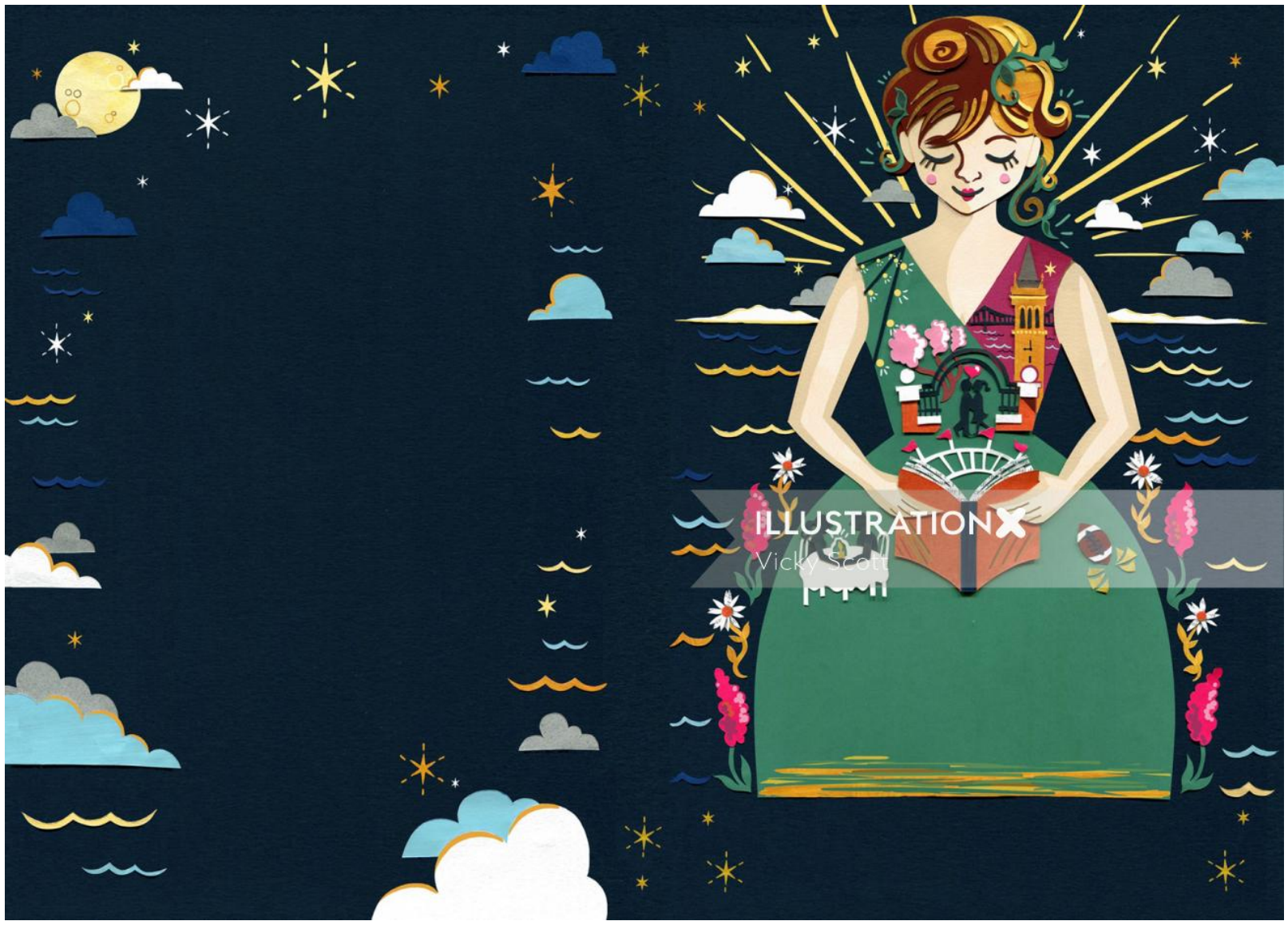

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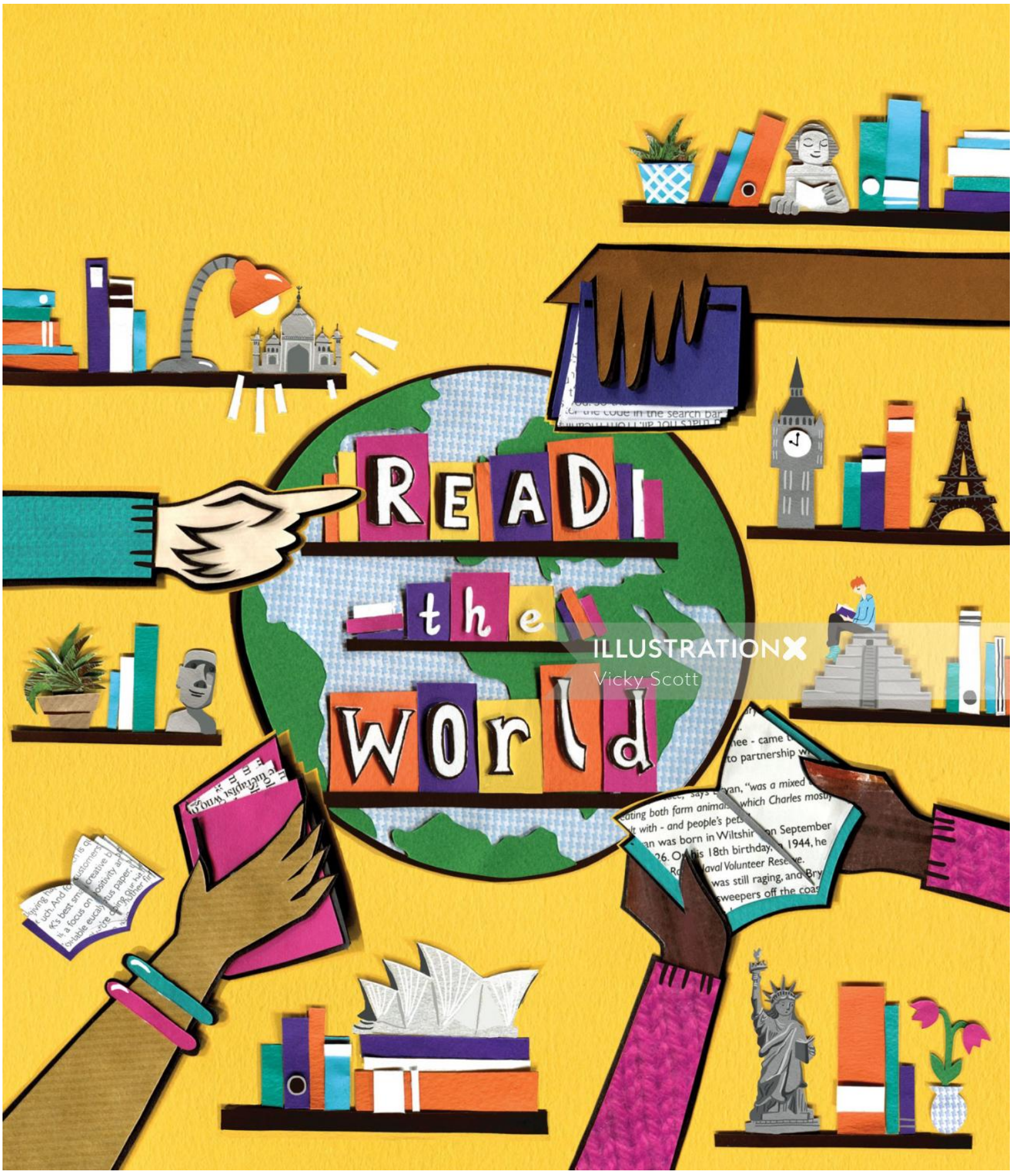

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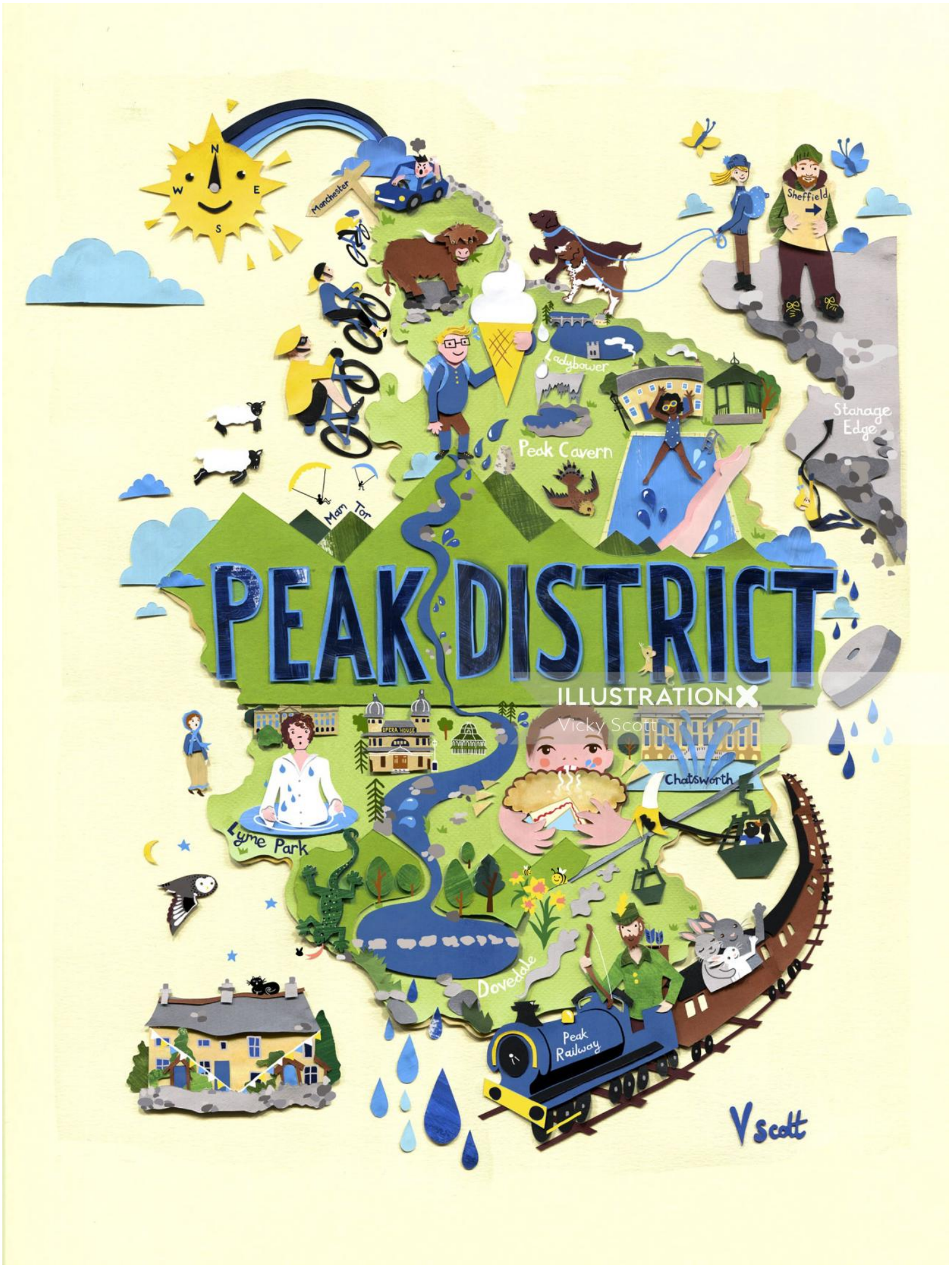

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Story: Pat Kelleher. Illustration: Vicky Scott

One day, Dawn's teacher asked if she wanted to join the school choir. Dawn's face blushed red, and she shook her head. The thought of singing in front of anybody made her go hot and cold all over. Dawn liked to sing, but only when she was by herself.

Every day, as she was getting ready for school, she heard a robin singing in the garden. She went down to breakfast, humming cheerfully.

"That's a nice tune," said her Dad.

"The robin sang it," said Dawn. "He likes to sing by himself, too."

"But he's in the biggest choir of all!" said Dad.

Dawn looked at him. "But he's just sitting in the garden by himself."

The next morning her dad woke her up very early. "Time to get up," he said. "We're going outside."

Half asleep, she got dressed and put on her wellies. It was still dark out.

"Where are we going?" she said, with a big yawn.

"It's a surprise," said Dad winking.

They went down the footpath to the common.

"Here we are," said Dad chirpily. "Let's sit down here, shall we?"

He got out a flask of hot chocolate and some snacks for themt to share. They sat and ate in silence.

Then, just as the sun brightened the edges of the night sky, a bird started to sing in the trees.

"It's a robin!" said Dawn, in delight.

This time, in the quiet of the common, she heard another bird joining in, too. Dawn listened, enchanted by the sound.

"That's a nightingale," said Dad.

Next to the song of the nightingale, the robin's song seemed a bit plain. But now other birds were singing as well. The songs were all different. Some cawed, some tweeted, and some whistled, some were quiet and some were loud.

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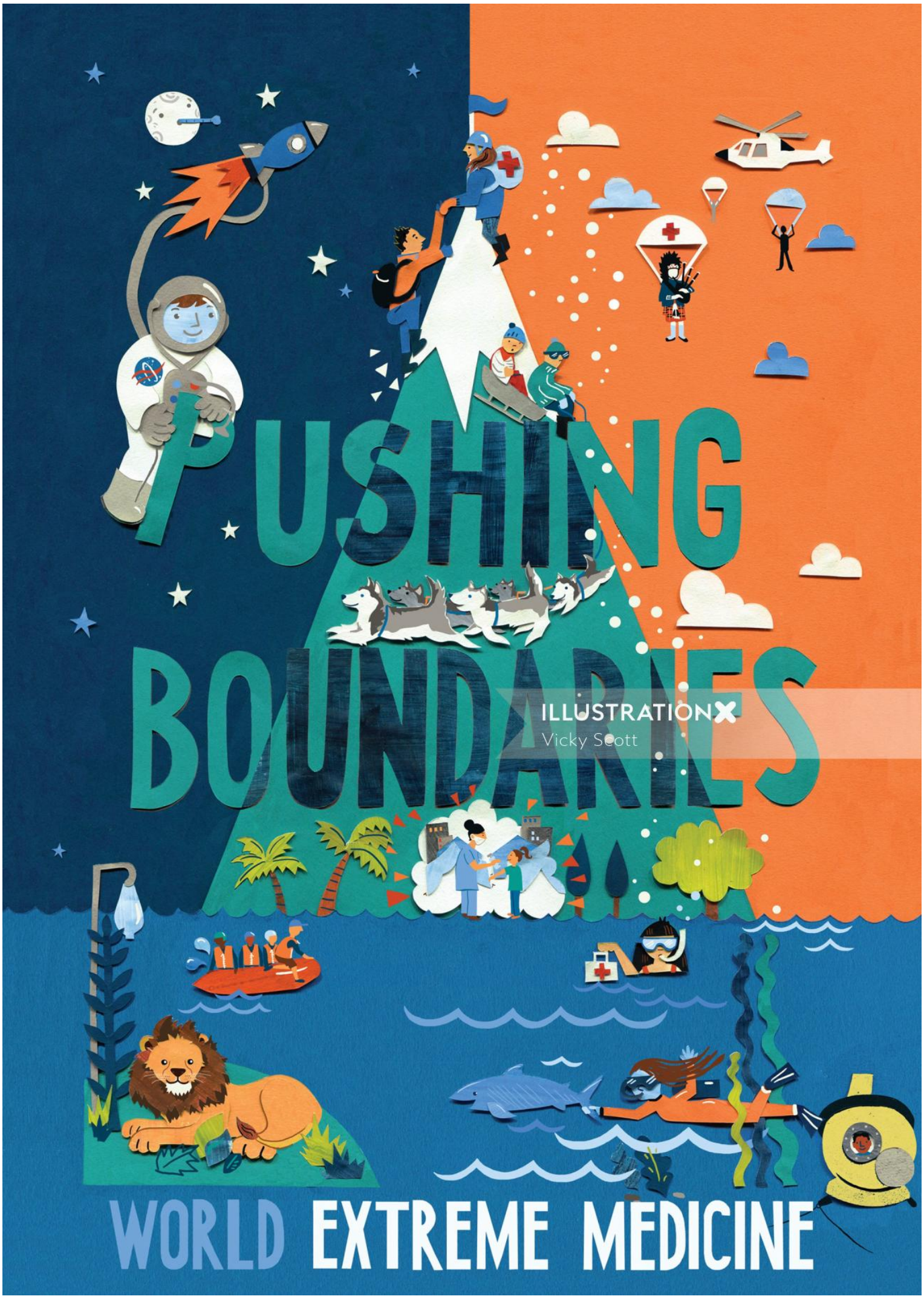

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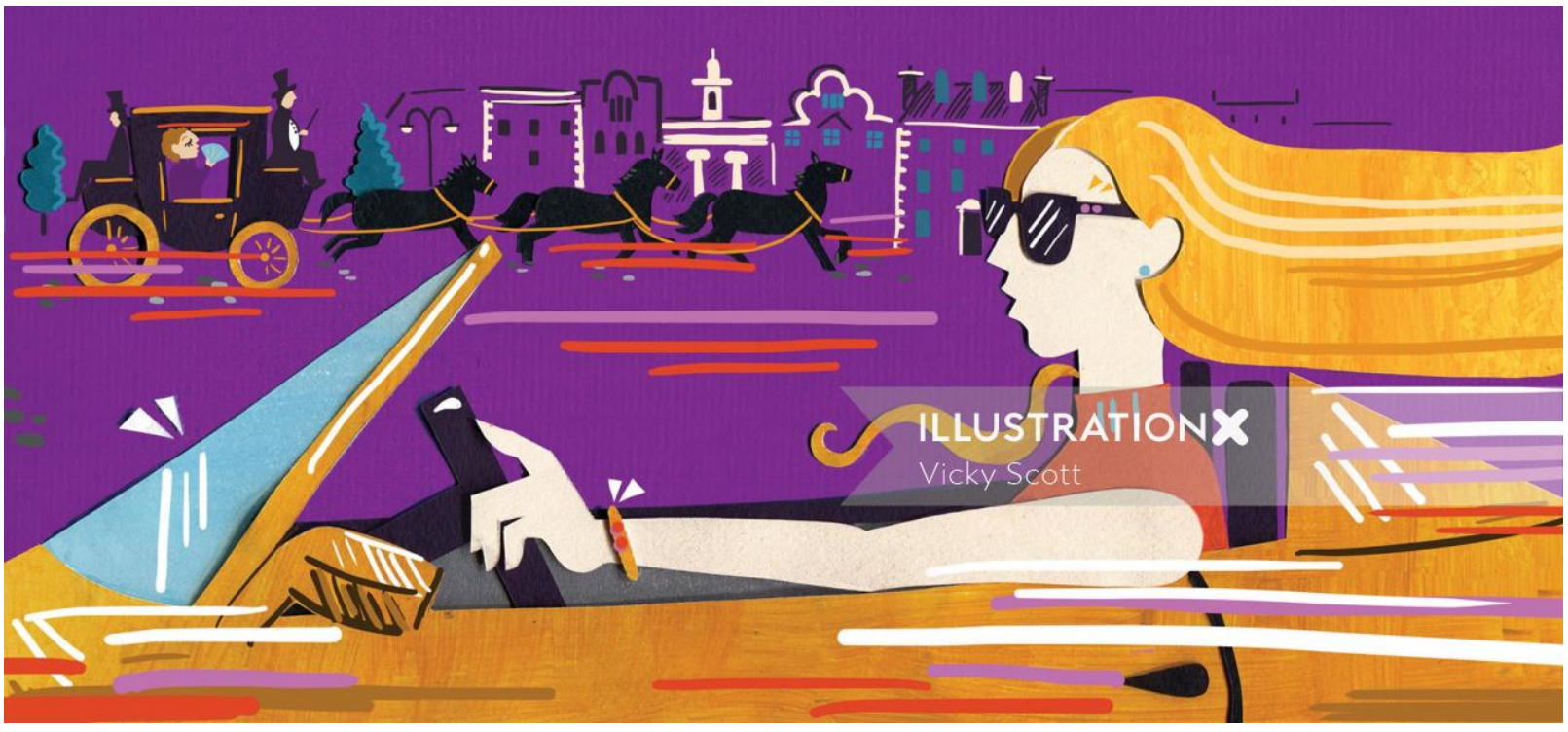

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I cried when I realized I was lost. With trembling hands I checked my phone again—no signal. Unsure of what to do, I pulled over and begged God for help. My family had just moved to a new state, and I was eager to prove my independence by driving to another city for an appointment. Without parental units.

An old farmer pulled up in front of me and asked if I was having car trouble. I explained how I was lost and had no signal. A grin cracked across his leathered face as he said, "All that modern tech won't help you out here. You have to rely on real sources."

Instead of simply providing directions, he kindly led the way in his truck. And complete peace washed away my anxiousness. I had a trustworthy source to follow.

That getting lost experience was many years ago, but the lesson I learned has stayed with me. Following God as my trustworthy source in life means I can rest in His peace. Throughout life's ups and downs, I'm learning to look to the One who provides real peace instead of spotty signals.

Have you ever faced a situation like this? Perhaps your current circumstances are threatening to rattle your soul. Girl, if you're like me, anything from having a bad hair day to listening to the news can threaten my peace. Believe me, I know the struggle is real.

Finding peace

In John 14:27, Jesus promised, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." The world's peace relies on the power of *self*; Jesus' peace relies on *Jesus*. It's easy to anchor ourselves to temporary distractions like TikTok, Netflix, popularity, shopping or food. But nothing will give us the kind of peace that Jesus promises to provide.

You can have a peace that no one can steal from you because it isn't dependent on you. This means that, as God's daughter, you have peace whether you *feel* it or not.

Turning from the chaos

There may be moments when you find yourself filled with anxiety and worry, but that's not what God wants for you (Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:6). So, what's a girl to do when the stress of life threatens her peace? Turn from the chaos and toward Jesus.

Here are a few simple tips to help you stress less and pursue peace:

Pray. It instantly connects you to Jesus.

Practice gratitude. Gratitude gets your eyes off yourself and sets your sights on God's blessings.

Sweat it out. Hit the gym with your mom, sister or friend. Even a good power walk will help worries melt as you become more aware of God's goodness.

Get outside. Notice how nature reflects God's glory, creativity and power.

SOAP. Invite peace by SOAP'ing Scripture. SOAP is an acronym for **S**cripture, **o**bservation, **a**pplication and **p**rayer. This practice can help ground you in God's promises as you write out a Scripture verse, observe what it says, apply it to your life and create a prayer based on what you found.

There's an app for that. Find a Christian meditation app to help refocus your mind and soul on the reality that God's peace is for us.

Create a playlist. Have you ever noticed how a good song will get your feet moving and make your mood brighter? Create a peace-filled worship playlist and pop in your earbuds.

Meet up. Don't manage stress alone. Meet for coffee with a trusted friend or adult.

Much like curbs and stripes mark the path for cars on the road, our hope in Jesus marks the path to peace. Isaiah 26:3 promises, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." Being anchored in anything else will disappoint, no matter how well-meaning it is. So go ahead, take a deep breath, and exhale. God's got this.

Heather Riggleman calls Nebraska home with her husband, three kids and two cats. She is an author who happens to believe Jesus, Jazzercise and tacos can fix just about anything.

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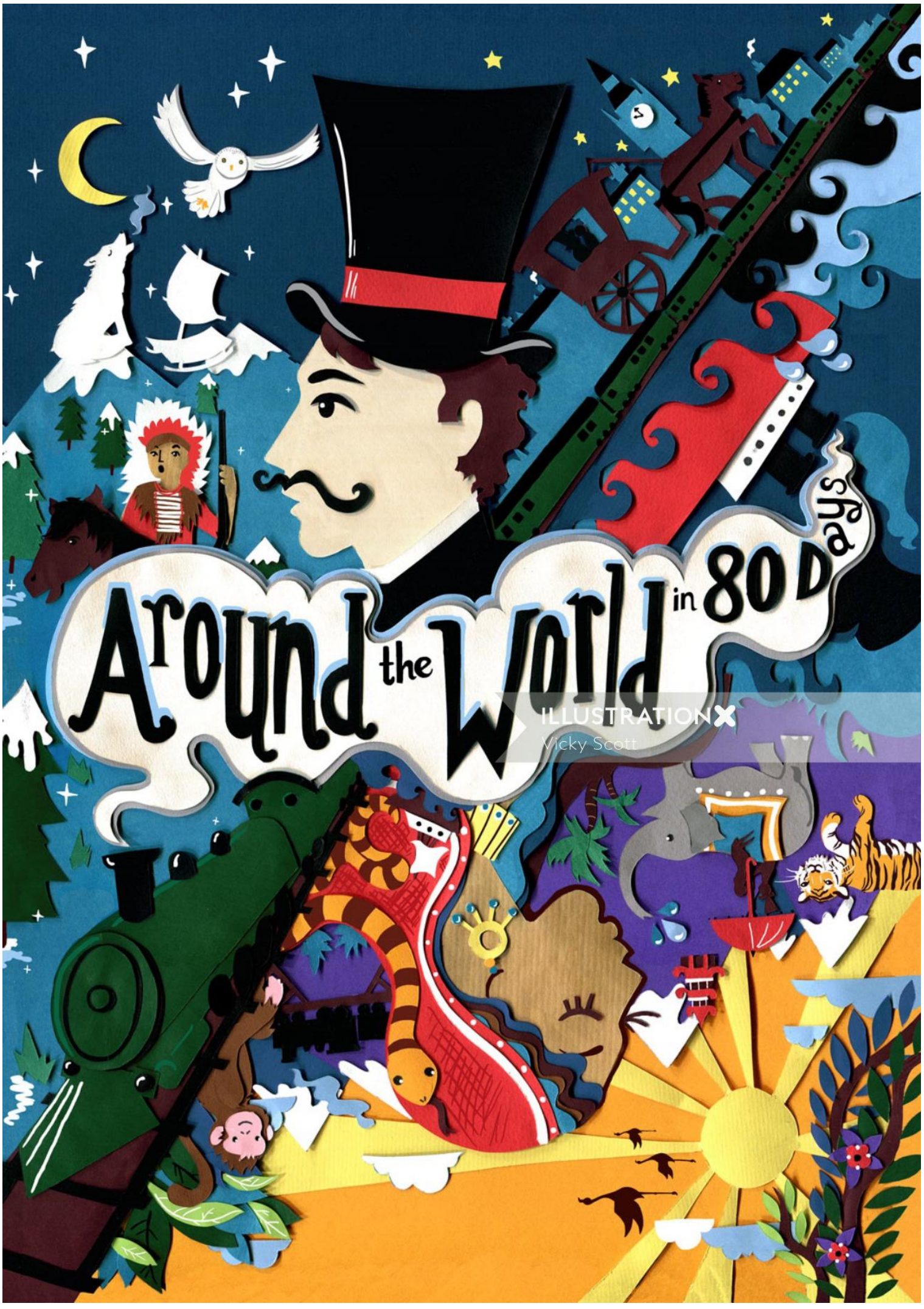

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Finally, there may be good news about endometriosis

A new blood test could **detect endometriosis in 90 per cent of women** who have it. But can it change the problems around how we treat this debilitating illness?

WORDS BY ROSALIND RYAN | ILLUSTRATIONS VICKY SCOTT

If we told you there was a painful health condition that affects up to two million women in the UK, takes around seven-and-a-half years to diagnose, costs the economy £8.2bn a year in lost working days, and can lead to infertility, you'd think we'd invented a *Handmaid's Tale*-style medical disorder. But it's real – and it's endometriosis.

WHAT IS ENDOMETRIOSIS?

'It's a condition where the cells lining the womb get into the wrong places, such as the ovaries and fallopian tubes,' says Dr Jan Toledano of the London Hormone Clinic (londonhormoneclinic.com). 'When the womb lining grows and breaks down, those stray cells do as well, causing severe pelvic pain.' This pain can be bad enough to interfere with your everyday life, leaving you stuck in bed, unable to work or even see your friends and family.

Other symptoms include: heavy, painful periods; pain during or after sex; pain while having a poo; constipation; feeling sick or unusually tired; anxiety; and, sometimes, trouble conceiving. Peter Barton-Smith, consultant gynaecological surgeon for the Princess Grace Hospital, London (endometriosisclinic.co.uk), says, 'Your pain will also generally have a cyclical nature, so it tends to be worse during your period.'

Some women don't actually have any symptoms at all – and their endometriosis is only discovered during an operation for another unrelated condition, such as the removal of an appendix.

WHAT CAUSES THE CONDITION?

The exact cause of endometriosis is not known, but there are several different theories:

RETROGRADE MENSTRUATION This is where some of the womb lining flows back up through the Fallopian tubes and attaches to the organs in your pelvis.

YOUR GENES Endometriosis tends to run in families, and some families from certain ethnic groups may be more susceptible.

IMMUNE SYSTEM DISORDER Your body fails to target and destroy endometrial cells outside the womb, and you may have reduced immunity to other illnesses.

LYMPHATIC SPREAD Endometrial cells could travel around the body in the lymphatic system or bloodstream.

TOXINS IN THE ENVIRONMENT A new theory proposes that exposure to certain environmental chemicals, particularly dioxins, can trigger endometriosis, but no research has found that this happens in humans.

Certain risk factors also make developing endometriosis more likely, including starting your periods early, short menstrual cycles and high oestrogen levels. 'Stress is very important, too,' says Dr Toledano. 'When you're stressed, many hormonal changes happen in the body including raised oestrogen levels.'

Your diet can also increase your chances of developing endometriosis. 'Sugars can be a risk, while caffeine and alcohol may be triggers for some women,' warns Dr Toledano. However, a 2015 review by Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Brazil, found a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D, fresh fruits and vegetables – preferably organic – and wholegrains could help prevent endometriosis developing or getting worse.

THE DIAGNOSIS DEBACLE

Despite raised awareness, partly thanks to celebrities like Lena Dunham and Padma Lakshmi discussing their endometriosis, it still takes between seven and eight years to get diagnosed. Why? 'It's a double-edged answer,' says Barton-Smith. 'I still see women who have been told by their GP to put up with painful periods because periods are painful! But others may feel they're over-complaining or don't have the confidence to keep pushing for a diagnosis.'

This onus on women to keep pushing is a major part of the problem. Dr Caroline Overton, spokesperson for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, says, 'Endometriosis starts when your periods begin, but if you have nothing to compare it with, you might think painful periods are normal.' Endometriosis also runs in families but if your mother wasn't diagnosed, she may have unwittingly passed on the message that this is what periods are like. FYI – very painful, heavy periods are not normal, so see your doctor.

A lack of understanding and awareness among healthcare professionals may also be to blame, but that's not surprising. Most have between five and 10 minutes for each patient, and they're not endometriosis experts. Many of the symptoms could also be other conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Keep a symptom diary, noting how many painkillers you take and the impact on your everyday life, and take it to your appointment – download one from the Endometriosis UK website (endometriosis-uk.org). You can also ask to be referred to a gynaecologist, or swap to a different GP.

HOW IT'S TREATED

Treatment for endometriosis depends on your age, whether you want to get pregnant, your pain levels and the severity of the condition. There's no cure, but it's usually confirmed ◆▶

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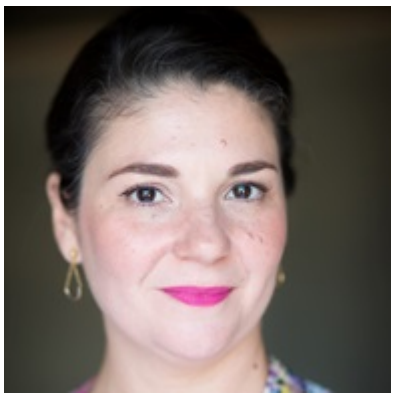

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