

HILLS and VALES, EXETER

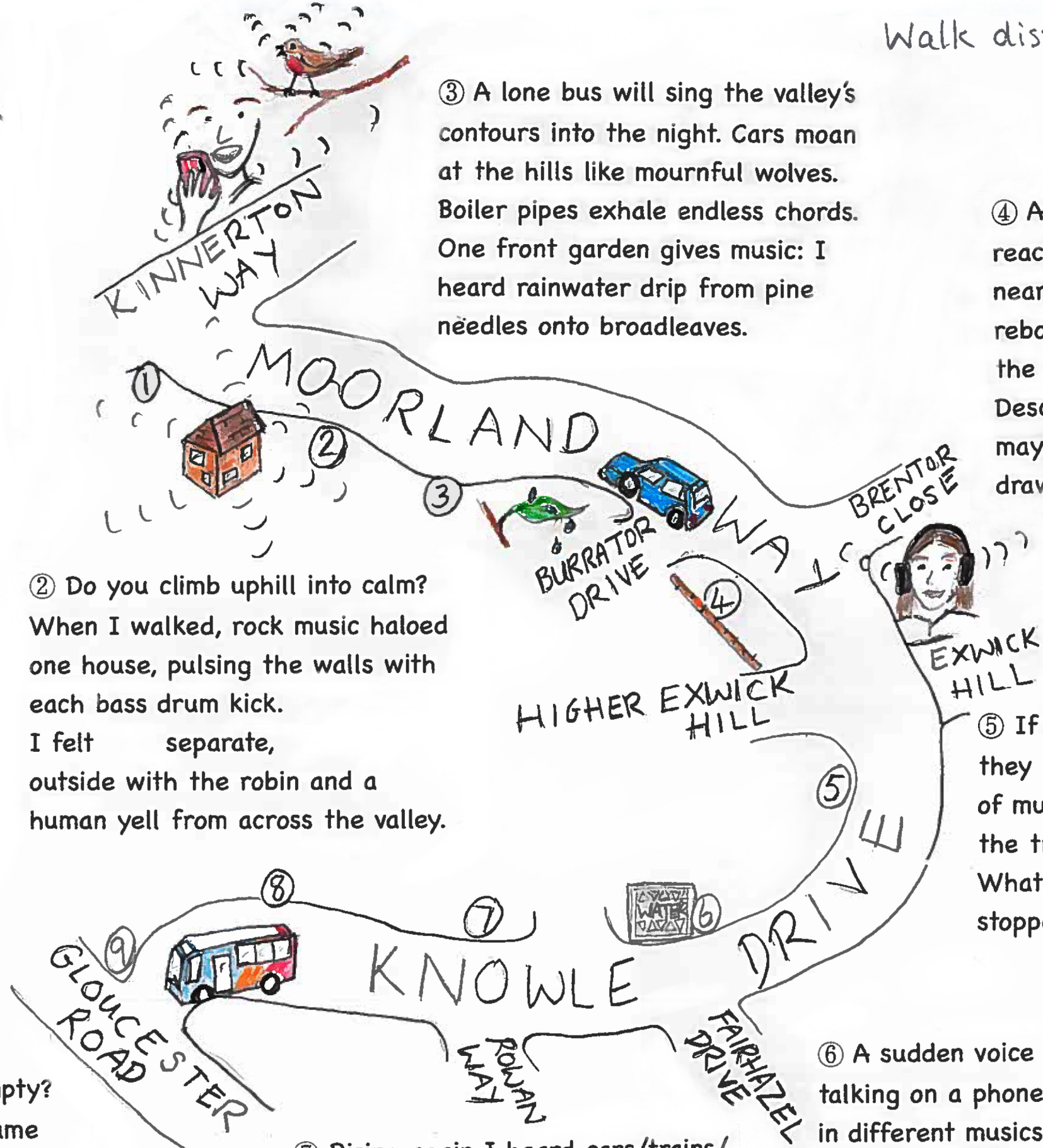
A Sound Walk
Emma Welton
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Walk distance approx. 700m

① Close your eyes. Allow the valley's music to seep into you. Many cars will pass. I waited, then out of the night human chatter burst from speaker-phone and tangled with trilling robin.

⑨ At the end of my walk rain trickled, tyres swished. A bus clattered through, gears and brakes gasping. I wonder whether we learn the essence of a place, when we listen at night.

⑧ Is it peaceful here, or empty? When I listened, all music came from the city, 'over there'. I heard the distant level crossing alarm and against the background burr a single desperate car roaring uphill, 'wake up, everyone!'



③ A lone bus will sing the valley's contours into the night. Cars moan at the hills like mournful wolves. Boiler pipes exhale endless chords. One front garden gives music: I heard rainwater drip from pine needles onto broadleaves.

② Do you climb uphill into calm? When I walked, rock music haloed one house, pulsing the walls with each bass drum kick. I felt separate, outside with the robin and a human yell from across the valley.

④ As we ascend, the city's breath reaches us over rooftops. Stand near the high wall: it might rebound idling train engines from the valley bottom. Descending below house-height, maybe peace returns between drawn-out car passes.

⑤ If someone walks past, what are they listening to? I heard the pulse of music from headphones mix with the trains, the traffic, the wet. What could we hear if the vehicles stopped?

Can you imagine?

⑥ A sudden voice surprised me, talking on a phone. Our ears were in different musics. Mine heard the city thrum and a dog bark out of a closed window. I stepped on a water meter cover outside no.28: a pleasing, dull, gritty clunk. Play it, if you like.

⑦ Rising again I heard cars/trains/trains/cars/cars/a muffled yelp... I wanted it to be a fox, a rare hint of wild night life between the silent bungalows.

