



WORDS: SIMON BUTCHER
PHOTOGRAPHY: ALEX BRUNET

THE CONFESSIONAL APPEAL OF THE YEAR'S MOST CHARMINGLY BLEAK STARS.

037

DAUGHTER

As the year comes to a close and album shortlists are collated, Daughter's 'If You Leave' will be getting plenty of mentions for its bittersweet brilliance - one of the most eerily atmospheric and hauntingly intimate releases in a long time. If 2013's greatest records celebrated making the cut by having a Christmas party of their own this one would be hiding at the back of the room awkwardly flirting with James Blake's 'Overgrown' while Kanye's 'Yeezus' and the Arctics' 'AM' arrogantly dance-off for attention.

It's an introverted creation, with the melancholic heartbeat of Elena Tonra lyrically powering the chillingly sparse combination of gentle guitar picking and dramatic percussion. "I've lost it all, I'm just a silhouette / I'm a lifeless face you'll soon forget," she bleakly pronounces on 'Youth'. "I'm a foolish fragile spine," she coos desolately in 'Smother', then ends with the tragically insecure thought: "I sometimes wish I'd stayed inside my mother, never to come out," but is this merely melodrama? And if not, where does Elena conjure these feelings from? "I think a lot of people have felt like that," she says pensively about the final line of 'Smother'. "Sometimes I'm like, 'If I wasn't here maybe everything would be better for everyone else.'"

It's a surprising thing to hear Elena confess considering she's anything but shy and sullen as we chat during the last dates of Daughter's European tour. She's full of good humour, reflecting on what's been a "very weird year" for the band, who've almost circled the world performing to rapt crowds at

pin-drop gigs across continents. "It's been really mad and I was thinking that if I hadn't made the small choice to go to college then I wouldn't have met Igor and none of this would've happened."

The college mentioned is London Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, where she took song-writing classes and met Swiss guitarist Igor Haefeli, then recruited French drummer Remi Aguilera, but Elena began writing long before that as a twelve-year-old struggling to come to terms with high school, where she didn't fit in: "They all just thought I was weird, which I



probably am," she laughs, in self-deprecating fashion.

"I had to adjust to people treating me like shit basically. I had to some way be like, 'FUCK YOU!' but I had no way, so I would literally write down fuck you songs and put them in a drawer. That was my way of letting it out."

Daughter's debut album, 'If You Leave', sees the tone of the 'fuck you' drawer converted into an introspective analysis of relationship trauma. "Now it's things that I'm maybe too afraid to say to other people... I'm just scared that if I do everything will be lost," she confides. It's deeply personal territory from someone who initially wrote songs in the London warehouse Igor was living in around 2010, and never imagined the wider world would care. Many people are finding cathartic comfort in her honest confessionals now, but it's a double-edged sword: "It's all out in the open now, which is enjoyable, but the album is a pretty weird subject at the moment because it hits harder now than when I wrote it, which is maybe because I was writing about something that

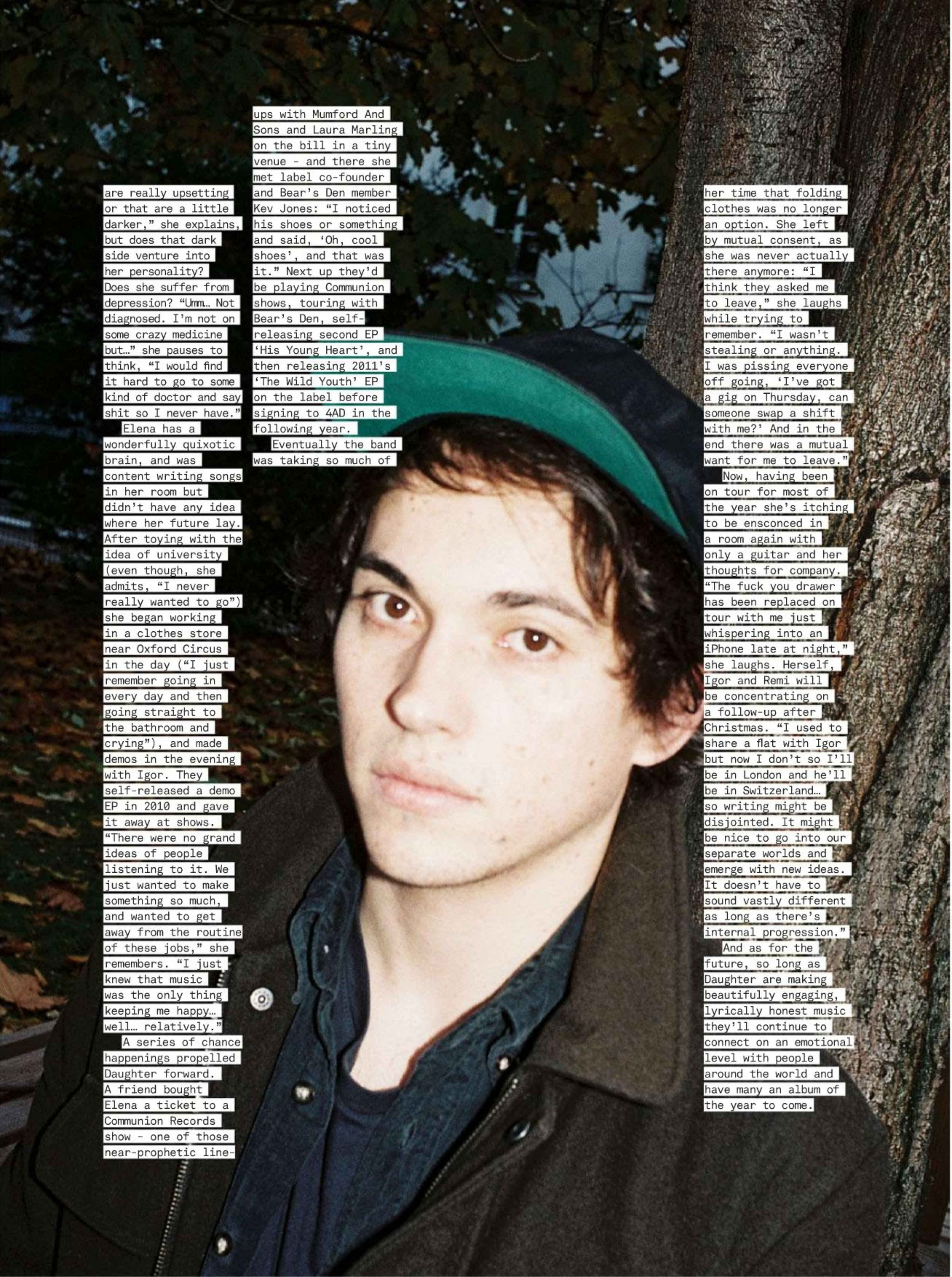
I didn't know would happen and it obviously has now."

Her positive tone shifts towards the delicate whisper usually heard on record: "I feel like if I start talking to you about it you're just going to hear me crying on the phone for about 20 minutes." We ask what kind of music she

likes listening to when feeling down and her positivity returns. "I tend to gravitate towards sadder music," she enthuses, listing Elliot Smith, Radiohead, and Sigur Ros.

There's a similar undercurrent of honesty and vulnerability in all these artists and it's the same with Daughter. "It's exploring these topics that are sad but are truthful, real things," she describes.

"As much as I think happiness can be real I don't think that I've ever been in a state where I've been so happy that I've wanted to write about it. From my writing perspective the only time I'm really inspired is when I'm writing about things that



are really upsetting or that are a little darker," she explains, but does that dark side venture into her personality? Does she suffer from depression? "Umm.. Not diagnosed. I'm not on some crazy medicine but..." she pauses to think, "I would find it hard to go to some kind of doctor and say shit so I never have."

Elena has a wonderfully quixotic brain, and was content writing songs in her room but didn't have any idea where her future lay. After toying with the idea of university (even though, she admits, "I never really wanted to go") she began working in a clothes store near Oxford Circus in the day ("I just remember going in every day and then going straight to the bathroom and crying"), and made demos in the evening with Igor. They self-released a demo EP in 2010 and gave it away at shows. "There were no grand ideas of people listening to it. We just wanted to make something so much, and wanted to get away from the routine of these jobs," she remembers. "I just knew that music was the only thing keeping me happy... well... relatively."

A series of chance happenings propelled Daughter forward. A friend bought Elena a ticket to a Communion Records show - one of those near-prophetic line-

ups with Mumford And Sons and Laura Marling on the bill in a tiny venue - and there she met label co-founder and Bear's Den member Kev Jones: "I noticed his shoes or something and said, 'Oh, cool shoes', and that was it." Next up they'd be playing Communion shows, touring with Bear's Den, self-releasing second EP 'His Young Heart', and then releasing 2011's 'The Wild Youth' EP on the label before signing to 4AD in the following year.

Eventually the band was taking so much of

her time that folding clothes was no longer an option. She left by mutual consent, as she was never actually there anymore: "I think they asked me to leave," she laughs while trying to remember. "I wasn't stealing or anything. I was pissing everyone off going, 'I've got a gig on Thursday, can someone swap a shift with me?' And in the end there was a mutual want for me to leave."

Now, having been on tour for most of the year she's itching to be ensconced in a room again with only a guitar and her thoughts for company. "The fuck you drawer has been replaced on tour with me just whispering into an iPhone late at night," she laughs. Herself, Igor and Remi will be concentrating on a follow-up after Christmas. "I used to share a flat with Igor but now I don't so I'll be in London and he'll be in Switzerland... so writing might be disjointed. It might be nice to go into our separate worlds and emerge with new ideas. It doesn't have to sound vastly different as long as there's internal progression."

And as for the future, so long as Daughter are making beautifully engaging, lyrically honest music they'll continue to connect on an emotional level with people around the world and have many an album of the year to come.