

## **BEASTS**

### **BY TESS LITTLE**

We were stacked high and narrow in that terraced Victorian house. The attic contained two bedrooms, one of which always smelled faintly singed – it was accidentally wired to the bathroom below, so when we flicked on that light downstairs, this bedroom would also be illuminated, as though by poltergeists. In this way, through our second year of university, its occupant would be woken as the rest of us returned from clubs or as we finished essays just before our morning deadlines, jacked up on espressos, Red Bull, Ritalin. On the first floor was the offending bathroom, along with three more bedrooms, one of which had clearly once formed part of the hallway. The ground floor held the other two bedrooms and a large bathroom, which had a fireplace and was carpeted. Buried in the basement were the kitchen, living room and another loo – all perpetually dark and damp. We rarely dwelled in this underbelly, instead, each burrowed away in our separate rooms. Regardless, somebody had tacked wrinkling movie posters to the wall, and someone else had thrown a silky, batik blanket over the sofa to hide its miscellaneous stains. The sofa, like the rest of the furniture and all the pocked-plaster walls, belonged to our landlord. The hole in the kitchen ceiling, where a broken extractor fan had once nestled, belonged to our landlord. Our student loans belonged to our landlord.

There were seven of us. Friends, acquaintances, strangers – all hastily assembled in the landgrab rush. Local estate agents released every student house for the next year on one particular date, so to secure anything inhabitable we had to queue outside their offices all night. Conversation was stilted as we waited on camping chairs, in sleeping bags. Students from the Christian union visited every now and then, with polystyrene cups of scalding tea and answers to any questions about Jesus et al. that lingered in our minds. What the point was, why our saviour had died, how his Father had created the heavens and the light and us in His image so we would subdue the Earth and every creeping thing that crept upon it.

