There is a story by the Argentine writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges. The narrator walks into the cellar of a house and sees all of knowledge and human existence, joy and pain, the full spectrum of human experience, simultaneously and completely.

Paloma Faith read *The Aleph* wellbefore she had her daughter. But she only really understood the story after becoming a mother in 2016. “I saw the Aleph in her eyes,” she says. “There was the strange realisation of motherhood. Your heart breaks from all of the love.” Faith channelled that experience of how a heart can swell and crack with overflowing love into her upcoming single “Better than This”, from her forthcoming fifth studio album, *Infinite Things.*

But *Infinite Things* is more than an album about motherhood. It’s a rumination on sickness and loss. It’s about finding your way back to romance within a long term relationship. It’s — most daringly — it’s a *cri de coeur* on the industry, from a female artist who’s been in the game for two decades. Maybe the honesty of a woman with experience is something the music business has been lacking for too long.

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Faith wrote most of the songs for *Infinite Things* before the Covid-19 pandemic swept the world. Then we went into lockdown, and Faith ripped them all up and started afresh. “Lockdown made me realise on a personal level that I was a creative person, and I’d lost some of that creativity in the commercial world, and also in becoming a parent,” she observes. Faith spent her time growing tomatoes, cooking, just thinking about stuff. The enforced downtime was creatively fruitful. “I feel like I got *myself* back,” she says. “I had time to think about *who* I am, and what is valuable to me.”

Thinking: Faith hasn’t had time for much of that, in recent years. Four albums; a flourishing acting career, including a role as Bet Sykes in the Epix Batman prequel series *Pennyworth*; ambassadorships for Greenpeace and Oxfam; her stints as a judge on *The Voice* and *The Voice kids.* “Acting is like a holiday for me,” Faith laughs. “It’s so nice to do something collaborative, and also play someone totally not like me. Sykes is kickass, awful, doesn’t give a toss. Whereas I’m super sensitive to what everyone is feeling. When I am Bet I get to kill people and beat them up without sentimentality!”

Lockdown taught Faith that, for most of her career, she’s been “a rat on a wheel” she cackles. “A hamster in a cage!” Locked down in London with her long-term partner and daughter, Faith finally had time to take stock of her frenetic career, and decide what was meaningful to her. “The philosophy behind the whole album is about dealing with the issues of what is *actually* important. We live in a world where there is so much value to be found in small things, but we never slow down enough to take stock of them.”

Faith recorded the album in her basement, teaching herself how to produce her own vocals — something she’s never done before in her career. “I was always made to think producing was very complicated,” Faith jokes. “It turns out it’s actually quite simple!” Recording at home resulted in full-bodied, freer sounding vocals. “No one was looking at me singing,” she explains. “I was singing alone. I thrived in that situation.”

It is her most personal album yet, drawing on her experience of being in a long-term relationship with someone for so many years (her partner is artist Leyman Lahcine), that Faith freely jokes, they forget when their anniversary is. Track “Last Night on Earth” addresses a situation familiar to many couples — where you have an argument and can’t go to bed until you’ve made up — whilst “Better Than This” can be interpreted in a relationship sense about the failings and struggle of working at staying together and also as a social commentary about the continuous cycle of human error in love and politics. “It’s an album of love songs for people who are there to stay,” Faith says. “That enduring love. Warts and all.” She pauses. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard a love song like that, actually.”

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Lockdown also made Faith confront difficult, darker truths: her uncomfortable relationship with the music industry. Upcoming track ‘Monster’tells the story of Faith’s relationship with the industry, from her come-up as a 27-year-old pretending to be a decade younger to appeal to male record executives — Faith spent her 20s supporting her younger half sister after the breakdown of her relationship with her parents — in exposing detail. “It’s literal,” says Faith of the single.

“Before I signed my record deal,” she goes on, “I didn’t have anything, and I was really happy. And then you get used to certain things, like having a certain number of people at your gigs or knowing your songs, and the validation that comes with it.” ‘Monster’ explains “what it feels like to be made out to be this huge important person, and to expose all of your emotional baggage and hurt whilst people just sit back and watch and listen,” says Faith.

When you achieve a certain level of fame, you detach from the things that got you into the game in the first place. “When I was doing the big venues, I missed the smaller venues,” says Faith, “I missed the makeshift fly posting, and that feeling of blood pumping around my veins.” After decades of her every word being misreported in the press, Faith felt herself clam up. “I started trying to homogenise myself so I didn’t make a headline,” she says.

Faith is a grafter: she started work at the age of 14. “I’ve never been unemployed since!” Faith says. But her uncompromising sense of morality sometimes collided head-on with the music industry. Record label executives in the US wanted her to reshoot the video for her hit 2014 track ‘Only Love Can Hurt Like This’ because it featured her kissing a black man: Faith refused. “I said, ‘I couldn’t live with myself if I broke America on those terms,’” Faith says. “The decision to have a biracial relationship in the video was purposeful.”

The label executives sent her back to the UK. “I didn’t even stay the night,” Faith says. “I never heard from them again.” She didn’t regret the decision even for a second. “I feel that I’ve achieved success without compromising my morals,” Faith says. “Yes I’ve made mistakes and been gobby and worn appalling outfits. But in my core, I feel confident in my morals.”

It was Faith’s desire to protect her infant daughter from the corroding effects of celebrity culture that led to the misreporting around her decision to raise her child “gender-neutral.” “When I initially had my child, I was very protective because I felt like celebrity culture wasn’t a safe or a healthy place for a baby to be,” she says. “I omitted all details about the baby, like her name and sex, because I wanted to keep her out of the public eye. But it was misperceived by the media as me raising her gender neutral. Actually, I just didn’t want to talk about my kid. Because she might not want to grow up and be a famous person!”

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Faith is emerging from lockdown with a new sense of priorities. “I want to embrace the art school student that still lives inside me,” she says. It’s a decision that she tracked out in the standout track ‘Me Time’, which will resonate with anyone who used the enforced downtime of a global pandemic to access what really matters to them in their life. “I need some me time,” Faith croons, “figuring out who I want to be time.” “It’s about being in lockdown with people who want your attention the whole time,” she says. “You never get a break!”

Faith put together the record at home, with a small group of long-time and new collaborators including the producers Patrick Wimberly and Detonate, songwriters Ed Harcourt, Starsmith, Tre Jean Marie alongside the producer and songwriter MNEK and close friend Josef Salvat.

“Because of lockdown,” says Faith, “I started to write much more *purely*. I was on my own, writing over piano lines people had sent me.”

Faith is so beloved by her fanbase because she’s open about her imperfections. “It’s my USP,” says Faith. “They like it when I forget the words and they laugh and help me.” She is raring to get back to performing, to feel the sweat and euphoria of a crowd once more, everyone in the same place dancing. “That’s why I make music,” says Faith. “Not being able to perform for so long is the bit I’m most sad about.”

This is a new Paloma Faith, a Paloma Faith who retreated within herself and found the 22-year-old art student within, not the careful, polished veteran of show business. “I have a different perspective on who I want to be now,” she says. “I’m not interested in making everyone like me on daytime TV anymore. I’m rediscovering the reasons I started making music in the first place.”