



OUR

OWN

WORDS

This book is special.

It arrives at a moment when it feels like the ground beneath us is constantly shifting. Look around and it can feel as though the world is on fire, and, too often, it is women who are expected to carry the heat. The UK is currently in a declared national emergency in response to violence against women and girls, yet for many of us this crisis is nothing new. It is something we have been living with, surviving, and navigating for decades.

Too often it feels as though we are shouting into the void. Funding for women's services has been systematically eroded. Research into women's health remains underfunded and incomplete. Decisions about our bodies, our safety, and our futures are still largely made without us. Power continues to sit in institutions that were never built with women in mind. Institutions that demand silence and compliance rather than care and change. It can be hard not to feel that nothing will ever shift.

INTRODUCTION

So where do we go from here?

Many of us have been taught to dismiss poetry and creativity as indulgent or irrelevant in the face of 'real' problems. But this book stands in direct opposition to that idea. When women come together to create, to tell the truth, to listen deeply, to imagine freely, something profound happens. Creativity becomes a form of resistance. Storytelling becomes survival. Expression becomes power.

This book exists because women made space for one another when the system did not.

Safe Ground has been working alongside Advance for the past three years, supporting women with lived experience of the criminal justice system and domestic abuse. Our latest programme brought together a group of women from across the globe, guided by the extraordinary poet Toria Garbutt. Over weeks of writing together, we shared stories that are too often ignored or erased. We laughed, we cried, we disagreed, we reflected, and crucially, we listened. Not to fix. Not to judge. But to witness.

These poems hold grief, hope, tenderness, humour, rage and truth, often all at once. They speak to harm and survival, but also to joy, imagination and the futures women are still daring to claim. In a world that repeatedly tells women to shrink, to soften, to move on quietly, this book insists on voice, presence and collective power.

This is not just a collection of poems. It is a record of what happens when women are trusted, when creativity is taken seriously, and when space is made for honesty without shame. It is both an archive of this moment and a call to action, a reminder that real change does not come from silence, but from connection, courage and community.

We hope you read these poems slowly. Let them sit with you. Let them challenge you. And above all, let them remind you that when women speak, and are heard, the ground can shift.

Emma Hulme – Head of SIG Safe Ground

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ARE WHO WE

Quiet Time — Rosy Vijayanteemala

My Inner Self — Rosy Vijayanteemala

I Will Be Who I Choose to Be
— Tenika Parker

If I Was a Season — Simone

I Am... — Simone

ENERGY

i AM FULL OF

Quiet Time — Rosy Vijayanteemala

Time to be alone with one's thoughts,
alone in a dark room,
alone on a park bench,
alone in a bed.

Am I missing anything?
Is the world still going round?
Why am I alone?

No.

Quiet time is being self-contained,
empowering energy.

Thinking of solutions to problems,
how to get from A to B.

No nonsense — my mind is not at rest.
I cannot quiet my thinking.

I am full of energy,
both positive and negative.

Quiet time is for me.
I refuse to think
and be bothered.

NEGATIVE

BOTH POSITIVE AND

DISCOVERED

ANOTHER WORLD TO BE

My Inner Self

— Rosy Vijayanteemala

Who am I?

What am I?

The world sees a happy face,
smiling all the way for everyone.

Who sees my feelings?

What is so happy or sad inside me?

Another world to be discovered.

An overactive consciousness.

An injured heart.

An overactive traffic between
feelings,
emotions
and reality.

Can I share these feelings?

Who will listen?

Who can really understand
the inner self?

CONSCIOUSNESS

AN OVER ACTIVE

BOLD

i SEE ME

I Will Be Who I Choose to Be — Tenika Parker

I will be who I choose to be.

I am who I am.

I am me.

I am me, even with my flaws.

I am strong, even though you call me meek.

I can shout, even in the whisper of the wind.

I stand firm like the elm in the forest.

I see me bold, proud and beautiful,
catwalk ready with no red carpet.

I dance to the rhythm of my soul
and the beat of my heart.

I embrace me
for the great love of me.

BEAUTIFUL

PROUD AND

ANIMAL

if MY BODY WAS AN

If I Was a Season

— Simone

If I was a season I would be summer-
cocktails, blissful sun,
booming, smiling faces,
water,
the ocean as blue and warm as ever.

If my heart was a colour it would be green,
my love for plants,
nature,
flowers and trees.

If my heart was a scent it would be Dior Poison,
sweet,
full and bold.

If my words were a colour they would be
purple and pink.

My mind is a Rubik's cube,
loads of colours and puzzles
resembling my overflowing thoughts.

If my body was an animal it would be a butterfly,
just evolving from a caterpillar.

My year is 1992,
the year I was born.
19th of May,
on a Tuesday in Stockholm.

If I was a feeling it would be gratitude
and optimism.

BUTTERFLY

IT WOULD BE A

SUN I AM THE

I Am...

— Simone

I am summer, autumn, winter and spring.

Italic to bold,

Gothic to Ariel,

Barbie ex to Chuckie.

Some days Disney.

Some days Boondocks.

I am fierce, loud and

sometimes sarcastically cold,

then reserved and somewhat shush.

I am talkative,

and other days withdrawn.

I am ADHD with autism.

I am not labelled but educated.

I am a daughter,

mother and sister,

as well as an aunty.

I am the sun shining on my face

as I lay on a sunbed

on a thick Egyptian cotton towel

next to a pool.

I am golden brown,

just like perfect pancakes

with strawberries and cream

or lemon and sugar.

I am sushi,

dumplings,

or jerk chicken and fried dumplings.

I am Swedish born

with a Caribbean / British upbringing.

SHINING ON MY FACE

BODY THE HEART AND THE

My Anger – A.N.G.E.R.

— Yasmine 'Qween.B' Bakeba

Passion, Desire, Warmth

— Tenika Parker

TRICKLE

STARTING OFF AS A

My Anger – A.N.G.E.R.

— Yasmine 'Qween.B' Bakeba

My Anger

Annoying Anger

Antagonising Anger

Good for nothing alienating Anger...

My anger is like an erupting volcano,
liquid fire scorching a rainforest
as it detonates into its atmosphere.

My anger is a colossal wave
of red emotion,
towering over a beach pier
before it washes over the sands of its shore,
forming a new canvas within its destruction.

My anger is unruly,
unpredictable
and unreliable.

Like a wayward child
it's conniving,
provocative
and mischievous.

Starting off as a trickle
that creeps off the contours
of the lips of a leaf,
quickly turning into a storm,
followed by the thumping thunder
and lightning of my rage.

My Anger
Annoying Anger
Antagonising Anger
Good for nothing alienating Anger...

CONTOURS

THAT CREEPS OFF THE

LIFELESS

EMPTY AND

Passion, Desire, Warmth

— Tenika Parker

In this crowded room,
I stand alone,
yawning,
mind drifting.

A tingle of connection,
eyes engaged
and a promise of a name.

Cheeks flushed.
Butterflies flutter.

Heaven ascended,
tethering given,
loneliness defeated.

Passion ignites
the embrace.

Tango,
salsa,
foxtrot.

Rhythm sounds,
bodies entangled.

Kettle boils,
water bubbles rapidly.

Heat all-consuming.

The steam erupts
and the whistle is blown.

The magma explodes,
cools with the air,
touches the surface
and hardens.

Cold.

Dark.

Black.

Devoid of a soul.

The embrace,
the expression,
becomes less welcoming,
replaced with unease.

Breath is rancid,
toxic in the air,
hard to engage.

No shimmer of passion,
nor joy.

Empty and lifeless.
Drained and unfulfilled.

Thoughts of being
alone again
in the crowded room.

UNFULFILLED

DRAINED AND

THRESHOLD

On That Day

— Synnøve Aasen

A Letter to My Younger Self

— Simone

Tattoos of Creative Expression

— Tracey Boncey

HEART AND ON THAT DAY MY

On That Day — Synnøve Aasen

On that day my body was a leaf
trembling at the smallest gust of wind.

And on that day my mind was a black hole,
thoughts floating around for a while
then just vanishing.

And on that day my heart was an anvil,
battered and heavy,
holding me down
in a sea of grief and relief.

On that day I hoped to see the bright sunlight,
but I only saw a shooting star.

On that day I gave into the world
and let it take my life in its hands.

Still I awoke the next day.

And I hoped,

I hoped,

I hoped.

ANVIL WAS AN

PROCESSED YOUR BRAIN HAS

A Letter to My Younger Self — Simone

Simone, you're younger,
filled with endless and somewhat gullible love.

Flashy with thoughtful delusions,
yet still a world of laughter
and no regrets.

Simone, I wish I knew
how big your heart really is.
How much of an inspiration you are
to so many of your friends.

That girl that picks on you,
that always tries to make you feel a way,
is hurting deep down inside.
Don't take things so literally.

Simone, the reason you are so vulnerable
to master manipulators
is because you have ADHD.
Your brain has processed so much trauma.

You process life in a different way
It's okay.

You can and always will
get through
whatever hurdles you cross

Simone-
Hard, hurtful love is not love.
Let that person go.

TRAUMA SO MUCH

TATTOOS

PAIN TURNED INTO

Tattoos of Productive Expression — Tracey Boncey

In that year I discovered
my happy sunny reality
was all a dark cloud of falseness.

And in that year my body became a sponge
that soaked up the negative words of others.

And in that year what once was a world
of colour and confidence
became an overcast sky
of black and grey.

And in that year
coconut and vanilla comfort
turned to scents of fear
of what was approaching.

Then that year tears turned to silence.
Pain turned into tattoos
of productive expression.

EXPRESSION

OF PRODUCTIVE

These Moments are Perfect

— Tracey Boncey

If Tables Could Tell Stories

— Synnøve Aasen

Going Home to Sudan

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /

هدب ع (ي مي ه ا ر ب ا دم حم) ح ام س

LINEAGE

HOME AND

Sipping Tea with Family

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /

هدب ع (ي مي ه ا ر ب ا دم حم) ح ام س

A Poem for Aunty Pauline

— Tracey Boncey

CALMNESS

A s i L E N T

These Moments Are Perfect — Tracey Boncey

The door bangs closed behind me.

Drop my heavy bag from my shoulders.

Turn off my phone
to silence the outside world
and its invasions to my peace.

Sink into the chair,
it envelopes me.

A silent calmness,
warmth from the sun
shining in the window.

The smell from a nearby café.
The chirping from a bird
in the tree outside.

These moments are perfect.

THE SUN

WARMTH FROM THE

CELEBRATION

A PLACE OF

If Tables Could Tell Stories

— Synnøve Aasen

The kitchen table in the house where we grew up.

A place of joy.

A place of celebration.

A place for difficult conversations.

Where we shared dinners

and tidbits from our day.

Where we baked Christmas cookies

and wrapped presents the night before Christmas.

Where we did our homework as kids

and invited friends old and new.

A place to fix things.

Broken objects

or broken hearts.

Where we argued
and made up again.

Where we shared hopes,
dreams and secrets.

Where we remembered our loved ones
that have passed.

Where we ate pizza
and laughed after a night on the town.
Played the guitar
and sang.

Where we could sit by the window
and watch the boats come and leave again.

See the glorious sunrise in the west
And red and golden sunsets in the east.

Where you could let go of worries
and just breathe.

CONVERSATIONS

A PLACE FOR DIFFICULT

ANONYMITY

i LOVE THE

Going Home to Sudan

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /

دبوع (ي مي ه ا ر ب ا دم حم) حامس

I love the hot air meeting me,
as if I'm about to enter
a furnace,
as I deboard the plane
into Khartoum.

I love the anonymity
and the feeling I belong.
That I am valued.
That I am home.

I love the smiles on my
uncles' and aunts' faces.
The bemusement
in their frowning smiles.

The uncertainty
of how to greet me,
in which language
to greet us.

Yet they devour and rapture
in our meets
and in certainty deliver
their greets!

I love falling into their
deep black eyes
and feeling enchanted
by their eternal wisdom
and beauty.

I looooooove being home.

Without judgement.

Without external gains.

Without educational
hierarchy.

With acceptance,
joy and gratitude
for being able to meet.

To be connected
without words.

In sight.

In mind.

In power and essence.

In soul,
in blood
and in spiritual magnificence.

A Sudanese migrant girl's
real life dreams come true.
Every time I return on flight
back to my home
of/in truth.

I BELONG

AND THE FEELING

SUCH CALM

IT MEANS AND BRINGS

Sipping Tea with Family

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /

هدبوع (ي مي هارب إ دم حم) ح امس

The joyful taste of tea,
with hints of mint and me.

In childhood I stand sprightly

whenever they mention tea.

It means and brings such calm.

The taste of family.

Nothing will ever come closer

than you are today to me.

Thank you for taking the time,

and thank you for making the tea.

The gentle taste of three:

my family,

tea

and me.

OF FAMILY

THE TASTE OF

KIND, CALM, THE SOUND OF YOUR

A Poem for Aunty Pauline — Tracey Boncey

Because this is an Aunty Pauline poem,
it is sprinkled with love and warm cuddles.

Because this is an Aunty Pauline poem,
it has lots of fond memories
of happy moments spent at Briars Close.

Because this is an Aunty Pauline poem,
the sound of your kind, calm, happy voice
will never leave my memories.

Because this is an Aunty Pauline poem,
the many china dolls around your home
will always be a happy memory.

Because this is an Aunty Pauline poem,

I can never remember anything
other than kindness.

This poem is an Aunty Pauline poem,
and the warm memories of her
will never leave the family she adored
or the many friends she made.

HAPPY VOICE WILL NEVER LEAVE

HEALING UNLEARNING AND

Until We Learn to Unlearn

— Yasmine 'Qween.B' Bakeba

Inner Child of Mine

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /

هدبع (ي مي هار ب ا دم حم) حامس

DIFFERENTLY

TEACHING US TO WALK

Until We Learn to Unlearn — Yasmine 'Qween.B' Bakeba

Until we learn to unlearn
toxic behaviours
passed down by our ancestors
and even guardians,

those unhealthy hereditaries
leased by blood currencies
and unwanted behaviours
that become second nature,

we could find ourselves
passing over
without fully reaching
the potential that Yahweh
has in store for us,

fate that is designed
as well as destined for us,

but only when we sit with our spirit
long enough
to confront the patterns inherited,

as well as the habits
passed down through
wounded blood,

does light start rising
in our bones.

There are legacies we honour
and legacies we must release.

Weights that never belonged to us
yet shaped us all the same.

Truth uncovering every
quiet fracture,
every shadowed instinct
we mistook for our own,

and in that revealing,
we learn to walk new paths —

choosing alignment over impulse,
peace over repetition,
clarity over the comfort
of old pains.

As we unlearn what
darkness taught,
we finally step into
what Heaven intended,

a freedom that fits us,
and a purpose
that breathes through us.

So we peel back the layers,
slowly,
bravely,
deliberately

unwrapping the patterns
that cling to our spirits,

calling them by name
so they may loosen their grip.

For healing is a covenant,
a quiet agreement
between our pain and our promise,

a choosing of freedom
even when bondage feels familiar.

We rise by remembering
that we are not bound
to the burdens we inherited,

nor chained to the echoes
of stories
we did not write.

Yahweh whispers renewal
into the marrow of our being,

teaching us to walk differently,
to breathe differently,

love without the shadows
that once shaped us.

And in that sacred unveiling,
we learn that transformation
is worship,

each step forward a testimony,
each surrendered pattern a praise.

For destiny waits not on perfection
but on willingness.

On hearts that dare to unbecome
everything that was never
truly theirs.

DIFFERENTLY

TO BREATHE

VALID

ALL THESE ARE

Inner Child of Mine

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
هدب ع (ي مي ه ا ر ب ا دم ح م) ح ا م س

You wouldn't apologise for laughing,
so just let it all out.

Why then do you apologise for crying?

All these are valid and healthy emotions.
They are allowed to exist.

We are always told to look at the bright side
and be mindful of how others feel.

But lest we forget,
this is not to be
at the expense of our equal liberty.

It appears we are only allowed to be in glee,
expected to cry only at funerals
and never freely be at ease.

In expressing pure,
uncharted emotions,
when purely all we desire
is simply to be seen.

EMOTIONS

AND HEALTHY



Fatima Al Samha – Fatima the Beautiful

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
هدبع (يميهاربإ دمحم) حامس

African Clouds

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
هدبع (يميهاربإ دمحم) حامس

**Seasons Shed. Snakes Shed.
Girls Do Too and Grow!**

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
هدبع (يميهاربإ دمحم) حامس

The Family Tree / Forest of Trees

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
هدبع (يميهاربإ دمحم) حامس

TWEEEL WA SH AHRY

Fatima Al Samha – Fatima the Beautiful

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
ه د ب ع (ي مي ه ا ر ب ا د م ح م) ح ا م س

I am Fatima the beautiful
and my hair is long.
I love dancing with swans
and singing a lot.

Ana Fatima Al Samha
wa shahry tweel.
Ana bahib al wiz
wa bagnie kateer.

ه ح م س ل ا ة م ط ا ف ا ن ا
ل ي و ط ي ر ع ش و
ز و ل ا ب ح ب ا ن ا
ر ي ت ك ي ن غ ب و

ALWIZ ANA BAHIB

BE FREE

African Clouds

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
هدب ع (ي مي ه ا ر ب ا دم حم) ح ام س

I want a brand new name.

I want the virtue of the evening rain,
but not its gossiping sun,
with its inconsistent lack of belief
in the stream and the hours it makes fun.

The stars work so hard,
to the betterment of all earth's children
and vast magnificence pun.

In tons and tons and tons!

I want to drown in the rain
with its elements of fluidity and calm,
yet torrential run.

Washing away all the nagging
and disbeliefs in me and all our sons.

I want to be free to be and create
without the wonder of how it will bring
humbleness and pain.

CREATE

TO BE AND

LIVE IN GLEE A WORLD WHERE WE ALL

Seasons Shed. Snakes Shed. Girls Do Too and Grow!

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
هدب ع (ي مي ه ا رب ا دم حم) ح ام س

Autumn is where our world recharges.

The leaves fall off the trees,
fearlessly letting go of the old,
embracing continuity.

The new in you and me.

If I was a summer,
I would be a scalding dry summer,
with lagoons steaming up
to make the rain real again!

If you were to smell it,
it would be citrus green,
with a hint of piano playing
to a lion's team.

The most effective way
for us all to be free
is to foresee and foresee and foresee
a world where we all live in glee.
I want to dance in the rain.

IN THE RAIN i WANT TO DANCE

COME TOGETHER THEN ALL THE TREES

The Family Tree / Forest of Trees

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /

هدب ع (ي مي ه ا ر ب ا د م ح م) ح ا م س

Different trees
running on different ecology,
treeology.

Running on:
emotion,
psychology.

Two trees living as one,
a blended family tree.

The old oak tree.
A baobab tree.

Conversations and life
in each one differs.

A single parent family tree.
A tree running on compost.
An onion tree.
A heroin tree.
A nicotine tree.

A herbal tree.
A tea tree.

Then all the trees
come together
to live in one happy forest.

A warm tree.

A cold tree.

A clean tree.

A dirty tree.

A kind tree.

A mean tree.

A full tree.

An empty tree.

A love tree.

A hate tree.

A growing tree.

A stunted tree.

An ill tree.

A healthy tree.

A loud tree.

A quiet tree.

A writing tree.

A reading tree.

An Arabic tree.

A nourished tree.

A malnourished tree.

A famished tree.

Universal leaves.

Root currency.

ING

CLOS

In That Year – 2025

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /

هدبع (ي مي هاربا دمحم) حامس

PAIN TO PURPOSE

In That Year – 2025

— Samah (Mohamed Ibrahim) Abdu /
هدب ع (ي مي ه ا ر ب ا ة دم حم) ح ام س

In that year I started hopeful,
only to have the absolute
rug pulled
from underneath me
at the end of only the
first week.

In that year I panicked
in my heart
about losing to a system
I was taught would protect it.

In that year I pushed through
to find the good
in me and you.

In that year I wept
and kept it all in me.

In that year I fought
for my heart and its abilities.

This year I chose me.

This year I will use deadlocks
as opportunities.

This year you will find me
outspoken and pretty.

Surrounded by kind souls
whose kindness is the key

in spreading love and
compassion,
we agree!

And never again will I choose
to be in a vicinity
that mutes our energy.

In that year pain and suffering
turned to creative expression
in poetry!

Pain to purpose.
Poison into medicine.

In that year my body
missed him.
In that year, I licked
my wounds
and an army of my friends
and family
came saved me.

Risk became reward.
Ejection became redirection.

Freedom flew into the room
and my womb.

In that year I sensed
the surreal scent of
nothingness,
The quiet in my home
and roam
I felt stillness that shuffled
my dome

An empty space.
A lonely place.

On that day I wished
for the sun,
instead I saw the fullness
of the moon.

Which shone and shone
and still calls me home.

MEDICINE TO

DIFFERENTLY

WE PROVIDE SPACE TO DO THINGS

About SIG Safe Ground

We provide space to do things differently

For over 30 years, Safe Ground has worked within the criminal justice system, using creativity, compassion and challenge to support people to understand themselves, their relationships and the systems that shape their lives. We are an arts-based, therapeutically informed charity rooted in relational practice and an anti-punitive, anti-shame approach.

We believe real change does not come through control or compliance, but through connection, honesty and collective imagination. Our work creates spaces where stories can be told safely, anger and grief can be named, and new possibilities can become reality, especially in systems that too often silence women's voices.

This anthology sits within that tradition: creative, political, and grounded in lived experience.

If you want to work with us, challenge systems, or do things differently, get in touch:
emma.hulme@socialinterestgroup.org.uk

This collection is illuminated by seven powerful women and their lived experience, shaped by memory and moments of change. It is an exploration of threshold — the space between what was and what is becoming. Hold this book gently in your hands and breathe in the wisdom, beauty, resilience, and magic that lie within its pages. This is what happens when women come together and tell their stories: we remember who we are, we make meaning from the in-between, and we open a path forward for others to follow.

— Toria Garbutt

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