



call for
Poetry & Flash Fiction
submissions

on the theme of

Violence Against Women and Girls: Enough is Enough!

written by women in the Hillingdon community



Background and Dedication

On November 25th, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, we put out a call for poetry and flash fiction on the theme of 'Violence Against Women and Girls: Enough is Enough!' to the women of Hillingdon.

This collection is dedicated to all those women who have experienced male violence and those women murdered at the hands of gender-based violence and by a current or former partner.

Thank you so much to those who responded to our writing call - your powerful words will raise awareness and inspire others to join the campaign to end violence against women and girls.

We are honoured to share your submissions.



Sisterhood Rooted in Pain

**We are in pain.
Hundreds of years of silent blame
that came from the men who steal our last name,
That comes from the screams whispered at night
from our sisters silently losing their fight
to a system that's never protected our right**

To Choose

**What we feel, how we know who we are.
That was taken from me when he ripped off my bra
and started something he'll never regret
leaving me with a scar I'll never forget**

The Girls

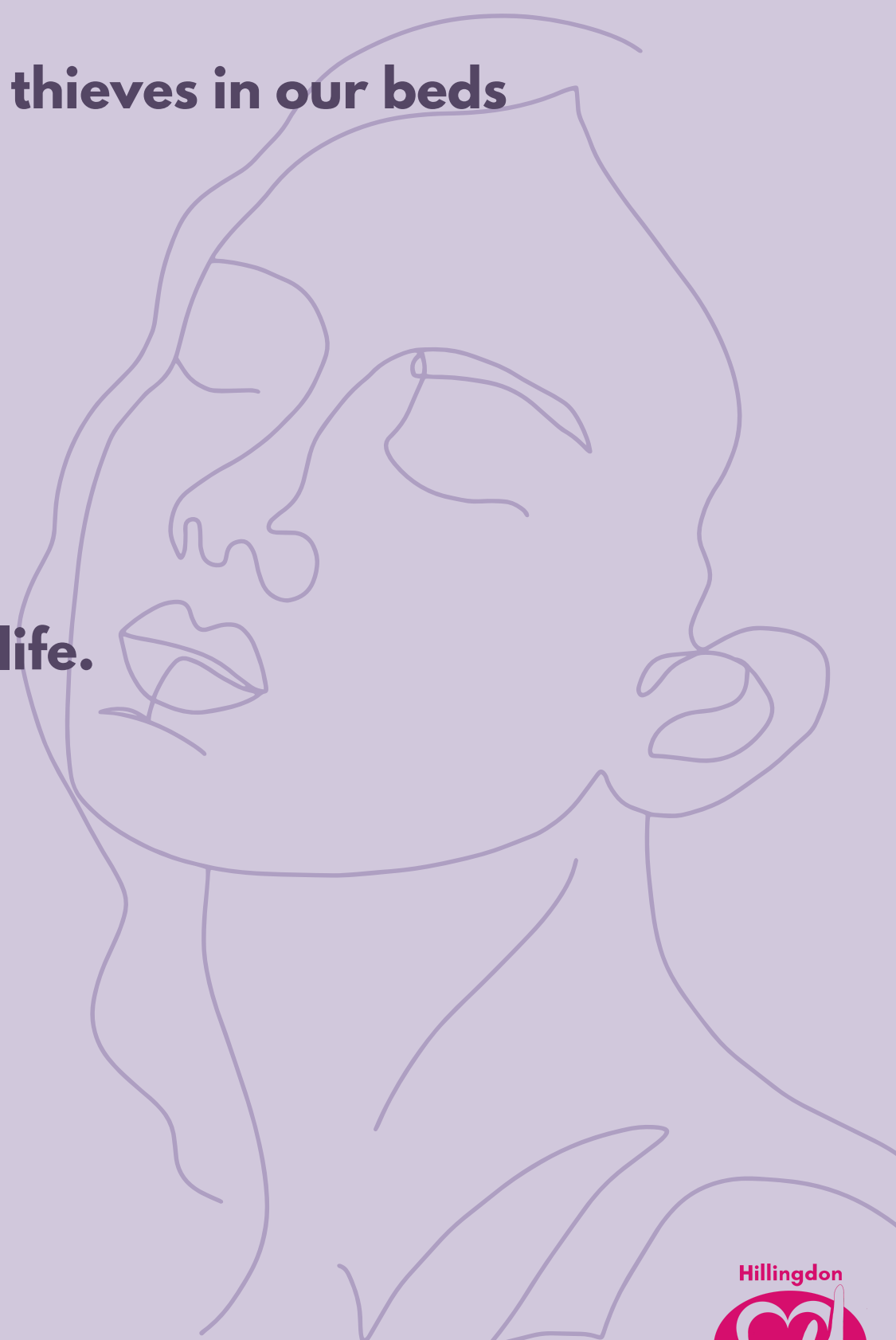
**Defined by their relation to a man.
HIS sister, HIS mother
Why don't they understand
that between our thighs there's a goldmine of power.
A Goddess just waiting and ready to flower.**

**We refuse to be objects, used and discarded by thieves in our beds
who can't find where their heart is.**

**We are more than
His sister.
His Mother.
His Wife.**

We are tied together in sisterhood and eternal life.

- Scarlett Wood



Noises

The beautiful silence of the night - then

The clank of the gate

**The clattering at the door
keys**

Turning, clicking, creaking

The stumble over the threshold

The grunt, the growl, the groan

Deep breath

The padding down the stairs

Soft, slow, subdued,

The crunch of egg shells

Loud

A hopeful greeting

The grunt, the growl, the groan

Low, scowling, intimidating

Fear

The loud ding, the clink of cutlery

The moan, the grumble, the gripe

The smash, the crash, the crunch

Pleading

chair scraping across the floor

The grunt, the growl, the groan

Scamper, scurry, scuttle

RUN

a predator stalking its prey

Snarling teeth slashing claws

The pounce

Scream

The grab of hair, the boot, the fist

The crack of bone against floor

The wail, the whimper, the whine

Blame

The grunt, the scold, the scoff

You asked! You deserve! Your fault!

The retreat

Quiet

Heavy breathing, heavy steps climb

Door slamming open, then slamming shut

The creak of the bed

Wait

Soft snores, is it safe...

The padding downstairs - this time my own

Check for air, stroke her hair

Alive

Clean the scene, nothing to see

Tomorrow will be a good day

With sorry's, sympathy, shame

Bed

School soon.

-Aileen Rafferty



When is enough, enough?

**When is enough, enough?
Is it when I am so weak and you are so tough?**

**Was it when I was lying on the floor after being hit.
Did I deserve it? for not washing your sports kit.
Was it being stripped, pinned and forced to have sex.
Was it my fault, you saw my ex?**

**When is enough, enough?
Is it when you started to get rough?**

**Was it being pushed down the stairs and breaking my arm,
I thought I was being kind, talking to your friends and causing no harm?**

**Was it the first slap for talking back?
I didn't want to argue, said sorry - give me some slack.**

**When is enough, enough?
Is it when you started hiding me and my stuff?**

**Was it when you wouldn't open the door to my family?
They called round for a chat and dinner, how bad could that be?**

**Was it when you hid my phone so I couldn't call my mates?
What did you think? I was arranging lots of dates?**

**When is enough, enough?
Is it when you cause me to stay in with a huff?**

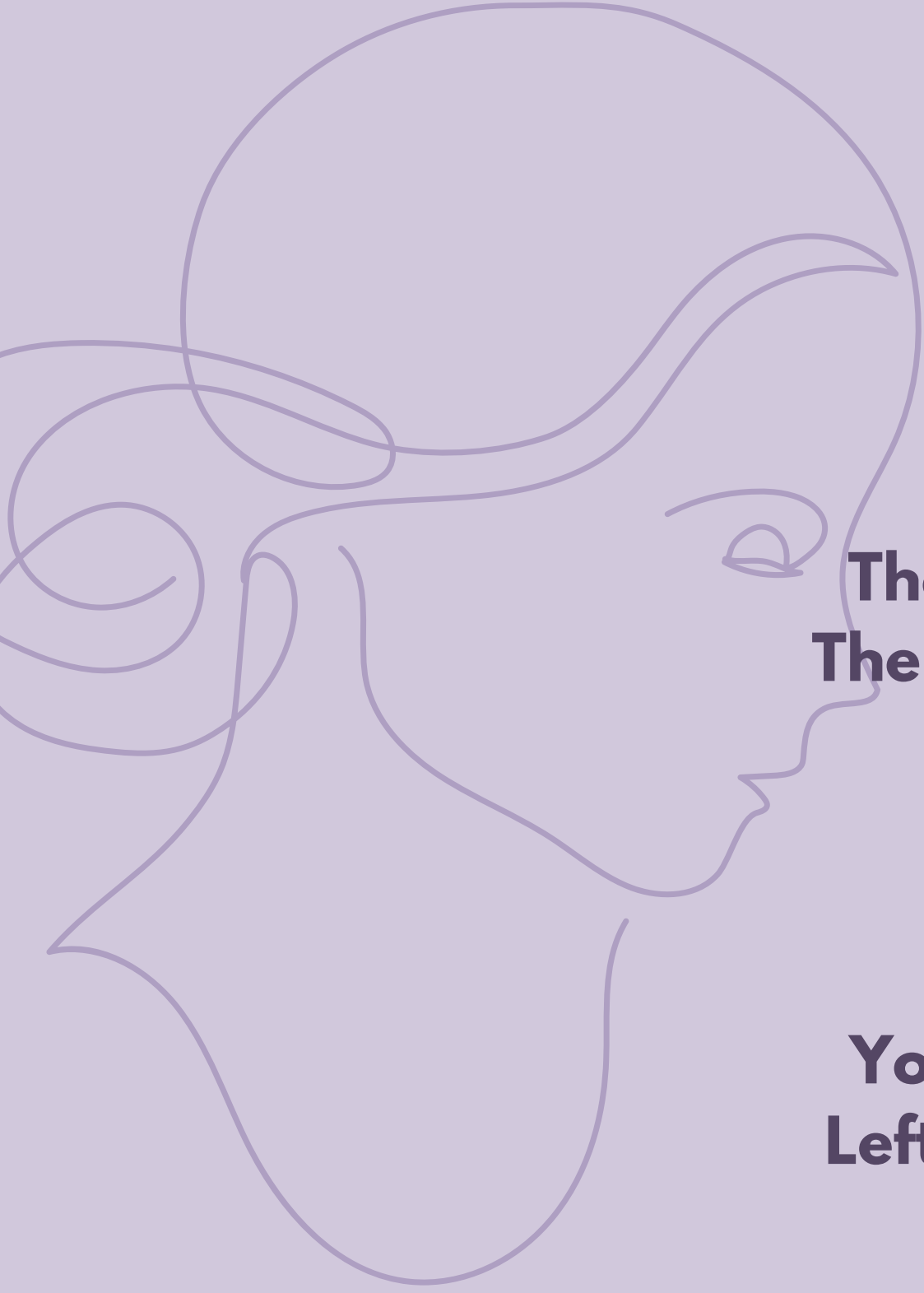
**Was it when you said I looked a fool?
I couldn't believe you could be so cruel.**

**Or was it when you said I couldn't go out looking like that.
In my normal skirt, top and favourite hat.**

**NO! Enough is enough, before we even meet.
That violent and manipulent monster, we should never have to greet.**

-Mel G





I'm Leaving

**The hurt you've made me feel,
The pain you've put me through.
I wish I spoke up sooner,
No one thinks it's true.**

**Pushing me down,
You've made me feel so small.
Left our dear child traumatised,
A witness to it all.**

**Feeling hushed,
Feeling isolated.
I should be the loudest in the room,
Whilst our rights are still violated.**

**Every meaning of health is compromised,
Being subject to your violence.
Your only way out of this -
Praying for my silence.**

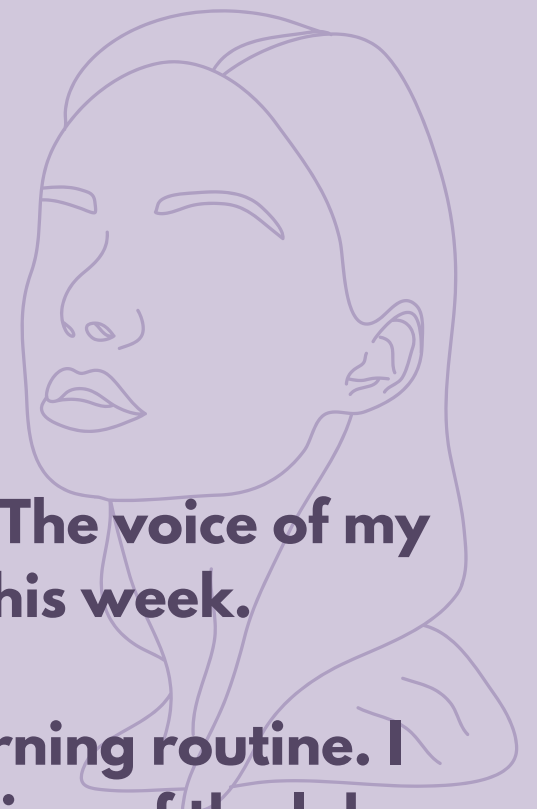
**I don't want that anymore,
And I don't care for your threats.
I just hope it hasn't broken our son,
I just hope he forgets.**

**Forgets about you,
Forgets about this.
But remembers how strong we are without,
So you're something he won't miss.**

**I will never forgive you for the suffering you caused me.
You've caused damage deep within.
You've driven us both out of your life,
And for that, we win.**

-Daisy Partridge

The Fear



I leave my house, fumble for keys, lock the door and make my way towards the park. The voice of my mother echoes through my head as I walk, a girl was abducted from a park near me this week.

I remember when she told me because that was the day I had explained to her my morning routine. I told her how I leave home early to sit at my bench in the park, the one with a perfect view of the lake. I told her how I sat there and watched the trees. How the wind shoved through the branches until they had nearly snapped right off, and how some unlucky few were overpowered by the wind, the weaker ones split and broke off from the rest and others were left hanging, lifeless and barely attached. She told me of a local girl, taken in broad daylight, while walking home, and explained that she would prefer for me to avoid the park. Mulling over my mother's words, I reach the park entrance and continue through. I want to. I am not naive or ignorant. I just want to walk through a park. I sit in my usual spot and time passes slowly. I am so relaxed that I nearly forget to leave. One last step and I have successfully left the park without any problems, I then continue and make my way to school.

It is now the afternoon, and I am rushing home. Winter has shortened the days and it is almost pitch black outside already. I avoid the park because there are no lampposts to light the path there and it's not a place I want to be when it gets dark. I take my usual precautions while walking, remembering that I mustn't wear my earphones while alone, remembering to put my phone slightly up my sleeve so it is not visible but is still clasped tightly to my palm, remembering to walk at a quick pace and to stick to the main roads. Wrapped in thought I'm suddenly interrupted by a strange silence. There are no cars passing by, splashing through puddles scattered across the tarmac road, no bustling crowds of school kids talking and laughing and there is not even wind blowing through the trees and against the houses here. Just the rhythm of my footsteps, the occasional collision of my bag against my side and my sharp intake and outtake of breaths. I focus my attention on these sounds until I become aware of the addition of distant shoes tapping against the slick, wet pavement.

Their pace is much slower than mine, effortlessly sauntering in comparison to my hurried strides. There are still no cars as I come to a small crossing, but I turn my head back slightly just to see who is behind me. I cannot make out more than a dark figure at the end of the road. I think, because of his stature, he is a man, but do not look long enough to be sure. I reach the other side of the crossing. His speed slightly increased from a casual stroll to a faster step. Each tread seems surer and the tapping louder. The thumping of my heart is spreading, and I can now feel it beating in my chest, reaching up my neck and then pounding on my head for an idea. I need to relax, it's probably nothing, the likelihood is so slim. Wait. What did my friend say at school today? Was it 1 in 3 women? Or 1 in 6 men? No. Something about 86% of victims. I can't remember. Oh God, I need to do something. The thumping and tapping grows as the shoes approach. I can hear heavy breathing, sniffing and muttering. Then a cough makes me jump as I realise how near he is. I grab my phone and dial the number to call my Mum. By the first ring I can see his shadow looming over me in the dull light of a lamp post, by the second he has moved to the side and fallen into step with me, by the third ring I have glanced at his appearance in the darkness, by the fourth he has shot me a quick smile and walked on.

"Hello?", my Mum answers but I am still trying to fathom what has happened. I watch his back, the outline of his figure retreating until it is lost to the darkness. I realise that I have 'the fear'. But it is better to be safe rather than sorry, right? Yes, it must be, after all, not all bees sting, but why take a chance with any of them, just in case.

I stopped going through the park after that day.

-Kathryn Nicholls

PROJECT US, RESPECT US...

**What? My skirt is too short? My make-up too much?
It's not an invitation. Don't ogle. Don't touch.
I wasn't leading you on, no intention to tease.
Why can't I be free to dress as I please?**

**I only came out for a drink and to dance,
Didn't know I'd be taking such a risk, such a chance,
Or that girls having fun somehow isn't allowed
And I'd only really feel safe in a crowd.**

**When I'm out on the street, alone in the dark,
Hearing footsteps approach as I cut through the park,
I can't see who's there, but as they draw near
I am filled with tension, apprehension, and fear.**

**A movement in the shadows? A kerb-crawling car?
Drunken shouting as men fall out of a bar.
Cross the road, all the rules say. Stay in the light.
Or, better still, just don't go out at night.**

**Are you following me? Don't you know how it feels?
I would run if I could, but it's hard in these heels.
You're bigger, you're stronger, you're intimidating.
Have you any idea of the fear you're creating?**

**Are you going to attack me? I'm afraid for my life.
When out by myself, should I carry a knife?
A weapon's not the answer, but what else can I do?
I don't want to end up as threatening as you.**

**You're the good guy, you say? Wouldn't hurt a fly?
You may get all indignant, but just ask yourself why
Girls get scared. They don't know you. They don't know you care.
There are sleazebags and killers and rapists out there.**

**So, think. Keep your distance. Remember, you're a stranger,
We have no way of knowing if we're safe or in danger.**

**Please, protect us, respect us, and educate boys...
Women are equals and girls are not toys.**

-Vivien Brown





Reclaiming the Fire

When did your fire go out? they ask...
A simple, yet complex task,
To tell the long story of this mask.

A mask I wear to hide the scars,
To hide the story of these bars,
The ones I built to keep me safe,
To shield me from the long-lost faith.

As a child, I'd sing and dance,
Every moment I had the chance.
Until the day I learnt a truth,
That extinguished the fire my soul had lit.
A simple truth, a lie I lived,
Summed up in four words... Not all dads hit.

Not all dads are violent or beat up mums,
Smash up the house after a few rums.
My home is different, we get no peace,
Fights and chaos and often police.

But I still kept singing, I had my friends,
Their families are nice, on them I depend.
Until the day my friend's grandad,
stole any innocence I still might've had.

I didn't understand it, but I knew it was wrong.
I couldn't tell anyone, I believed that strong.
Life changed, I changed, and things moved on,
Grew up, messed up, my fire was gone.

But I loved to dance,
and that's when we kissed,
The love of my life,
Until he raised his fist.

He didn't mean to, he wasn't well,
And just like that, I was under his spell.
A rollercoaster of bliss,
Passion and romance,
It was only fair, he get a second chance.

The singing is over,
The dancing is dead,
The fire is smoulder,
I'm empty instead.

I try to leave, I have some hope,
They don't believe me; say I can't cope.
A single mum, nowhere to run,
Simply surviving, what have I done?

Darkness unfolds; freeze, fight or flight,
But wait, what's this?
A fire ignites.
From the darkness, arises a light.

A path unfolds, some steps to take,
A helping hand, some changes to make.
Enough is enough,
No going back, onwards we go,
Walking away, Leaving behind,
Him, and all, that hinders my grow.

Healing, retrieving, all that I lost,
Learning true love, it came at a cost.
But this love I feel, for myself now,
It's strong, it's pure,
I don't have to ask how.

The singing returned, the dance restored,
I embrace the fire, of my own accord.
It was tough, but enough!
I AM enough.
The past is outgrown,
Honour the lessons, it led me home.

Home to me,
And all I can be.
Risen from the ashes,
A survivor, a mum,
The woman I've become.

-Suzanne

Footsteps Fall

Late night
journey home
empty carriage
train departs

Shuttered shops
deserted town
closed curtains
frost glistens
cats call
eerie mist
lights fade
into darkness

Phone plunged
deep in pocket
scarf pulled
across face
keys in hand
steady pace

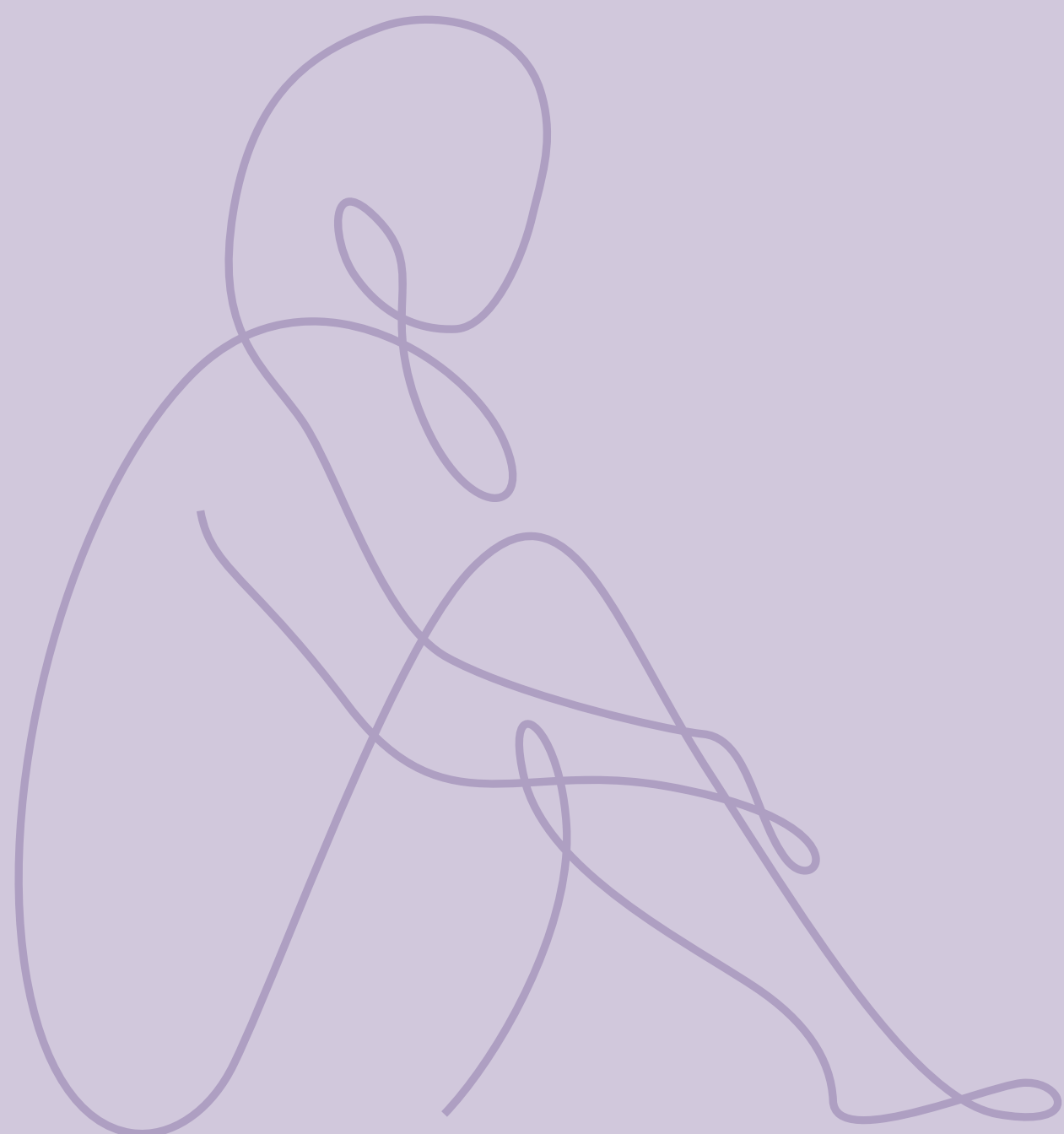
Footsteps fall
on stone
cold slabs
concealed shadow
dark silhouette
heart races
silence floats
stills breath
dries throat
Filthy hand
covers mouth
pulls hair
throws down
twists round
drags across
stony ground

Crazed face
looms above
bloodshot eyes
twisted mouth
stale breath
stench of sweat
vile beast
full of hate

Numb with fear
lonely tear
choking sob
silent scream
searing pain

Cruel
Mindless
Abhorrent
Violation.

-Bee



The Inner Me

I can't take this heartache, feels like I've gone deeply insane. Makes me broken and in more pain.
Longing for a better tomorrow not filled with such tragedy n sorrow.
Looking through windows of a painful past like my life had came to an end.
Enduring physical and mental abuse.
From someone I was meant to love n depend.
Not choking and suffocating I'm deep suppressed in silence. Living with internal fear and on eggshells through agonising domestic violence. Fighting so bad the tears I hold back as I yearned to cry.
Fighting to live another hellish day this is no lie. Confusing love which really him controlling and conditioning me. To respond the way I was manipulated and told.
Waiting in fear 3 years as the dv darkened more and unfold.
I longed for times of peace and calm. But no rest me just misery my mental illnesses as i began to self harm.
I will never forget that day. He pushed our love so far away he broke my heart in more than 2. Punished and abused, when all I did was unconditionally love you.
Im lost and drowned in the emotion suffocation in this heartbreak ocean.
As the ocean got deeper the more I cried longing for the dv to subside.
Get my life on track. Seems all the lies of a happy ever after n happy loving life.
Saying he'd always love me n me to be his wife. But no just used and abused and broke me n threatened to kill me with a knife. Now whilst he's away in custody I'm now trying to find the inner me.

-M. Burgess



Touch

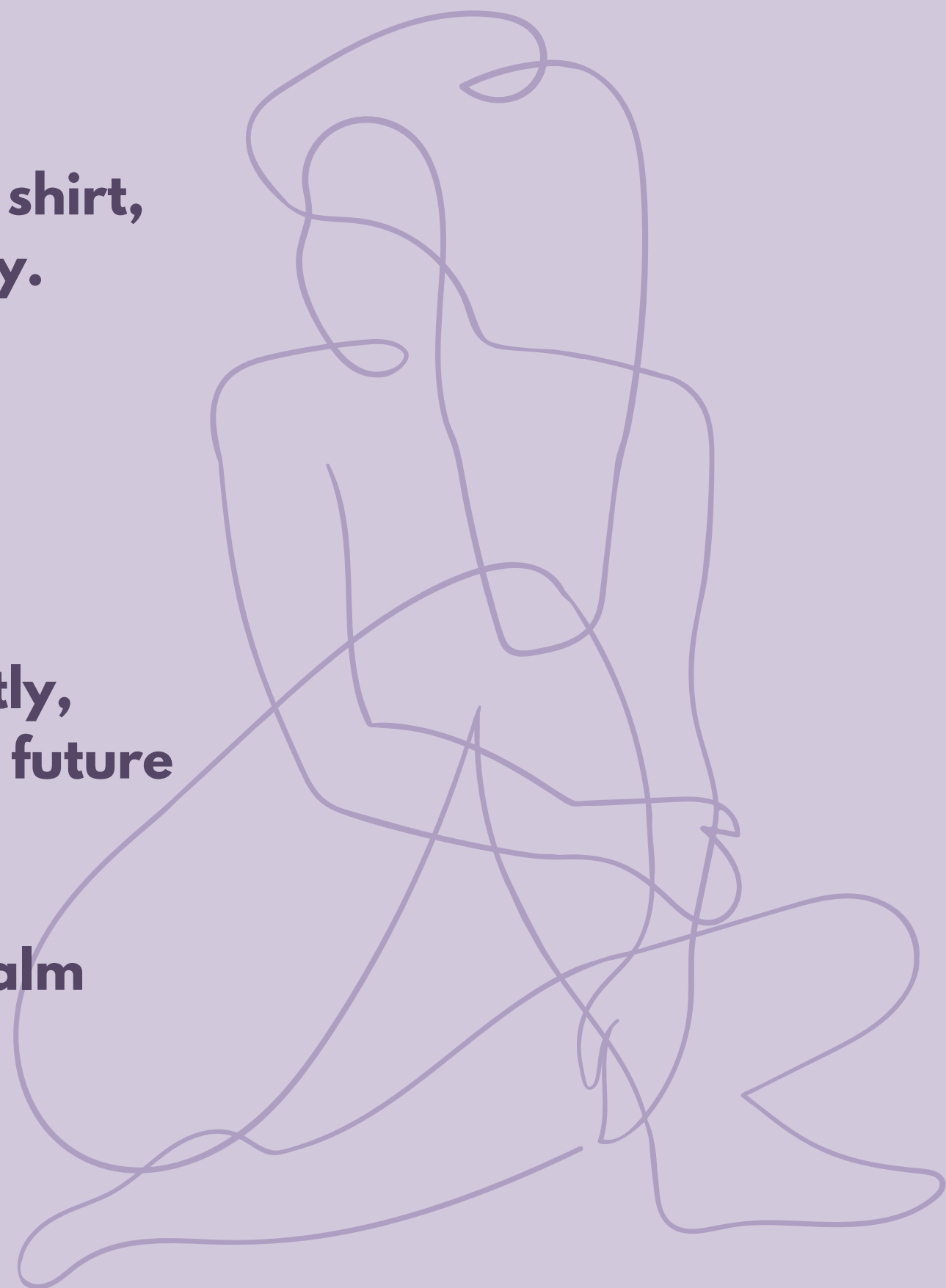
**You hold your trembling hand high, ready for action.
Time stops as you gaze,
puzzled, at this disembodied, unfamiliar thing.
Luckily you aren't responsible for its actions, are you?
Like your father wasn't for his, or so he told you.
In this moment you recall
your mother's cool palm on your hot forehead,
telling you she loves you**

**And, then, more memories slip in.
Now you're older.
You lie with her – your lover - unbutton her shirt,
cup her breasts, trace a finger over her belly.
Her back arches to meet you
as you reach between her thighs,
and she welcomes you, invites you in
whispering that she loves you**

**A few years on and you touch, so very lightly,
your infant daughter's head, imagining her future
Your heart bursts with dreams and fears
as not all are as kind as you, her father.
Her hair, as soft as a feather, tickles your palm
And you raise her to your lips.
Your kiss won't wake her
And you hope she knows you love her**

**And, now, we're back in the moment, with your anger.
Your hand raised, to her – your lover, whom you once caressed.
She never learns, repeats the same mistakes
this woman, this mother, this daughter.
But look - your lover holds her hand up,
the other resting on her daughter's head. She's emboldened.
This must stop. She knows your imminent touch,
your slap, is no expression of love.**

She's had enough.



The Swamp

One moment of distraction.
She is resolutely dragging her body out of the
Swamp.

Did I see a ghost?
I saw someone.

It's late. The bus stop reeks of petroleum.

I did. A woman.
You've been drinking.
I'm telling you.
Where?
By the swamp.
Over the dam?
I know you think there's no one but I'm telling you
what I saw.

The cricket ball follows the old path. Out by the
Swamp. The wind uncurls.

I heard her again.
Go back. Is it the summer buzz? May be.
No... cannot be.
I am losing my sanity.

I can feel her crawling out of the swamp.
She slithers onto the grass. Her hair tattered.
Naked. She looks at me.

I see her worn body.
Is she still there?
Silence.
Her bosom heaves like wildwood. She turns
around. Her bare back facing me. She bends
down. Touches the muddy water.
Home, she whispers.

The lady by the Swamp, mother says.
(Raped. Declared dead. 1982)

The storm lingers on the horizon. I sit by the
tamarind tree.
I wait. For her.

Do you want me to sing you the Blues?
She nods.
The melancholia of the tune pierce through her ears.
Crying, she looks at them in the reflection of the
swamp's water.
The moon rises like a moth.
She sits by the tree.
Blood bleeds between her legs.

She spreads them and looks down at herself.
I turn around and look the other way. She heads
towards the water.
Twenty-seven seconds...

She is sitting cross legged.
I stand still.
An hour passes by. She doesn't speak anything.
I walk towards her. Sit by the trunk.
Our shoulders touching.

She has scratches on her inner thighs and her breast.
Her nails bitten. Fingertips swollen.

I can't make myself look at her. I want to see her.
A gush of wind. She puts her hair behind her ears. She
turns her back to me again.
There are knots in her hair. I touch them.
She doesn't fidget.

I section them. I tie a loose braid.
I ask her if she wants flowers in her hair. She nods.
I bring her a yellow flower and put in in her braid.
We sit sound.
Our bodies becoming dust.

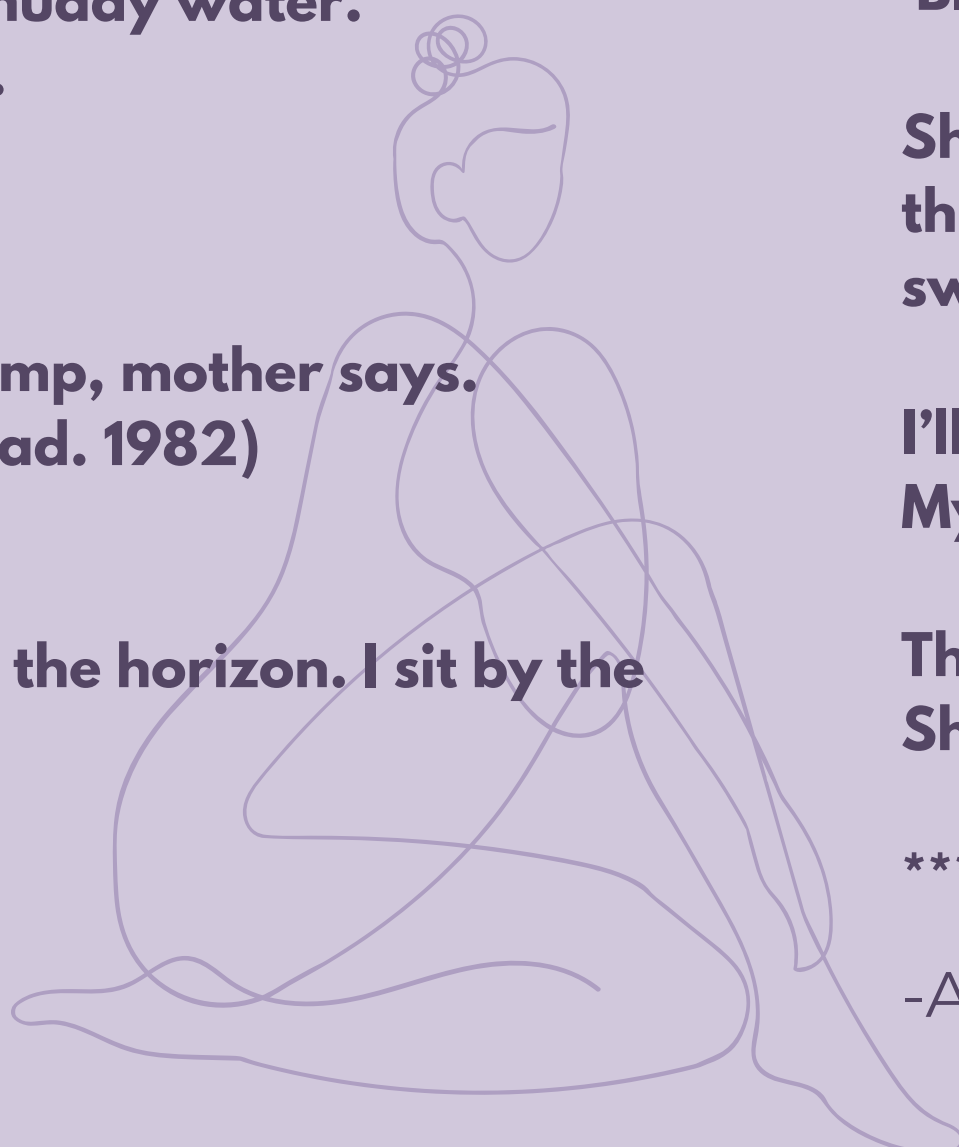
She looks at me. Gets up.
Blood drips down her legs.

She gets down on her knees and hands, crawling
through the mud, one scarred limb at a time; and
swiftly disappears into the swamp.

I'll come back again.
My words echo in the silence.

The yellow flower floats.
She disappears into the Swamp.

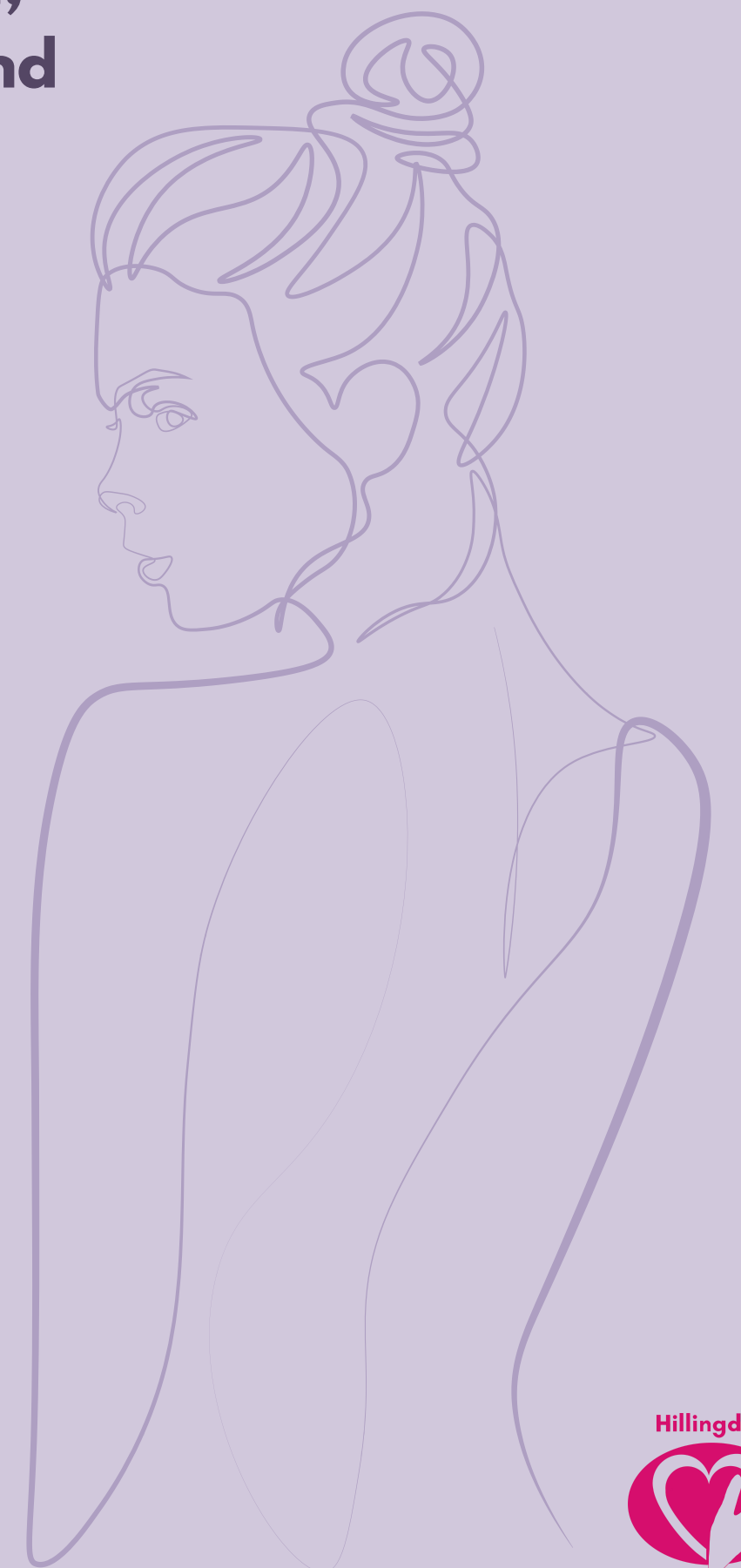
-Aishwarya Khale



Forgetting: a satire

**Her faint outline brims; translucent glass window,
immaculate hospital ward, fear takes over me. Dramatic musical;
fear, no recognition, old age satire making a mockery of me.
Combs her matted hair, bewildered- her eyes roam across
my face. Alien countenance; maps the geography of my
ghastly eyes and pallid cheeks. Tiny evocations, boxes unfold,
of hills from her childhood town, her father
riding across fields, duels and horses. Push-pull; old threads
melt apart- watch, the ceremony of the vanishing melody.
Nearby sits a mirror, look into it and watch it mimic a reflection.
Who do you see- her revolutionary familial lies dressed as
Gospel truths, churning into a glued gooey white light,
in a corner, within. It will crumble too, cracker biscuits
interacting with spoiled soy milk. Crouched in a tub,
she hums archaic folk songs, retains my anticipation,
red bouncy rubber ball, she smiles, a broken tooth grandmother smile.
When it all began; the moon did not rise in a warning.
I woke up, the world bled ice. Memorials taken down,
photographs fleeting away, from places, antiquity and
homes, leaving white tints of mush.**

-Aishwarya Khale



A physicist's daughter in a dollhouse

The lab reverberates, at the declaration of my father's name,
A Celebrity/God- echoing through his holy chambers.
He flies off to find his secret potions and magic crystals.

Mother rests by the porch, weaving marred scarfs,
Thread-bare. His telekinesis machine, lays unscathed,
a tiny rubble. We carry on, in a dysfunctional dollhouse on fire.

The reticent smell of rotten apples, rests in our backyard,
she stiches, for her loveless doll, in a plastic house; enduring a
marriage, which exists like a proper experimental theorem.

Never wanted (more or less), only a right amount of sugar in the pie.
New moon, brings him from the faraway land, getting his women,
things we want, not what we need. Complacent desires, still water.

The machine: unfolds the enigma, a pandora's box, suppressed
Yearning, spewing snakes and accompanied misery. Hold her
petite wrist, pull her into the trance, she knows.

The needle sits in the cloth, her fingers gravitate, to the design
on the porch. She will complete the scarf, fold it, fill the spaces
with various colourful threads and cover the dollhouse with it.

Come with me; her hand in mine, swaying to the jazz of the midnight.
Switch it on! The ring of the machine, she cusps my face,
- it is time to liberate. I levitate; away, from the three dolled house.

-Aishwarya Khale



Statistics

Globally, 1 in 3 women have been subjected to intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life.

Most violence against women is perpetrated by current or former husbands or intimate partners.

Of those who have been in a relationship, almost 1 in 4 adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband.

In 2018, an estimated 1 in 7 women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband in the past 12 months.

Calls to helplines have increased 5x in some countries as rates of reported intimate partner violence increase because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

137 women are killed by a member of their family every day.

Fewer than 40 % of the women who experience violence seek help of any sort.

At least 155 countries have passed laws on domestic violence, and 140 have laws on sexual harassment in the workplace.

15 million adolescent girls worldwide, aged 15–19 years, have experienced forced sex.

Across 5 regions, 82 per cent of women parliamentarians reported having experienced some form of psychological violence while serving their terms.