



Freedom and The Bridge

Rain on the roof at 3am.

The muffled scream of distant sirens and wind through the open window.

Was there ever a lonelier time, I wondered. Lying in the dark and stillness with the wolves circling. I thought the rain would never end that night, although I knew it would or at least transform into something else.

I'm not sure if I'd got tired of it all or was just plain exhausted but at some point I decided to do things differently; stop evading and deflecting. The times I'd done that crossed off the days and trodden water. In retrospect it's such a short-sighted approach. Side stepping circumstances gets you nowhere and it certainly won't lead you to freedom and boy, I'm a hell of a lot more fun since I decided to be free.



And then it was early 2021, the song however was from 1994. There was a girl and a bridge and a news report which was broadcast as a radio appeal to the public for information on said wandering girl. Fragments of facts merged with imagination, resulting in a creative explosion, at least in my eyes. We've history; that song and me.

In real time, there was a girl and a bench and a world in pandemic, daily rhetoric, personal challenges and whatever else decided to show up unannounced, as was the nature of the time. The sun on my face, sultry swaying branches and the green gold hues of the grass carpet all around, just as dusk was falling and wrapping the day in half light. A tiny corner of the world I managed to find that afternoon, when the rest of the planet was fading in and out of itself and reality was being pelted with curveballs.

I wonder what it was about that song at that time; why I found it or it me. I think about that girl found wandering on the Severn Bridge; shoeless, mute and lost and what led her there. I recall, at the time, the loud noise and bright lights of my own world so maybe there was a mirroring of her life with mine and an affinity due to a sense of chaos for us both. But, regardless of what brought us together that



afternoon, I just needed my head to be in that place and so I dived into the music. I sat on that bench, turned my face to the sun and closed my eyes. I dived as if it were my final listen, and I dived deep as I do when I need perspective or to navigate; when I want to run away or run towards; when I feel too much or think I don't feel enough; when I can't figure out what I feel, or if, or why...or those times



when there's doubt or a sense of floating away. Or just when I'm having a tough time residing in myself and some days it tranquillises, some days it lifts or inspires; igniting something that radiates. Some days it's that familiar thing to turn to or escape to, to hold or be held by.

I might have turned to this song a hundred times for refuge, and scores of others over the years. You see, deciding to be free didn't dissipate the anxiety, expel doubt, or alter my hard wiring and just because I talk about freedom doesn't mean I've a detailed plan or grasp of what it looks like. For me, it's a sense of space and the absence of constraint; an elusive concept really and maybe more a process than a destination.

I still remember that night with the rain, in the dark and others like it but now they're more like a bunch of meetings with old friends I'd rather forget than potential triggers or landmines. Because I changed and grew, realised emotions pass, fear disintegrates and night becomes day. I know it really helps to remember this.

The bench is still there, sat in the neatly kept garden on paving slabs with a birch tree hanging over. It's one of my favourite spots and the songs are a constant; making up the patchwork soundtrack to my life humming along with their bouncing melodies and breathing life into words.



Valerie Theay, Expert by Experience