

TOGETHER APART



A LOCKDOWN JOURNAL
WITH SONGS

NAZNEEN RAHMAN



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A LOCKDOWN JOURNAL
WITH SONGS

NAZNEEN RAHMAN





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To experience Together Apart in full you will want to listen to the album too. It has the songs and stories set to music and will inspire different emotions to the text.

To find the Together Apart album go to

www.nazneenrahman.com

For Ismail.

And every Ismail.

Thank you for making time
to share this journey with me.

It means a lot
that you chose to.

Love and light

Nazneen xxx



DAY 1

"From this evening I must
give the British people a
very simple instruction -
you must stay at home."

**BORIS JOHNSON,
PRIME MINISTER**

STATEMENT TO THE NATION,
MARCH 23RD, 2020

*“Never doubt that a small group
of thoughtful, committed, citizens
can change the world. Indeed, it is
the only thing that ever has.”*

MARGARET MEAD

ON MARCH 23RD, 2020 the UK went into lockdown to curb the merciless march of coronavirus.

We were told to stay home, to stay apart, so we could stay alive.

We complied.

We ceded personal freedoms we thought were our unassailable rights days before. Driven by fear, responsibility, self-interest, and altruism, we packed up our lives and hunkered down.

The impact was profound, swarming into every crevice of our lives. There was no respite, no havens, little solace. We became chimeras of clarity and uncertainty. What we must not do today was clear, but for how long? And how should we rewrite our rubrics to fit lockdown life.

My path seemed clear. I would put away my music and use my medical and science skills to be as helpful as possible. It was no sacrifice. It was not the time for my kind of art. I am not a chronicler of the current and in lockdown there was only 'today'. Perhaps in a year or two I might write about how the fabric of humanity had been altered, or not altered. It was the sort of thing I wondered about.

That is not what happened.

Words, thoughts, emotions, lyrics, melodies, swirled inside me. I became a random song generator, a musical juicer, mental scraps transforming into harmonic sludges of dubious merit. It was exhausting, confusing, disorientating. I slept poorly. I couldn't concentrate. I needed to calm down.

When I need to calm down, I write, and I seek structure. I find comfort in structure when stranded in chaos I can't control.

So, this project was born - first as a way of coping with the chaos, then as a way of creating something from it. Some upside.

I decided to write four songs over two months from the start of lockdown. Each song would be birthed on a single day from the mood of that day, to capture the ephemeral present before it was contorted to rationalise the past and future.

A real-time musical journal of life in lockdown.

Largesse from the pain of separation to ease the pain of separation.

A small way to be TOGETHER though we must be A P A R T.



DAY 10

"Of those hospitalised in the UK, sadly 2,352 have died. This is an increase of 563 fatalities since yesterday. The youngest of them was just 13 years old."

**ALOK SHARMA,
SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR BUSINESS**

DAILY PRESS BRIEFING,
APRIL 1ST, 2020

*“We all live with the objective
of being happy; our lives are all
different and yet the same.”*

ANNE FRANK

APRIL 1ST, 2020 was the day the crisis changed for me.

The day it became personal.

It was also my birthday.

* * *

I write my life in rituals. It helps make sense of the reading of it. The Birthday Song is one such ritual. Every birthday I write a scrap of a song, sometimes more melody than words, sometimes more poetry than tune. If you could plot the soul of my Birthday Songs, you would know who I am.

Song is, perhaps, too grand a word to describe these doodles-that-happen-to-be-sung. I've only once 'finished' a Birthday Song; the 2010 offering prevaricated it's way on to my 2019 album 'I'm Too Old to Die Young'.

So, I hadn't planned to write a lockdown project song that day. I had a prior commitment with a scrappy Birthday Song. A song circling around our unquenchable pursuit of the hazy, tortuous, teasing nirvana, we call happiness.

Over 500 Covid-19 deaths were announced in the UK on April 1st, a shockingly high number for the times. I did not know any of them, so they should have flickered in my consciousness fiercely but briefly, like a struck match. Assimilating the deaths of the unknown is an essential, sanity-preserving skill of a doctor, best achieved with sympathy and empathy, but without fear or tears.

And we all practice this assimilation; how would we get through the days otherwise? How would we stop ourselves drowning in sorrow if we felt, for just one moment, the loss of the 150,000 people who die every day? The pain would be intolerable. So, we retreat to our armour-plated, bullet-proof, emotion-proof panic rooms, drilling tiny holes in the walls to connect us to the precious few for whom we are willing to risk the agony of loss.

Occasionally, a faceless death pulls on the strings that bind us to our loved ones, reminding us of possibilities, inevitabilities we decry. Rarer still, a death slices through all our protective layers with the sharpness of a paper cut, and the magnitude of humanity's collective bereavement is known to us.

I didn't see it coming.

I would have sprinted into my cosy closet of denial if I had. It was just another headline, a tragic one for sure, but tragedy is commonplace. Yes, this had extra

elements. A child, only 13. No other medical problems. He was well, the full richness of the world open to him. Then he was dead.

It wasn't the sudden, brutal untimeliness of his death that tracked down my cheeks in big, fat, slow tears. It was the unbearable aloneness. For him, for his family, for all he loved and that loved him. The cruelty of those early lockdown days prevented parents holding the hands of their dying children. Marked only by a stark sentence.

"Sadly, he died without any family members close by due to the highly infectious nature of Covid-19."

There are truths that bind us all, that transcend all differences.

No one should die alone.

No child should ever die alone.

No one should be stopped from holding the hand of their dying loved one.

The essence of humanity is in our holding and our held hands.

There can be no happiness without it.



HAPPY EVER AFTER

HAPPY EVER AFTER

We thought we had it all worked out

Life was tough

But not for us

They were them

And we were entitled

Somehow

Then the rules were tossed to trash

You are me

I am you

Noone's got a clue

Everyone's hiding

Everyone's crying

Happy ever after

Happy ever after

It's not what I thought it was

When I was having fun

Doing whatever I wanted

Happy ever after

Happy ever after

It's just staying alive

Being by your bedside

Holding your hand

So it seems we're all the same
 Playing for time
 Praying for signs
You can't buy your way out
 Not yet

 The gloss stripped away
Reveals misjudgments we made
Things we thought mattered
 Don't mean anything
 All want one thing

 Happy ever after
 Happy ever after
It's not what I thought it was
 When I was playing god
 Doing whatever I wanted

 Happy ever after
 Happy ever after
It's just staying alive
Being by your bedside
 Holding your hand

Let me make my promises
Let me sell my soul
Let me pray to gods
I don't believe in
I can dance on fire
You can pull your noose tighter
I will give you everything
For just a chance to bring him

Home

Happy ever after
Happy ever after
It's not what I thought it was
Where are you god

Happy ever after
Happy ever after
Is you staying alive
Being at my side
Holding my hand
Holding my hand

Hold my hand

Hold
My
Hand



DAY 21

"Today marks a sombre day
in the impact of this
disease as we join the list
of countries who have seen
more than 10,000 deaths
related to coronavirus."

**MATT HANCOCK,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

DAILY PRESS BRIEFING,
APRIL 12TH, 2020

*“I don’t cover my face because I
want to show my identity.”*

MALALA YOUSAFZAI

MY SONGS often seem to be about one thing but are really about something else.

It used to delight me, this playful sleight-of-word.

Then a thought winded me, wouldn't it be better to just write about the 'something else'?

I tried.

It didn't go so well.

* * *

In the early days of lockdown, separation served as a universal metaphor through which the pain and practicalities of the crisis was voiced. It was no surprise then that an hour of musing unfolded *When Will I See You Again*, a straightforward missing-you song, decorated here and there with a pandemic patina.

It was a surprise when I came back to it a few days later and realised missing your loved ones was a sub-plot, an easy-access portal to a deeper, more subversive loss — missing ourselves.

We had adapted to being apart from family and friends with customary pluck, commandeering all possible means to stay connected. Many of us also reconfigured our working lives. We were living through avatars, half-dressed cartoons we sent out to represent us in the new world. A world that had given up its risky physical premises to climb into our laptops and phone lines.

For travel-weary introverts there were flecks of gold in the grit of this existence, and I basked in them. For a time. But questions, doubts were already circling. Who were these people? These versions of ourselves. Did we know them? Did we like them? Were they on our side, holding the fort until we could get back to the helm? Or were they going to take over?

Were they us 2.0?

As the days rolled on, austere, monotonous, our connections to others settled into new patterns. But our connections with ourselves, our former and new selves, became more unsettled and unsettling.

What was real? These 2D technicolor impersonators that could take us anywhere, see anyone, be anyone, as long as we stayed in our computers? Or the grey, unwashed, sofa-hugging body-hackers staring back at us in our mirrors, going nowhere.

That night I dreamed I was dancing barefoot on the beach, twirling and twirling, the warm sand undulating between my toes. It felt so real. Was it real?

And if I meet that girl again, will I know her?

Will she want to know me?



WHEN WILL I SEE ME

WHEN WILL I SEE ME

I need the sun from your smile in my morning
You need the strength from my hand when you're falling

Two metres

Two thousand miles

Too far away

Being apart is the new mark of caring
Being alone our best way of sharing

Two metres

Two million miles

Too far away

When will I see you again

Darling

Your hand enclosed in mine

We're peering into empty eyes

2D lives

We make the best of bad choices

When will I see you again

Playing tough hiding tears

Disguising fears

We stow our hearts in our voices

When will I see you again

Bringing together is my way of being

Connecting a crowd my way of seeing

Opening minds

Opening mine

Hand in hand

Shrinking the world to four walls and a laptop

Shrinking our lives thoughts that we can't stop

Losing control

Taking its toll

Banned and canned

When will I see me again

Dancing

The sand beneath my feet

Living in these empty days

Endless malaise

We pack away our intentions

When will I see me again

Getting by towing the line

Making it fine

We masterclass reinvention

When will I see me again

Empty eyes

Empty days

When will I see me



DAY 49

"There are millions of people who are both fearful of this terrible disease, and at the same time also fearful of what this long period of enforced inactivity will do to their livelihoods and their mental and physical wellbeing. So, I want to provide tonight - for you - the shape of a plan to address both fears."

**BORIS JOHNSON,
PRIME MINISTER**

STATEMENT TO THE NATION,
MAY 10TH, 2020

*“Freeing yourself was one thing,
claiming ownership of that freed
self was another.”*

TONI MORRISON,
BELOVED

ON A FRESH FEBRUARY AFTERNOON in 2019

I was strolling along the cliff-tops overlooking Half-Moon Bay with a precious friend. The type of friend whose every word enriches.

We fell into talking about freedom.

‘You know freedom always comes back to that balance between freedom-from and freedom-to,’ he said.

I stopped. The rhythm of our easy strides upset by my need to divert all mental processing to this bold statement.

I am still processing.

Freedom is a powerful word. A word that fuels armies. But what does it mean? Beyond believing it our right, how often do we inhabitants of the privileged world think about freedom?

We want freedom from hunger, pain, illness, injustice. Of course. The world could have this if we chose to live in confinement, with rationed healthy food, daily exercise, restricted interactions. But we do not call this freedom, we call it prison. This pure free-from existence is our exemplar of unfreedom.

Because we need freedom-to. With our good health, full stomachs and educated minds we want to create, grow, love, learn, feel, live. Without freedom-to life is not living.

Or so we thought.

In the first flush of pandemic fear, freedom-from was our only priority. It was not a radical awakening. We did not, in a mass realisation, understand that relinquishing a few freedom-tos would prevent millions of unnecessary deaths from poverty, smoking, obesity, climate-change. We choose to shield ourselves from problems of own making, however devastating. Far preferable to wage war on an external enemy. We know that story. We can make those sacrifices. With proud hearts.

On Day One we willingly gave up our freedom-tos. Doing our bit. On Day 49 we were asked to start embracing them again; the story had taken an unexpected twist, hiding from the invasion as terrible as living with it. The world is powered by our appetite for freedom-tos, not our fear of freedom-froms. If we did not feed, the damage would be irreparable.

It always comes back to the balance between freedom-from and freedom-to.

But we did not rush through our gates gulping in the new air. We did not push our heads out of our bunkers blinking at the brightness of new opportunities. No. We sat on our floors rocking back-and-forth, confused. What had really changed? Was it nothing, or could it be everything?

Beyond the urgent clamour of the crisis deeper questions were clawing at our raw insides - had we got the balance right before? Could it be we were spending our lives see-sawing up and down the freedom highway, breaking our backs freedom-from clambering up to the zenith then blowing it sliding down to a meaningless freedom-to? Or was freedom like the horizon, always in the distance, a tantalising illusion we chase, not realising we are squandering our freedoms on the hunt?

In the choking fog of uncertainties,

One thing was certain.

We had no clue how to balance.

Not now, maybe not ever.

And there was no Hollywood ending in view.

FREEDOM



FREEDOM

Stay home, stay safe, stay alive
What's the point of living
Lost in a prison

Stay home, stay safe, stay alive
Could we be hurting
More than we're serving

Stay home, stay alive
So little money
So many worries

Freedom

Lock down, go to ground, make it count
Having a life
Is more than being alive

Lock down, go to ground, make it count
Is it an answer
This unsticky plaster

Lock down, make it count
It's too hard
Being apart

Freedom

What's the way back

Freedom

What's the way out

Freedom

I just wanna be free

Freedom

Is it safe out there

Is it safe in here

Is it safe

Restart, be smart, a la carte

Going too fast

Might squander the past

Restart, be smart, a la carte

Could we be hurting

More than we're serving

Restart, a la carte

Short-term gain

For your endless pain is

Not Freedom

Don't hide, go outside, or your fired

Having a life is

Not having to die

Don't hide, go outside, or your fired

Is it an answer

This unsticky plaster

Don't hide, go outside

Is a quick fix

Worth the risk

Freedom

I just wanna be free (what's the way back)

Freedom

I just wanna be free (what's the way out)

Freedom

I just wanna be free

Freedom

What's the way back

What's the way out

Is it safe out there

Freedom

Freedom

Freedom



DAY 60

"So let's all come together this Mental Health Awareness Week and support each other."

MATT HANCOCK,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

DAILY PRESS BRIEFING,
MAY 21ST, 2020

*“Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without
the words
And never stops at all.”*

EMILY DICKINSON

I HAVE A FONDNESS for breaking stupid rules.
With zestful brio.

As I've aged, I've found almost all the rules I want to break, I invented myself.

This doesn't make them easier to reject.

Annoyingly.

At the start of this project I had ruled the last song would be about the Future. How I was thinking and feeling about the future at the moment of writing. As it turned out, I wasn't feeling great about it. It had been a dispiriting week in the world. A week of lessons not learned, of soundbites outgunning strategy, of hypocrisy outplaying humanity. It was good fodder for a song, and the song I wrote had potential. But it didn't feel true. Not the next day, or even the next hour.

I didn't want it to be the last song, so I avoided finishing it; it couldn't be the last song if it didn't exist. But this left me with the problem that I didn't have a final song and May 23rd, the day I had ruled the project would end, was fast approaching.

What was to stop me just binning it and writing a different song? Only that it was against the rules. But maybe they were stupid rules, so I should just break them?

The danger of breaking your own rules is slipping into the convenience of changing the rules to fit your wants. And then there is the mental anguish of deciding if it is a stupid or significant rule. Best avoided. And, of course, breaking one's own rules always has symbolic significance, irrespective of the rule.

So, it was decided. I'd finish dispirited-song. But I really didn't want to. So I didn't.

Whilst this ridiculous stand-off between myself and myself was going on, I found I had written another song. Not according to the rules: it emerged through a week of idle strummings and off-hand hummings. Sauntering along by my side, casually, carelessly, just hanging out.

It was inspired by my virtual society of friends, colleagues, listeners. I assumed my world would shrink in lockdown, but it expanded. I was surrounded by warmth, strength, creativity, resourcefulness. Health workers, caring for us whatever the personal cost; scientists, striving to save us, entrepreneurs pivoting to serve us, the Sustaineers dreaming of a greener world, the Voyagers dreaming of a brighter one, and so many beautiful musicians finding ways to keep our hearts singing.

Green shoots all around, grown with genius and gumption. Doing things faster, and better, and kinder. And everywhere, I could hear the same marvellous whisper.

“Look at what we can do, when we want to.”

So this song was born, and with it a cheeky ‘track-and-trace’ approach to crowdsourcing the choir I needed to finish it. It felt right.

I wanted it to be the last song, even though it broke the rules.

Not because it is more representative of how I feel; I have many moments of gloomy anxiety, but because it is how I want to feel and, more important still, it is how I want to act.

Hopefully.



THE NEW HOPEFULS



THE NEW HOPEFULS

She was pulled from pain by a stranger's hand

Perhaps it was you

He was moved to tears by the kindness of strangers

Maybe it was you

Or me

Or them

Or all of us

Fearful times drive fearless changes

Like maybe there are no strangers

And I'm hopeful

We'll find a brighter dawn

We've glimpsed the path to a different why

In the searing blue of a smogless sky

New hopefuls

Sure we've tried before

But now we see

What we can be

What we can change

With just the blood in our veins

If we want it

She had closed her eyes to destruction and unfairness
Nothing she could do
He had told himself 'this is how it is I'm doing my best'
You know that's you
And me
And them
And all of us

Quiet lives feed fertile minds
All deciding to do better

So we're hopeful
We'll find a brighter dawn
We've glimpsed the path to a different why
In the searing blue of a smogless sky
New hopefuls
Sure we've tried before
But now we see
What we can be
What we can change
With just the blood in our veins
If we want it

Hopeful

We can do anything

We are The New Hopefuls

We can do anything

Hopeful

We can do anything

We can do anything

If we want it

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not exist without Oscar Moos, a super-talented young producer, who I met through my third album 'I'm Too Old to Die Young'. On paper there is nothing Oscar and I have in common; we are different in every way. And yet we are musical soulmates. We feel and make music with the same sensibility. It was a joy to create *Together Apart* with him.

Oscar produced *When Will I See Me*, *Freedom* and *The New Hopefuls* and all the storysongs. He also made the beats that inspired *When Will I See Me* (Quirky_Loop) and *Freedom* (TF_Melodic_Loop_Wurly_Tapestop). You can hear the original beats in the 'behind the scenes' pack that comes with this book. I had not started a song from a beat before, it was interesting and liberating. I am going to make some more.

My son, Haroon, assisted with the production of *When Will I See Me*, which we recorded in the makeshift studio he fashioned from our spare room; the mattress positioned against the wall providing excellent soundproofing. Haroon, as always, was a constant sounding board for my ideas and music.

Joe Davison, from Auburn Jam Music, produced *Happy Ever After*. Joe produced my first two albums, 'Can't Clip My Wings' and 'Answers No Questions', and without his talent and encouragement I would never have mustered the courage to share my music. It was lovely to make something together again.

The mastering of the songs was done by Mads Hye and Rolf Grove at Skouboe Studiet, and of the storysongs by Oscar Moos.

I found the images for the artwork on Unsplash. They are by Emile Seguin, Gert Stockmans, Christian Fregnan, Mathilde Decoucelle and Alaric Sim. Thank you for your generosity in making your photographs available. Catalina Alzate used them to design the covers.

Rob Bradbrook designed the book and made it truer and lovelier than I thought possible.

I have a wonderful, engaged and supportive listener base who came on this journey with me. I write a museletter to them most weeks and they give me inspiration and encouragement. I am so grateful for their support of this project and hope they like the result. If you would like to get my museletter you can sign-up on my website: www.nazneenrahman.com.

Finally, a special thank you to The New Hopefuls choir who provided the gorgeous harmonies at the end of *The New Hopefuls*, which is my favourite part of Together Apart. Assembling a choir in lockdown required some creative thinking. In the spirit of the times I borrowed a track-and-trace approach, contacting everyone with whom I spent 15 or more (virtual) minutes in the week I wrote the song. Thirteen game, helpful, brave souls answered my invitation: Daniel Boone, Leena Ceccolini, Lynne Good, Andrew Griffiths, June Kirkwood, Ruth March, Jane Michotte, Mene Pangalos, Matt Pattison, Ayla Payne, Rania Payne, Haroon Taylor and Rabin Yaghoubi. They sang along to segments I sent them, recording their renditions on their phones and sending them back to me. Oscar wove these together and I hope you agree the final result is stunning.

The New Hopefuls choir was created apart, by individuals who mostly did not know each other, nor what they were signing up to, then brought together to inspire us with their bold, warm, strong 'We can do anything'. They are the essence of this work.

Because collective voices have beauty and power.

And humanity always finds a way to be TOGETHER, even when forced to be APART.

NOTES

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NAZNEEN RAHMAN

NAZNEEN RAHMAN is a scientist, doctor, writer and singer-songwriter. For 20 years her medical science was in the field of cancer genetics, identifying genes that cause cancer and translating the knowledge to improve patient care. She is now focused on the climate emergency through YewMaker, a purpose-driven enterprise making healthcare sustainable.

Nazneen's music and writings explore the messy glory of being human. Her previous works include three albums 'Can't Clip My Wings', 'Answers No Questions', and 'I'm Too Old to Die Young' which together comprise 'The BitterSweet Trilogy' and chart life's journey through changes, choices, and chances. Three of the songs reached the finals of the UK Songwriting Contest.

In 2016 she was awarded a CBE for Services to Medical Science.



Visit www.nazneenrahman.com for links to music, writings, the museletter, and upcoming works.