



Parkbench Perspectives

By Wayne Visser

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Why is it, when I sit on this bench, that I feel free? It makes no sense. So much of my life is a cage. So what is it about this bench, this place? Is it the open space, uncluttered by the props of my life's drama? Or the early morning sun and the sparkling dew on the grass, whispering that even the longest nights end and the coldest freeze thaws? Maybe it is just that everything I care most about is right here where I see it clearly, from this bench.

The twins are happily preoccupied on the blanket with their toys, and the boys are close by in the playground area. They epitomise what it means to be carefree. They still know the joy of simple pleasures. When last was my life simple? It's hard to believe it ever was. How much time do they have left, before their innocence evaporates? Before their world gets complicated? Before they realise the harsh pain of reality?

It won't be long now and I can't bear it. To know that I can't protect them from being hurt. To know that I can't shield them from being caught in the crossfire. It's not *their* fault! Why should *they* suffer because their parents don't love one another; because power and politics twist relationships; because they are part of a deal to avoid public embarrassment? Will my love be enough? Or will they resent me, for making them complicit in the lie I've been living?

Just look at Adrian, in his superman t-shirt, waving at me from the top of the slide, looking for all the world like the superhero he is. God. I remember that feeling! I even had the t-shirt: Wonder Woman of course. What happened to her? Did she die in one too many battles with cynicism? Was she educated to death? Or did the church crucify her? And who is going to tell Alex that he's not invincible? I don't have the heart to tell him that saving the universe is a little ambitious when people can't even save a marriage.

And what about Brian? He has none of Adrain's confidence. He is such a sensitive soul. Cries for almost no reason. How is he going to cope in a world that rewards bullies and scorns softness? At least I had the confidence. At least I was with the "in" crowd. I know now that that was a mixed blessing. Some people still me as little more than a cheerleader at the ballgame which is my husband's career. But at least I was a bit older before I learned about rejection.

And who knows with the twins. They are still so young. If things go wrong, if things get messy, how will they be affected? Will they be strong for each other? Later, when they find out the truth, will they join together against me? Or will they forgive me? Will they believe me when I tell them that everything I did was because I thought it was the best for them? Or will they just see a coward who lived her life to please everyone except herself?

If I had one wish, it would be that these beautiful children of mine grow up to be free. Is that possible? Can I live in a cage without placing bars around them also? Will I teach them to expect limitations and to accept compromises? Will my bitter experience of love convince them that love is never sweet? Will they renounce their faith in dreams, because my nightmares have haunted their lives? So many impossible questions, it drives me crazy.





Perhaps it is enough that, for now, I am here on this bench, and those I love are close by. With one exception, of course. He is not close by. But at least here, in this park, there is space for me to reach out to him. The rustling leaves of the trees echo my emotions. The cries of the birds carry my thoughts on wings. The drifting clouds merge my soul with his.

What would he say to me if he were here, sitting next to me on the bench, his arm around my shoulder, his hand resting gently on mine, caressing my wrist with his thumb? Would he try to convince me that my cage is an illusion? Probably not. Would he tell me to break out of the cage, whatever the cost? I doubt it. What would he say?

Maybe he would talk about other ways of being free. I can almost hear his voice now. It is deeper than his boyish face suggests it should be, and has that strange lilt of an accent: "There are some things which can never be caged ..." And then he would look searchingly into my eyes and say my name and I would melt like a chocolate in his mouth.

I'm not sure I really believe in his philosophies. They don't square easily with the walls of the reality that surround me. Or maybe I just don't fully understand them yet. But what I do know is that sometimes, he makes me feel like so much more may be possible. He makes me believe in the kaleidoscope of hope, of dreaming, of inspiration, of creativity, of flying, even the possibility of love.

Perhaps even more important than all of that, he makes me believe in myself again. He reminds me that Wonder Woman did not die after all; she was drugged by evil forces and has just been asleep a long, long time. Maybe she just needs a butterfly kiss to wake her up. Some would call what we have a fantasy. But I call it a soul space. And it is the space we have together.

Don't ask me what all this has to do with a weathered bench. Maybe it is a wormhole in time? Or maybe the resonance of this place is just strong - the purple flowers on ground, the seagulls scrapping for food, the "MT" hiding among the many initials carved on the bench slats. Or maybe some questions don't have answers. Anyway, time to get back - the stage awaits.



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