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I Will Be Alright: The Cruel Irony of Freedom

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What does freedom mean when the right to live safely depends on where you were born, and who gets to decide whether you belong? Can a country promise protection while sending someone back to danger? And what happens when the rights a society celebrates are denied to those who need them most?

In I Will Be Alright, Cyrus Neshvad explores these contradictions through the story of a teenage refugee whose circumstances stand in stark contrast to the symbol she embodies. Yet the film's interest extends beyond immigration policy, asking what happens when people are reduced to their legal status, and whether human connection can offer a form of solidarity where institutions fail.

Set in Luxembourg, the 18-minute short follows Laïla, a 16-year-old Iranian girl who has fled her country and lives under the threat of deportation. To earn money, she dresses as the Statue of Liberty, standing in a public square as people pass by. It is an image that immediately establishes the film's central contradiction. Laïla embodies a symbol associated with freedom and opportunity, yet she is denied the security those ideals are supposed to represent. As police officers check the identities of people they suspect of being undocumented, the difference between those who can move through public space without fear and those who cannot becomes impossible to ignore.

Neshvad's opening is effective because it communicates a political argument without needing to spell it out. The Statue of Liberty is not simply a costume or a visual motif; it becomes a reminder that freedom is often celebrated as a universal principle while being experienced as a privilege. Laïla can represent liberty for the people who pass her, but she cannot be certain of her own future. Her circumstances challenge the assumption that living in a democratic society necessarily means being protected by its promises.

The threat of deportation gives this contradiction a more urgent dimension. Laïla and her mother are not merely attempting to avoid an administrative decision. They are fleeing circumstances in which returning to Iran could expose Laïla to imprisonment or even death. When her mother is apprehended, the prospect of forced return becomes a personal crisis, leaving Laïla to navigate a world in which the people and institutions capable of determining her future hold considerably more power than she does.

The film therefore raises questions about asylum, international protection and the responsibility of countries towards those fleeing persecution. These are questions that cannot be resolved by sentiment alone; asylum

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decisions involve legal obligations and assessments of individual risk. Nevertheless, Neshvad brings the human consequences of those decisions into focus. A person who might otherwise be reduced to a case file becomes a teenager whose future remains uncertain, whose family can be separated and whose most basic need is the chance to live without fear.

What makes the story particularly interesting is the way it places political insecurity alongside another kind of suffering. Laïla's encounter with Nathalie, a Luxembourgish teenager struggling with grief and isolation, brings two young women from very different circumstances into the same narrative. One is fighting to remain somewhere she might be allowed to build a future; the other is struggling to find a reason to continue with hers. Their circumstances are not interchangeable, and the film is strongest when it allows that difference to remain visible while exploring the possibility of connection between them.

This contrast also opens up a broader discussion about the ways women and girls experience vulnerability. Laïla's insecurity is shaped by displacement, the threat of persecution and the consequences of decisions made by authorities and adults. Nathalie's distress emerges from a different set of personal circumstances. By bringing them together, Neshvad suggests that suffering cannot always be understood from the outside, and that people whose lives appear entirely different may recognise something of themselves in one another.

The story of Laïla's mother introduces a further moral complication. The possibility of her involvement in a murder raises questions about what resistance looks like when women are subjected to oppressive structures, and where the distinction lies between understanding an act and excusing it. A woman's circumstances may help explain the choices available to her without making every choice morally uncomplicated. This is an important distinction, particularly in stories about patriarchal power, where female characters can too easily be portrayed either as passive victims or as figures whose violence is justified by their suffering.

At its best, I Will Be Alright allows these questions to coexist. It asks the audience to consider the conditions that produce desperation without abandoning the question of individual responsibility. The same tension extends to the police and other officials involved in enforcing immigration rules. They are not necessarily presented simply as villains, but their roles invite a more uncomfortable question: what responsibility does an individual retain when carrying out a policy that may place another person in danger? Following the rules and considering their human consequences are not always the same thing. The film's moral force lies partly in this space between institutional duty and individual conscience.

Neshvad reinforces these ideas through the film's visual and sound design. Cinematographer Guillaume Duchemin's dark palette, controlled lighting and framing contribute to a sense of unease, reflecting Laïla's

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precarious existence. Public spaces that might ordinarily suggest freedom and familiarity become places where she must remain alert, while the contrast between light and darkness reinforces her uncertain position. The Statue of Liberty image is particularly effective because its meaning is immediately recognisable, yet its significance changes when the person beneath it is someone whose freedom is under threat.

Sound also becomes part of the film's political language. The noise of an aircraft preparing to carry asylum seekers back to Iran transforms something ordinary into a reminder of what deportation might mean for Laïla. The threat is no longer an abstract possibility discussed by officials; it becomes something she can hear approaching. Such details help translate the fear of forced return into a sensory experience, bringing the audience closer to the uncertainty that defines her life.

The performances are central to making these ideas feel personal rather than merely symbolic. Tanaz Molaei gives Laïla a combination of vulnerability and determination, conveying the fear of a teenager who has little control over her circumstances without reducing her to helplessness. Toufan Manoutcheri brings emotional weight to the role of her mother, grounding the story's questions about survival and responsibility in the relationship between them. Their presence helps the film retain its human focus even when its political symbolism is most pronounced.

However, the importance of a film's subject does not automatically make every storytelling decision equally convincing. I Will Be Alright attempts to bring together refugee rights, patriarchal violence, grief, suicide, institutional responsibility and the possibility of solidarity within a limited runtime. These themes are connected, but they also demand space to develop. At points, the story's emotional turns risk feeling too carefully arranged, as though the characters' suffering and eventual connection have been positioned to deliver a particular conclusion. When the narrative leans towards melodrama, the film's more complicated questions can become less persuasive.

This is where the short-film format presents both an advantage and a limitation. Neshvad has little time to establish the characters and the circumstances shaping their decisions, and the film's visual economy allows certain ideas to register immediately. Yet the same compression can leave some developments feeling contrived rather than fully earned. The connection between Laïla and Nathalie carries emotional potential, but its impact depends on the audience believing in the characters as individuals, not simply as counterparts designed to illustrate a wider point. The film is most compelling when it trusts its central image and its characters' actions to speak for themselves, rather than pushing every moment towards an emotional climax.

Ultimately, I Will Be Alright is interested in the distance between the freedom societies celebrate and the

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freedom they make possible for others. Its most affecting idea is also its simplest: a girl can stand in the likeness of a symbol recognised around the world and still be denied the security that symbol promises. Through Laïla's story, Neshvad asks audiences to look beyond the language of borders and legal status to consider the people whose lives are shaped by those decisions.

The film does not need to suggest that every moral question has an easy answer. Its strongest moments recognise that compassion and accountability can coexist, and that understanding another person's circumstances does not require overlooking the systems or choices that have brought them there. Although some of its emotional developments feel more constructed than its subject deserves, the central contradiction remains powerful. I Will Be Alright is not simply a story about the struggle to find safety; it is a question about who is allowed to feel safe in the first place, and whether freedom means very much when it is not extended to everyone.

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