

Not Enough

Right now I'm watching the opulence of corporate spaces and activities glide across the screen and I'm holding in my lap all the ambitions in which I work. All the unmet needs, lack of space, of staffing hours, the hungry bellies... thinking of how we cobble together what little we get by way of grants and sponsorships and donations; the local food security organization – who have so little themselves – share what they can.

Non-governmental “helping” services have to subsist on the scraps of a civil society that undervalues what we do, we squabble and compete for funding; there is never enough money to serve those who don't have enough money. This fact is ever-present and obvious. Having grown up in an environment with not enough money, this logic of scarcity is hardwired into me. The tone of impoverishment is a given that blankets my biography so seamlessly as to feel like... nature, like a law of physics.

But. Right now.

I feel a doubt gently moving underneath, a faint tremor in the ground upon which these assumptions rest.

Because my mum and sister and I didn't really have not enough. There was always enough to eat and to wear. No, the overwhelming sense of scarcity was born as I watched middle-class families on TV around their dining tables and on their boats and at their cottages. We are supposed to live in a house and have a dog, we are supposed to have a casserole, a car. And those images left me longing.

Still, and again.

Fall down this rabbit hole with me.

My partner does; he has no choice. He who has been left to pay my father's debts, called in by my imploring face too prideful to give words to the need. Say you love me; how can a million times not be enough? My silence is just how well I have learned that begging is not sexy, and will bring absence.

Insomniac over the words “you” and “disappear”, as if they are two robin's eggs I don't want to roll over in my sleep.

Get up, leave this place; I go out to the pub. I deserve a treat, it is a treat I need. A pint or five and a hundred cigarettes, I just really deserve a treat, for all my work. Or to still the voices accusing me of not having done enough work, it amounts to the same thing. Others have cake.

I reach for a cigarette and read the warning on the pack: **cigarettes can cause impotence**. First smile of the day. So *that's* what's god damn doing it.

Because I'm thinking of a student in my community college literacy programme, and the one after another after another violations against her life. I am not dramatising; what brought her to a programme like mine is a story I can't speak out loud or you would never sleep again.

To it I have listened with my whole body, and I have given affirmation of both her capacities and her entitlement to a life, a future. But this validation can only try to drag history back with desperate fingernails. Against a million messages that she is worthless, my love looks very much like throwing lint at an advancing bulldozer. How could there ever be enough positives to dry up that ocean of negatives?

Here powerlessness and absurdity undermine what usually makes my life meaningful. I become furious with my well-meaning friends who tell me my very presence is enough, that I am somehow doing enough through the work I do with students. Here I sit, with a beer, on a patio, while a child is being gang-raped by soldiers in Sudan, and I am doing enough? Spare me.

The real injustice is that we measure our lives and our sufferings against one another's at all. How can it be fair to compare the lack in my life – which is real – to the lack in another's, when they are in a far worse situation materially? It leaves the student I just mentioned silent – like a Hollywoodised image of pain – but you know what? It leaves me tongue-tied, too. For someone to measure their life against mine seems immoral, scandalous, and above all, false.

Tonight I need to feel some kind of meaning to all this violence and I don't and it sucks. And I am not young enough; I don't have enough time to make anything right. Even if I figured out how to fix what's broken, I'd have to use all this language and all these tools of the system. Trapped in a terrible downward spiral by this degraded language, by how this society talks to itself. If words like "democracy" and "freedom" can be hijacked and made into gibberish, why do I even teach literacy? One thing I'm sure of is that tonight is a bad night.

Should go to sleep. I don't remember enough of my dreams, though. I should. There have been moments of feeling held and guided by a deep goodness... I was called and instructed and led. Pop songs would give me messages. But the grinding down of the daily has lately ground down the certainty that I am God's child.

Breathe.

No, I mean it: slow down and **breathe**.

See more clearly in an instant. Even from this place that looks like nothing, there is so much, so much more than enough. Start with this hand and all its need to write.

And there is this moment in time, full-to-bursting with itself. It offers itself not to the privileged but to all, without distinction. And I am present for it, my consciousness having everything – everything – somehow inside it as well as outside it. What a wonder.

There is infinite space in my heart. That it is tender is not a liability. I have enough time to work all this out, I am not too late. I arrive at the right time, to teaching, bringing a whole self, this whole identity, its slowly developing integrity. To share... and at the risk of saying something kind about myself, I have much to give.

Go home, girl, there is more to be grateful for. There is enough music, that soundtrack of thunder every day! There has been enough rain in Toronto this summer, enough to keep the air so nice, make things grow so green, making enough.

Heather Lash
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