

Billionaires and Bootstraps

**Spoken Word by Damali Robertson, RScP, a HSCL member since 2014
Imagining Justice Open Mic Night
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I don't know bout y'all
But I been feeling tired lately

Now. With that said. This poem is not about my circadian rhythm,
My bedtime routine, or relationship with the rem state

This poem is about something else entirely

Because I been feeling mighty, mighty tired lately

Tired of living in a place that feels like two countries
Witnessing what feels like a disparate duality
Where billionaires earn more in one year than most people will see in their lifetimes
Where right around the corner families sleep in tents at 27th and Grand
Where homework is done by candlelight or flashlight, if at all and then billionaires
and their talking heads say we need to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps

WHAT

I don't know bout y'all
But I sometimes feel righteous anger washing over me

When I think about the free labor that planted the seeds that grew the trees that
produced this fruit they call generational wealth

When I think about the weeds that stunted the growth of the hibiscus flowers
and roses that struggled to be the fullest expressions
of themselves - that pushed through the concrete and grew anyway

We grew anyway

In spite of the histories of stolen land and people, in spite of the violence, lynchings,
Bloody Sunday, redlining, the burning of Black Wall Street, the war on drugs,
the maternal mortality rate and the onslaught of white rage.

I can't help but think about this place. Where we live in these two countries.

Where right down the road a family sleeps in their car. And a child
does their homework by candlelight, if at all. And teachers and school districts
care more about test scores than critical thinking. Then throw around terms
like achievement gap and underperforming.

Tell me. What can be achieved when children come to school hungry?
When rents are sky high and the minimum wage remains at an all time low.

When our stories are written out of American history
and they wage constant attacks on our bodies and humanity.

What can be achieved when we stay in trauma response?

If you ask me. Survival mode looks like underperforming.

And this tired feeling. This righteous anger is really just grief.

Grieving what never has been
what could be
the promise of a tomorrow that never seems to come
Grieving this country's soul
Each time we see a child murdered in Palestine, see children working in mines
in the Congo, or think about the children and families unhoused right here.

We grieve

And this grief is sacred
And these words are activism

Where I speak a word into being that hasn't been spoken before
Where I speak a consciousness into existence that says
That our bypass won't save us

Where we have to look what is in the eyes and name it
Where prayers only work when we act
And love in action looks like mountains moving
Because faith without works is dead
And we are alive because
We are the ones we've been waiting for