

# The Hope of a Thousand Small Lights

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## THE TASK

Joy, for many,

it is made up  
of the simple wonders of this life.

Sometimes we do not know it,  
and it's only at the end  
we can recall  
the feeling  
of a tiny hand in ours:

cherubic face upturned,  
wide-eyed with trust,

as we remind a young one  
where to cross  
the road,  
their t's,  
a stitch they dropped,  
their plastic knitting needles,  
fingers, when they tell a fib,  
and oh,  
their tiny hearts

(which one day  
we all know will break  
over somebody  
or some thing  
that matters most).

The simple wonders of this life:

oh, innocence,  
and, women  
walking arm in arm  
on quiet dusk-descended streets,  
in safety:

laughter singing sisterhood,  
Delightful in their whimsy.  
Stunning in their calm ferocity.  
At ease, and glorious  
in casual and unthinking freedom.

Joy is the tiny wonders of this life,  
bequeathed so readily to some:  
    a meal with friends;  
    shelter on icy nights;  
    family together;  
    dignity and hearth;  
    a tender body,  
    loving unconditionally when winter falls.

The space and strength to say:

*this life is mine,  
this right is mine,  
this body's mine,  
this choice is mine,  
this thought is mine,  
and mine alone.*

The simple wonders of this life,  
and of these rights:  
profound-uneared.  
Intrinsic and inalienable.

Not to be sold,  
or spent,  
or spared.

Not to be spat at,  
spurned or savaged.

*That's the task.*

That is the task:  
to light up  
the darkened corners  
where these joys have been denied.

To strike the match  
that lights the lamp.  
And heavens, what an ask:  
to flood with brightness,  
and to search the shadows  
where the worst of our humanity has gathered.

To square up against  
the sure-unspeakable, and say:

*Enough!*  
*This can not be what we're made of.*  
*This can not be what we sleep on.*  
*This can not be what we let to breed,*  
*and rot, and fester.*

*Oh, the horrors*  
*found marauding in the margins*  
*where the many do not tread.*

That is the task:  
to lay a hand on trauma's shoulder,  
turn it round, and  
look it in the eye.

To say:  
*this must be brought justice:*  
*we are searching,*  
*we are watching.*  
*We will find you –*  
*when we find you,*  
*we will never look away.*

To acknowledge  
that there walk amongst us reapers:  
scythes-at-ready,  
riding on the horse of war and mayhem,

slaying all that we hold dear.  
Sniffing the air  
for scent

of those so vulnerable  
they cannot – dare not –  
raise:

their fists to fight,  
their voices-loud,  
objection,  
*international alarm.*

Yes, this is what was realised  
that Summer, there,  
in the city of seven hills.

Oh, this is  
what was born,  
in Rome,

at the conception  
of the International Criminal Court.

A vow, by hand of nations,  
resolute-united,  
saying:

*we will chase the shadows  
to the round, unending edges  
of this aching earth.  
No matter famine, war or fire,  
fall-of-state or flood.*

*No matter dissidence  
or disobedience,  
or tragedy, or ruin.*

*Life itself  
is sacred.*

*There are acts  
which chill the blood.*

*And we will, together,  
will, we swear,*

*protect those folks  
the greatest darkness*

*finds.*

THE MANDATE

Some say the law  
ought not to bend.

That it should be a neutral,  
certain thing.

But there are reasons  
judgement and interpretation  
are bequeathed  
to human  
– humane –  
hearts, and heads.

Enter women, in coalition:

women, from the wings  
of all the world,

who raised the plight  
of territories

from the Balkans, to Rwanda.  
From fields of conflict,  
and beyond.

These women urged the court  
to recognise that category of crimes  
which, by the horror of their calculation,  
target women

– target women, and their daughters  
by the tent there, playing catch;

target women, and the sleeping children,  
strapped to buckling backs;

target women, and their cheeky nephews,  
dirt-drawing twig-in-hand;

target women, and the crawling babes, look,  
right by their feet,

and the crimes which target  
those whom gender,

(in the minds  
of misogynistic men  
and their supporters),

make  
as vulnerable  
as these.

There are some crimes  
which, by design,  
so make of man  
*the enemy of all mankind.*

So the sisterhood  
walked the corridors of power:  
lobbied, whispered, woke  
and wrangled  
in the halls of Rome.

The sisterhood  
stole little sleep,

and guided by the hand  
of some other-worldly strength,  
– and bleary-eyed,  
and sure of heart,

worked tirelessly

to see the statute recognise  
the folk the greatest horrors

always find.

*Whatever you do to the least of my sisters.  
Every woman is a sister of mine.*

And where war walks,  
its bed-friend torture lounges,

to test the very limits  
of what a broken body  
can bear.

For those who gender makes a mark of  
when the world forgets to watch,  
*for them,*

the women guarding the statute of Rome,  
they coalesced, they did their best

to weave through law  
an equal hand.

To see that women always walk the halls,  
and sit the benches:  
see that there is always pause

to think of what it means  
to be a woman in this world.

And to encourage those there judging  
to bring to table, and to thinking,  
all their living's taught them  
(and perhaps the very things their living's  
taught them are unimportant).

And oh, they were at pains to see  
that academic theorisation

would not prove the enemy  
of *just* interpretation.

And so it was the court,  
there writ through treaty,

realised, and recognised  
and ratified

a place,

*the space,*

for Feminist  
consideration.

When, much later,  
warm, just printed from the press,  
the thing was set to paper,  
they had achieved

not all their aims  
(and many, true, lamented  
that the hand of status quo

stripped back the goals  
of progress).

But, still,

that they so tried,  
and would not give in,  
that they *believed*,

that was enough

to imbed  
a gender mandate  
in the ICC.

When all was said and done,  
and when dawn broke in Rome,  
there bled a sunset, peach and golden,  
flecked with dappled rose,  
that faded out  
into the morning blue.

A glimmer of hope  
that change would come.

Something had shifted,  
*everyone* knew.

#### THE MEASURE

When the stench of terror  
still hangs in the air,

and the slain  
are yet to be given their rites;

when the shelling has stopped,  
but the copters still whirl  
in near, not distant, memory.

When children crawl, shaking,  
from out of their cupboards,



eyes terror-wide,  
and darting.  
When word finally spreads  
that it's safe on the ground  
and the task begins,  
    of searching.

When mourning comes,  
and the wailing continues;

with the damage surveyed,  
and the losses inventoried.

When the shock sets in,  
and the shaking starts,

and husbands crawl forward  
to cradle their wives.

What, the measure of justice, then:  
what, the measure of success.

What of the vow of '98:

the united hands  
which would drive back hatred  
and brutality; inhumanity, and fear.  
What of a court built to raise survivors  
– to raise their stories to the sky:  
their brave whispers  
    leading the justice cry.

Built to give pause  
for interpreters to speak,  
supports at the ready,  
and *ready to hear*

the facts, unfettered,  
and ferocious,  
– *ferocious*, in their telling.

Built on the edge  
of the northern sea,  
deep in The Hague,  
in the City of Peace:

Saltwater to truth.  
An oceanic breeze.

Oh, let the light in

*let the light in,*  
to dance through darkened halls.

To pirouette and tumble,  
and to search out every shadow:

refracting,  
and reflecting,  
and unfiltered,  
and a-glow.

Nominations of brilliant women,  
were brought to the bench:  
in numbers justice  
and her sisters, favoured.  
Women of all axes  
persuasion, and thought:  
there were some triumphs, after all.

But in crept the corners  
of status quo.

Unprecedented thrived,  
and unwieldy process:

*Expertise* not decreed  
a matter of course,  
or consultancy diverse  
and broad.

Certain crimes  
weren't recognised  
as particular, in their horror:

the plight of girl soldiers,  
and their bodies as tools,  
and their freedom denied,  
and their labour subsumed,

and commanders well-shielded  
by the chain of command,

and bodies, forced-bared  
had their justice denied,

and they dismissed crimes designed  
to de-masculinise,  
and desexualise boys, and men.  
And the experts were challenged,  
and testimony decried,

and stigma stayed tongues,  
and the states closed their eyes.

The corners of status quo crept in,  
to restrict the justice there *could* have been  
if what happened in Rome  
hadn't stayed in Rome,  
and the mandate  
was followed through –

and the court stood proud,  
and bared all teeth,

to do  
what it was *born*  
to do.

#### THE MAP

What use the pen,  
if not to protect.

What remedy ink,  
if not a salve,

and what use reason,  
if not to reason *well*.

What of a mandate for reform  
without the *courage* to reform,

What becomes of a revolution  
that doubts *itself*.

Well, now takes hold,  
across the globe,  
an epic reimagining:

a movement, whispering  
across the wide-deep ocean.

A radical unpicking  
of the neat, and patriarchal stitch

Imbedded in the fabric  
of unwieldy man-made law.

For what wonder critique,  
if condemnation withheld:  
and judgements untouchable-revered.

And so, the many pens  
of Feminist thought,

in deep and honest contemplation,

bleed ink for the judgements  
that there might have been:

if bravery,  
and courage  
and equality  
    and reform  
had turned the corner of The Hague  
and stared down, proper, face-to-face,

the casual-unthinking bias  
of international criminal law.

Law made *by* men,  
and made *for* men,  
which makes *of* men  
the perfect injured;  
makes of men, defendants,  
judges, sentencers, and all.

For some, the law's lean  
cannot be unwritten

(through process, judge  
or survivor's hearing),

for at its foundation there is rot,  
and colonial conquer, and imposition.

But critique will cartograph the map:  
myriad voices, in good faith and fact.

Let another scholar now spark their lamp,  
and unwrite into the night.

And in the darkness, *there*, it flickers:  
the hope of a thousand small lights.

As another,  
and another,  
and another,

unwrites,

and the harmony  
of choral-collective  
takes flight.

And Feminist scholars  
of all genders and creeds

light up the darkened corners  
where world justice has been denied.

To strike the match  
that glows the lamp.  
And heavens, what an ask.  
Oh, *change*.  
Oh, women  
– and their allies –  
writing desk by desk  
on quiet dusk-descending nights,  
in starts, with distant gunfire,  
tired, resolute, or charged,

their labour singing sisterhood,

at ease, and glorious,  
in sure, and fierce, and thinking  
freedom.

