

WHEN ENOUGH IS A'PLENTY

By Katherine Savage

An angel of a'plenty summoned my first garden plot. She came to me from the other side at a time when I needed a nudge to get out of bed. I'd been in bed metaphorically for a few years, from the profundity of my discouragement in human behavior. I was feeling the holes rather than the levity of having let go of relationships and activities where my efforts had not changed the trajectory of their effects on the planet. Believing this was personal, I reeled my offerings back in, put them under the covers, and turned off the light. One night, my Grandmother Sarah came into the foreground of my dreams, and once again gripped the edge of our dinner table between creased palm and fused arthritic fingers, asserting to the offer of more food, "I have a'plenty."

My grandmother learned how to quantify adequacy from raising six children in eastern NC on a subsistence farm during the first Great Depression, with a husband frequently partnered to moonshine. She created enough out of almost nothing, sending those children off to college and into successful lives from having borne witness to how many needs could be resolved in her force field of love. By kindling my memory of her frequent *I have a'plenty* incantations at the table where we received our nourishment, she made visible that knowing what she needed was a generosity that made my very existence possible. She offered her words for my use as an invocation, to bring forth a future out of trust in my enough-ness.

And so, soon after this dream, when my father (her son) offered me his garden asleep with disuse, a plethora of goosebumps spread over my skin, for surely this was my angel of a'plenty messaging me. With shovel and hoe but little knowledge of what to do with a seed, I gave myself over to learning the tasks of planting, tending, and harvesting. As I dug, fears and griefs dropped into the soil to be composted and remade. My hands and knees became conduits of health from soil to heart. After repeatedly witnessing the diversity and strength of life that sprang forth from the genetic coding in tiny seed pods of promise, I felt encouraged to believe that the power of even my slight self could be so manifested. There was a well of generosity growing in me that I knew wouldn't diminish as long as I remained connected to the garden ground. Gardening, it seems, is something one does until one understands, a garden is what one is.

I then opened that garden to a few neighbors to tend with me, and our harvests transcended food. Sharing the food we grew and each other's company inspired us to host neighborhood potlucks and gatherings. Other neighbors, seeing the generative goodness that comes along with extremely locally-sourced food, asked for help in their own yards building gardens, installing chicken coops and beehives, and planting food trees. Sometimes when we gathered to work or celebrate, we learned about quiet neighbors with large needs, and organized projects to help. A tender feeling of "we belong to each other" began taking root and growing in the place of our drive-by waves and nods from the car.

No one at our gatherings compromised the balm of living in an actual neighborhood by pointing out where our views on issues of the day diverged, though we all knew this well enough from

yard signs in campaign seasons. Without ever discussing climate change, we were on our way to building a neighborhood that could turn to rather than on each other during difficult times. Without mentioning descent, we were creating a template for how to face forward into the great transition with a next-door neighbor who, in your mind, voted for the descent-causing candidate. We were not activating anything other than muscles, soil potential, and heart energy, and yet we were leaning into resiliency, preparing to flow through challenge by knowing the power of our sources of plentitude. A back-yard garden was administering to us the first rite of abundance thinking . . . *when you remember what you truly need, therein will you find enough.*

I associate those days of growing a garden and a 'hood of neighbors, with the period of life in which I gained some understanding of what I'd been making space for with all the clearing out I'd done, when I was once again able to place myself inside the "trouble" as a helper without the immediate temptation to crawl back in bed. For I had been a witness to how the Creator speaks through places and experiences to offer the heart wisdom we desperately need, and then we, from being tended to so abundantly, carry and create experiences of nurturance for others. I saw, I believe, the shape for how we keep going anyway, no matter what. In a time of terror over how much of the familiar is falling apart, we need experiences such as these to remind us we carry the Creator within us, always. With that faith, we can stay present with the challenge of how to allow what must come apart to do so—like neighbors who do not engage the other. We can learn to recognize what is emerging in its place and encourage its manifestation—like neighbors coming to understand they hold much more in common than not.

With an angel of a'plenty on my shoulder and a beginner's guide for abundant living in my back pocket, I then answered a 30-year call from the South Toe River and Black Mountain range to live with them. In these last two years, I have used a lens of abundance to read the story of this geographically beautiful but financially challenged place. Because of Yancey County's formidable topography, it has never been much of a candidate for capitalistic ventures, and some of what did come has been taken back with little hope of replacement. With the new losses I've personally witnessed—the closure of labor and delivery at our local hospital and of schools that had been community gathering sites—I see anger and frustration mount, fear intensify, and the story of scarcity deepen. Having been in descent longer than the county I moved away from, this community is no longer waiting for an outside rescue and is collaborating intensely on how to stretch what we have as far as possible. While this is necessary to stem the pain and damage of descent, collaboration is also an expression of faith in the wealth of working together and leveraging resources, and it is a strong step in to building a shared belief that a'plenty is real and can be counted on to give us what we truly need.

My enough glasses are helping me see how I might elevate the significance of what is already happening here, so that clarity of intent can accompany what comes of our partnering. For these collaborations to result in physical manifestations, abundance must be used both as the narrative for decision-making and as the energy we lean into. Though many here are aware of ways in which we are rich, few are in the habit of placing our sources of a'plenty on the

problem-solving table as a strategy for ameliorating concerns. I am using a narrative of enough to address the troubles of our children's compromised health and a fragile food system, and to connect our local farmers with child care centers. I'm leveraging its energy to confront the problem of exorbitant funeral home fees and their earth-injurious practices, and to provide death midwifery to those who want to remain at home after their last breath. These offerings are welcomed in a conservative county because they build on an existing understanding that we are physically rich in river bottom land for growing food, and spiritually wealthy in the mountain ethic of "taking care of our own," including our dead. There is also power in the ability of these offerings to take our human needs out of the politics of tribe and into the common life of a people and their landscape. They democratize abundance, in other words, which is critically important when the conversations of how we provide social care to those in need are highly charged and polarizing.

There is also the need if abundance is to manifest, to name its forms out loud and frequently, so that we make of it a mantra and know with specificity what to insert into our dreams and prayers. In the South Toe valley, we can begin the litany of a'plenty with the power and beauty of our landscape. It shows me what to ask of Spirit--*lift me with the power of mountains that make my jaw drop and vision rise, so I can tear down what is killing us and support the ascendance of what is life-giving. Send me the clarity of a clean cold river, so that I can see what help is mine to give and what to let flow on. Thank you, Spirit, for the satiation I experience every time I step out my door, and may that fuel an intensity of willingness to interrupt ruinous human behavior.* These petitions answered, after all, make possible the richness that feeds everything else we do.

As the old structures give way, we are becoming nouveau riche in the energy being released and freed. I am watching people take it up, leverage it to create new forms, and attract others in the joy of their offering. Examples abound. In the absence of recovery programs, practitioners of alternative medicine are offering their services to those who've abused opioids to numb their pain. Citizens are considering how to take back our hospital from the for-profit system that will likely close it, and there is talk of converting our abandoned school buildings into community centers with edible gardens and services for families.

To ensure our energy is sustained as descent intensifies, generators of critical transition skills, behaviors, and resources are forming. A community art space thrive-hive provides supplies and space for people to "encounter, encourage, and express their creativity", and build our muscles for thinking out of the boxes of trouble we are in. A local lending program is investing in entrepreneurs who want to provide goods and services in our valley. Voice venues are proliferating to give warm and lofty air to the songs and stories that can weave our community solidarity through transition. Herbalists, wildcrafters, and permaculturists are skilling us in how to live reciprocally with our land, so that we can learn the behaviors of a species who knows its dependency.

Find your enough glasses and put them on. Then look around. You will see that descent is only the falling apart of what is not serving our planet's majesty, and you will want to bring it on. You will see the forms rising that could receive our species on the other side, and you will want

to play matchmaker—pointing people towards each other when the same energy is swirling around them. You will want to hold space—gathering people to plan the particulars of how to help an offering into being. And when your joy gets activated by the direct inspiration of Spirit to your very self, you will feel the tender honor of that, then determination to nurture it into being. There will be no more talk of one side “winning.” It will not matter to you so much if it “works.” You will feel as I do, the arc of heartening energy of abundance moving amongst and between the people, and it will be enough just to be in what is unfolding. In your bones you will find, once again, the hope we’ve been tending like a garden for so very long. It will be a’plenty.