

How to Change the World With Hot Cocoa & Neruda by Hannah Brencher

Wake up. Don't press snooze. Sling your legs over the side of the bed. Right. Left.

Turn on music. Good, good music. Like first date, new shoes, or better yet, barefoot music.

You need a life soundtrack. Has anyone told you that yet?

Pick out something spectacular from your closet. Feel good in your skin. Put on an item that tells some kind of story. Always have a story to tell, just a wrist or coat sleeve away. And if that yellow sweater ain't got a story yet, vow that this will be the day it comes home with one.

Wear bright cardigans on the rainy days. Rain boots on any day. And, if the sun is shining and someone asks why you are clomping around in red wellies, you simply say that you are Parading in Puddles of Passion Today. Offer them a flute in the Parade. A trombone. Or a front row spot.

Take your bag. A few bobby pins. A hair elastic, as you will need one. You know you will. Remember breakfast. Greek yogurt, perhaps? Berries? Honey is good for the heart. Red Kettle. Drip Coffee. Yellow Mug. Teaspoons of Sugar Cause You Just So Sweet.

Coat. If you need it.

Walk outside.

Open doors for others. Compliment the woman at the corner. Ask yourself what a real life, human, fleshy "retweet" would look like and try it with the girl on the subway beside you. It must be one part conversation, two parts listening, another part learning something and telling someone else when you reach 59th Street and walk the rest of the way because the air is just too good for underground travel today. Acknowledge people. Look them in the eyes. Better yet, memorize their eye color like the roots to Spanish words you digested before the eighth-grade test on verbs.

Research ways to be a blessing.

Yes, research. Google. For starters: care packages, postcards, cookie recipes, trinkets. Call instead of texting today. Email instead of Facebooking. Use that status of yours to lift up your network. Keep the Drama for your Mama, and if you really listened to your Mama, then you know she ain't a Keeper of Drama. So let it go. Out the windows. Under the Doors. Let all the mean thoughts slip away with the winter that never came.

Clean. Your room. Your car. Your pocketbook. You'll feel lighter. You will find that you don't need all of it. Get rid of the things that hold you down. Back. Standing still in a spot that expired two years ago. If it is too hard to let go, then throw a Going Away Party. Pack all the memories in a box and whisper lies to them, "You are just going on a vacation. You'll come back soon." Love notes without the lovers. Old shirts without the arms to wrap them in. Make room for new love notes. New shirts. New arms. Buy new doormats. New can openers.

Take time on people, as if it were the only thing you had to do today. Ask hard questions. Listen when they don't answer. Say stuff. Hard stuff. Mammoth stuff that won't fit the text messages. The Kinds of Things that Tap Danced Upon the Elephants in the Room.

Avoid lies. Remember feelings and how simple they are.

Sad. Happy. Tired. Joyful. Like red in preschool. Like 2 x 2 in the second grade.

Drink hot chocolate. Abandon chairs to sit on counter tops. Screw the calorie count every once in a while. Find an author whose words are like truffles for you. Sit on the countertop, drinking hot cocoa, screwing calories, and reading Neruda out loud.

Learn a few Greek words. Make pancakes for dinner. Write your dreams down, even when you insist that you don't have the time. Place them where you can see them. Draw the tree that has been heavy on your heart all morning. Since childhood. For the past few weeks. A big family. A movement of sorts. A bestseller. A college education.

Decide on one person whom you will tell about the tree. Make a coffee date.

Ask yourself: How thick is my tree? How crisp are the leaves? How high are the branches? Can I climb them? Dare I climb them?

And, when you've drawn the tree completely, ask the most important question of all: Will it give shade to someone else one day?