



All About Shopping (and a bit about bingeing)

by Geneen Roth

We're in New York for a few days and I want to shop. Matt suggests going to a museum, a matinee, a movie. Is he kidding? I tell him I just want to "stroll down Madison Avenue. Look in the windows. See what Simon Doonan, the window designer for Barney's has created this month." I tell him it inspires me that Simon is able to do so much with objects like smashed up soup cans and bird-cages and old phonographs. He gives me a "yeah, right" look but drops the subject anyway. It's sort of like those moments when he used to ask if what I was wearing was new, and although it usually was a purchase I'd recently made, I'd look down at my body with incredulity. "This old thing? I've had it for months!"

I kiss him good-bye, grab my purse, leave the room. As I pass by stores with glittery ballerina flats, fabulous jackets, and nifty purses with pockets for everything, I decide that I don't need another purse, jacket or pair of shoes, but I do need another pair of glasses. Feeling incredibly virtuous from everything I am not going to buy, I turn into a frame store and begin the hunting-and-gathering part of the expedition. Twelve pair of frames later, I've found the ones that will change my life. The salesman calls them "crystal" because they have no color. He says they pick up the light around my face. I strut shamelessly around the store, gazing like Narcissus at my reflection in the wall-to-wall mirrors. I imagine sweeping into assorted rooms, bedazzling everyone with my excellent taste in glasses.

"How much?" I ask. With all the bells and whistles—thin glass, tinting, etc.—it comes to close to a thousand dollars. I try not to gasp or appear shocked. I didn't know what I was planning to spend—the need to shop doesn't have to do with money, it has to do with fervor

and fantasy and passion—but I know it wasn't a thousand dollars. Still: Love Magnets are not cheap. I tell him I have to think about it and will come back tomorrow.

That night is fitful, distracted. Even when I am having dinner with an old friend, I am thinking about the glasses.

The next day Matt and I are returning from breakfast and I decide to tell him about the sheer amount of energy I am spending thinking about the glasses. Will he come look?

My new best friend, the salesman, brings out the glasses. Before I can get them on my face, Matt says, "Sweetheart, even if they were the last pair of glasses in the world and you had to crawl on all fours because you couldn't see, I'd tell you not to buy them. They look like goggles, like you should be snorkeling with schools of fishes, not walking around in crowds of people."

I tell Matt he's crazy, I look at Armand and shrug. But I can sorta kinda see that the glasses really do look like goggles. I remember the time I went shopping with a friend who took me to a store to ask my opinion of a pair of pants that she loved. As she was prancing around in her newfound Love Magnets, I told her in the kindest possible way that they looked like a tablecloth. It's as if we invest the things we want with magic, and then, usually when we get them home, the spell is broken.

As we walk back to the hotel, I realize I don't actually need the glasses—that with the exception of replacing socks and underwear with holes, I wouldn't need one more of anything—not even a new pair of black boots—for a long time (okay, the rest of my life). But knowing that doesn't keep me from wanting another new thing.

Just last week, during an eating meditation at a retreat, one of my students told me that she'd eaten bags and bags of chocolate kisses,

but she's never eaten just one. She's always focused on the one that's in the bag, not in the one that's in her mouth, and in that way, never allows herself to savor what she already has. It seems as if my relationship to money is no different than my relationship to food, to love, to fabulous sweaters: Since I am never aware of what I already have, I always want more.

This thing about enough—what it is, when you know you have it—is hard to grasp. And here's why: Except for conditions of abject poverty, enough isn't an amount. Because, for the most part, what we really want, what we truly can't get enough of, is staring us in the face, clearer than a pair of crystal frames without the lenses: We want to be alive to ourselves. We want to know we belong here. We want to take up the space we've been given and occupy every unique unrepeatably inch of ourselves. The truth is that until we believe we are enough, we will never believe we have enough.

So, just for today: Break your trance of deprivation. Stop the background chatter of discontent.

Live as if you already are enough. Watch what happens.



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