

# A time to evaluate the nature of what we have

*We have no grounds for self-admiration, as though we were surrounded by our own possessions; they have been loaned to us. We may use and enjoy them, but the one who allotted his gift decides how long we are to be tenants; our duty is to keep ready the gifts we have been given for an indefinite time and to return them when called upon, making no complaint.*

Seneca, *Consolation to Marcia*

## Do you truly own anything?

Your car, laptop, cat? Your body, status, relationships? No, because all those things can be taken away in a second. You may work overtime and pay the price to “own” those things, and yet they can be gone anytime. Fate, bad luck, or death can dispossess you of them without prior notice.

Car? Stolen!—Money? Lost!—Cat? Ran away!—Wife? Died!—High status? Gone!

We’re not prepared to deal with such losses. We think we *own* those things and only realize we *don’t* once they’re gone. And now it’s incredibly hard to deal with it. We’re devastated, lost, and drenched in tears.

## Be aware you can lose what you “own”

Seneca says we can’t handle such losses because we’re unaware of the possibility of losing those things in the first place. We never think about bad events in advance and get caught by surprise. But how can we be so unaware?

It’s ignorance.

## We see evidence everyday

In his consolation letter to Marcia, he asks how we can see so many funeral processions passing past our houses yet not think about death. So many funerals are sad, yet we’re still convinced our kids will outlive us. Many rich people lose all their possessions, yet we don’t think it could happen to

us.

So many *Missing Garfield* flyers hang in the streets, yet we don’t think our Tiger could get lost, too. *How can we see so much misfortune in the world around us and not think of it happening in our own lives?*

We close our eyes. We ignore it. We think we’re invincible. We take things for granted. This ignorance will cost us dearly, we



will end up devastated and unable to cope.

## When the lender calls, don’t complain

*This is why Seneca advises us to think of everything as borrowed from nature.* You don’t own anything. Everything you think you own has been loaned to you temporarily. Not as a gift, but as something you’ll need to return whenever the lender wants it back.

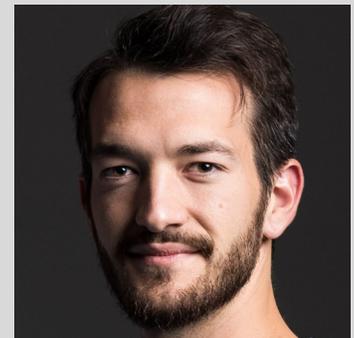
And as Seneca says,

*It is a sorry debtor who abuses his creditor.*

Seneca, *Consolation to Marcia*

Think of all you’ve got as borrowed: your best friend, spouse, kids, cat, health, status, car, and laptop. These things have been loaned to you. Be aware of that and anticipate that the lender will want those things back at an unknown time. Then, misfortune will hit you with less force and you’ll be able to deal with it more effectively.

In the end, we come with nothing, and go with nothing.



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