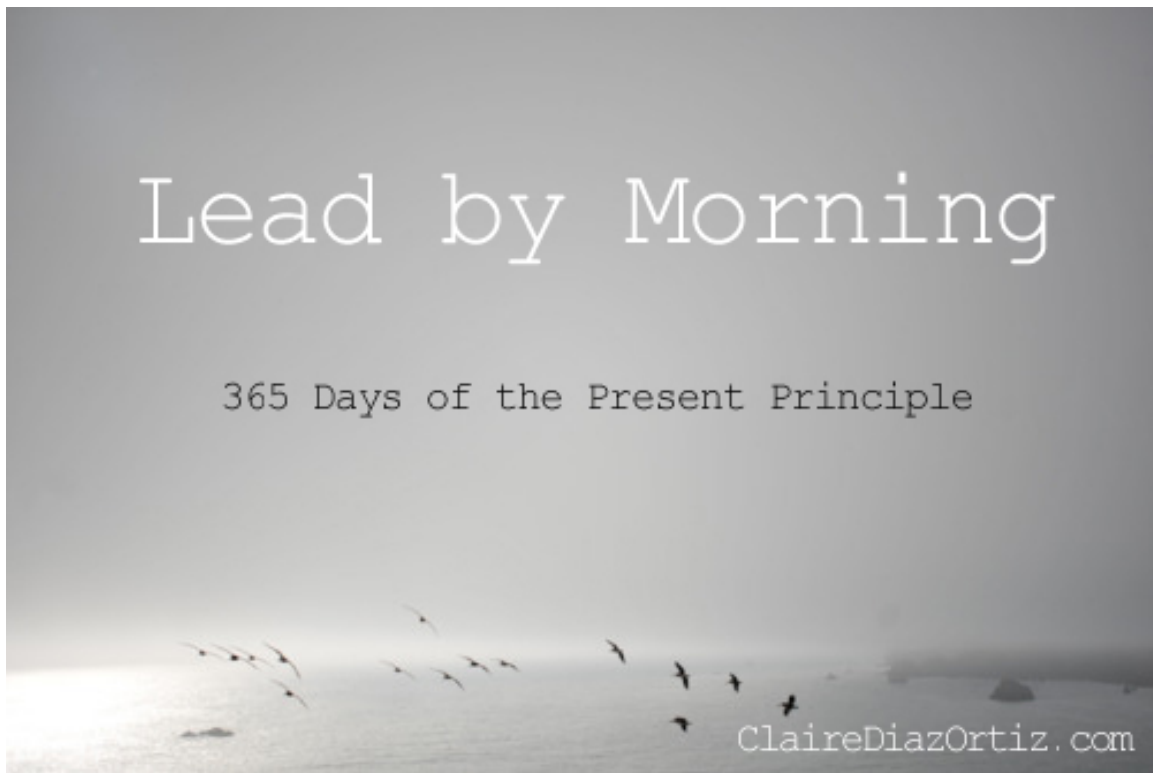


Lead by Morning

365 Days of the Present Principle

ClaireDiazOrtiz.com



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The Present Principle

We have more control over our days than we think.

It's true.

We may not govern all the events that come to pass in our lives, but we do control our responses.
And that control can best be exerted in the morning.

Mornings set the course of our days, and even in times of darkness, stress, or turmoil, we can take daily steps to ensure that our days are better, brighter, and more full of the life we seek. It doesn't matter if you're a night owl or a morning lark. It doesn't matter if you do your best work or your worst work in the morning hours.

What does matter is you live on an earth where morning serves as the beginning to each new day.
Every day.

We've all heard that routine is beneficial. There is no more beneficial routine than the one you set in the morning.

There are seven steps to a winning day, and they all begin in the morning.

It's called The Present Principle.

If you lead your morning, you can lead your life.

~ The Seven Steps of the Present Principle ~

{Prescription: seven steps, every morning.}

P = Pray (pause, peace)

R = Read

E = Express

S = Schedule

E = Exercise

N = Nourish

T = Track

What to Express ~

- Reflections on the day's passage.
- What you hope for or dream of in this waking moment.
 - Life skills or qualities you seek to cultivate.
 - Goals.
- People or situations you are praying for or wishing well.
 - A statement of gratitude.
- Everything on your mind. *Everything*. Lists. Prose. Sketches. Poems. Turn thoughts to paper. Free your mind to breathe. *Express*.

The Seven Steps of The Present Principle

Good days and bad days have one thing in common: they both begin in the morning.

I believe that by taking ownership of your mornings, you can take ownership of your day – setting yourself on the right track for a *good day*.

This manifesto (The Present Principle) is about giving you your day back.

Let me explain.

My days used to get away from me. Sometime between the pillow and the pillow, I ran about, randomly plugging in important and not-so-important activities into the fifteen hours of waking time life had allotted me. It was ineffective.

It was a mess.

For me, it was in realizing that I needed to change that change first began.

I'm a huge fan of acronyms, because they help me to organize my thoughts and better follow the many things I want to remind myself to do. Although I have used the Present Principle for years, it wasn't always called that. Instead, I spent

years using a nonsensical string of consonants to remind myself of the seven important things I wanted to do each day.

I used to write this nonsensical string of letters on pieces of paper all around me, reminding me to do the seven steps I sought to complete each day because I couldn't remember the string of letters. I realized the strangeness of it all, one day, when I had used a doctor's prescription to write my "word" on. When the pharmacist asked – "what's *JJEMMPPR*?" I realized it had gotten too far.

I needed a better word. (Sadly, I'm still working on the scraps of paper habit).

Shortly thereafter, my brain realized that with a little effort my unsightly onomatopoeia could be reshaped into a wonderful word of portent: PRESENT.

Forever after, my quiet time (the day's start to my seven step completion) became my PRESENT time, and my daily seven steps became the PRESENT Principle.

Here are the seven steps to the PRESENT Principle that are essential to giving me the best day I can create before life hits.

P = pray (pause, peace)

R = read

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In short, the PRESENT Principle is a way of proactively organizing – or, *visioneering* – my day, starting in the morning.

Every morning, and every day.

Starting the seven steps in the PRESENT Principle in the morning (and not later in the day) is key. When I wake, I give myself the “present” of PRESENT time. If you already have a moment in your day set aside, you may currently call this “quiet time”. For me, calling it “PRESENT time” reminds me of the gift I’m receiving when I take this time out of my busy day of demands to think about me and my soul. And it’s one more reminder to be present as I begin the seven steps that I believe are key to giving me success, happiness, and fulfillment.

Step 1: Pray (or, Pause, Peace)



We all long for peace.

And there is no better way to grant ourselves a sliver of it than to make our days open with its presence.

What is peace?

Prayer. Meditation. Silence. A moment of pause.

Take the word “pray” to mean whatever act of cultivating peace best reaches you.

Whatever you call it, this is without a doubt one of the most important parts of each and every day you live. Taking a moment in which you try to think about solving the problems of (your) world is fundamental if you ever want to get actually get out there and solve them. Beginning your morning with this step is essential, and in every morning routine I have tried, this has always been the first step I return to.

What is peace for me?

For me, this is prayer. On some days, it is also meditation on some days. It happens with tea. In silence, or with [beautiful music](#). It serves as such a strong, lasting, positive memory from one day to the next that, upon waking, *I look forward to it.*

Whatever Pray (or peace, or pause) means for you, let it give you quiet and calm in the morning.

Here are some suggestions on cultivating an atmosphere of peace for your morning:

- Be alone
- Hot beverages are welcome additions
- Cozy chairs

- Comfortably warm (or cool) temperate for your body
- A beautiful view, a pretty picture
- [Soothing music](#).
- A candle or incense
- A bell to help you signal the moment's beginning or end

Step 2: Read



I still remember the first time I heard someone use the word “read” to mean more than simply to pass one’s eyes along the words on a page.

I had recently moved to Kenya and was living in an orphanage where dozens and dozens (187, to be exact) of children were constantly preparing for exams. I was convinced (!) that Kenya was the only country on the planet that provided students with near constant examinations. During what seemed (to me) their eternal study hall sessions in the floor above my orphanage apartment each night, they would try to cram all the knowledge they could into their brains.

Although I knew they needed help, I didn't understand that they were asking me for it.

“Will you help us to read for our exam?” One asked me one day on the way to their study hall after dinner.

“Help you *read*?” I questioned.

I was no stranger to helping young kids read – but these were teens who well knew the ins and outs of Jack and Janes trips up the hill.

And that was when I learned about the word **read**.

In England (and many of her former colonies like Kenya), the word “read” is used the way Americans use the word “study”. Later, when I attended graduate school in England, I would learn this all to well.

I better go “read” for my exam. You clearly didn't “read” enough for yours. And, yes, libraries are for “reading” (and reading!). In this step in the Present Principle I want you to remember your friends across the pond. Think of READ as not just a time to literally absorb the words on paper, [Kindle, or Nook](#), but to reflect on these words and absorb them. To, literally, *study* these words.

I read [100 books a year](#). I read *none* of those in my PRESENT time in the morning. Instead, the “reading” I do in this present time is a chance to study a passage and reflect on its meaning. In a year of mornings, I *might* get through one book in total.

If I'm lucky.

When you're working on the Read step, it's time to throw everything you learned about speed-reading out the window and instead to embrace a love for diving into passages and staying there.

For many of us, this READ step may mean a bible study early in the morning. Either in a traditional sense of following 365 lessons over the course of a year, or in the less traditional sense of you – solo – plowing your way through a bible or other religious tome from January 1 until December 31.

If you're not religious, though, don't turn your back. Reading any type of motivational quotations, affirmations, or stories in the morning time is an amazing way to start your day, and a wonderful way to help center your practice of silence and meditation (what I call “pray” in the present principle).

Looking for a great motivational devotional to help you?

Here are a few I have loved over the years:

- [Simple Abundance](#): A Daybook of Comfort and Joy
- [The Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude](#)
- [My Utmost for His Highest](#)
- [Illuminata: Prayers for an Everyday Life](#)
- The Bible (I also read [The Message](#) in my morning Present Time)

Step 3: Express



Expression is what our soul longs to do, and no truly good day can begin without us at our most vulnerable crying out our deepest longings, feelings, fears, and desires. After first centering yourself in Step 1, Pray (be it peace, pause, or prayer), and then focusing on Read, it's now time to give your own personal expression to these moments. In a journal or notebook devoted to such writings, take a moment to write.

What should you write about?

In some ways, the world is your oyster.

If you've never kept a journal before, the most important step is simply getting things down on paper – whatever those things are. No matter if it's a letter to your realtor or a gluten-free grocery list. Over time, the goal is to express your true, personal feelings in this space. For a great book on starting (and progressing) in the journaling process, see Alexandra Johnson's [*Leaving a Trace: On Keeping a Journal*](#).

Once you've graduated in your journaling to the point that you have no problem sharing your feelings (whether high or low) it's important to remember that part of the step to EXPRESS in the Present Principle is truly about a guided time of writing.

Think of it this way: although it is *critical* to simply express what is in your heart, it is also important to at least end a morning journal entry with a time of focus, reflection and direction for the day ahead.

Here are a few key things you want to incorporate into any morning EXPRESS time. Don't feel pressure to address all of these, but rather use them as a starting place to help your guide your time to be both emotionally healthy and productive.

Some ideas for what to EXPRESS:

- What you learned in the reading and any reflections you have on it.

- What you hope for the day, the week, the year, and your life as you sit in the quiet calm journaling this morning.
- The concerns that you can't get out of your mind – all those nagging things scratching away at your mind. Studies show that writing these things down actually frees space in your brain for you to think. Don't keep your brain space taxed with the task of remembering things. Instead, write them down. You can use your brain for the important stuff (like prioritizing what of the many things really needs to get done.)
- All the things you have to do – everything. Not in a list or numbered way. Just expressing all the thoughts that are in there to get them out of your mind and onto paper.
- The things you are grateful for. For anyone trying their hand at journaling, finishing each journal entry with a statement of thanks, or a list of things you are grateful for, is a small way to put you in a thankful mood.

Step 4: Schedule



For many, schedule is a bad word.

Schedules are the dusty, illegible, oversized pages of the piano teacher you hated, always penciling in *just one more session* that kept you miserably indoors on bright, sunny days. (Or maybe that's just me.)

I'm willing to bet, though, that you have your own skeletons in your scheduling closet.

But what if I told you that schedules should set you free? What if I told you that the best schedule represents the very essence of freedom?

I'll say it again.

A schedule should set you free to live.

A schedule should be a way to find the time to do the things you need to do so that you know they can get done. A schedule should then give you all the flexibility you need to change it, and none of the guilt of “missing” a dreaded appointment.

So how can you achieve such a dreamed-for schedule?

Throw out your preconceived notions and make your own.

As we explored in the EXPRESS step, it is essential to get all your thoughts out on paper. At least once a week (although I recommend doing this quickly every day and more in depth once a week), write down all the nagging things that you know you need to do, think you should do, or worry about not doing. Clarifying these for yourself (I love a pictorial format like a [mind map](#)) is incredibly freeing. At once, you see all the things you have on your plate.

Then it's time to really look at them.

Once your brain no longer has to use its energy storing all your many tasks and ideas, then use your brain energy to prioritize that day's tasks. Stick to a few critical things each day, and a handful of smaller items. Then, go about scheduling these items into your day around – finding (potentially flexible) time slots when you will complete each item. You are not superman, and your schedule shouldn't look like his. Importantly, allow buffer time, flexible time, and downtime when one task finishes and another begins.

Remember – a schedule should be a realistic approximation of a real day in your life, not a terrific opportunity for disappointment self-flagellation.

Need more?

Amy Lynn Andrews has a wonderfully simple and inexpensive book, [Tell Your Time](#), that takes a great approach to scheduling as well. Another book I like is called [The Clockwork Muse](#). (Although specifically written for writers, it is an excellent tome on organizing your time and maximizing small moments in your day.) [Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity](#) and [The Power of Full Engagement](#) are other favorites I re-read nearly every year.

Step 5: Exercise



Recently I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts ([Simple Mom](#) with Tsh Oxenreider) and she was talking with Rachel Meeks of [Small Notebook](#). They were discussing the importance of exercise, and Rachel Meeks made a comment that made me stop in my tracks as I ran (yes, I love leaving my favorite podcasts as “treats” I get to do when exercising – which is not always what I’m excited about).

She said that reframing the word exercise into the word MOVE is incredibly powerful and motivating.

Indeed.

The easiest way to make yourself go on a twenty minute run is to tell yourself that you're only going to run for twelve minutes – or nine, even. At the nine minute mark, you are much more likely to push yourself to twenty.

I am convinced that it is this strategy alone (along with my passion for podcasts and saving good ones for runs) is the very reason I became a marathon runner.

I am the slowest runner on the face of the planet, and I would have never dreamed that I would one day be someone who could actually run two marathons in one week (on my couch-loving days when the most exercise I do is pressing the ON button to watch *The Biggest Loser*, I look back on that week and I hardly recognize myself!). Nevertheless, it's true. Thanks to [Lost podcasts](#), I climbed to Everest Base Camp in Nepal.

I've run marathons. I've hiked long and far. And I'm *not* athletic. (No, *really*. Ask my friends.)

I'm just persistent.

Like any good marathon-training program teaches you, the “high” of running farther than you expected to (or ever have before) is incredibly motivating.

Whether you are training for a marathon and run twelve miles for the first time or you run twenty minutes after telling yourself you only have to run nine – you feel immense accomplishment.

I want to be clear that any exercise –movement – is wonderful. Running may not be your cup of tea, and also may not be best for your body, season of life, or personal motivation. Maybe the calm of yoga, or the camaraderie of team sports is what you most need.

Most importantly, find a way to move that you can reliably do, and that you won’t find ways to avoid. Don’t set high weighty goals of three hour bike rides you won’t ever begin, and don’t rely on fancy equipment or membership dues to help you along. We’ve all heard the stories of how many new gym memberships are opened on January 1 of each year, and we’ve all heard the sad endings of how many of those are abandoned by March (if not before).

Find the way you were meant to move.

And do it – each and every day.

Step 6 – Nourish



If you've felt so far that the PRESENT Principle is about sacrifice, I hope that this step will change your mind, once and for all. Nourish is about doing that wonderful thing that makes you feel better – whether it's sticking your hands in a mound of clay to make something beautiful, cooking the perfect tomato sauce, or reading a good book in the corner of a sunny room.

To have a good, healthy, productive day that you look back on and want to repeat you absolutely must nourish yourself.

Gretchen Rubin in her book [The Happiness Project](#) – makes the point that a positive activity should not be one that makes you feel guilty for doing it. I agree. You can't nourish yourself with your vices.

Need some ideas?

- Reading a Novel
- Browsing an Architectural Magazine
- Baking
- Knitting
- Painting
- Writing
- Wrapping a Gift
- Playing Hopscotch
- Picking Fruit
- Planting Herbs
- Making a Smoothie (not for breakfast, but just for fun)
- Taking a Bath
- Listening to Beautiful Music
- Dancing in a Room Alone
- Singing a Song
- Playing a Musical Instrument
- Doing a Crossword Puzzle

- Watching a Favorite TV Show
- Listening to a Favorite Podcast
- Eat a Big Salad

Remember, the NOURISH step should be small enough to fit into each and every day (the week-long yoga retreat, while wonderful, is not the right fit for this exercise), and does not need to stay the same (in fact, I think it shouldn't).

Find small, interesting ways to add new joy into your life and nourish your soul. Finally, remember that the NOURISH step is not just another thing to check off your list. Don't combine it with a necessary task you already do and think that will satisfy the need your body and mind has to truly nourish it each day. For example, making a delicious afternoon smoothie is a way to NOURISH you, and I want you to do that. Does that mean that if you have that wonderful smoothie for breakfast you can count your breakfast prep time as your NOURISH moment of the day? Nope. Same goes for a big wonderful salad. Great to have one, but don't let it take the place of your NOURISH moment.

When you're nourishing yourself, it's important to tell yourself you are doing so. Indeed, this step is as much about finding the time for the moment of self-love than it is the act of what you do during that moment.

Make time to NOURISH you. You need it.

Step 7: Track



[Marcel the Shell](#) is, without a doubt, my favorite YouTube video of this millennium. If you've never seen it, [stop everything to do so now](#). It's worth the three minutes of your life. I promise.

One of my favorite stories that Marcel the Shell tells is about his car – which is, technically speaking, an insect. As Marcel the Shell explains, having a bug for a car is not as easy as you might think. Sure, you don't need to worry about such things as seatbelts and automatic door locks, but the real problem has to do with the GPS system, or lack thereof. See, bugs can't stick to set routes or even reach

set locations on the journeys they make. No matter how hard they try, they always end up off course.

Take one week, when there was a maple syrup spill in the kitchen at Marcel the Shell's house. Result? Every time the bug took passengers like Marcel on a drive, they all just ended right back up at the maple syrup spill – not buying the groceries or picking up the baby Marcel the Shells from soccer practice like they needed to.

Fun? Yes.

Productive? No.

There are different elements to the PRESENT Principle – and different steps require varying amounts of flexibility, self-love and discipline. However, one truth remains across all steps: Implementing them all, every day, will make your day a better one.

So how do you make sure you are implementing them every day? You track yourself to make sure you are.

But the TRACK step is not just about checking a box that you completed the 7 important steps of the day. Instead, it's about seeing where you're excelling,

where you need improvement, and then making incremental steps to reach greater levels of success. At the end of the day, take a look back at your efforts to hit all seven steps in the PRESENT principle. What worked? What didn't? Take thirty seconds to jot a few words down, and then in tomorrow's PRESENT time you reflect a bit more on how to make slight improvements.

Conclusion



We all want better days.

We do.

If every day begins in the morning, then the morning is where change for the better should take root.

No matter how you remember the outcome of a bright clear day in the mountain air or a dusty miserable day spent in the dentist's basement, you cannot un-remember that both days began in the morning.

The PRESENT Principle is about giving you a guiding framework for establishing a positive morning ritual that sets your day in the direction you want it to go.

By waking in the mornings, and following seven simple steps to Pray, Read, Express, Schedule, Exercise, Nourish, and Track, you will be better able to make your day everything you want it to be.

Lead by morning.

“Do you keep a diary?” a male companion asks a diarist seated at her writing desk.

“I’d give anything to look at it. May I?”

Quickly covering its pages, she replies, “Oh no. You see, it’s simply a very young girl’s record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy.”

The Importance of Being Earnest

January 1

Now from his breast into his eyes the ache
Of longing mounted, and he wept at last,
His dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,
Longed for as the sun warmed earth is longed for by a swimmer
Spent in rough water where his ship went down
Under Poseidon's blows, gale winds and tons of sea.
Few men can keep alive through a big surf
To crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches
In joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind:
And so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,
Her white arms round him pressed as though forever.

[Homer](#)

The Present Principle ~

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What to Express ~

- Reflections on the day's passage.
- What you hope for or dream of in this waking moment.
- Life skills or qualities you seek to cultivate.
- Goals.
- People or situations you are praying for or wishing well.
- A statement of gratitude.
- Everything on your mind. *Everything*. Lists. Prose. Sketches. Poems. Turn thoughts to paper. Free your mind to breathe. *Express*.

January 2

You came, across your life, across Ladakh, to this room, to this morning, to me, and now another journey is beginning, the journey which you traveled here to begin.

[A Journey in Ladakh](#)

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January 3

A Blessing

Suddenly I realize that if I stepped out of my body I would break into blossom.

[James Wright](#)

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January 4

All the particles in the world
Are in love and looking for lovers.
Pieces of straw tremble
In the presence of amber

[Rumi](#)

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January 5

I don't want to end up having simply visited this world.

[Mary Oliver](#)

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January 6

Come to the edge
We might fall
Come to the edge
It's too high!
COME TO THE EDGE!
So they came
And he pushed
And they flew

[Christopher Logue](#)

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January 7

You said you saw the heavens open/
and show riches,
ready to drop on us.

[Sylvia Plath](#)

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January 8

To burn like this without surcease, to bear the inner burning coming on like fruit's quick ripening, to be the pulse of a bonfire in this thicket of endless stone, walking through the nights of our life, obedient as our blood in its blind circuit.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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January 9

I know how I felt – richer, happier, more alive than ever before or ever since. It is feeling that survives; feeling and the place.

There is no sequence for those days, no chronology.

[Penelope Lively, Moon Tiger](#)

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January 10

Man with Wooden Leg Escapes Prison

Man with wooden leg escapes prison. He's caught. They take his wooden leg away from him. Each day he must cross a large hill and win a wide river to get to the field where he must work all day on one leg. This goes on for a year. At the Christmas party they give him back his leg. Now he doesn't want it. His escape is all planned. It requires only one leg.

[James Tate](#)

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January 11

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

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January 12

The story of the water hyacinth in the Congo is a wonderful allegory for the white man in this country. The plant's intended role was innocent enough. It was brought here as a garden ornament decades ago. According to one story, a Belgian colonialist who had seen it in its native South American environment imported the first seedlings to prettify a waterway near his remote colonial outpost. Another account blames an American Baptist missionary who was attracted by its delicate pastel flowers.

There was nothing innocent about the alien's behavior once it took root in the Congo. It grew and grew, spreading the deadly mat across much of the Congo river basin, suffocating the life out of ponds lakes and low moving rivers and upsetting entire eco-systems. It is now categorized as a dangerous alien weed that should be eradicated before it clogs even the main arteries of the river system. And I saw with my own eyes the extent of its grip on the Congo river.

Downstream from Kisangani I barely saw a single stretch of river free from floating knots of water hyacinth.

[Tim Butcher, Blood River](#)

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January 13

It is, of course, a symbol of the terrible beauty of death, and the paradox that the more intensely one lives, the more one burns and consumes oneself; death, here, includes the concept of love, and is larger and richer than mere love, which is part of it.

[Sylvia Plath](#)

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January 14

All I can think, when I hear your voice, is that the past is true, which both appalls and uplifts me.

[Penelope Lively. Moon Tiger](#)

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January 15

I backed in you;
I loved you, helplessly, with a boundless tongue-tied love.
And death doesn't prevent me from loving you.

Besides,
In my opinion you aren't dead.

(I know dead people, and you are not dead.)

[Franz Wright](#)

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January 16

Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.

[C. S. Lewis](#)

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January 17

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot soles.

[Walt Whitman](#)

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January 18

What had Claire said to me at breakfast, about wanting to die together, at the same time? I had sometimes been on the verge of believing that Claire had had other lives...Claire, more than her sister, knew things that I doubt anyone had taught her. She was quick to understand the natural order and the rules of society. It was tempting to think of her in foreign lands, with strange parents and an array of siblings, riding a camel down the avenue, speaking a language that is long since dead.

I could think of anything, anything at all.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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January 19

Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see.

[C.S. Lewis](#)

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January 20

So the point of my keeping a notebook has never been, nor is it now, to have an accurate factual record of what I have been doing or thinking...perhaps it never did snow that August in Vermont; perhaps there never were flurries in the night wind, and maybe no one else felt the ground hardening and summer already dead even as we pretended to bask in it, but that was how it felt to me, and it might as well have snowed, could have snowed, did snow.

[Joan Didion, The Year of Magical Thinking](#)

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January 21

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave Father; and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it. I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You cannot now realize that you will ever feel better. Is not this so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe it, to feel better at once. The memory of your dear Father, instead of an agony, will yet be a sad sweet feeling in your heart, of a purer and holier sort than you have known before.

From a condolence letter written by Abraham Lincoln to Fanny McCullough, the daughter of Lincoln's cherished friend, Lieutenant Colonel William McCullough, who died in the Civil War.

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January 22

Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become.

[C.S. Lewis](#)

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January 23

The one thing all nations on the earth share is the fear that a member of the family will want to be an artist.

[Robert Frost](#)

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January 24

We're going to have a strange life.

[Ernest Hemingway](#) to John dos Passos, 1932

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January 25

Oh soul,
you worry too much.
You have seen your own strength.
You have seen your own beauty.
You have seen your golden wings.
Of anything less,
why do you worry?
You are in truth
the soul, of the soul, of the soul.

[Rumi](#)

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January 26

I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?

[Benjamin Disraeli](#)

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January 27

I know the trick to get rid of pain: whole chunks of my life dissolve like a drop of ink in water.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild.](#)

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January 28

This is one of the many ways you can change your life.

[Francesca Marciano](#)

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January 29

And I sing this
For the heart with no companion
For the soul without a king
For the prima ballerina who cannot dance to anything

[Leonard Cohen](#)

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January 30

Since there is no help, come, let us kiss and part –
Nay, I have done: you get no more of me:
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart
That thus so cleanly I myself can free

Michael Drayton

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January 31

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the root of trees
Is my destroyer
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry flower

Dylan Thomas

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February 1

You don't want to come back here. The weather is miserable and everyone is in a bad mood.

It sounded wonderful.

[Francesca Marciano, Rules of the Wild.](#)

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February 2

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

[I Corinthians 13:13](#)

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February 3

If I could tell you only one thing about my life it would be this: when I was seven years old the mailman ran over my head.

[Brady Udall, The Miracle Life of Edgar Mint](#)

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February 4

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope.

[Romans 5: 3-4](#)

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February 5

When you say that you're having an impossible time, what do you mean?

- I'm constantly emotional.

Are you emotional right now?

- I'm extremely emotional right now.

What emotions are you feeling?

- All of them.

Like...

- Right now I'm feeling sadness, happiness, anger, love, guilt, joy, shame, and a little bit of humor...

[Jonathan Safran Foer. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*](#)

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February 6

I thought, it's a shame that we have to live, but it's a tragedy that we get to live only one life, because if I'd had two lives, I would have spent one of them with her.

[Jonathan Safran Foer. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*](#)

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February 7

Luke, once this winter, brought home the school goldfish, Swimmy, for the weekend. He got up on a chair to stare at this bowl and said hello. No answer. Then he recalled what kind of goldfish it was, “Ca va, Swimmy?” he said at last, “Ca va?” ... Speaking the goldfish’s language to the goldfish.

[Adam Gopnik. Paris to the Moon.](#)

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February 8

But I have seen the images that will help you order your heart and mind are images of love' that the energy you need to bring peace to your life is an energy of love. There are many ways that lead to Enlightenment, and no one is better than another, and all are hard to travel; the Way for you, I understood when I saw you, is the Way of Compassion, the Way of Avalokiteshvara.

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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February 9

I shrug my shoulders. “As you can see, I have moments in abundance.”

[Emily Barr. Baggage](#)

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February 10

Sometimes I can hear my bones straining under the weight of all the lives I'm not living.

[Jonathan Safran Foer. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*](#)

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February 11

One moment of pure seeing is the beginning of Liberation. If you can see, for a moment, one flow, one face, one dog, as they are in themselves and for themselves, you have begun to be free enough to love.

[Andrew Harvey, A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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February 12

Give me the splendid silent sun
with all his beams full-dazzling,
Give me juicy autumnal fruit ripe and red from the orchard,
Give me a field where the unmow'd grass grows.

[Walt Whitman](#)

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February 13

Animals, cherubs, and angels lurked in niches.

[Tony Cohan. Mexican Days](#)

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February 14

“Come my love,” he said. “You’re the only person I want to be with for the rest of my life.”

Oh my beautiful magic child brother...

“Get up Esmerelda,” he’d say playfully. “Let’s go and look at beautiful things.”

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild.](#)

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February 15

“Why honey, don’t you want to get dressed?”

My mother took care never to tell me to do anything. She would only reason with me sweetly, like one intelligent, mature person with another.

“It’s almost three in the afternoon.”

“I’m writing a novel,” I said. “I haven’t got time to change out of this and change into that.”

[Sylvia Plath. The Bell Jar.](#)

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February 16

Then plan after plan started leaping through my head, like a family of scatty rabbits.

[Sylvia Plath. The Bell Jar.](#)

The Present Principle ~

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February 17

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Langston Hughes

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February 18

Panther-like in a dapple of tree shadow, Dodo Conway's black station wagon lay in wait.

[Sylvia Plath. The Bell Jar.](#)

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February 19

If you have a life of dreams
And want your dreams to be fulfilled,
Then be as pure as the dew of the dawn
And play on your heart-violin every day.

Sri Chinmoy

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February 20

Light that lies deep inside of me
Come forth in all thy majesty
Show me thy gaze
Teach me thy ways
That I a better person may be

Darkness that lies deep inside of me
Come forth in all thy mystery
Show me thy gaze
Teach me thy ways
That I a better person may be

Love that lies deep inside of me
Come forth in all thy unity
Let me be thy gaze
Let me teach thy ways
That I a better person may be

Author Unknown

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February 21

Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of how much you already have.

Anonymous

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February 22

If for a tranquil mind you seek,
These things observe with care:
Of whom you speak, to whom you speak,
And how, and when and where.

Anonymous

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February 23

What to do? Think + create + love people + give of self like mad. Go outward in love and creation and maybe you will fall into knowing what you want simultaneously as what you want walks by your picket gate singing a never-again song with a nonchalant catch-me-quick hat aslant back on his head and a book of “how like if a flea circus” under his Einstein arm.

[Sylvia Plath's Journal, 1953.](#)

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February 24

Imagine what you are writing about. See it and live it. Do not think it up laboriously, as if you were working out mental arithmetic. Just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it, turn yourself into it. When you do this, the worlds look after themselves, like magic...the minute you flinch, and take your mind off this thing, and begin to look at the words and worry about them, then your worry goes into them and they set about killing each other.

[Sylvia Plath](#)

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February 25

And after and for a long time to come he'd have reason to evoke the recollection of those smiles and to reflect upon the good will which provoked them for it had power to protect and to confer honor and to strengthen resolve and it had power to heal men and to bring them to safety long after all other resources were exhausted.

[Cormac McCarthy. All the Pretty Horses.](#)

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February 26

Courage is the price that Life exacts for granting peace.

Amelia Earhart

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February 27

The story of an idea, is, of necessity, the story of many ideas. Ideas, like large rivers, have never just one source. Just as the water of a river near its mouth is composed largely of the waters of many tributaries, so an idea, in its final form, is composed largely of later additions. And because this is so, it is often difficult to find the source of a river or the beginnings of an idea.

Ley. Rockets, Missiles, and Space Travel

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February 28

It is hard to see a person on a horse without imagining that person thinking, I am on a horse and you're not.

[Paul Theroux. *Fresh Air Fiend*](#)

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March 1

On stripping bark from myself (for Jane, who said trees die from it)

Because women are expected to keep silent about
Their close escapes I will not keep silent
And if I am destroyed (naked tree!) someone will
Please
Mark the spot
Where I fall and know I could not live
Silent in my own lies
Hearing their, “how NICE she is!”
Whose adoration of the retouches image
I so despise

No. I am finished with living
For what my mother believes
For what my brother and father defend
For what my lover elevates
For what my sister, blushing, denies or rushes
To embrace

I find my own
Small person
A standing self
Against the world
An equality of wills
I finally understand

My struggle was always against
An inner darkness: I carry within myself
The only known keys
To my death – to unlock life, or close it shut
Forever. A woman who loves wood grains, the cold
Yellow
And the sun, I am happy to fight
All outside murderers
As I see I must

[Alice Walker](#)

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March 2

But then I suppose every era looks a little foolish to its descendents. This is because the past is the only country where it is still acceptable to mock the natives. But we should not laugh too hard: for soon enough, we shall all live there.

[Paul Collins, Sixpence House.](#)

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March 3

The dog is the only animal that dreams; and he and the elephant are the only animals that understand looks; the elephant is the only animal that, besides man, feel ennui; the dog, the only quadruped that has been brought to speak. Leibnitz bears witness to a hound in Saxony that could speak distinctly thirty words.

Arcana of science. Faculties of brutes, 1829.

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March 4

It is useless to fret. What you mean to find matters less than what you do find.

[Paul Collins. Sixpence House](#)

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March 5

The real hero is always a hero by mistake; he dreams of being an honest coward like everybody else.

[Umberto Eco](#)

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March 6

We have to remember that we look for solitude in order to grow there in love for God and in love for others. We do not go into the desert to escape people but to learn how to find them; we do not leave them in order to have nothing more to do with them, but to find out the way to do them the most good.

Thomas Merton

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March 7

Who are the great travelers? They are all sorts, of courses. A large number have been depressives, bipolar types capable of serious gloom...their passion is visiting the unknown. Travel, which is nearly always regarded as an attempt to escape from the ego, is in my opinion the opposite: nothing induces concentration or stimulates the memory like an alien landscape in a foreign culture.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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March 8

History is of course crammed with people like mother – who are just sitting it out.

[Penelope Lively. Moon Tiger](#)

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March 9

Don't let this soft light fool you, nor the light steps of Wilson; there is no warm nest here where you can curl up and feel safe. This place will first take you in and then spit you out in the desert. You'll be on your own, without shelter, or shade, but you'll know that it was always meant to be like this, since the beginning of time. This raw, this stark. Don't let its beauty fool you.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild](#)

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March 10

When lovely woman stoops to folly
And paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone

T.S. Eliot

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March 11

Why what could she have done, being who she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

[W.B. Yeats](#)

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March 12

I opened the door and blinked out into the bright hall. I had the impression it wasn't night and it wasn't day, but some lurid third interval that had suddenly slipped between them and would never end.

[Sylvia Plath. The Bell Jar](#)

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March 13

There is an old story of two construction workers sitting down to eat lunch together. One opens his lunch box and complains, “Yuck! A meatloaf sandwich...I hate meatloaf sandwiches.” His friend says nothing. The following day, the two meet up again for lunch. Again the first worker opens his lunch box, looks inside, and this time more agitated says, “Another meatloaf sandwich? I’m sick and tired of meatloaf sandwiches. I hate meatloaf sandwiches!” As before, his colleague remains silent. The third day, the two are preparing to eat lunch when the first construction worker opens his lunch box and begins to shout, “I’ve had it!! Day in and day out it’s the same thing! Meatloaf sandwiches every blessed day! I want something else!” Wanting to be helpful, his friend asks, “Why don’t you just ask your wife to make you something else?”

With bewilderment on his face, the first man replies, “What are you talking about? I make my own lunch.”

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March 14

And if you hit upon the idea that this or that country is safe, prosperous, or fortunate, give it up, my friend...for you ought to know that the world is ablaze with the fires of some faults or others. There is certain to be some suffering...and a wholly fortunate country does not exist anywhere. Whether it be excessive cold or heat, sickness or danger, something always afflicts people everywhere; no safe refuge can thus be found in the world.

Buddhist Scriptures

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March 15

Since 1945 there have been only 26 days without war.

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March 16

Every one suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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March 17

I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma, a harmless enigma that is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth.

[Umberto Eco](#)

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March 18

Look Well to This Day

Look well to this day,
For it and it alone is life.
In its brief course
Lie all the essence of your existence:

The Glory of Growth
The Satisfaction of Achievement
The Splendor of Beauty

For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is but a vision.
But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness,
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Anonymous

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March 19

But you, Timothy, certainly know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance.

[2 Timothy 3:10](#)

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March 20

Everybody in this house, especially Lev Nikolaevich, whom the children follow like a herd of sheep, has foisted on me the role of scourge. Having loaded me with all the responsibilities for the children and their education, the finances, the estate, the housekeeping, indeed the entire material side of life -- from which they derive a great deal more benefit than I do -- they then come up to me with a cold, calculating, hypocritical expression, masked in virtue, and beseech me in ingratiating tones to give a peasant a horse.

[Sonya Tolstoy. October 25, 1886.](#)

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March 21

Thumbing through stacks of foreign dictionaries, Alice James and her brothers learned an invaluable lesson early in life: the verb “to be” is irregular in almost every language.

[Alexandra Johnson. The Hidden Writer.](#)

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March 22

Family quarrels are bitter things. They don't go according to any rules. They're not like aches or wounds, they're more like splits in the skin that won't heal because there's not enough material.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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March 23

It seemed suddenly true to her that no man would ever do more than kiss her life or her imagination, no man could overcome the quantity of experience she had now accumulated. The labor of explaining everything – not just telling anecdotes, which was rather fun, but explaining strands of thought that stretched over years, habits of perception firmly in place, justifying deeply held views (such discussion bored her even to thin about)- seemed as difficult and unrewarding as carrying stones across a stony field.

[Jane Smiley. Duplicate Keys.](#)

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March 24

The farther behind I leave the past, the closer I am to forging my own character.

Isabelle Eberhardt

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March 25

Even if it was relatively insignificant, it was something, and I needed to do something, like sharks, who die if they don't swim, which I know about.

Jonathan Safran Foer.

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March 26

While I think of it I must note, lest unborn generations should think me a plagiarist, this proves conclusively what I have always maintained against strenuous opposition, that my Mind is Great.

Alice James.

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March 27

“Can’t repeat the past?” says Gatsby. “Why of course you can!”

And every American schoolchild is taught that in this belief lies Gatsby’s tragedy. But why should the thought be so absurd? Can’t repeat the past? We do it every day.

[Adam Gopnik. Paris to the Moon.](#)

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March 28

“You have done it, the real female writing. We are all writing about the Womb, but you are the Womb.”

Anais Nin quoting novelist Lawrence Durrell in her diary.

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March 29

For the next few hours I would wander off to explore corners of the city which for years I had only heard or read about, following a mental jigsaw of names whose pieces I could at last, and with great delight, finally fit together. There was nothing to compare with this: every minute was a pleasure and a discovery. It was like walking through the landscape of a dream, finding it concrete and alive.

[Jason Eliot, An Unexpected Light](#)

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March 30

He was utterly unflappable ... I had met him several years before in Kabul when the mujahidin stormed the city at the end of communist control. He brewed tea calmly as rockets exploded into houses a few years from us and, at the airport, as we cowered on the ground during bombardments of heavy artillery, mused wistfully over the loss of his fountain pen.

[Jason Eliot, An Unexpected Light](#)

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March 31

That was what happened when you lived with someone confused: you became confused yourself, and one thing developed the oddest way of blurring into other things.

Anne Tyler. *Back When We Were Grown-ups*

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April 1

And it's best if you know a good thing is going to happen, like an eclipse or getting a microscope for Christmas. And it's bad if you know a bad thing is going to happen, like having a filling or going to France. But I think it is worst if you don't know whether it is a good thing or a bad thing which is going to happen.

[Mark Haddon. The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night](#)

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April 2

Once upon a time.
When was that?
All times at once. A long time ago, and right now.
Both?
Yes, always both.

[Audrey Niffenegger. Time Traveler's Wife.](#)

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April 3

You can stroke people with words.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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April 4

“I’ll see what I can do,” I told Jay Cee. “I probably might just fit in one of those double barreled accelerated courses in elementary German they’ve rigged up.”

I thought at the time I might actually do this. I had a way of persuading my Class Dean to let me do irregular things. She regarded me as a sort of interesting experiment. At college I had to take a required course in physics and chemistry. I had already taken a course in botany and done very well. I never answered one test question wrong the whole year, and for a while I toyed with the idea of being a botanist and studying the wild grasses in Africa or the South American rain forests, because you can win big grants to study offbeat things like that in queer areas much more easily than winning grants to study art in Italy or English in England; there’s not so much competition.

[Sylvia Plath. The Bell Jar.](#)

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April 5

I encouraged him, in the usual way you that you wish for others what really you want for yourself, to have complete confidence in himself and never be afraid to be alone, to further his travels and always question the meaning of things.

[Jason Eliot, An Unexpected Light](#)

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April 6

This evening was like some golden age of human happiness, attained sometimes by children, more rarely by grown-ups, and it communicated its magic in some degree to all of us.

[Eric Newby. A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush.](#)

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April 7

If youth only knew: if age only could.

Henri Estienne

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April 8

The whole conversation is like a toboggan ride, threatening at every moment to fly out of control in any direction. She's enjoying it, though, and regrets that they will soon have to stop soon for some errands.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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April 9

There are no conditions to which a man cannot get accustomed, especially if he sees that everyone around him lives in the same way. Levin would not have believed it possible three months earlier that he could go quietly to sleep in the circumstances he now found himself.

[Paul Theroux. Hotel Honolulu.](#)

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April 10

She has twenty feet of copper wire hanging from the trees, attached to shortwave radio. She is reading, planting a garden, listening the radio, talking to her dogs, supervising lunch, and trying to write a letter all at the same time. She is gently manic, in a pottering sort of way.

[Alexandra Fuller. Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight.](#)

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April 11

The only thing to love is fear itself
Love of fear is the beginning of wisdom
The only thing to love is fear itself
May Fear and Fear and Fear be everywhere

[Sylvia Plath](#)

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April 12

I feel that this month I have conquered my Panic Bird. I am a calm, happy and serene writer...I have done this year what I said I would: overcome my fear of facing a blank page day after day, acknowledge myself, in my deepest emotions, a writer, come what may.

[Sylvia Plath](#)

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April 13

When one hears of a publisher being shot by an author, it is well to have all the facts before us before expressing disapprobation.

James Payn. The Illustrated London News, 1893

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April 14

My depression is giving way to anger – the anger I know so well, when everything decides to die on you and you are stuck again, back in the deep African mud.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild.](#)

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April 15

Buddy wrote that he was probably falling in love with a nurse who also had TB, but his mother had rented a cottage in the Adirondacks for the month of July, and if I came along with her, he might well find his feeling for the nurse was a mere infatuation.

[Sylvia Plath. The Bell Jar.](#)

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April 16

This is the way a man drives when he hopes he will slam into a tree and there will be silence afterward and he won't have the think anymore.

[Alexandra Fuller. Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight.](#)

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April 17

Love after love
The time will come
When, with elation,
You will greet yourself arriving
At your own door, in your own mirror,
And each will smile at the other's welcome,

And say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
To itself, to the stranger who has loved you.

All your life, whom you ignored
For another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

The photographs, the desperate notes, peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott

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April 18

And I tell you, if you have the desire for knowledge and the power to give it physical expression, go out and explore. If you are a brave man you will do nothing. If you are fearful you may do much, for none but cowards have need to prove their bravery. Some will tell you that you are mad, and all will say ‘What is the use?’ For we are a nation of shopkeepers, and no shopkeeper will look at research which does not promise him a financial return within a year. And so you will sledge nearly alone, but those with whom you sledge will not be shopkeepers; that is worth a good deal. If you march your Winter Journeys you will have your reward, so long as all you want is a penguin’s egg.

[Cherry-Garrad. The Worst Journey in the World.](#)

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April 19

That night as he lay in his cot he could hear music from the house and as he was drifting to sleep his thoughts were of horses and of the open country and of horses. Horses still wild on the mesa who'd never seen a man afoot and who knew nothing of him or his life yet in whose souls he would come to reside forever.

[Cormac McCarthy. All the Pretty Horses.](#)

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April 20

I didn't want to think about him, wouldn't think about him because I had other sad affairs with which to occupy my mind, as well as the setting of the sun and my trip down the highway to get home.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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April 21

One cannot always be more than pain, you realize, I say to her after awhile. At some point you just have to give in.

[Francesca Marciano](#)

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April 22

Maybe a person shouldn't be their own hobby.

Sarah Dunn. The Big Love.

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April 23

Oh Googlebot though art quick!
The invisible spider
that crawls in the night,
through the howling scorn,

Hath (finally) found my bed
of blue and orange joy.
And his dark secrets found
doth now life bestow.

Will Edwards

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April 24

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

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April 25

Be sad, but not too sad; grieve, but do not become absorbed by your grief. You cannot change what you haven't done, but you can change what you will become. Remember that somewhere you are free already. Draw hope from that; live in that hope.

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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April 26

Her father never greeted her, either in letters or on the phone. He always simply talked, as if she had just gone out of the room for a minute and returned.

[Jane Smiley. Duplicate Keys.](#)

The Present Principle ~

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April 27

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

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April 28

It is the great quantity of what is not done that lies with all its weight on what wants to come out of the soil.

Rainer Maria Rilke

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April 29

I have felt, since the first days here, that I must leave everything to chance, that I must compose and will nothing in this country. To walk by a stream, watching the pebbles darken in the running water, is enough; to sit under the apricots is enough; to sit in a circle of great red rocks, watching them slowly begin to throb and dance as the silence of my mind deepens, is enough: I do not think I can contain or feel any more.

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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April 30

We're like islands on the moon. (There's no water on the moon). A person could walk from one to the other if they just decided to do it.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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May 1

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

I Corinthians 13:1-13

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May 2

“But guys, it’s not that simple.”

Actually, it is that simple, it’s just not that easy. If you were quitting smoking, you wouldn’t buy cigarettes, hang out with people who smoke cigarettes, go to places where people were smoking cigarettes, or get drunk and call cigarettes at 4 am begging them to come over for one last smoke.

Behrendt. It’s Called a Breakup Cuz it’s Broken

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May 3

It's a common phrase, I know. But it means something particular to me: the tunnels, the security systems, the plastic forks, the shimmering, ever-shifting borderline that like all boundaries beckons and asks to be crossed. I do not want to cross it again.

Susanna Kaysen. *Girl, Interrupted*.

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May 4

It was a little bookstore on the Rue du Cherche – midi, it was a soft sense of spinning slowly, it was the afternoon and the hour, it was the flowering season of the year, it was the BERBUM (in the beginning), it was a man who thought he was a man. What an infinite piece of stupidity, my god. And she came out of the bookstore (I just now realize that it was like a metaphor, her coming out of a bookstore, no less) and we exchange a couple words...we looked at each other and I think we began to desire each other (but that was later on, on the Rue Reamur) and a memorable dialogue resulted, clothed from head to toe until our hands began to chat, it was sweet stroking hands while we looked at each other and smiled, each in the others mouth, we rubbed each other with our eyes, we were so much in agreement on everything that it was shameful, Paris was dancing there outside waiting for us, we'd barely disembarked, we were barely alive, everything was there without a name and without a history...

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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May 5

The peso collapsed, again and again, like a patient on life support.

[Tony Cohan. Mexican Days](#)

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May 6

Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.

Maya Angelou

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May 7

Whenever I am feeling blue, I like to go to the Balzar and watch a waiter gravely transfer a steak au poivre and its accompaniments from an oval platter to a plate, item by item. It reaffirms my faith in the sanity of superfluous civilization.

[Adam Gopnik. Paris to the Moon.](#)

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May 8

She sounded as if she would willingly surrender her job to progress, if a robot could be found.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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May 9

It's as if she somehow got left behind, missed every boat across the river, and now must watch happiness being acted out on the beach of a distant shore.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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May 10

A person could spend most of a lifetime in retrospective terror, thinking of all the things one nearly didn't do.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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May 11

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

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May 12

I remember thinking we were as remote from the world as we should ever be in our lives.

Peter Levi, The Light Garden of the Angel King

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May 13

I used to wonder what was on the other side of mountain, how the landscape resolved itself beyond the immediate wall in front of you. Flying in from the baked-brown plains of India this morning, I found out: on the other side of mountains are mountains, more mountains and mountains again.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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May 14

When you come right down to it, Gregorius said, “Paris is one big metaphor.”

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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May 15

It's strange how people come into your life, which back routes and shortcuts they choose to take before they join the main road you're traveling on. Somehow you know they have been on a parallel journey for some time, and any minute you may come across each other at a junction – you can feel them coming your way. Sometimes it takes them forever to show up and you become almost impatient.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild](#)

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May 16

The policeman looked at me for a while without speaking. Then he said, “I am arresting you for assaulting a police officer.”

This made me feel a lot calmer because it is what policemen say on television and in films.

[Mark Haddon. The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night](#)

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May 17

His face is gentle and fine. It is a gentleness that has been through the fire of death.

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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May 18

It was tempting not to think about it. A life of never thinking about it was quite easy to imagine.

[Jane Smiley. Duplicate Keys.](#)

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May 19

There aren't enough doctors in Africa. Those who choose to become doctors here don't do it for the money or because they want to do good. They do it because they have to heal, the way most people need to breathe or eat or love. They can't stop. As long as they are alive, they will never not be a doctor.

[Alexandra Fuller. Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight.](#)

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May 20

Now and then, on the day he was to leave, a guest might walk the two blocks to the beach and sob in the sunshine.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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May 21

It may be that a great unstated reason for travel is to find the place where one has been the happiest.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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May 22

The world is splitting open at my feet like a ripe, juicy watermelon. If only I can work, work, to justify all my opportunities.

[Sylvia Plath](#)

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May 23

This is love: to fly to heaven, every moment to rend a hundred veils;
At first instance, to break away from breath -- first step, to renounce feet;
To disregard this world, to see only that which you yourself have seen.

I said, "Heart, congratulations on entering the circle of lovers, On gazing beyond the range of the eye, on running into the alley of the breasts. Whence came this breath, O heart? Whence came this throbbing, O heart? Bird, speak the tongue of birds: I can heed your cipher!"

The heart said, "I was in the factory whilst the home of water and clay was baking. I was flying from the workshop whilst the workshop was being created. When I could no more resist, they dragged me; how shall I tell the manner of that dragging?"

[Rumi](#)

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May 24

Too late, always too late, because even though we made love so many times, happiness must have been something else, something sadder perhaps than this peace, this pleasure, a mood of unicorn or island, an endless fall in immobility.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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May 25

Again I am raging, I am in such a state by your soul that every bond you bind, I break, by your soul.
I am like heaven, like the moon, like a candle by your glow; I am all reason, all love, all soul, by your soul.
My joy is of your doing, my hangover of your thorn; whatever side you turn your face, I turn mine, by your soul.
I spoke in error; it is not surprising to speak in error in this state, for this moment I cannot tell cup from wine, by your soul.
I am that madman in bonds who binds the "divs"; I, the madman, am a Solomon with the "divs", by your soul.
Whatever form other than love raises up its head from my heart, forthwith I drive it out of the court of my heart, by your soul.
Come, you who have departed, for the thing that departs comes back; neither you are that, by my soul, nor I am that, by your soul.
Disbeliever, do not conceal disbelief in your soul, for I will recite the secret of your destiny, by your soul.
Out of love of Sham-e Tabrizi, through wakefulness or nightrising, like a spinning mote I am distraught, by your soul.

[Rumi](#)

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May 26

A penciled note, almost illegible: yes, he suffers once in a while, but it is the only decent way out.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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May 27

Hotel Ghorband, my diary reads.

Boxing day menu: hors d'oeuvres: broth with grit, stale bread, sliced radish.
Entrée: unidentifiable parts of sheep's head, leftover rice. Dessert: warm green tea.

then, below, this:

After dinner entertainment: trying to keep the lamp going, trying to understand what others are saying, fielding endless questions, viz: those which I don't understand; those with I do understand but cant answer; those which I can answer, the answers to which would not be understood; those which nobody anywhere can answer.

[Jason Eliot, An Unexpected Light](#)

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May 28

“I cling to steady things, like a barnacle clings to a boulder.”

-- “A barnacle will cling to anything,” he said.

“Flotsam and jetsam. Only it thinks those things are a boulder.”

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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May 29

There are two kinds of travelers.

[Adam Gopnik. Paris to the Moon.](#)

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- Everything on your mind. *Everything*. Lists. Prose. Sketches. Poems. Turn thoughts to paper. Free your mind to breathe. *Express*.

May 30

I try not to lie. I try to keep my lens clean. What more can I do?

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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May 31

Then I decided I would spend the summer writing a novel.
That would fix a lot of people.

[Sylvia Plath](#), *The Bell Jar*

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June 1

I've learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow. I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights. I've learned that regardless of your relationship with your parents, you'll miss them when they're gone from your life. I've learned that making a "living" is not the same thing as making a "life." I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw something back. I've learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision. I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one. I've learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back. I've learned that I still have a lot to learn. I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

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June 2

one sees truly only with the heart
the essential is hidden from the eye

The Little Prince

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June 3

I had achieved the ultimate in fresh air fiendishness. I was flat on my back. Fulfilled, content, naked, alone, happy. I thought: I am a monkey.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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June 4

They were very cheerful and friendly and I avoided them strenuously.

[Jason Eliot, An Unexpected Light](#)

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June 5

But you know, for those who can bear to ride out the wave, I think what happens is that here you are constantly reminded of what it means to be free and to be alive. And then it becomes very difficult to settle for anything less than this. You want to live with that awareness all the time. You want to be able to sit on this rock at dawn and feel THIS happy over and over again.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild](#)

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June 6

From these depths depart towards heaven;
may your soul be happy, journey joyfully.
You have escaped from the city full of fear and trembling;
happily become a resident of the Abode of Security⁴ .
If the body's image has gone, await the image-maker; if the
body is utterly ruined, become all soul.
If your face has become saffron pale through death, become a
dweller among tulip beds and Judas trees.
If the doors of repose have been barred to you, come, depart
by way of the roof and the ladder.
If you are alone from Friends and companions, by the help of
God become a saheb-qeran⁵ [lord of happy circumstance].
If you have been secluded from water and bread, like bread
become the food of the souls, and so become!

[Rumi](#)

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June 7

Any poet, if he is to survive beyond his 25th year, must alter; he must seek new literary influences; he will have different emotions to express.

T.S. Eliot

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June 8

You will say goodbye for all the right reasons. You're tired of living in wait for his apocalypse. You have your own fight on your hands, and though it's no bigger or more noble than his, it will require all of your energy. It's you who has to hold on to earth. You have to tighten your grip-which means letting go of him.

Melissa Bank. *The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing*

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June 9

What were we spending so much time doing if not getting to know each other?

Jonathan Safran Foer

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June 10

From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars/govern a life.

[Sylvia Plath](#)

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June 11

I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, but only more love.

Mother Teresa

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June 12

Goodbye, said the fox to the little prince. And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: it is only with the heart that one can rightly see; what is essential is invisible to the eye.

The Little Prince

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June 13

Before I left Khartoum, I stopped by the many-arched Grand Sudan Hotel where I had heard that my hero, Hemingway, used to stay en route to hunting expeditions. At the reception desk, I asked if this was true. “Mr. Hemingway?” said the concierge. We will ring up to him. What room is he in?

[Christina Lamb, Small Wars Permitting](#)

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June 14

For a brief moment in the universe the veil was lifted. The mysterious became known. Questions met answers somewhere behind the stars. Furrowed brows were smoothed and eyelids closed over long unblinking stares.

Your beloved occupied the cosmos. You awoke to sunrays and nestled down to sleep in moonlight. All life was a gift open to you and burgeoning for you. Choirs sang to harps and your feet moved to ancestral drumbeats. For you were sustaining and being sustained by the arms of your beloved.

Now the days stretch before you with the dullness and sameness of desert dunes. And in this season of grief we who love you have become invisible to you. Our words worry the empty air around you and you can sense no meaning in our speech.

Yet we are here. We are still here. Our hearts ache to support you.

We are always loving you.

You are not alone.

Maya Angelou

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June 15

The purpose of life is not to be happy - but to matter, to be productive, to be useful, to have it make some difference that you have lived at all.

Leo Rosten

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June 16

Today

A woman with a gash
so deep and wide in
her black soul
came and spilled her
self over me.
Asking to be held
like no-one held her
Asking to be fed
like no-one fed her.
She crawled beneath
my skirt trembling and
afraid and clasped
my lifeboat legs.
But I had meetings
to go to,
and a world to save.

Gabriela Pearse

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June 17

We thought they were a windfall/
Never guessed they were a last blessing

Ted Hughes

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June 18

It is because of love.

Nobody ever moves to Africa for any other reason than that. It doesn't have to be a woman or a man. It's because of love itself. But I've just learned this. This answer is the gift I've just been blessed with.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild](#)

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June 19

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better.
It's not.

Dr. Seuss

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June 20

A lamp turned too high might shatter its chimney. Please just glow sometimes.

Olive Higgins Prouty to [Sylvia Plath](#)

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June 21

You shook, you sobbed with joy, you were ocean depth
Brimming with God

Ted Hughes

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June 22

I've been to a marvelous party,
I must say the fun was intense
We all had to do
What the people we knew
Would be doing a hundred years hence.
Dear Cecil arrived wearing armor,
Some shells and a black feather boa,
Poor Millicent wore a surrealist comb
Made of bits of mosaic from St. Peter's in Rome,
But the weight was so great she had to go home,
I couldn't have liked it more!

Noel Coward

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June 23

It seems to me that any full grown, mature adult would have a desire to be responsible, to help where he can in a world that needs so very much, that threatens us so very much.

Norman Lear

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June 24

Yet the hooded culture was a hooded vulture, the tsetse flies were tsetse flies, the crocs crocs, the bats bats, the sunlight's shattering flash like the wipe of a golden sword. [He] knew he ought to have been nearer to the object of his quest, yet he seemed no nearer.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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June 25

When you are the only creative writer it can give rise to jealousy and opposition in a family that does not understand why you shut yourself away in a room alone with your thoughts, trying to woo the muse. By contrast, when there are two of you, the atmosphere is supportive. It's easier to concentrate on what you are doing, because both of you do the same thing.

It's like singing together in the dark.

Ted Hughes

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June 26

Even amidst fierce flames the golden lotus can be planted.

The Bhagavad Gita

Written on the gravestone of [Sylvia Plath](#)

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June 27

It would seem that a choice cannot be dialectical, that the fact of bringing it up impoverishes it, that is to say, falsifies it, that is to say, transforms it into something else.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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June 28

In 1866, Livingstone set off on another long expedition, looking for slave-traders, potential Christians, the Nile, or anything else that might need discovering.

[Adam Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost](#)

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June 29

Jam Yang said, you must write and I must be a guide. It is our svaha, our nature. Perhaps next times we will be luckier, less condemned to our different vanities. I will talk less and you will carry no big black notebooks, full of illegible writing.

What will we do with our vanities?

We will drink. We will see visions. We will heal the sick and bring love and calm to the mad and evil. We will play cards all night and not need to sleep. We will walk on water in front of a hundred thousand cameras, to refute all materialists forever.

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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June 30

Only from the heart can you touch the sky.

[Rumi](#)

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July 1

A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects.

Robert A. Heinlein. Time Enough for Love.

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July 2

In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

2 Peter 1:5-7

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July 3

Our situation is the following. We are standing in front of a closed box which we cannot open.

Albert Einstein

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July 4

You said when we first spoke, I think, that only the perfect can help others. What did you mean?

If a man who is still full of anger and desire and greed tries to ‘help’ another, what will his help be worth? It will be dirty, it will be colored, it will be a burden as much as a help. If you are serious about wanting to be of help to others you should be serious too about achieving perfection of heart and mind. Only when the heart is clear can it feel without greed or possessiveness, only when the mind is clear of all false perceptions, can it guide action. If you really love others and truly see the extent and range and depth of their suffering, and feel it in your heart, then you will want to give them strength and want to bring them peace. If you do not have strength and peace yourself how can you give it to them? If you do not have light, how can you bring light to others? If you are not free of suffering, how can you free others?

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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July 5

It is a tenet of contemporary American psychology that mental health requires psychological separation from one's parents. One way of resisting over-involvement, for some people at least, is resisting telling details.

[Deborah Tannen. You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation](#)

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July 6

Open body positions that speakers use are more likely to persuade their listeners.

[Deborah Tannen. You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation.](#)

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July 7

I have been quiet and patient since I've been back here. I have been this woman with a very fine scar. It is a secret scar that nobody else can see. I look at it when I'm naked and I have learned to love it. It gives me power. I have been wounded and the wound has made me stronger...This is also what I've learned in Africa: the only whites who will heal are the ones who let themselves be wounded.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild](#)

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July 8

But I knew when I finished this first travel book that I would be able to do it again.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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July 9

Sometime in your life, hope that you might see one starved man, the look on his face when the bread finally arrives. Hope that you might have baked it or bought or even kneaded it yourself. For that look on his face, for your meeting his eyes across a piece of bread, you might be willing to lose a lot, or suffer a lot, or die a little, even.

Daniel Berrigan

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July 10

The business of the sophist, according to Aristophanes, is to invent new reasons. Let us try to invent new passions, or to reproduce the old ones with a like intensity. I shall analyze this conclusion once more, from a Pascalian point of view: true belief is somewhere in between superstition and libertinism.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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July 11

If I do something out of the ordinary-take two baths in one day, for example, I say to myself: are you crazy?

Susanna Kaysen. Girl, Interrupted.

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July 12

Love the earth and sun and animals,
Despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks,
Stand up for the stupid and crazy,
Devote your income and labor to others...
And your very flesh shall be a great poem.

Walt Whitman

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July 13

That is how Paris destroys us, slowly, delightfully, tearing us apart among old flowers and paper tablecloths stained with wine, with its colorless fire that comes running out of crumbling doorways at nightfall.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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July 14

I just want you to understand that you are responsible, in a sense, for the formation of an individual, and I am fortunate enough to be that person.

Sylvia Plath to her benefactor, Olive Higgins Prouty, on being at Smith College.

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July 15

The first of the four noble truths taught by the Buddha explains that life is suffering. The second truth explains why. We suffer because the self desires, grasps, clings, is never satisfied, never happy, never free of its many illusion; we desire what we don't have, and when we get it, we desire to hold on to it, and when we are sure we have it, we lose interest in it and desire something new. In our constant, blind striving for something more, something better, something new, something secure and permanent, we act in ways that hurt ourselves and others, and create bad karma, which leads to rebirth and therefore more suffering. Even if we manage to be content with what we have, we are still subject to old age, sickness and death, and so are our loved ones. The third truth says that we must end this ceaseless wanting and grasping if we want to end suffering. The final truth explains how – through the noble eightfold path of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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July 16

An old woman whose past perhaps has left her bitter. Jealous of the happiness of others. It is an ordinary story. But is not mine.

[Cormac McCarthy. All the Pretty Horses.](#)

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July 17

Maybe she saw the great white light and felt the intoxicating warmth of God.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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July 18

Sedimentary obsessions, and Obsidian dreams.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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July 19

I see the moon these days from Paris because I once saw Paris from the moon. And this seems to me not a cultural prejudice but a practical fact, (but then all cultural prejudices seem like practical facts to the prejudiced).

[Adam Gopnik. Paris to the Moon.](#)

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July 20

There were stories to tell, certainly, but there were also stories to tell about the telling of the stories. Although I long ago lost faith in the idea of truth, I knew that once I spoke, the stories would take on their own shape, their own truth. In my darkest hour I doubted that there was even a lesson to take from that rubble of time. But whatever the moral was, I knew I needed to fashion the pieces together, and to myself, before all of it came tumbling out, the essence drifting heavenward, gone before I understood where it was.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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July 21

In the coming months and years, I would learn that – just as there is no blood test to identify who will jump into the fray- there is no simple biographical arc either. No resume can predict why this man or woman, at a safe remove from a crisis, suddenly announces, “This is MY fight.”

[Melissa Faye Greene. There Is No Me Without You.](#)

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July 22

We are all tourists, I think. Whether we stay for two weeks or two years, we are still outsiders, passing through.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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July 23

God shall have a starring role in my history of the world. How could it be otherwise?

[Penelope Lively. Moon Tiger](#)

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July 24

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 37:4

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July 25

I dislike planes, and whenever I am in one – suffering the deafening drone and the chilly airlessness that is peculiar to planes – I always suspect that the land we are overflying is rich and wonderful and that I am missing it all.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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July 26

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.

Buddha

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July 27

I see it now, and I don't think I will ever forget it. In a way everything here always happens for the first time. How the birds fly, the clouds move, the sun rises. Each times it's like watching a miracle happen.

You will never get used to it.

It will always be new.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild](#)

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July 28

Bread for myself is a material question. Bread for my neighbor is a spiritual one.

Nicholas Berdyaev

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July 29

Thank you, god, for my mom. She's a good, good mom. She knows how to be a good mom. When when I am mad, she love me. Even when I sad she love me. Even when I do bad thing, she love me. My mom, she so cute. My mom, she not ugly. But she ugly, I still love her. Even if she ugly, I love her. Even if she REALLY, REALLY ugly, I love her. And she love me, if she ugly. But she not, she cute. Thank you, thank you, god, for good and cute mom.

{An adopted Ethiopian child speaking of his mother.}

[Melissa Faye Greene. There Is No Me Without You.](#)

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July 30

I spend a lot of time at home composing lists and filling date books. My life normally has all the order and direction of a five-year plan. But it is always the detours that move me, like meeting another culture by firelight or swimming at first dark in a desert stream. The writer Annie Dillard has a theory about these moments. Insight can come to those who wait for it, she says, but it always a “gift and a total surprise.”

“I cannot cause light,” she writes. “The most I most I can do is try to put myself in the path of its beam.”

[Tony Horwitz. One for the Road.](#)

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July 31

At an uncertain time in my life I joined. And up to a point – they gave me a lot of rope – the Peace Corps allowed me to be myself. I realized that it was much better to be neglected than manipulated, and I had learned that you make your own life.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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August 1

Mahamudra Upadesa

Keep your spirit in its nudity
Let the polluted waters of the mind
Flow away of themselves...

If you perceive the true nature and extent of space
All fixed notions of centre and limit will disappear
If the spirit sees in the spirit
All mental games will end...

Although you can call it 'empty'
Space is indescribable
Although you can call it 'luminous'
Giving it a name does not prove the spirit exists
Space cannot be a given a name or home...

Without changing, rest without attachment
In your state of origin
All your bonds will dissolve
The essence of the spirit is space
There is nothing that it holds to in the end

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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August 2

There is a point where, when a place looks very strange, it is not an indication of its remoteness, but simply a mark of your ignorance.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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August 3

Jan yang turned to me. “You are a writer. You are taking photographs in words all the time. What do you do about that?”

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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August 4

Generosity is not giving me that which I need more than you do, but it is giving me that which you need more than I do.

Kahlil Gibran

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August 5

My life is my message.

Mahatma Ghandi

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August 6

If everyone howled at every injustice, every act of barbarism, every act of unkindness, then we would be taking the first step towards a real humanity.

Nelson DeMille

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August 7

His haunts were the world's haunts; his world was the world. This is an emotion shared, I suppose, only by children and aristocrats; everyone goes where we go. Where else would you expect to meet people?

I have none of it and in my heart always expect to be alone, the one man sitting awkwardly at a table in the wrong restaurant after everyone else has left it. When I see my wife and children coming down the boulevard to meet me, I am dazzled. The baby, Olivia, was, I could see, a little like me, constantly pulling away from her mother's breast to give me the same anxious reassuring smile: YOU OF ALL PEOPLE! HERE OF ALL PLACES!

[Adam Gopnik. Paris to the Moon.](#)

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August 8

“I am fine. How are YOU?” she enunciated in smiling reply, thrilling the children, who covered their mouths in happiness and ran off to tell friends and family of their successful encounter with a pure-born exotic.

A small child in an Ethiopian orphanage, meeting an American visitor.

[Melissa Faye Greene. There Is No Me Without You.](#)

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August 9

When I was a kid, I used to think that bravery involved action. It took courage, I guessed, to move forward, to pursue a dream, to get ahead in the world. Just to get where you were supposed to. I thought having desire took courage. Now I realize that none of that requires bravery. The only thing you really need bravery for is standing still. For standing by.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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August 10

She looked up at him and her face was pale and austere in the upright and her eyes lost in their darkly shadowed hollows save only for the glint of them and he could see her throat move in the light and he saw in her face and in her figure something he'd not seen before and the name of that thing was sorrow.

[Cormac McCarthy. All the Pretty Horses.](#)

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August 11

I hear a hundred different fleeting whispered stories but I do not hear anyone talking openly. Without talk, nothing will be explained or understood, solved or learned. I want to write it on the sides of the mountains, across the autumn sky. TALK TALK TALK.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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August 12

The more complex and developed a society becomes, I think, the less responsibility individuals have to take for their actions. As long as I could lug my garbage out to the curb two mornings a week in Toronto, what did I care what happened to it. But here, we are made to see the consequences of our consumption.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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August 13

It would seem that a choice cannot be dialectical, that the fact of bringing it up impoverishes it, that is to say, falsifies it, that is to say, transforms it into something else.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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August 14

I should have realized it would be no ordinary journey when I telephoned from Portugal and finally got reservations and a giggling voice answered, “Here is Beauty!”

When I explained I was calling from Portugal, Beauty was very excited.

“Poor-too-gell,” she said in wonder, “What time is it?”

When we established it was the same as in Zambia, Beauty was astonished.

Someone called Precious came on the line, equally excited, then the line went dead.

[Christina Lamb, Small Wars Permitting](#)

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August 15

The writer is odd from day one, and in the course of pursuing this maddening profession becomes distinctly odder.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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August 16

Normal, happy, well balanced individuals seldom become imaginative writers, and generally writers tend to be notoriously unhealthy. There are reasons for this, the most competing of which are that a writer works alone, indoors, in a room, on a chair, with the door shut. Any young person who wonders what his or her chances are of becoming a writer ought to assess their ability to deal with solitude and, figuratively speaking, an entire working life thrashing around in auspicated darkness. It has been said that writing is a rat race in which you never get to meet the other rats.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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August 17

I began to think that it makes just as much sense to model a doll out of crumbled bread as to write the novel I will never write or to give my life in the delves of ideas that could redeem whole peoples. The pendulum immediately changes direction and there I am again among calming notions: a worthless doll, a great novel, a heroic death. I line them up, from least to greatest: doll, novel, heroism.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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August 18

A bird sings out, a two-note song, and I come back to myself. ‘Let’s just stay here,’ I say, because the road ahead bends and quivers in the heat, and we still have twelve kilometers to go, and standing here is like drinking spring water.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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August 19

Howard had come to me like some exotic remedy, that rare extract calibrated to produce sensation without harm.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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August 20

I liked her better than him...she is very young in all her cut and dried theories of life but as she cheerfully remarks, "When the natives let you down for the hundredth time you just retire to your room and weep and then you start again."

Audrey Richards, Cambridge anthropologist, on Lorna Gore-Browne at Shiwa House. Rhodesia, 1932.

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August 21

When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.

Author Unknown

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August 22

Most people who love Paris love it because the first time they came they ate something better than they had ever eaten before, and kept coming back to eat it again.

[Adam Gopnik. Paris to the Moon.](#)

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August 23

Cooking, for middle class, end-of the century people, is our only direct, not entirely debased line with the hermetic life, with Zen sitting, with just doing things without a thought. No wonder monks make good cheese.

[Adam Gopnik. Paris to the Moon.](#)

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August 24

Brahms

It must be that my early friendship with defeat
Has given me affection for the month of August.
The potato fields belong to early night.

So many times as a boy I sat in the dirt
Among dry cornstalks that gave assurances
Every hour that Francis has his ear to the night.

Columbus's letters tell us that we will receive
The gifts that mariners all receive at the end—
Memories of gold and a grave in the sand.

The shadow of a friend's hand gives us
Promises similar to those we received from
The light under the door as our mother came near.

Each of us is a Jacob weeping for Joseph.
We are the sparrow that flies through the warrior's
Hall and back out into the falling snow.

I don't know why these images should please me
So much; an angel said: "In the last moment before night
Brahms will show you how loyal the notes are.

Robert Bly

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August 25

I realized that the fall from grace is deliberate. We edge closer to cataclysm. We sense flames, disjointed winds, and sirens. Vegetation is singed and brittle. A band of children with their eyes clawed out pass to our right, their feet bleeding. We move toward them, follow them. We know exactly what we are doing. We long to be burned and then we are.

[Kate Braverman](#)

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August 26

Anthropology: the academic discipline that makes a career of documenting the details of people's lives.

[Deborah Tannen. You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation.](#)

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August 27

No matter how dissatisfied people are with the results they are getting, they rarely question their way of trying to get results. When what we are doing is not working, we do not try doing something totally different. Instead, we try harder by doing more of what seems self-evidently the right way to proceed.

[Deborah Tannen. You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation.](#)

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August 28

It was hard to deny belief in the fact that a flower could be beautiful to no end; it was bitter to accept the fact that one could dance in darkness.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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August 29

We have multiple lives and inhabit them simultaneously. We cannot count the identities we enter and shed, apartments and villas rented and abandoned, whole houses with clothing left on hangers in closets.

[Kate Braverman](#)

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August 30

Life is long out here. Longer than you think. Longer than you *can* think.

The Echomaker.

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August 31

This had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined us for all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.

Willa Cather. My Antonia.

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September 1

Most days are still a travesty of pedagogy.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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September 2

Girls with bear-skin caps from public schools in the wilds of Minnesota (who confessed, with humble desire for improvement, to never reading a whole book) sat next to elegant blonde young ladies from the best New York City preparatory schools deep, at the moment, in Satre, or Finnegans Wake. With a few exceptions, most of my students were glisteningly eager to work.

[Sylvia Plath](#)

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September 3

Susan's phrase, "a mighty fortress is our library," recurred to her. Just then it did seem that a dozen acquaintances and one beautiful building might indeed equal a friend.

[Jane Smiley. Duplicate Keys.](#)

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September 4

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Isaiah 26:3

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September 5

To burn like this without surcease, to bear the inner burning coming on like fruit's quick ripening, to be the pulse of a bonfire in this thicket of endless stone, walking through the nights of our life, obedient as our blood in its blind circuit.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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September 6

I cannot think because my head is full of the sound. It is beautiful, it is not beautiful, it is discordant and stark, it is frightening, yes but it is also somehow comforting, it is music for great unroofed spaces, it is, what is it? It is convincing, I think finally. It is the closest word I can find. I close my eyes and now it is easy to think of nothing.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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September 7

So inscrutable is the arrangement of causes and consequences in this world that a ten-penny duty on tea, unjustly imposed in a sequestered part of it, changes the condition of all its inhabitants.

Thomas Jefferson

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September 8

Yes

It's about the blood
banging in the body,
and the brain
lolling in its bed
like a happy baby.
At your touch, the nerve,
that volatile spook tree,
vibrates. The lungs
take up their work
with a giddy vigor.
Tremors in the joints
and tympani,
dust storms
in the canister of sugar.
The coil of ribs
heats up, begins
to glow. Come
here.

Catherine Doty, Momentum

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September 9

Cinderella's Diary

I miss my stepmother. What a thing to say but it's true. The prince is so boring: four hours to dress and then the cheering throngs. Again. The page who holds the door is cute enough to eat. Where is he once Mr. Charming kisses my forehead goodnight?

Every morning I gaze out a casement window at the hunters, dark men with blood on their boots who joke and mount, their black trousers straining, rough beards, callused hands, selfish, abrupt ...

Oh, dear diary, I am lost in ever after: Those insufferable birds, someone in every room with a lute, the queen calling me to look at another painting of her son, this time holding the transparent slipper I wish I'd never seen.

Ron Koertge

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September 10

Bypass

When they cracked open your chest, parting
the flesh at the sternum and sawing

right through your ribs, we'd been married
only five weeks. I had not yet kissed

into memory those places they raided
to save your life. I could only wait

outside, in the public lobby
of private nightmares

while they pried you apart, stopped
your heart's beating, and iced you

down. For seven hours a machine
breathed for you, in and out. God,

seeing you naked in ICU minutes
after the surgery ... your torso swabbed

a hideous antiseptic yellow
around a raw black ladder of stitches

and dried blood. Still unconscious,
you did the death rattle on the gurney.

"His body is trying to warm itself up,"
they explained, to comfort me.

Susan Kelly-Dewitt

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September 11

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

John Donne

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September 12

It would be intemperate to make a sweeping generalization about rural Australian radio stations because I listened to no more than six or seven thousand hours of them in the time I was there, so I might have missed something good, but I will say this: when our modern monuments have crumbled to dust, when the careless hand of time has worn away all traces of the twentieth century, you can be certain that somewhere in an Australian country town there will be a disc jockey saying, “And that was Doris Day with her classic hit, Que Sera, Sera.”

In a Sunburnt Country

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September 13

How to Live

Eat lots of steak and salmon and Thai curry and mu shu pork and fresh green beans and baked potatoes and fresh strawberries with vanilla ice cream. Kick-box three days a week. Stay strong and lean. Go fly-fishing every chance you get, with friends

who'll teach you secrets of the stream. Play guitar in a rock band. Read Dostoyevsky, Whitman, Kafka, Shakespeare, Twain. Collect Uncle Scrooge comics. See Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs*, and everything Monty Python made. Love freely. Treat ex-partners as kindly

as you can. Wish them as well as you're able. Snorkel with moray eels and yellow tangs. Watch spinner dolphins earn their name as your *panga* slam-bams over glittering seas. Try not to lie; it sours the soul. But being a patsy sours it too. If you cause

a car wreck, and aren't hurt, but someone is, apologize silently. Learn from your mistake. Walk gratefully away. Let your insurance handle it. Never drive drunk. Don't be a drunk, or any kind of "aholic." It's bad English, and bad news. Don't berate yourself. If you lose

a game or prize you've earned, remember the winners history forgets. Remember them if you *do* win. Enjoy success. Have kids if you want and can afford them, but don't make them your reason-to-be. Spare them that misery. Take them to the beach. Mail order sea

monkeys once in your life. Give someone the full-on ass-kicking he (or she) has earned. Keep a box turtle in good heath for twenty years. If you get sick, don't thrive on suffering. There's nothing noble about pain. Die if you need to, the best way you can. (You define *best*.)

Go to church if it helps you. Grow tomatoes to put *store-bought* in perspective. Listen to Elvis and Bach. Unless you're tone deaf, own Perlman's "Meditation from Thais." Don't look for hidden meanings in a cardinal's song.

Don't think TV characters talk to you; that's crazy.

Don't be too sane. Work hard. Loaf easily. Have good friends, and be good to them. Be immoderate in moderation. Spend little time anesthetized. Dive the Great Barrier Reef. Don't touch the coral. Watch for sea snakes. Smile for the camera. Don't say "Cheese."

Charles Harper Webb

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September 14

Seaman's Ditty

I'm wondering where you are now
Married, or mad, or free:
Wherever you are you're likely glad,
But memory troubles me.

We could've had us children,
We could've had a home—
But you thought not, and I thought not,
And these nine years we roam.

Today I worked in the deep dark tanks,
And climbed out to watch the sea:
Gulls and salty waves pass by,
And mountains of Araby.

I've traveled the lonely oceans
And wandered the lonely towns.
I've learned a lot and lost a lot,
And proved the world was round.

Now if we'd stayed together,
There's much we'd never've —
But dreary books and weary lands
Weigh on me like a stone.

Gary Snyder

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September 15

For a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back, that's an earthquake. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.

Death of a Salesman

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September 16

Kryptonite

Lois liked to see the bullets bounce off Superman's chest, and of course she was proud when he leaned into a locomotive and saved the crippled orphan who had fallen on the tracks.

Yet on those long nights when he was readjusting longitude or destroying a meteor headed right for some nun, Lois considered carrying just a smidgen of kryptonite in her purse or at least making a tincture to dab behind her ears.

She pictured his knees giving way, the color draining from his cheeks. He'd lie on the couch like a guy with the flu, too weak to paint the front porch or take out the garbage. She could peek down his tights or draw on his cheek with a ball point. She might even muss his hair and slap him around.

"Hey, what'd I do?" he'd croak just like a regular boyfriend. At last.

Ron Koertge

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September 17

Then said a rich man, speak to us of giving.
And he answered:
You give but little when you give of your possessions.
It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

Kahil Gibran. The Prophet.

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September 18

When I got the idea for Schindler I was on my way back from a festival on Australian films ... and I came back through America to see publishers. [I had to buy a briefcase], and that's how I came up with the Schindler story: by buying a briefcase from a fellow who owned a luggage store in Beverly Hills who was a Schindler survivor.

Thomas M. Keneally on writing Schindler's List

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September 19

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Romans 12:9-13

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September 20

If I write more, I will dedicate them to [my mother] as well. It is a small, small thing to do for one's creator.

Edward P. Jones

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September 21

It's just like magic. When you live by yourself, all of your annoying habits are gone.

Merrill Markoe

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September 22

Coconut

Bear with me I
want to tell you
something about
happiness
it's hard to get at
but the thing is
I wasn't looking
I was looking
somewhere else
when my son found it
in the fruit section
and came running
holding it out
in his small hands
asking me what
it was and could we
keep it only
cost 99 cents
hairy and brown
hard as a rock
and something swishing
around inside
and what on earth
and where on earth
and this was happiness
this little ball
of interest beating
inside his chest
this interestedness
beaming out
from his face pleading
happiness
and because I wasn't
happy I said
to put it back
because I didn't want it
because we didn't need it
and because he was happy
he started to cry
right there in aisle

five so when we
got home we
put it in the middle
of the kitchen table
and sat on either
side of it and began
to consider how
to get inside of it

Paul Hostovsky

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September 23

I try every day to write great poetry, as I tried when I was 14. ... What else is there to do?

Donald Hall

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September 24

Rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.

Joel 2:23

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September 25

Miss you, rabbit. Miss the side by side.

Richard Powers. The Echomaker.

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September 26

Boo, Forever
Spinning like a ghost
on the bottom of a
top,
I'm haunted by all
the space that I
will live without
you.

Richard Brautigan

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September 27

We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognizing and appreciating what we do have.

Frederick Koenig

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September 28

Each day comes bearing its own gifts. Untie the ribbons.

Ruth Ann Schabacker

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September 29

They were right all along, I think. This is the most remarkable place, after all.

[Jamie Zeppa. Beyond the Sky and the Earth.](#)

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September 30

Babies are such a nice way to start people.

Don Herrold

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October 1

Find out how much God has given you and from it take what you need; the remainder is needed by others.

Saint Augustine

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October 2

In the summer of 1996 human habitation on earth made a subtle, uncelebrated passage from being mostly rural to being mostly urban. More than half of all humans now live in cities. The natural habitat of our species, then, officially, is steel, pavement, street-lights, architecture, and enterprise - the hominoid agenda. With all due respect for the wondrous ways people have invented to amuse themselves and one another on paved surfaces, I find that this exodus from the land makes me unspeakably sad. I think of children who will never know, intuitively, that a flower is a plant's way of making love, or what silence sounds like, or that trees breath out what we breathe in.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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October 3

Outside of a dog, a book is a man's (or woman's) best friend.
Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.

G. Marx

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October 4

When suddenly, at midnight, you hear
an invisible procession going by
with exquisite music, voices,
don't mourn your luck that's failing now,
work gone wrong, your plans
all proving deceptive—don't mourn them uselessly.
As one long prepared, and graced with courage,
say goodbye to her, the Alexandria that is leaving.
Above all, don't fool yourself, don't say
it was a dream, your ears deceived you:
don't degrade yourself with empty hopes like these.
As one long prepared, and graced with courage,
as is right for you who were given this kind of city,
go firmly to the window
and listen with deep emotion, but not
with the whining, the pleas of a coward;
listen—your final delectation—to the voices,
to the exquisite music of that strange procession,
and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing.

Constantine P. Cavafy

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October 5

The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But the Good Samaritan reversed the question, "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

Martin Luther King, Jr.

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October 6

Our prayers for others flow more easily than those for ourselves. This shows we are made to live by charity.

C.S.Lewis

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October 7

It is not down in any map; true places never are.

Herman Melville

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October 8

I've given up reading books. I find it takes my mind off myself.

Oscar Levant

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October 9

Have I said it before? I am learning to see.

Rainer Maria Rilke

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October 10

The Pyramids will not last a moment compared with the daisy. And before Buddha or Jesus spoke the nightingale sang, and long after the words of Jesus and Buddha are gone into oblivion the nightingale will still sing. Because it is neither preaching nor teaching nor commanding nor urging. It is just singing. And in the beginning was not a Word, but a chirrup.

D.H. Lawrence

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October 11

I raise the glass
to the kids in the park
that stare at the stars
and pass out in the dark...

Full Moon Partisans

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October 12

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

Eastern Wisdom Traditions

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October 13

The next time envy plants itself beside you, look at what it wants to show you, then let it motivate you.

Barbara Demarco-Barrett

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October 14

You cannot do good work if you take your mind off the work to see how the community is taking it.

Dorothy L. Sayers

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October 15

But I had the sense of discovering Nantucket in my own way and, through dead reckoning, had discovered something in myself. That to me is the essence of the travel experience. Is there any point in going across the world to eat something or buy something or watch people squatting among their ruins? Travel is a state of mind. It has nothing to do with distance or the exotic. It is almost entirely an inner experience.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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October 16

A toothache, or a violent passion, is not necessarily diminished by our knowledge of its causes, its character, its importance or insignificance.

C.S. Lewis

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October 17

There's a certain slant of light,
On winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,
'Tis the seal, despair,-
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
Shadows hold their breath;
When it goes, 't is like the distance
On the look of death.

Emily Dickenson

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October 18

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

T. S. Eliot

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October 19

You have more good luck than anyone I've ever met. You will live a long time, have many friends, many experiences. You will see the whole world. You only have one problem in your life. You worry too much. Always you get too emotional, too nervous. If I promise you that you will never have any reason in your life to ever worry about anything, will you believe me?

Elizabeth Gilbert. Eat Pray Love.

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October 20

Sometimes I think that the best thing you can say about a person is that he knows what to do.

[Jane Smiley. Duplicate Keys.](#)

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October 21

I suppose things are better now, but...I don't know.
People still hate each other, they just know how to hide it better.

John Seymour

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October 22

A long time ago there lived a child called Ling-ling who was a good artist. After her mother's death, her father's favorite concubine began to maltreat her by showing preference towards her own children. Ling-ling had no one to play with and spent her time painting. Her pictures became famous and were sold for many tails of silver. Her stepmother now grew jealous.

One night, she crept up to Ling-ling's bed and stuck a dirty nail into the child's hand, spreading feces on the nail to cause an infection. In a few days, Ling-ling's hand became red and swollen. Though the nail was removed, pus poured from the wound. However, Ling-ling continued to paint.

Now a strange thing happened. The wound never healed, but Ling-ling's paintings became better and better. The more the pus exuded, the greater the beauty of her work. In the whole of China, there was nothing like it. The pain in her hand seemed to imbue Ling-ling with an essence of invincibility, enabling her to zhan er bi sheng, dou er bi ke (prevail in every battle, become each adversity).

The Emperor himself heard of Ling-ling's masterpieces. She was summoned to the palace to paint the portrait of the crown prince. They fell in love and married. However, despite the administration of innumerable poultices prescribed by the best doctors in China, Ling-ling's wound would not heal. She continued to paint superbly until her death at a ripe old age.

Her words were like a gentle breeze, blowing away the dark clouds. Her belief in my worth had always sustained me throughout all my difficult passages. And now, her story touched me with the artistry of a magic wand, bringing harmony and solace.

Falling Leaves

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October 23

"Remember," Mala says, and smiles, amazed, as I am, that there was ever a time that we were strangers. "I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination."

Jhumpa Lahiri. Interpreter of the Maladies.

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October 24

You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.

Anne Lamott

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October 25

And a woman spoke, saying Tell us of Pain.

And he said:

Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.

Even as the stone of the fruit must break,

That its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.

And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles of your life, you pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy:

And you would accept the season of your heart, even as you have always accepted the seasons that pass over your fields.

And you would watch with serenity through the winters of your grief.

Much of your pain is ill-chosen.

It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self.

Therefore trust the physician, and drink

His remedy in silence and tranquility:

For his hand, though heavy and hard, is guided by the tender hand of the Unseen,

And the cup he brings, though it burns your lips, has been fashioned of the clay which the Potter has moistened with His own sacred tears.

Kahlil Gibran. The Prophet.

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October 26

Insanity can be defined as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

Unknown.

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October 27

If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself.

C.S. Lewis

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October 28

Yesterday a child came out to wonder
Caught a dragonfly inside a jar
Fearful when the sky was full of thunder
And tearful at the falling of a star
Then the child moved ten times round the seasons
Skated over ten clear frozen streams
Words like, when you're older, must appease him
And promises of someday make his dreams
And the seasons they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down
We're captive on the carousel of time
We can't return we can only look behind
From where we came
And go round and round and round
In the circle game

Sixteen springs and sixteen summers gone now
Cartwheels turn to car wheels thru the town
And they tell him,
Take your time, it won't be long now
Till you drag your feet to slow the circles down
And the seasons they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down
We're captive on the carousel of time
We can't return we can only look behind
From where we came
And go round and round and round
In the circle game

So the years spin by and now the boy is twenty
Though his dreams have lost some grandeur coming true
There'll be new dreams, maybe better dreams and plenty
Before the last revolving year is through
And the seasons they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down
We're captive on the carousel of time
We can't return, we can only look behind
From where we came
And go round and round and round
In the circle game

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October 29

This was my mom after all – a woman who had taught herself to swim as an adolescent alone in a cold Minnesota lake, with a book she'd borrowed from the local library entitle HOW TO SWIM. To my eye, there was nothing this woman could not do on her own.

Elizabeth Gilbert. Eat Pray Love.

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October 30

The Lord bless thee,
And keep thee.
The Lord lift his face shine upon thee,
And be gracious unto thee.
The lift up his countenance upon thee,
And give thee peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

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October 31

What if a demon were to creep up after you one night and say, "This life that you live must be lived by you once again and innumerable times more; and every pain and joy and thought and sigh must come again to you, all in the same sequence. The eternal hourglass will again and again be turned - and you with it!"? Would you throw yourself down, gnash your teeth and curse that demon? Or would you answer, "Never have I heard anything more divine"?

Friedrich Nietzsche

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November 1

She followed slowly, taking a long time,
As though there were some obstacles in the way;
And yet, as though, once it was overcome,
She would be beyond all walking, and would fly

Rainer Maria Rilke

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November 2

The trumpet of a prophecy! O wind, if Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Percy Shelley

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November 3

I tell students, when in doubt, to title their story after the smallest concrete object in the story.

Ron Carlson

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November 4

I feel a tiny pang of regret, as though I've lost a secret, and then a rush of exaltation: now everything begins.

Audrey Niggenegger. *The Time Traveler's Wife*.

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November 5

It was grab his neck and adore him or free fall.

Ted Hughes

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November 6

I want to everything with you.

Melissa Bank. The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing.

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November 7

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.

Pslam 23

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November 8

When people talk about the details of their daily lives, it is gossip. When they write about them, it is literature: short stories and novels.

[Deborah Tannen. You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation.](#)

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November 9

His face, alive noted with relief, was perfectly familiar. For that more than anything else, she kissed him.

[Jane Smiley. Duplicate Keys.](#)

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November 10

It is not in the nature of love to be so daunting. I don't want to have to fear you, especially when your wit can be so unkind. I've never been good at being afraid, and you know what scared animals are like. Stop talking, just hold me. Even better: marry me.

[Francesca Marciano. Rules of the Wild](#)

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November 11

I know, Howard, I know that embracing your family will bless me.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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November 12

The teeth at your bones are your own, the hunger is yours, forgiveness is yours. The sins of the fathers belong to you and to the forest and even to the ones in iron bracelets, and here you stand, remembering their songs. Listen. Slide the weight from your shoulders and move forward. You are afraid you might forget, but you never will. You will forgive and remember. Think of the vine that curls from the small square plot of land that was once my heart. That is the only marker you need. Move on. Walk forward into the light.

Barbara Kingsolver. *The Poisonwood Bible*.

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- Reflections on the day's passage.
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November 13

I liked his judgments about places, epitomized by his summary of Equatorial Guinea: “Great place. Anarchic, though. Not ready for prime time.”

Paul Theroux

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November 14

There's a certain slant of light,
On winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,
'Tis the seal, despair,-
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
Shadows hold their breath;
When it goes, 't is like the distance
On the look of death.

Emily Dickinson

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November 15

In times like these, we've been taught to lie: calm down, you'll be alright.

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November 16

Minds, like parachutes, only work when open.

Anonymous

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November 17

As I wake up out of my months-long sleep, I find the course of my life has narrowed right down, and I feel myself rushing along it like a flood of rich, red mud. I believe I'm very happy.

Barbara Kingsolver. *The Poisonwood Bible*.

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November 18

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without words, and never stops at all.

Emily Dickinson

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November 19

Every great mistake has a halfway moment, a split second when it can be recalled and perhaps remedied.

Pearl S. Buck

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November 20

Rows and flocs of angel hair
And ice cream castles in the air
And feather canyons ev'rywhere
I've looked at clouds that way

But now they only block the sun
They rain and snow on ev'ryone
So many things I would have done
But clouds got in my way
I've looked at clouds from both sides now
From up and down, and still somehow
It's cloud illusions I recall
I really don't know clouds at all

Moons and junes and ferris wheels
The dizzy dancing way you feel
As ev'ry fairy tale comes real
I've looked at love that way

But now it's just another show
You leave 'em laughing when you go
And if you care, don't let them know
Don't give yourself away

I've looked at love from both sides now
From give and take, and still somehow
It's love's illusions I recall
I really don't know love at all

Tears and fears and feeling proud
To say I love you right out loud
Dreams and schemes and circus crowds
I've looked at life that way

But now old friends are acting strange
They shake their heads, they say I've changed
Well something's lost, but something's gained
In living ev'ry day

I've looked at life from both sides now
From win and lose and still somehow
It's life's illusions I recall

I really don't know life at all
I've looked at life from both sides now
From up and down, and still somehow
It's life's illusions I recall
I really don't know life at all

Joni Mitchell

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November 21

Human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and can't really get rid of it.

C.S. Lewis

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November 22

The conception of two people living together for twenty-five years without having a cross word suggests a lack of spirit only to be admired in sheep.

Alan Patrick Herbert

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November 23

At such moments you feel the weight of an outsider's greatest privilege: to be able to leave.

[Jason Eliot, An Unexpected Light](#)

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November 24

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing
and rightdoing there is a field.
I'll meet you there.

[Rumi](#)

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November 25

Everything you're sure is right can be wrong in another place. Especially here. I say this frequently.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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November 26

Come, come, whoever you are.
Wonderer, worshipper, lover of leaving.
It doesn't matter.
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Come, even if you have broken your vow
a thousand times
Come, yet again, come, come.

[Rumi](#)

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November 27

Who gets up early to discover the moment light begins?
Who comes to a spring thirsty, and finds the moon reflected in it?
Who, like Jacob, blind with grief and age,
smells the shirt of his lost son
and can see again?
Jesus slips into a house to escape enemies,
and opens a door to the other world...

But don't be satisfied with poems and stories of how things have gone
with others.
Unfold your own myth, without complicated explanations...

[Rumi](#)

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November 28

I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands and wrote my will across the sky in stars

T.S.Eliot

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November 29

"Come to the edge."
"We can't. We're afraid."
"Come to the edge."
"We can't. We will fall!"
"Come to the edge."
And they came.
And he pushed them.
And they flew.

Guillaume Apollinaire

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November 30

Unforeseen

Before we buried him, no one thought
to trace around his hand.

It would have been an easy thing to do
if you could stand his fingers cold, stiff:
just a piece of paper underneath
and pen or pencil.

I don't think there's anybody
could half imagine in a million years
how much since he died we've argued
over just how big his hands were.

It's hard to know when you need to
what it is you're going to want.

Reid Bush.

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December 1

When we said goodbye we were like two children who have suddenly become friends at a birthday party and keep looking at one another while their parents take them by the hand and lead them off, and it's a sweet pain and a hope. And you know the name of one is Tony and the other one Lulu, and that's all that's needed for the heart to become a little piece of fruit.

[Julio Cortazar](#)

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December 2

Warmth, banked since the night before, kindled again, as always.

[Jane Smiley. Duplicate Keys.](#)

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December 3

A winter's day
In a deep and dark December;
I am alone,
Gazing from my window to the streets below
On a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow.
I am a rock,
I am an island.
I've built walls,
A fortress deep and mighty,
That none may penetrate.
I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain.
It's laughter and it's loving I disdain.
I am a rock,
I am an island.

Don't talk of love,
But I've heard the words before;
It's sleeping in my memory.
I won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died.
If I never loved I never would have cried.
I am a rock,
I am an island.

I have my books
And my poetry to protect me;
I am shielded in my armor,
Hiding in my room, safe within my womb.
I touch no one and no one touches me.
I am a rock,
I am an island.

And a rock feels no pain;
And an island never cries.

Simon and Garfunkel

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December 4

Poppy was beginning a story.

“In the fall of 1939,” he told Hakim. “I experienced a dental emergency.”

Anne Tyler. *Back When We Were Grown-ups*.

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December 5

Every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers, 'Grow, grow.'

The Talmud

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December 6

And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair.

Kahlil Gibran

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December 7

Meditate.
Live purely. Be quiet.
Do your work with mastery.
Like the moon, come out
from behind the clouds!
Shine

Buddha

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December 8

We shall find peace. We shall hear angels.
We shall see the sky sparkling with diamonds.

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

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December 9

Storms

There will be storms, child
There will be storms
And with each tempest
You will seem to stand alone
Against cruel winds

But with time, the rage and fury
Shall subside
And when the sky clears
You will find yourself
Clinging to someone
You would have never known
But for storms.

Margie DeMerell

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December 10

Dancing bears in raincoats
Kmart's finest
Teenagers' alarm clocks

Unknown

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December 11

She was wearing purple, a color that nearly glows when she puts it on. A purple sweater, and a turquoise and lavender scarf. As I looked at her there among the pumpkins I was overcome with color and the intensity of my life. In these moments we are driven to try and hoard happiness by taking photographs, but I know better. The important thing was what the colors stood for, the taste of hard apples and the existence of Lena and the exact quality of the sun on the last warm day in October....the fleeting certainty that I deserved the space I'd been taking up on this earth, and all the air I had breathed.

[Barbara Kingsolver. Homeland.](#)

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December 12

She is also called the savior, the bringer of Peace, the Mother of Wisdom. Why is she laughing? She is laughing in triumph and in exultation. Her laughter, it is said, crumbles worlds. She is the holy violence within us that will defeat all our fears and illusions, the great laughter that will laugh in the face of our vanity, the inner fire in which it will be consumed.

[Andrew Harvey. A Journey in Ladakh.](#)

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December 13

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Mary Oliver

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December 14

A Letter

I have been wondering
What you are thinking about, and by now suppose
It is certainly not me.
But the crocus is up, and the lark, and the blundering
Blood knows what it knows.
It talks to itself all night, like a sliding moonlit sea.

Of course, it is talking of you.
At dawn, where the ocean has netted its catch of lights,
The sun plants one lithe foot
On that spill of mirrors, but the blood goes worming through
Its warm Arabian nights,
Naming your pounding name again in the dark heart-root.

Who shall, of course, be nameless.
Anyway, I should want you to know I have done my best,
As I'm sure you have, too.
Others are bound to us, the gentle and blameless
Whose names are not confessed
In the ceaseless palaver. My dearest, the clear unquaried blue

Of those depths is all but blinding.
You may remember that once you brought my boys
Two little woolly birds.
Yesterday the older one asked for you upon finding
Your thrush among his toys.
And the tides welled about me, and I could find no words.

There is not much else to tell.
One tries one's best to continue as before,
Doing some little good.
But I would have you know that all is not well
With a man dead set to ignore
The endless repetitions of his own murmurous blood.

Anthony Hecht

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December 15

Holiday Haiku

ceramic santas
sitting in a discount bin
where is my hammer

Carol Denney

The Present Principle ~

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E = Express

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- What you hope for or dream of in this waking moment.
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- Goals.
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- A statement of gratitude.
- Everything on your mind. *Everything*. Lists. Prose. Sketches. Poems. Turn thoughts to paper. Free your mind to breathe. *Express*.

December 16

What are ideals of form for if we aren't going to be made to fear for them? All our ingenuity is lavished on getting into danger legitimately, so that we may be genuinely rescued.

Robert Frost

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December 17

In an interview, General Norman Schwartzkopf was asked whether there was any room for forgiveness toward the people who have harbored and abetted the terrorists who perpetrated the 11 Sept attacks on America.

Schwartzkopf said, "I believe that forgiving them is God's function. Our job is simply to arrange the meeting."

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December 18

After a while you learn the subtle difference between
holding a hand and chaining a soul,
And you learn that love doesn't mean leaning and
company doesn't mean security,

And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts
and presents aren't promises,

And you begin to accept your defeats with your head
up and your eyes open, with the grace of an adult,
not the grief of a child,

And you learn to build all your roads on today
because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans.

After a while you learn that even sunshine burns if
you get too much.

So plant your own garden and decorate your own
soul, instead of waiting for someone to bring your
flowers.

And you learn that you really can endure...

That you really are strong,

And you really do have worth.

Veronica Shoffstall

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December 19

I am afoot with my vision....I tramp a perpetual journey.

[Walt Whitman](#)

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December 20

The years that these dates enclosed were among the happiest as well and the saddest I have ever known: joy bordering on rapture, misery at the very edge of despair.

[Paul Theroux. Fresh Air Fiend](#)

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December 21

There were so many miracles at work: that a blossom might become a peach, that a bee could make honey in its thorax, that rain might someday fall.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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December 22

It was tempting to think that if only they could speak, infants could take us back to their beginning, to the force of their becoming; they could tell us about patience, about waiting and waiting in the dark.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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December 23

Oh it's a fine and useless enterprise, trying to fix destiny. That trail leads straight back to the time before we ever lived, and into that deep well it's easy to cast curses like stones on our ancestors. But that's nothing more than cursing ourselves and all that made us. Had I not married a preacher named Nathan Price, my particular children would never have seen the lights of this world. I walked through the valley of my fate, is all, and learned to love what I could lose.

Barbara Kingsolver. *The Poisonwood Bible*.

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December 24

The minute I heard my first love story,
I started looking for you, not knowing
how blind that was.
Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along.

[Rumi](#)

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December 25

Knock, And He'll open the door
Vanish, And He'll make you shine like the sun
Fall, And He'll raise you to the heavens
Become nothing, And He'll turn you into everything.

[Rumi](#)

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December 26

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

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December 27

But the women don't disappear, they only rearrange. (On marriage)

[Barbara Kingsolver.](#)

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December 28

This is not a full circle. It's Life carrying on. It's the next breath we all take. This is the choice we make to get on with it.

[Alexandra Fuller. Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight.](#)

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December 29

Dreams are the soul of the imagination, the slender and evasive remnants of the shells we erect as our dwellings. We build our shells from the sand of our ground bones, mortared with our very blood, and imagine we fence the dreams away but we only fence them in. A few, the rare, the beautiful, remain as near to the heart of their dreams as children, and we know them by their laughter, by the ease with which they are moved to tears, by our own desire to be around them

Keith Miller. *The Book of Flying*.

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December 30

Is it love that connects us, is that what it is? I never knew that the feeling I have is regular old love because it's so intricate. Perhaps there is another name for it, one we don't yet know. I used to think that love was simple and noticeable, like rain falling, so that just as you'd look at your skin and say water you would also wake in the morning and say love. But it has been underneath this new and old thing I feel, subterranean, silent and steady, like blood, rushing along and along without often making itself known.

[Jane Hamilton, A Map of the World.](#)

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December 31

Quoye experienced moments in all colors, uttered brilliancies, paid attention to the rich sound of waves counting stones, he laughed and wept, noticed sunsets, heard music in rain, said I do. For if Jack Buggit could escape from the pickle jar, if a bird with a broken neck could fly away, what else might be possible? Water may be older than light, diamonds crack in hot goat's blood, mountaintops give off cold fire, forests appear in mid-ocean, it may happen that a crab is caught with the shadow of a hand on its back, that the wind be imprisoned in a bit of knotted string. And it may be that love sometimes occurs without pain or misery.

Annie Proulx

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Resources

Good Reads

I'm a huge fan of productivity and learning to live and breathe better. Here are some of the books and resources that have helped me so far in my journey.

- [The Power of Full Engagement](#)
- [One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are](#)
- [Tell Your Time](#)
- [The Clockwork Muse](#)
- [168 Hours](#)
- [Organized Simplicity](#)
- [Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity](#)
- [The Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude](#)
- [Illuminata: Prayers for an Everyday Life](#)

~ The Seven Steps of the Present Principle ~

{Prescription: seven steps, every morning.}

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Reflection Questions on the PRESENT Principle

To think. To share. To discuss.

1. **Pray (peace, pause).** What does the first step of the Present Principle -- *pray* -- mean to you? Is it traditional prayer, meditation, or a moment of peace? How will you quiet your soul in your present time?
2. **Read.** The second step of the Present Principle is to *read*. Read in the morning to uplift, inspire, and direct. Any work of motivation will do – providing it makes your soul sing and gives you visions of bright, clear days ahead. What are some specific ideas you have of what you'd like to read in your present time? The bible? An inspirational devotional? A book of quotes? A passage of a particular non-fiction book? Think of three specific works now, and share them with each other. (You can also check out my daily devotional companion, *Lead by Morning: 365 Days of the Present Principle*).
3. **Express.** Pull out your journal every morning. Then, start to *express*. How? *However you want to*. Unfettered prose? A pencil sketch? A quick poem? Take five minutes in the workshop now to practice expression. (Use the back of this paper, it's begging you to.) *Let it out*. Loved your breakfast? Hate the weather? Covet your neighbor's shoes? *Express*.
4. **Schedule.** We live better days when we have a plan. Do you run from hard and fast schedules, or thrive by mapping out your day? Take a moment now to discuss your view on planning and to-do lists, and how you can rethink the word "schedule" to make the idea of mapping your day an appealing and useful exercise each morning.
5. **Exercise.** Exercise is hard. *Moving* isn't. What can you do today to move more and make the fifth step of the Present Principle easier for you to accomplish each and every day?
6. **Nourish.** If you've forgotten to do something for yourself this week month, you're not alone. But now it's time to change that. The sixth step of the Present Principle is to nourish. You! Every day, for ten minutes (or more!), you are Queen. List five live-giving activities right now that nourish you and provide you with special delight. Gardening? Knitting? Pinterest? What present can you give yourself today (and tomorrow)?
7. **Track.** If you don't know where you're going, any train will get you there. *So where did you go today?* Take two minutes out of your evening (and two minutes at the end of this session!) to write down how you did? How many of the seven steps were you able to accomplish? Did you get it done in the morning? Did they make you sing or sulk? Track your progress in baby steps.

Find out More About the Present Principle

- Enjoy the Present Principle? Share this (free) manifesto) here: www.clairediazortiz.com/thePresentPrinciple
- Purchase the companion, Lead by Morning: 365 Days of The Present Principle here : www.clairediazortiz.com/LeadByMorning
- Follow my Instagram (and Pinterest!) journey *to be present* via @clairediazortiz on Instagram or via pinterest.com/clairediazortiz
- Find me:
 - www.ClaireDiazOrtiz.com
 - twitter.com/ClaireD
 - ClaireDiazOrtiz@gmail.com

About the Author



Claire Diaz-Ortiz leads social innovation at Twitter and is a frequent speaker on social media, leadership, and social change. She is the author of [Twitter for Good: Change the World one Tweet at a Time](#) and is known for developing the [TWEET model](#) — a framework to help organizations and individuals best excel on Twitter. Claire holds an MBA and other degrees from Stanford and Oxford, and is the co-founder of [Hope Runs](#), a non-profit organization operating in AIDS orphanages in Kenya. She also owns [Do Well Media](#), [Interwebs Publishing](#) and [Saving Money Media](#). Read more about her at www.ClaireDiazOrtiz.com or via @claired on Twitter.