

What I Wish for You

by Jan Frazier

Sometimes I ask myself this: *If this were to be my last opportunity to say something that might be of use, what might I say? What would I wish for people?*

That they not miss the moment. Not miss life, the very thing. The now of it. That the mental noise abate enough, some part of every day – some bunch of nows – that they really see, really feel, that they are here. That they are alive, aware of the moment they're in – the moment that *is* what they are. Because all they have of themselves, really, is the deeply personal encounter with this fleeting bit of reality. However much it might seem to be otherwise, however compelling the impression of an ongoing self, having a history and opinions and aspirations (all of which live in the mind, not in life itself).

If I could bring this about for someone, the last time I were to open my mouth or put pen to paper, this is what I would do. It would be enough. Not missing your life is enough. Is abundant. Never mind if you have a big awakening.

But anyway, where else does awakening occur but in the now, in a moment of juicy, sumptuous life? Awareness feeling itself happening, tingly with apprehension of the smell or feel or taste of a thing. Where else but this moment can the revelation occur?

This is the thing we want. It's not by trying to become different from how you are. It's not (God help us) by trying to wake up! It's about paying attention to what you're doing.

So it's a win-win situation. You may wake up, really wake up: never resist again, never again get lost in thought, or be subject to mind-caused torment, finally knowing what you deeply are. You may not. Probably you won't. Hardly anybody does come to this.

But meanwhile, you won't miss your life! When it comes time to die, you won't have missed the precious thing – the only thing you ever could have had. You'll have paid attention, a good chunk of your allotted time, to what was right in front of you. Good and bad, the pain in the ass, all of it. You won't have failed to pause to feel the wind on your face, to let it mess up your hair. You won't have stopped your heart from breaking, when it needed to break. You'll have allowed yourself to rest, when rest was needed. You won't be sorry it's come time to die.

All you have, or ever will, is *this moment*. It's a jewel in your hand. But briefly, oh so briefly: because here, now, is another. Nothing lasts. You cannot experience anything later (however much your mind might try to get you to). This is the human condition, from which there is no escape. And why would you want to be someplace else? Why see life as being clamped into handcuffs, your fists at your back? There is no solace in fearing what's ahead. Isn't life a feast? It better be. It is restful to be *here*, to really be here, without lament.

In the play *Our Town*, the character known as the stage manager asks the audience this: Does anybody ever live a life fueled by the knowing that something in us is eternal? Not eternal as in outlasting death. Eternal as in not-caught-up-in-time. The stage manager is

asking if we feel the ongoing stillness within ourselves, the timeless thing that's devoid of content or motion or trouble of any sort. The now, really felt, is vast and motionless. It goes as far as the sky goes. He is pleading with us to get that, while we're alive.

Feel that, and time isn't a prison. Death isn't a bad guy. Aging isn't an enemy. Every day is your best friend, the most cherished thing, whatever it may bring. A heap of miracles, every one of them imperfect and ordinary and not to be missed. When you stop asking life to "make you happy" – when you sense, at least occasionally, this inner stillness – then life is allowed to be itself, as it comes, moment to moment.

Learn to savor the simple, the plain act that is just itself, without needing to have meaning, without needing to get someplace better. The simple gesture of running the sponge over the soapy plate, a round face without expression. There is no thought for being finished, for the next dish, or for what happens after the dishes are done. Walking up the stairs: just *this* step, this foot on the wood. It's not about getting someplace. The exquisite pleasure of the flex of muscle (even if it's sore), the pressure of the foot against the surface (even if the stairs need repair or sweeping). Even with the body in motion, always there is the stillness.

This is the thing we want. It's how the presence of the eternal is felt to be alive in the ordinary reality of the lived moment. It's not by trying to become different from how you are. It's not (God help us) by trying to wake up! It's about paying attention to what you're doing. Laying a stick of wood onto the fire inside the stove, the feel of the cut surface against fingers and palm. Bending to put the scoop of cat food into the little dish. Pausing to watch the whiskered face lower itself to the fragrant morsel, as if in prayer. (Where do you suppose the cat is, ever, but in this precious moment?)

This is the whole thing. This is it, what life is for. This is the fulfillment, the encounter with the beloved.

Someone asked recently about the meaning of life. *Don't look in the usual places*, I said. If you have to go looking in your head to find some meaning, that isn't it. If there are words for it, that isn't it.

Do you notice what the warm coffee feels like going down your throat? Do you stop to watch the cat enjoy its supper? Did you think it was supposed to be grander than that? What possible "meaning" could come near to feeling yourself be alive?

The best thing that can ever happen is when things stop meaning something. When whatever comes along, or whatever gets done, is left to be its plain self. Unelaborated, unadorned, unnamed. The end of infernal interpretation! The radical relief of it.

In the absence of all that familiar handling, the world floods the scene. Into the open palms come the feet of little birds. Everything is new, as if never seen before. *Thank you* is the only thing left to be said.