

## HERE AND NOW, SKY GRAY OR BLUE

In summer, my days are made up of words and too much coffee, of long sweat-soaked walks and writing amongst the trees. My nights are built from bleary-eyed novels, from staring out the window at the stars or the darkness that covers them, from conversations in the starlight more precious than sleep. My summers are running barefoot, chasing thunderstorms, making friends with mosquitos that swarm near the lake. They are dandelion-crowns, they are laughter, they are rain.

It is a beautiful life.

Sometimes, I'm told that I'm quiet. I'm solitary, I suppose, often preferring the company of words to people. But my laughter can fill a hundred rooms, light up a thousand stars. I spend my summers alone, but hardly ever lonely. More so I am surrounded by everyone, in crowded coffee shops and quiet neighborhood streets, dancing near rivers and singing to the sky.

Being awake is a great burden -- to be aware is to feel great pain. In this body I will always be; I will know my experiences, and mine alone: it is a terrible curse. But what wonderful experiences these are!

In this life, I have been given the gracious gift of time; I have fully *lived* every moment. And in the dark of those common dismal nights, when the clock's infernal, unending ticking, ticking, ticking, echoes loudly in my brain, it is these stories I must remember. For I have seen the world despite having travelled almost nowhere at all. I have felt all that I can feel and will feel even more still. In these anxious, ever-spinning twilights, I must remember this, as you must, to keep going: I have felt and understood so much, and there is so much to chase just ahead.

In winter, my days are the soft-gray light that shines through the window, the chilling air, warm blankets and long books. They are cloves and cinnamon, freezing fingertips and shivering laughter. My nights are tossing and turning, deep sleep, and tenderness. My winters are memories of autumn, hopes of spring, seconds that drip slowly by. They are cold.

But still, life is beautiful.

How can this be? Through the cold and the gray, the dark and the never-ceasing wind, we laugh. We smile. We will continue, we feel immortal, we catch snowflakes on our tongues and forget the ashen-gray sky from which they fell. When the morning sun casts dancing shadows through the trees, when the first light's rays kiss the mountaintops, we continue on singing. And when the world freezes over as we sleep, we sing. We stretch our arms out and twirl, spinning in seemingly perpetual motion.

Do you hear the music? Do you see the light, just ahead? Reach -- you can almost touch it. Yes, it slipped through your fingers, but just this once. Spin stories from your words, and laughter from your life; the tangled messes will unravel, but the chaos isn't so bad.

Don't you know that you are here? And time is ticking, the world is spinning madly, madly on, All is enveloped in this expanding *here-and-now* -- and you are here.

This life is beautiful, so open your eyes.

My summers are rooftop sunsets, sweet berries, and freedom. My winters are spices, crisp air, and *almost*. And I am here, neverending, and life is beautiful.

- Danielle Cooke  
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