



Cold Tangerines

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introduction

This book is a shameless appeal for celebration.

I know that the world is several versions of mad right now. I know that pessimism and grimness sometimes seem like the only responsible choices. I wake up at night and think about pesticides and international politics and fundamentalism and disease and roadside bombs and the fact that one day my parents will die. I had a hard year this year, the hardest I've yet known. I worry about the world we're creating for my baby boy. I get the pessimism and the grimness.

And that's why I'm making a shameless appeal for celebration. Because I need to. I need optimism and celebration and hope in the face of violence and despair and anxiety. And because the other road is a dead end. Despair is a slow death, and a lifetime of anger is like a lifetime of hard drinking: it shows in your face and your eyes and your words even when you think it doesn't.

The only option, as I see it, is this delicate weaving of action and celebration, of intention and expectation. Let's act, read, protest, protect, picket, learn, advocate for, fight against, but let's be careful that in the midst of all that

accomplishing and organizing, we don't bulldoze over a world that's teeming with beauty and hope and redemption all around us and in the meantime. Before the wars are over, before the cures are found, before the wrongs are righted, Today, humble Today, presents itself to us with all the ceremony and bling of a glittering diamond ring: *Wear me, it says. Wear me out. Love me, dive into me, discover me, it pleads with us.*

The discipline of celebration is changing my life, and it is because of the profound discoveries that this way of living affords to me that I invite you into the same practice. This collection is a tap dance on the fresh graves of apathy and cynicism, the creeping belief that this is all there is, and that God is no match for the wreckage of the world we live in. What God does in the tiny corners of our day-to-day lives is stunning and gorgeous and headline-making, but we have a bad habit of saving the headlines for the grotesque and scary.

There are a lot of good books about what's wrong, what's broken, what needs fixing and dismantling and deconstructing. They're good books. I read them, and I hope you do, too. But there might be a little voice inside of you, like there is inside of me, a voice that asks, "Is that all? Is this all there is?" And to that tiny, holy voice, I say, "No way, kiddo, there's so much more, and it's all around us, and it's right in front of our eyes."

To choose to celebrate in the world we live in right now might seem irresponsible. It might seem frivolous, like cotton candy and charm bracelets. But I believe it is a serious undertaking, and one that has the potential to return us to our best selves, to deliver us back to the men and women God created us to be, people who choose to see the best, believe the best, yearn for the best. Through that longing

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to be our best selves, we are changed and inspired and ennobled, able to see the handwriting of a holy God where another person just sees the same old tired streets and sidewalks.

These are my stories, the stories of life as it reveals itself in my field of vision, and the cast of characters are my friends and family and neighbors. I'm telling these stories because they're the only ones I know and the only ones I have the right to tell, believing that in them you will find your own stories, with your own beautiful and strange characters and plot twists. I believe that these love letters to my own quotidian life might possibly unmask the tiny glimmers of hope and redemption masquerading as normal life in your corner of the world.

The world is alive, blinking and clicking, winking at us slyly, inviting us to get up and dance to the music that's been playing since the beginning of time, if you bend all the way down and put your ear to the ground to listen for it.

I



on waiting

I have always, essentially, been waiting. Waiting to become something else, waiting to be that person I always thought I was on the verge of becoming, waiting for that life I thought I would have. In my head, I was always one step away. In high school, I was biding my time until I could become the college version of myself, the one my mind could see so clearly. In college, the post-college “adult” person was always looming in front of me, smarter, stronger, more organized. Then the married person, then the person I’d become when we have kids. For twenty years, literally, I have waited to become the thin version of myself, because that’s when life will really begin.

And through all that waiting, here I am. My life is passing, day by day, and I am waiting for it to start. I am waiting for that time, that person, that event when my life will finally begin.

I love movies about “The Big Moment” —the game or the performance or the wedding day or the record deal, the stories that split time with that key event, and everything is reframed, before it and after it, because it has changed everything. I have always wanted this movie-worthy event,

something that will change everything and grab me out of this waiting game into the whirlwind in front of me. I cry and cry at these movies, because I am still waiting for my own big moment. I had visions of life as an adventure, a thing to be celebrated and experienced, but all I was doing was going to work and coming home, and that wasn't what it looked like in the movies.

John Lennon once said, "Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans." For me, life is what was happening while I was busy waiting for my big moment. I was ready for it and believed that the rest of my life would fade into the background, and that my big moment would carry me through life like a lifeboat.

The Big Moment, unfortunately, is an urban myth. Some people have them, in a sense, when they win the Heisman or become the next American Idol. But even that football player or that singer is living a life made up of more than that one moment. Life is a collection of a million, billion moments, tiny little moments and choices, like a handful of luminous, glowing pearls. And strung together, built upon one another, lined up through the days and the years, they make a life, a person. It takes so much time, and so much work, and those beads and moments are so small, and so much less fabulous and dramatic than the movies.

But this is what I'm finding, in glimpses and flashes: this is it. This is it, in the best possible way. That thing I'm waiting for, that adventure, that movie-score-worthy experience unfolding gracefully. This is it. Normal, daily life ticking by on our streets and sidewalks, in our houses and apartments, in our beds and at our dinner tables, in our dreams and prayers and fights and secrets—this pedestrian life is the most precious thing any of us will ever experience.

I believe that this way of living, this focus on the present, the daily, the tangible, this intense concentration not on the news headlines but on the flowers growing in your own garden, the children growing in your own home, this way of living has the potential to open up the heavens, to yield a glittering handful of diamonds where a second ago there was coal. This way of living and noticing and building and crafting can crack through the movie sets and soundtracks that keep us waiting for our own life stories to begin, and set us free to observe the lives we have been creating all along without even realizing it.

I don't want to wait anymore. I choose to believe that there is nothing more sacred or profound than this day. I choose to believe that there may be a thousand big moments embedded in this day, waiting to be discovered like tiny shards of gold. The big moments are the daily, tiny moments of courage and forgiveness and hope that we grab on to and extend to one another. That's the drama of life, swirling all around us, and generally I don't even see it, because I'm too busy waiting to become whatever it is I think I am about to become. The big moments are in every hour, every conversation, every meal, every meeting.

The Heisman Trophy winner knows this. He knows that his big moment was not when they gave him the trophy. It was the thousand times he went to practice instead of going back to bed. It was the miles run on rainy days, the healthy meals when a burger sounded like heaven. That big moment represented and rested on a foundation of moments that had come before it.

I believe that if we cultivate a true attention, a deep ability to see what has been there all along, we will find worlds within us and between us, dreams and stories and memories spilling over. The nuances and shades and secrets

and intimations of love and friendship and marriage and parenting are action-packed and multicolored, if you know where to look.

Today is your big moment. Moments, really. The life you've been waiting for is happening all around you. The scene unfolding right outside your window is worth more than the most beautiful painting, and the crackers and peanut butter that you're having for lunch on the coffee table are as profound, in their own way, as the Last Supper. This is it. This is life in all its glory, swirling and unfolding around us, disguised as pedantic, pedestrian non-events. But pull off the mask and you will find your life, waiting to be made, chosen, woven, crafted.

Your life, right now, today, is exploding with energy and power and detail and dimension, better than the best movie you have ever seen. You and your family and your friends and your house and your dinner table and your garage have all the makings of a life of epic proportions, a story for the ages. Because they all are. Every life is.

You have stories worth telling, memories worth remembering, dreams worth working toward, a body worth feeding, a soul worth tending, and beyond that, the God of the universe dwells within you, the true culmination of super and natural.

You are more than dust and bones.

You are spirit and power and image of God.

And you have been given Today.