



I needed exercise. I had been working inside all day. Time until an evening engagement was short, so a few laps around the park seemed the best option. It was 4ish as I opened my front door. The crisp air greeted me, chilly enough to activate sniffles from my lingering cold.

I pushed the pace as fast as my legs would allow, partly for maximum impact and partly to get warm. Soon, I noticed my mouth curling into a smile, not a response to another person, but a private acknowledgement of how both good and simple life is.

December late-afternoon light is special. The sun's reign is more fleeting each day. The angle of its rays has flattened with the season, gently painting things muted gold, and everywhere feels like the edge of a shadow. Breathing becomes an activity of which you are aware, rather than an unconscious afterthought.

I am consuming my surroundings using each of my senses when I conclude, 'This is my favorite time of year.' As one does when one definitively asserts a thing, I begin to substantiate the claim in my mind:

The briskness is invigorating; I feel fully, conspicuously alive.

Holidays are special. It's family time.

Decorations lift spirits. Displaying them provides purpose and accomplishment. Savoring their effect yields peace and joy.

It's both an end and a beginning, cause for reflection and hope.

Etcetera...

Then, I entertain a contrary thought. I recall silently proclaiming on a white-hot day that summer beats everything, because the dark isn't coming until I'm too tired to absorb another wave through my feet and the hull of my boat. I can almost see well enough to squeeze

in one more hole of golf. Summer – it's my favorite time of year.

I see myself in spring, amazed by the colors that nature has imagined. I'm grabbing for seersucker a month or two early. The air smells like it has been purified. Prospects brighten. Spring – it's my favorite time of year.

It's fall. Not the reds and yellows of my youth. But football and an occasional flannel day or two to contrast with stubborn heat. Summer suits a sizzling grill. Autumn implies a languid and comfortable rhythm, the low-and-slow of barbecue replaces the shock of a quick sear. Fall – it's my favorite time of year.

I return to the moment I'm in. The lazy yellow is full of 5 o'clock flecks of grey. Open-mouthed, I watch my breath rise as I run into it, and it disappears. I have a thought: This one is not about seasons, rather it's timeless, yet it depends upon the passage of much time. I'm circling a park in a small city in Georgia, a state that my child-self didn't realize reached the ocean, and it's cold but refreshingly so. This is not a life I could possibly have imagined, yet it is exactly as it should be. And then I come back to the temporal. Today, this moment, this next footfall with this song in my AirPods and these trees in my field of vision: This is my favorite time of year. Just as tomorrow can be, and the day after, and the day after, if I allow it to be.

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