

## If the fates allow

Be here now, the Wise Men say.

Remember, and look forward, but don't miss today.

Sage advice. Even so, for a lot of us this holiday season, the present tense can be hard to like.

At least that's true for me. This is the first winter in years that Claude and I aren't in New England with my family. The cross-country trip just isn't safe. Believe me, I know how lucky I am: healthy, well fed, loved—yet I am brimming with nostalgia and anticipation.

This year we won't go to a certain Massachusetts tree lot, at night in the frosty air, with two little girls and their parents. Katherine and I won't stay up late together decorating. I won't bring my late mother's, her grandmother's, ornaments down from the attic in Maine.

My mother made ornaments all year round. Through the years she decorated thousands of satin balls with ribbons, pearls, sequins, and beads. Most of these baubles she gave away.

I remember. If you came to the house, or if she went to a holiday party, you got to choose a ball of your own from a basket full of that year's crop. They always went fast, and they hang today from branches in the homes of families still dear to us. She also left plenty of ornaments for my brother and me to inherit.

This week, for the first year in many, I got my own collection out of the garage here in California and piled them into tall glass cylinders. I opened one shoebox full of small white balls my mother had covered in white satin ribbon and pearls as a gift to me when Claude and I got married. I have dozens more in red, blue, purple, gold, and bright green. They're like faithful friends, and here they are, a gift for the here and now.

Next year, if the fates allow, I look forward to going east again. I'll make cranberry bread in the kitchen where I learned to cook. Katherine and I will hang shining stars all over the tree. We'll be together, all. And all our troubles will be miles and miles away.

For now, Claude and I are here at home, safe and warm, grateful and glad for what we have.

I hope you too are safe and warm this holiday season. I hope everyone you love is safe and warm as well. I hope your heart is light.

This may not be the season we would have chosen, but there is always light to be found. Breathe it in. Remember your days gone by, look forward to the bright new year, and do whatever it takes to have yourself a merry little yuletide now.

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\* With thanks to Hugh Martin and Ralph Blaine for the lyrics to "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."