



★ **The Book of Delights**

Ross Gay

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Ross Gay is known for his poetry, but *The Book of Delights* proves that he's also an adept essayist. In composing the book, Gay operated under a simple principle: keep a diary of entries over the course of one year, with each entry concerning something joyful. From this conceit he spins out a variety of reflections that are sometimes whimsical, sometimes touching, and always thoughtful.

Certain topics run throughout *The Book of Delights*, including Gay's love of gardening, the emotional impact of his favorite songs, and his appreciation for being in the moment. Seemingly small incidents are the springboard for little epiphanies. A mother and child sharing the burden of carrying a shopping bag across the street leads to a moving paean to mutual support. A shared high-five with a stranger becomes a tribute to human connection. A Lisa Loeb song leads to a memory about a childhood friend who invaded Gay's house to rearrange his furniture in an elaborate prank. Another friend's overuse of air quotes prompts a reverie on linguistics. *The Book of Delights* finds most of its joys in simple pleasures such as these.

Lest one think that Gay is merely a collector of droll sentiments, it should be noted that *The Book of Delights* doesn't shy away from the heavier side of life. Gay includes ruminations on weighty subjects such as loved ones who have passed on, the cold realities of racism, and America's president. Just as one can only truly enjoy sweetness after experiencing bitterness, he accommodates the full range of human experience. Documenting his travels and encounters over the course of his year with a wry, deft touch, his book stays true to its title and demonstrates his estimable talents as a prose stylist as well as poet.

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