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Advice for Graduates

Two years ago, a friend challenged me to write something about learning and passion. I soon realized that it is hard to say something inspiring about learning without sounding like a dreadful commencement speech. So here is what I finally found to say to graduates about life, learning and things that grow in the night:

You will often feel that you are going through the hardest years of your life. It will always be true. Accepting that life involves lots of hard work allows you the opportunity to do it anyway, and find ways to enjoy it. This will put you at a tremendous advantage over nearly everyone else. It will make the rest of us happy too, because there is nothing more inspiring than seeing someone thrive.

Somewhere along the line things will start getting easier, but you'll be enjoying life so much you will forget to notice. Don't take the easy times for granted, and don't assume that a life of leisure is your birthright. Cultivate friends who can call you on the carpet if you become hubristic. There is nothing quite so unattractive as the fall of the arrogant--and they do fall.

Finally, no matter how hard things get, beauty appears. It comes unexpectedly, with breathtaking color and clarity. You don't have to earn these moments, or deserve them, or even pray for them; they happen all on their own. The lesson here: you don't have to do everything yourself.

Work diligently, but don't deprive yourself of a good night's sleep. Slow down enough to notice the blooming things. And even though you may be planting teeny little starter plants in your garden, space them far enough apart so that they have plenty of room to grow. The same goes for you.