

SEASONS



By Peter C. Venable

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1. SPRING

The Poem River

is a stream where you wet bare eyes,
wade deeper, float into its channel
over submerged meanings, swirl around enigmas,

plunge over falls into the deepest pool,
then pour over currents to its last drop.

Drenched, we leave the bank, soon forgotten,
dry as bleached driftwood on black-rock coasts.

We will never forget being wet

and plunge anew.

March

March blasts a Bradford Pear.
Blossoms blizzard, swirled and drifted
on new asphalt— polka-dot petals on pitch.

Next day snow languidly falls
on that tree, veiling hardy blossoms
under whiter fluff. A crow leers

from a branch. Our eyes meet—
still as snow on its bough.

It Happens to Everyone

by a stone fence or under a hedge
our sticky fingers hunt four-leaf clovers
or poke twigs at squiggles under rocks

when a stream of yellow blurs
startles our designs streaking
in and out of a magic hole

what are these yellow-black flyers
darting in and out luring us closer and closer

and of course one of us tosses
a half-eaten apple it plops over the hole
the yellow current hovers and swells
before our astonished eyes

when a distant shriek
then the booming of giant steps

breaks our spell and we're snatched
into the air and zoom away like a rocket
escaping an exploding planet

we never saw the billowing
yellow cloud again that summer

but as we tramped in red and orange leaves
we often stopped and stared
at that empty hole wondering

when the striped darts
would again
arise.

Lux Aeterna

—Ln. light eternal

That night, freezing rain
 crushed slick boughs.
 Evergreens bowed in

glazed sanctuaries.
 A long, thin branch
 fractured at its base,

hung upside down by
 woody fibers—
 its upended crown

rocked from icy breaths.
 It swayed, storm or shine,
 cleaved to mother tree.

• •

Birdsong crescendos.
 Crows caterwaul at
 a distant pine. Lime

cascades everywhere.
 Wisteria purples
 shrubbery with grape shapes.

The branch rises—
 green blades crescenting
 towards sunny beams.

At 3:16

The bright places are haunts of darkness
however high the climb.

The north face cracks from water,
wind blasts wherever it wills,
wherever it comes from and
wherever it goes. Lichen grows
on our flesh with each climb

as our lives cling between above and below,
horizon and summit, crack after crack.

Who can see the kingdom of sky,
with afterbirth crusting the eyes?

Faith is gripping the cracks of our lives.

Mountain Echo

Drive into blue-ridged mountains
on a looping, two-lane road.
Observe the crag face,
the hawk soaring.

I hike through grasses and briars
until I lean over precipice.
Survey the vast blueness in crystal air.
As feet touch the jagged rim,
track pebbles vanishing down
rugged cliff walls to the remote gorge.
A stream glitters as a mica snake.

Jutting ledges and pitched clefts
threaten to greet brain and bone.
I spread my arms into wings,
and shout from the bottom of my throat

“There is no God!”

And who echoes from distant crags,
the ragged forest, the massive granite,
the hawk’s talons uncoiled for the strike?

On My 71st

I bob on the S-shaped metal chair
in my screened-in back porch shrine,
sip peach apricot black tea,
inhale rose hip, orange peel, peach
aromas as bee's honey soaks
my taste buds into euphoria.

A Tufted Titmouse squabbles at a Wren
drinking from a stainless-steel bowl.
They eye each other then
suddenly streak toward trees
as a large ebony shape lands
by the bowl, beak clamping on

a hamburger bun absurdly white
against purple-sheened feathers.
It scans 360, drops it in the water,
pecks over and over
until saturated, plops
the mushy bun on the deck

and savors morsel by morsel
like bread dipped in a chalice.
Preening, stretching wings, the Corvus
lifts toward the canopy and vanishes.
I raise my teacup in toast,
sip honey at the bottom of the cup.

2. SUMMER

Oak Island Pier

Fishing rods are sea urchin spikes
jutting and waiting for strikes
that never jolt this moment.
One stingray hooked.

Fishermen swap fishy stories,
baiting hooks, casting into the swells.
Tawny-brown birds—darker wings and tails—
hop on fish-scaly railings, fuss in jeebs and chirps.

A splinter from a bench catches
my little toe, fishhook-deep,
but undeterred I step to the end.
Dig it out later.

No king mackerels nibble.

An old couple ebbs by a scaling sink.
Those birds, black reptile eyes piercing,

stalk on the railing.

Under a rim-frayed cap he looks up.

*Bait snatchers. That's what we call 'em—bout
steal shrimp off the hook before it hits the water.*

At dusk from my balcony,
my binoculars show the next tide
arriving with poles, bait buckets, coolers,
holstered fish knives, windbreakers, smokes,

the new moon unblinking.

Ghost Crabs

Ghost crabs have
burned-matchstick periscopes.
They flaunt ivory claws,
strut by neighboring bluffs,
duel over property lines.

I think of my sheetrock burrow,
my sandcastle tucked in suburb strands.

One king crab fashions the highest tower,
perches, taunts rivals—
until a draining ice chest
erodes his palace into a wet lump.

Sand gnats attack in bloodlust fury.
Cursing, I rise; the crabs dart into their dens.

Over sandy rims they peer at the ghost man,
scurrying up warping steps
and fading between bungalows
into a dark hollow surrounded
by mounds of sand.

Wrightsville Beach

The ocean's horizon—straight as a razor's slit
along a medal ruler—is punctured by a regatta
of sailboat masts along its edge.

A white pigeon bobs over sandy swells,
head in Ping-Pong cadence.
Its red-rimmed eye is keen
for a chip or thundering foot.

A toddler, astonished
at this bouncing shape, pauses:

Pigeon and child eye
plug in visual current
until the child, squealing,
lurches closer—

feathers explode and it
disappears under
a shady bungalow roost.

Magnolia Nights

Sweat oozes down my chest,
fills my navel,

trickles down hairy calves
into steamy sheets as I read
against a soggy pillow.

Mist chokes the air.
Cicadas whirl. I can hardly bear
this sagging ceiling, dripping overhead.

Outside is the wild—
humidity drains on beaded grass,
teams of mosquitos' roar,
trees are dark sentinels in misty yards.
A blackbird sprays its song on the screen.

Listen:

You can hear sweat seeping
on a glass of iced tea,
through dank walls, puddled floors,
pouring on slippery skin.

Night wrings dark drops,
drowns bed light in this muggy room.

Only a cool breeze can sop
sweat of this draining night.

Grace

As I recline in this screened back porch,
three moths thump against the grid.

After weeks of baked dust,
moisture touches my cheek
and curls a paperback on the chair.

Distant rumblings never arrive.
A spittle of rain brushes by.

Off with the light.
The porch is dark as metro soot.
Drenched with pitch,
these eyes—insatiable jewels—

are dark in a pavilion of silence.

God's Peek From Cliff Dwellers Inn

On the porch, I wiggle my spine
between vertical wooden slats,
seat hard as railroad ties. Bare feet
prop against knotty railings.

The panorama begins:

Right view- Blue Ridge fir tree line . . .
serrated tips pierce navy skies a mile
up the slope. Cauliflower clouds tower
as I strain to view their peeks.

Mid view- dark-gray clouds smudge
pastel blue into graphite.
A faint sun fades away.

Left view- black as pitch
fog blunt fir arrows
and torrents pummel
a distant pond—wedding guests
dash toward a huge white tent.
Showers pour sheets from the eaves,
chills my toes. Inhaling deeply,
droplets fill my lungs.
Pounding rain mercifully muffles
pine pollen and DJ music

but typical of mountain rain,
Soon ceases. Spires of mist
rise in evergreen depressions

and those guests meander
at pond's edge and hover
around a lady in fantasia gown

as a fleeing white duck quacks protests
at a white drake paddling fiercely behind.

The Hour Before

at Blackwater Baptist Cemetery
behind the loose-shingled steeple,
a massive cedar shades
lichen-capped tombstones
bent askew by centuries
of blistering heat and pitiless ice
as I wait beneath, bough-shaded,

for the service under a blue tent
some seventy feet away, where her body
rests in its wooden cocoon.

Dragonflies surf heatwaves
as sweat soaks my collar and tie.

Odd
how spacetime curves into that
black hole singularity
under the coffin,

and how the vision of her smiling face—
beatific—beams through the tears to come.

3. AUTUMN

Daybreak

Dawn's eye
peeks over
briny waters.

Lightning chisels
channels through
waterfalls of rain.

Towering
black water crests,
pummel shores

and gusts carry
soaring leaves over
salt-crusted grass.

Sipping Applewhite Spirits

31°

In the pines this evening
breath hovers in misty apparition.
A lone stone chimney—a farmer's obelisk—
stands where planks and beams
passed through termite guts centuries ago.

Stars pin-hole the dark attic;
their cold light chills my face

as Pisces drifts in its celestial sea,
its scales hundreds of light years' old
fluttering to earth.

Am I gazing up? Or down
into the bottomless abyss,
where gravity glues my boots with pinesap
to this pine straw ceiling?

Thumbs Down

Pounding pavement.

Pounding pavement.

Pounding

Pounding

Pounding

Hitching exhaust fumes
as semis and flat tops rage by;
campers and U-Hauls clog inner lanes.

It takes only one mechanical host
for this parasite's ride on 95 South.

Two men with thistly faces taxi me
through Georgia in a crumpled van.
They snort cheap vodka, munch Milky Ways
and drawl about a paralyzed son
withering in a VA Hospital. A fly
buzzes in and out of hearing.

At dusk I'm jettisoned by an exit,
knee deep in retreads. Swamp pines
are saber-toothed against the Zodiac.

The headlights and hungry jaws of a bug-eating grill
roar through pitch, blast by, horn blaring

and red lights trails,

squeezes into a red spot, and

disappears into the black hole

of a deep December night.

Apparition

on
a window
at night.
A stormy
black out.
Dark drops
thinning
fog settling

A candle
flickers,
a phantom
glazes on
glass.

Snuffing the wick,
is the window
of darkness
opening or
closing?

And It Was Night

Come with me into the cave
crunching down a pebbled path,
steadying candles, stony plaque thickening,
mildew filling our noses and settling
over the barren bed

where we sit on damp boulders,
drip wax at our feet, then trace
flickering faces on granite walls.

We nod, blow them out;
red wicks dim and disappear

and we behold darkness, so pure—
no shade, no shadow, no sound, no breath
nothing here, nothing not here—

but this dark blood filling our ventricles.

4. WINTER

Cawcophony

Caws grate on January calm.
Through skeletal branches, fingery twigs,
a huddled shape roosts.

Crows hover above, squawk from neighboring limbs.
It gazes, ear tufts silhouetting grey skies.
The black horde thickens, circling, croaking
over the bleak sycamore.

A cat stalks from the deck
and crows turn towards it.
The owl bursts through a woody portal,

feathers spiraling toward wet pine straw. Geese
honk, skim over treetops. The cat

races under the deck.

One by one crows rise and plunge
in winter mist. One remains, ruffles feathers,
preens, and glares at the empty perch.

2°

In this dark living room:

Powdery snow
blasts against the picture window
and drifts on the sill. Wind pierces
between the pane's molecular crevasses,
nicking my cheeks.

Touching the pane,
it crystallizes my fingertips,
stiffens my arm, frosts my hairs,
hardens arteries into blue ice.

As fingers fuse to the window,
my body freezes solid

and my last thought shatters

into hexagonal jags

that blend into white pitch.

“The Reality of the Unseen”

—A chapter title in James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*

Six inches last night. Junipers, shagged with snow, bow

as next door I shovel an elderly couple’s driveway.
Against the whiteness, black asphalt is a desecration.

In the distance, a wind chime pierces the mute cold.
Its character is its destiny, too.

A blue shadow appears unseen behind a house
until the sun peers through clouds.

A Cardinal hops towards a Juniper.
her tracks are twin stick men, raising arms
in exaltation as they multiply behind her.

The Unseen abounds over and under drifts,
peeks through a porch screen slash.

Unseen but visible

Glazed

Glistening in headlights,
icy trees are deep-sea hydras.
Our house fills with chilly pitch. In candlelight
my breath billows against a bureau
as I rummage for sweatpants and wool socks.

In the den, we burrow under sleeping bags.
The fireplace stretches its red-coal throat
wide as a Roc hatchling.

I doze, and dream a spark lands on the rug
when upstairs a pipe seizes—clangs from Cold's bludgeon.

Awake, shuddering,

I hold my breath and listen for spurting water

but only flickers of flame

echo from dark corners.

7°

Warm this polar night—as he treks across
this black-pebbled beach, boots crunching,
salt spray crusting his eyebrows.
Surf ebbs at low tide. On rippled sand
terns squabble over a frozen fish head.

He enters the massive ribcage, stripped bone-bare
by bears, foxes, ravens and gulls. x
Jawbones seem to point as they jut forward.

Starlight-splashed ribs arch around him
and above, a majestic spine

his fingers cannot reach. Between bones
the Zodiac showers into his brown eyes,
beads on his fur parka. A blast of wind

shoves him against a rib—he grasps,
steadies, gazes to the faint horizon,
to the Great Bear

and beyond the darkness
tomorrow will bring.

Railroad Crossing

At a county crossing—no lights no gate,
tracks emerged from its vanishing point
on a curve and John thrilled to park in the middle,
church key on the dash, Corvair belching blue plumes,
then ignition off, radio blasting until we heard
the distant whistle. He winked in the rear-view mirror,
the black leviathan storming closer and closer,
tracks quaking, he'd twist the key,
clamp the steering wheel knob and
spin tires inches from the twilight zone.

The last day I remember,
near zero and dropping, snow hard as ice,
the crossing crusted with frozen slush,
sand, oily grit, salt, flattened cans,

radio broken, heater baking, a crow
cawing on top of the icicled crossing sign,

the locomotive thundered around the curve
John as usual flipped the bone,
winked, turned the key

and wincing is all I remember.

Asleep

A Cardinal is mystified, perched on a stainless-steel dog dish
as it gazes into frozen water—at that fluffy red reflection

miming every move.

By the wooden fence a frozen feathered shape is
irrelevant at 19° as wind pounds a fence.
Overhead, Canadian geese lance through gray skies.

I jog, wearing a ski mask and surgical mask,
through swirls of snow into upper Bethabara,
its ancient Moravian cemetery checkered
by gravestones protruding from snow.

I pause, panting, at one on the furthestmost corner.

Brushing snowdust, I see the name eroded, only

1741– 1794.

Sleeping.

Forecast

This bleak winter day ground hard

as stone a peeling birdhouse

tethered to a Crepe Myrtle branch

is alive with fledging chicks

one peeking through the hole

if we only stare long enough

AUTHOR

The author has written free and metric verse poetry for over fifty years; three volumes are on his website, petervenable.com. He is a retired addiction and mental health counselor, volunteers at a local prison camp, jail, church food pantry, senior citizen's center, and leads vesper services at a rest home.

Numerous people have acted as spiritual transformers in his life. Appreciations to his many clients over past decades. Much gratitude goes to his wife and family, and to Lucia Robinson who made numerous editorial corrections and suggestions. Nature remains mystical and magical as Blake said “. . . and heaven in a wild flower . . .” We stare at the thin space between the micro and the macro, raindrops to galaxies.

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