

SPRING'S DANCE OF LIGHT CAN PLEASE WITH ITS SHADOWS, TOO

BY DANNY HEITMAN, *FORUM* EDITOR



For those of us who suffer from hay fever, the arrival of spring can be less than an unalloyed joy. It's something I first learned as

a boy, when early spring invariably sent me to bed for a few days with the sniffles. The greening landscape, a universal sign of renewal, had inflamed my sinuses – a vivid reminder that this gentle rose of a warming year also carried a few thorns.

I've since landed on the right mix of medicines to keep my allergies in check, but I don't regret those early days of springtime convalescence. They helped me hear the bass notes of a season that can seem, at first encounter, like a flute that trills too sweetly.

The darker tones of spring, a time rightly celebrated for sunlight and warmth, give this part of the year an enriching depth. My childhood battles with pollen, which coated every car and park bench under bright yellow dust, spoke of a season touched by a plenitude so aggressive that it could

Grasping spring's real beauty might mean learning that not every spring moment is bliss.

border on violence, reddening eyes and nostrils into submission. Springtime rivers, their overflowing banks spreading both abundance and destruction, are another reminder that the season can be effusive to a fault.

I've found meaning in this idea of spring as something more than a pageant of pastels. Its charcoal shades complete the picture, complicating the season with an inexhaustible nuance.

Being alert to the more somber aspects of spring has been liberating. I no longer feel that good cheer on every day in spring is compulsory, which makes the random joys of the season – its verdant lawns, its riot of flowers, its symphony of birdsong – all the brighter. The season's shadows, often overlooked but visible nonetheless, throw its beauty into sharp relief.

Poets, those tireless publicists of spring, have often advanced an idealized version of the season that no actual spring could hope to match. The best poets, though, have exhibited a keen eye for spring's bittersweet qualities. I'm thinking of Jane Kenyon's "Spring Changes," when she observes how the fallow silences of winter "give way to hammering" as spring arrives.

Kenyon hints that the relentless busyness of spring isn't always welcome. Every time I read her poem, I'm reminded that my best versions of spring are the ones I dream up in winter, thumbing through seed catalogs on gray January afternoons as the wind howls beyond frosted windows.

The springs I conjure from the comfort of an armchair are creatures of imagination, more perfect than any spring that might hover on the calendar, waiting to blossom into view.

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