



This is the shiny time of year. In winter color contrasts are subtler and the Cape's scenery appears dull unless we make an effort to distinguish its diversity.

Our land and seascapes, of course, are far from monotonous since the ocean is never without color, color the sky reflects whenever it's not filled with clouds; pine trees, white, red and pitch, provide sweeps of green on every hillside and throughout the woodlands.

Even without the contrasts of blues and greens, winter brings delicate shades of rainbow hues, if we take the time to see.

So many different whites and blacks and silvers fill our view in winter, it seems there's an infinite quantity of pastels in Mother Nature's paintbox.

After a snowstorm you might believe your world is entirely shrouded in white. And so it is, but such a variety of whites! In the early morning, when the sun breaks through the clouds, there's a golden white where the sun's rays touch a driftface.

Along a bare hilltop, there's a line of demarkation setting it off from more distant hills beyond. The snow at the edge of the pond's black and open water looks whitest of all, you think.

And then you try to measure its clarity with the whiteness of snow at the foot of a pine tree trunk, wet and black; surely this spot looks whiter still.

Gaze north, upriver, with the light behind you; the water appears inky-black; the marsh grasses, snow-blanketed and ice-rimmed, flattened and torn with autumn's high tides, mark the meandering channel at low water.

You can see clearly the course of the stream, in spite of the white of the marsh, white of snow on the ice at the river's edge, white of snow on the hillsides sloping to the marsh's flat expanse.

If the whiteness were all one shade, the demarkations would blend and blur; you couldn't tell where upland left off and marsh began; you couldn't see where marshland stopped and river took over.

The boundaries are as visible, despite the snow, as they are in full summer. It's color that makes it possible for us to trace these boundaries.

Shadows on snow vary widely in hue. Some are purple, some blue, some lavender, some light, some dark. There are long deep stretching shadows of early morning and late afternoon; there are short stubby pale shadows of full midday, footling at the base of each tree and post; there are dark shadows under drifts, behind rocks, tumbling down hills and crouching beneath groves of trees.

And there are reflections of shadows to be found in still surfaces of lakes and ponds, not yet skinned over with ice. The mirrored colors appear even more intense than the lights and shadows themselves.

And everywhere things shine. The surface of the snow shines in the sunlight. Pondwater shines even under clouds. Puddles shine. All winter long we're surrounded by glitter and glimmer.

Leaves on holly trees shine. Black alder glistens as winds tear at its oval leaves. Dewdrops shine as they gather at pineneedletips, ready to fall or freeze to miniature icicles.

And frost shines, glitters like diamonds; patterns of frost make rainbows on windowpanes, on wild grasses, sedges and roadside weeds, on seed pods and twigs stiff-frozen with cold.

Frost shines on freshly plowed streets and sidewalks, picking sparks from stars, streetlights, lamplight, and tossing twinkles to us as we walk at night.

Moonlight shines on snow, casts a glow upward from the ground, into our eyes, in through our thermopanned windows, out across miles

of heaving ocean; light bounces back and forth between clouds and our snow-swathed world.

The sea shines splendidly. On clear days, the light dances over its surface, glances from wavetops, glimmers in depths and gleams in shallows.

And how the skies shine on sunny wintery days! From the moment the errant sun creeps up toward earth's ragged edge, turning gray dawn to pink, to coral, to rosy peach before shattering the morning with a blazing golden light, to the final frozen hush as the last tattered cloud in the west fades from crimson through violets to deepest darkest blue, the sky is a bowl of radiance.

The stars shine; first one winking on, then a dozen, then a million million, all in the space of a few seconds' time. The colder the air, the clearer, for cold air holds less moisture and fewer particulates in suspension; the stars seem to hover low in the sky, hardly beyond reach. They shine down on us, night after night, as they slide across the darkness of heaven, each in its never-changing path.

As darkness falls each evening, house lights shine, sending gleams and warmth of home-fires and hearthsides out windows to brighten the nighttime. Just as the stars seem closer in winter, house lights seem clearer and more brilliant in the cold dry air of January and February nights.

The glow of light from windows gives the traveler welcome assurance of nearby humanity and hospitality as he passes on his way. The shining lamplight promises a safe haven when his journey's done.

Imagine yourself abroad at night in winter's cold, with not a light to be seen in any direction except that of the moon and stars wandering the far reaches of space. How grateful you'd be, rounding a curve, reaching the brow of a hill, moving out from darkness of thick woods, to find a guiding gleam signalling the security of a fireside, a hot meal, a roomful of people bidding you enter and take your place amongst them.

Peoples' faces shine in firelight; their smiles warm your heart; their eyes shine with love, concern and caring for your wellbeing.

The fireplace, aglitter with burning flames, sends leaping shadows through the room as logs blaze and blister and woodsap snaps. A shower of sparks flies up the chimney, shining like stars in the dome of night outside.

This is the shiny season. It's the time when light flickers and gleams with greater brilliance and greater meaning than at any other time of year.

Days are short in winter, but lengthen as time passes and the stretching days promise springtime to come. The long nights, bone-chilling with cold, are frightening but for the shine.

Winter's gleams, its lights, its shininesses, its blacks and whites, its pastels, its shades and shadows hold a loveliness all their own, more cherished for their delicacy.

When surrounded by near-perfection we tend to be inured, but when we must search out the jewels and nuggets of beauty, those we find take on a special value for their rarity.

Look around and enjoy with me the shiny season.

Ah! See — a falling star!