Night run  Soft darkness cuddles my feet in its damp earthiness. I shoot past branches and apparitions—from yellow streetlights to blue moonlight-across a shivering electric barrier of both but neither. Dirt muffles footsteps and leaves soften my sharp breaths, yet chirps and rasps appear inside my mind as animals, evolved to penetrate the woods with poignant sound. Dead prairie grass crunches in pre-resurrection ecstasy. Mostly, I feel my way ankle-deep in ruts and mounds, wading through pools of warm shadow and cold moonlight. Boldly blind, I know my nighttime tunnel run best at the point it flashes past my hair. Jonathan G.

Soil sample  Its scent, both rotten and fresh, cups our nostrils. It is earthworms, bur oak leaves, and garden beetles. We step on it, but wonder little. It tells stories that our ears cannot hear. It is an expert of history, of man, of the living and dead. It is soil. It feels like dried brownies, like wet powdered sugar, like an apple turned brown. While connecting water, land, air, and footprints, it remains silent. What thought it deserves, yet what little it receives. If you look closely enough, you will notice that it is you and me, and most of history. Heather W.

Nature’s palette  Walking outside is more exciting than opening a crayon box with 96 colors. We can find a vast assortment in nature even by only looking at blues. The sky starts pale on the horizon and grows stronger as we look higher. Thin clouds create more tints along the way. In a lake every splashing duck or jumping fish starts ripples that reveal new shades. It is the same for any color. Each spring the vibrant grass pokes through the decaying leaves. Every blade is a different green. The woods, meadows, skies and waters provide us with an endless color array. Janine D.

Invisible but ever-present  Reeds shudder; grasses sway: side to side, and then back again, softly rustling their melancholy greetings. Leaves flutter, gently gliding down, twirling, twisting, and turning over and over; nature’s models on a runway in the sky. Scents drift, enticing and inviting, only to cautiously cruise away again as quickly as they came, leaving only their memory. A gentle flow cools my face, soothing the skin, brushing troubles behind as, like nighttime shadows, it passes by unseen. I breathe in and taste the spring; sun sweetened grasses, smooth thawing earth, and the breath of the trees. Open your eyes to perfection. Steve E.

Smooth entrance  The twin geese came into view from the northwest, honking their arrival in unison. Watching, captivated by the natural grace of the flight, my steps slowed and I imagine I am the birds gliding on wind currents, high above fields, spending my days traveling from pond to pond. Approaching the water, they prepare for landing; wings outstretched, feet sprawled and ready, the honking ceases and the geese focus on the task at hand. Altitude dropping, wing beating wildly, slowing them to ensure a smooth entrance. Feet, bodies hit the water, throwing water droplets into the air. We continue our walk. Meredith F.

Fields with stream  If you build it, they will come. Once the backhoe and bulldozer and barricades go, they will come. As tidy rows give way to chaos and empty hollows fill with tomorrow’s runways, they will come. Weary from a long day’s journey, in need of rest and excited to see a friendly place, they will come. Not knowing that John Deere once reigned over deer and “Muskrat Ramble” over muskrat, they will come. Ignoring a jogging librarian and pesky remnants like roads of class five, they will come. Geese aren’t picky. They just want to land. John W.

Air show  Off in the distance, high in the sky, a V of geese slowly moves toward the pond. When the V is approaching the pond, the shape quickly turns chaotic. Geese begin to fall out of the sky. They corkscrew their bodies 90 degrees as if someone pulled on a string attached to one of their wings. The string is pulled tight, then let go, and pulled tight again. The air show is over. The first goose smoothly glides to a watery halt, with the rest of the V following. Stoked; crazed honking erupts; they can’t wait to do it again. Joe P.
Too early  Beige grasses still buried under the memories of mushy March snows. Water-logged flakes had burdened the brown grasses, breaking them at their bases. Still they lay, killed by November winds and buried by the cold months that followed. Under cover, seeds and sprouts tentatively plan their return, waiting to emerge from beneath their parents’ bent and broken bodies. Tennis shoes trample about their margins, awaiting their symbolic appearance. Chlorophyll-less bodies are quick to bask in the early April sun, but little buds display more caution. In shirtsleeves and sandals, we welcome spring, even before it has sprung. Andrew H.

Resurrection  Fallen limbs strewn about the forest’s floor indicate a deathly epidemic. Their brothers in the sky appear stricken as well. A glance at the grove leaves only a feeling of despair. Though lifeless branches barely cling to their native trunks, Spring is sure to save them. Soon Spring will remedy that annoying plague called Winter. That day when Spring proves her annual omnipotence will be a joyous one. Budding flowers will blanket the trees leaving nothing for Winter to claim. Countless leaves will make St. Olaf’s arboretum alive again. Without surprise, the final push toward Summer will not be halted. Kevin D.

Leaves  Dry, brittle brown leaves cling in futile hope before falling to earth. We hardly notice the crunching under our feet as we wait with anticipation for new growth. Spring brings a freshness we crave after long months of almost no noticeable activity. But these “dead” leaves are just as important as the young buds appearing, being ground into the soil while we trod along the path, contributing to the ongoing cycle of nature. I see these leaves, being blown about in the wind, and wonder where their next home will be. Not green on a tree, but not lost forever. Colleen C.

Verde  The frost is gone. Nothing green stayed. The deadening brown appeared. Yet green is a conquering force. It emerges; straining like a newborn entering the world. Maturing rapidly; green blankets the world. It’s our turn to be covered—enveloped in the verdant freshness. It reigns for half the year, all the while the life-draining brown recovers and rebuilds for its victory in the Fall. There are remnants of the life-numbing brown. I fear the anesthetizing grip the brown has over the world. I block it out. I don’t recall that half of the year. I walk through this new Spring. Kate L.

Look closely  The pond’s gentle ripples diminished with the slowing breeze; smaller, smaller, gone. Dead. The ripples were dead, smothered into the surface - into the water. One oxygen, two hydrogens. H2O. Life. Water molecules fill our cells. We drink from the pond to fill our bodies — 80rushing rapidly, pulsating with each ripple. If our heart, our wind, rests for a breath our ripples disappear. Dead. We die. The pond is beautiful underneath the brilliant sun. The pond is life. Drink slowly. Too much life is deadly. Suffocate. Drowned in life. James B.

Chorus  Just-awakened frogs croak in chorus in the waterlogged meadow. But this choir lacks conductor, score, key, concertmaster, and metronome. There is no percussion section, no strings, no pre-concert tuneup, no crescendo or diminuendo. Unlike like the Ole Choir, which, not far away, sings sacred texts with razor-sharp precision, the frog choristers simply croak, together or apart, in tune or out, sacred or profane, sharp or flat. One frog sounds ridiculous; a thousand together sound sublime, covering each other’s gaps, canceling each other’s mistakes, averaging out to music. Their song is simple: me me me me me me me me ... Paul Z.