



RAIN

by David Koteen



Along with Thanksgiving—the annual reminder of the abundance in which we live—comes rain. From the Cascades to the Coast; from radio dj's to bank tellers to the vast spectrum of salespersons, the bad word of the day, every day, is *rain*. It's come to stay—through the holiday season well into the new year. Perhaps until the summer solstice. Rain. Rain. Rain. Periodically during this season the sun jolts the stage with an histrionic appearance. An annoying taunt. For the winter, gray ambience has already leaked through one's entire being—down umbrella spokes to damp socks.

But rain is inexorably linked with Oregon; like sun to Arizona. If you need something to complain about, here it is. Constantly present. You might as well bewail the parents you were given. It's unlikely they'll change. Which leaves it—once again—up to you. And change seems to be the name of the game. Really, there's the rub. Rain forces us inside: inside raingear; inside houses; inside ourselves.

The question is not how to change weather patterns, but how to change our own soggy perspective. Is there really nothing good about rain? After all, it is a part of our home. A fairly large part.

Last Wednesday an old friend dropped by, wet and dripping; the first words out of her mouth, "Won't it ever, ever stop?" A bleak outlook, I thought, for the beginning of December. As she dried off and warmed her insides with a hot cup of tea, a thought, which had been steeping a long while, emerged. "Mollie," said I (her given name is Maureen), "how about us two taking a long wet walk?"

So we started out. No umbrella, no rain hat, no rain coat nor boots. We dressed alike in sneakers (without socks), sweatshirts—hers was maroon, mine blue—and jeans; Mollie also wore a colorful Polish scarf around her hair. Admittedly, it was only drizzling, though persistently. Everything higher than the trees and rooftops was opaque gray. At first Molly stooped slightly, huddling her frame inward around the thought of how cold and miserable she was. Then a graduate shift.

Look at the gloss on those magnolia leaves! You can never see the birdnests when the leaves are on the trees.

I wonder what order the leaves drop off in?

Smoke puffed from chimneys; faces from cigarettes.

The splice of those electric wires looks like a seagull.

Listen! Can you hear the tires turning on the wet streets; and the chorus of windshield wipers? Raindrops ski down store windows.

Waiting for a light on the corner a couple was embracing. A Volkswagen sent a puddlewave up towards them. They simultaneously jumped back still locked together. Mollie laughed.

People's hair and faces are entirely different with the rain on them.

We discovered endless nuances in our environment. Naked deciduous trees and swaying conifers. Poplars still holding on to leaves; maples with only brown bunches of samaras. Squished black walnut husks. Animal-shaped puddles. Rain dripping sounds and people walking and running sounds. Mollie's stride took on an exhilarated bounce. Her face was full of color.

We ruddled up hill and down alleys and ended up at the University cemetery overlooking the ivy-walled McArthur Court. The cemetery grounds welcome the rain. Rain brings decay; decay brings birth. We walked along the edge of the pathways as the mud had settled in. Where the gravestones lay down water sat in the chiseled letters: Sachs-Orr-Williams-Donnelly-Arnold-James—1853-1897, 1877-1934, 1867-1884. A rust-bellied squirrel sat on a smooth marker, nibbling incessantly on a mushroom. Fifty-five gallon drums full of paper and plastic, filling with water. Green moss and grass squared off along the marble and concrete. Tall firs and an occasional redberried Holly. The squirrel finished the mushroom and scurried off.

We were tranquil as we walked back down the hill. The rain quickened its pace. Our sneakers gushed and squeaked on the sidewalk. We passed a gray-bearded transient, pushing a shopping cart of cans and bottles. A piece of cardboard with the word *perishable* on it partially covered the empty containers. His jacket had no buttons and the sole of his left boot flapped. I asked him where he was going. He pointed down-the-road. Mollie slipped a couple of dollar bills into the cart basket. As he strolled off down-the-road he began humming a song to himself.

It was "White Christmas."

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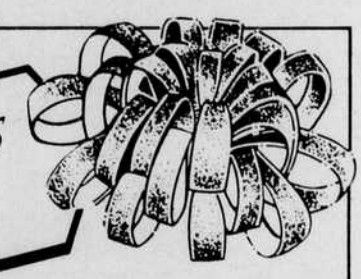
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