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## Winter Freeway

by David Koteen

Celia and Alex were sitting on the deck of their recently purchased small house off East Amazon. Celia had her eyes closed taking in the unseasonably delightful sun. Alex was letting the coffee steam from his mug rise up and warm his face. A Saturday brunch to celebrate the remodeling of their house. Since becoming a "couple" in 1982, they had decided not to get married, not to have a child. That it was unsound economics to pay for two apartments—double everything—and be building up no equity. Solid reasoning. So they collaborated on a house; and after four months, were still on speaking terms. Celia, meticulously organized, had all the choice comestibles already in appropriate dishes, eggs beaten and omelette ingredients near the stove, awaiting the arrival of others.

"Which do you prefer, David," Alex asked, pouring a cup of coffee, "summer or winter?"

As I hate to be late, I am often the first to arrive at any gathering, even though I make myself walk long distances to avoid being early. Also I dislike very much a continuous downpour or even three or four weeks of drizzle; and thus said,

"Summer." But added cautiously, "Can I still stay for brunch?"

Celia opened her eyes and glared up at me:

"Yes, you can eat, but no champagne. Sure, summer is great for your body. But winter really helps clean out the debris inside your head. As much as I enjoy the great outdoors, if it came down to a choice, I'd choose winter every time."

"I can't believe you're serious, Cel," her non-spouse argued. "You would give up long warm days, light clothing, back-packing, tennis for an additional six months of wet and cold? Incredible!"

"I never relax in the summer. Even on vacation, it's just an incessant slur of events. Not that I dislike the hot weather, but there's simply too much to do. I get even *more* frustrated. I love the under-urgings of this time of year. The silence before speech. Leafless trees and the subtle feeling of unbudded buds. Coming home and just sitting. Not planning to go, to do, to eat, to visit—just quietly reading or watching people walk by; or just sitting with my thoughts. I really like that."

The next day, Sunday, I was driving down to Roseburg to visit my friend Toni who had given birth on Thursday. I was still mulling over what Celia had said about her preference for winter. Secretly, I am an avid sitter and watcher. Not to mention eavesdropper. Whereas I usually drive

along I-5—anticipating "getting there," noticing the exit information, watching the rearview mirror for police—I decided very conscientiously to observe the phenomenon of winter.

Well, needless to say, winter is full of life, only sparser. There were a million things. To name a few which stood out: several hundred ducks in a wet field, twin fawns, a herd of curly horned angora goats, many dead possums, new lambs baaing and bouncing about, Holstein cows awaiting hay and silage. For me the winter insignia of wildlife along I-5 were the redtailed hawks perched every mile or so on a steel fencepost or atop a deciduous tree. Patiently sitting like a huge fruit, eyeing the expansive fields for movement.

In the fields themselves little growth. Dead grasses; wheat stubble; corn stubble. Because it's been so dry, plows and discs and harrows have come out of sheds to work the soil a month or two ahead of schedule.

What really dominated the landscape—struck me with awe—was the Freeway itself. The land it divides used to be united. Like a zipper I-5 holds it together and keeps it apart.

A third generation farmer in Yoncalla told me that when the Freeway went through, the government took whatever and how much land they wanted. Paid next to nothing for it. He had offered to give them as much acreage as they needed along the base of the hills. Nope, they needed the most fertile piece he owned. Then they tripled his taxes because he lived near the Freeway.

On the other hand when you consider the universal use of the road system—its immensity and density—surveying, engineering, grading, gravel, tar, concrete—not to mention the production of oil and gasoline and cars and trucks—you need to pull off at a Rest Area for a breather.

I drove on past the Weyerhaeuser mill, past the famous K&R ice cream stop at Rice Hill, the many sinewy valleys which twist and taunt into the distance, past Historical Oakland, laclustre Sutherlin, across the North Umpqua into Roseburg. Toni was rocking 4-day-old Asa when I walked in. She was all smiles. Her three-year-old was trying to skip rope and sing along with Pete Seeger.

"Well, we got one of each," Toni said.

"A boy and a girl?" I ventured.

"That too. But I meant a peaceful winter child to balance out our crazy hot weather family."

There's a beautiful stretch of undeveloped and heavily forested roadside along I-5 as it rises out of Douglas County into Lane. One of Oregon's great offerings is the year-round abundance of evergreens. Ever-green is a nice state to be in. And yet, definitely something to this summer mind/winter mind distinction. Either/or choices tend to make me avert my eyes and squirm. No doubt the reason I hail the coming of spring.

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