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Winter Wind

Half an hour past midnight, I put away unfinished manuscripts.

Everyone else in my family has gone to bed at more reasonable hours and sleeps securely toward morning.

Wind blows fiercely and tries to blow down our house. The thermometer outside the front door registers two below zero.

I sleep in a girl scout-owned house, our place to live, where Laura and I are employed part time to take care of the 750 acre camp, ranch, and to interact with the scouts who come there, in the Rocky Mountains of northern Colorado.

I wake before dawn.

Wind blows yesterday's snow against our house and back toward the sky.

Sun rises. Sunshine warms the day.

Wind bends down trees.

I mix ingredients and cook pancakes for my family. We all eat breakfast together.

Everyone else goes to their tasks in winter's day, Laura, mother and wife, drives up the highway to join the cleaning crew at the country club. Amanda, our youngest daughter, walks across the highway to clean rooms at a lodge, Juniper, our oldest daughter, drives up the highway to another lodge to clean rooms and guide trail rides on horseback.

I clean some of our house, wash dishes and pans from breakfast and leave them to dry in the drainer, then check the cupboards and refrigerator to see if I have what I need to fix dinner. I do have. It will take me an hour and a half to prepare the casserole and cook it. I have the middle of the day to do whatever else I want to do.

I walk downstairs to the room of windows looking to the outside wind and forest and snow on our mountains, and inside, to our bed, and my desk, and I write toward finishing an essay I started yesterday, that I will work on today and then store in computer files, without knowing yet that I will forget it in favor of much other writing, and many years will pass before I put finishing touches on it.

Our day progresses.

The thermometer climbs slowly until it reaches twenty degrees.

I surface from the depths of my manuscript in progress and look out the window into the day.

Wind dies. I watch ponderosa pine trees and fir trees and clean, white snow. Aspen trees stand bereft of leaves across the dirt driveway from the house. Not a

needle, not a branch stirs. Sun shines through mountain air into forest and reflects intensely bright from snow.

I eat leftover pancakes, cheese, and carrots we've saved from summer's garden.

I brush my teeth, then grab scarf, vest, hat, gloves, jacket, exit the house and pull the door shut behind me.

A beautiful winter day out here. A beautiful dirt road under my feet, where I earlier plowed away the snow to mound beside the road. I walk in the quiet day.

Dramatic granite formations and forest stand against clear winter sky. Forest of pine trees and fir and aspen grows toward the sky, surrounds open meadows whose grasses, bleached light yellow by winter, stand through snow and bend in obeisance to winter.

I walk a slow mile from our house in bright winter sunshine.

Wind hasn't died but only rested and waited, well hidden, leaps at me as fiercely as a puma, a golden mountain lion. Roaring wind tries to catch me by surprise and knock me down onto frozen earth.

I bend into the sudden assault and throw up my defense of thick wool and one hundred percent cotton.

Wind gnashes its teeth and slashes its claws. I turn toward home, almost warm enough. Tears blur my vision in sudden cold wind.

Fierce wind blows frigidly into my face, tugs at my clothes, tests fasteners.

Wind roars around me, harries me toward home, bites my legs when I turn my back to attacking cold air.

Wind calls in allies.

Thick grey clouds gallop down the mountain in mute pursuit of afternoon sunlight, bounce off high ridge forests of evergreen trees, and arrive seconds too late.

I bolt into the house and slam the door shut behind me.

Wind screams in frustration, rages, howls and moans, pokes thin, icy fingers in at every tiny opening but can not find access. Snow blows from dark clouds. Large flakes assault the forest, the mountain, our house, in darkly blowing wind.

I cook brown rice, chop almonds, grate cheese, stir the nuts and cheese, frozen peas, soy sauce, garlic, and nutritional yeast into the hot, cooked rice, mold it into a casserole dish, slide the dish into my 375 degree oven, set the timer for 30 minutes and start cleaning up the aftermath of cooking.

Amanda comes home.

Then Juniper walks in the front door.

Then Laura.

They shed coats, hats, scarves and gloves.

Wind coils about the house, blows snow toward the sky, wrings new snow from the clouds. The thermometer drops toward zero like heavy ice.

We are secure, all together for peaceful time together. We talk about our day, the wind, the snow blowing from the dark sky as we eat hot rice casserole.

Wind is our winter serenade.

Trees dance and bow to each other, to our house, to us, to the fierce wind and to cold, white snow.

After we wash dinner dishes, we gather around our fireplace, talk to each other, build memories for our futures and laugh together, warm in our solid, wooden winter house. Wind still blows fiercely outside and provides a winter background for our quiet conversation in our house.