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Winter dies a harsh death in Connecticut

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It is the season of sand and salt, one that coats your boots and manages to fling itself over every floor in your house even though you've faithfully followed your vow this year to leave your dripping boots always on the mat near the door. Winter is dying her slow death resentfully, leaving a residue of dirt everywhere - on your mailbox, your windshield, on the underbelly of your dog as she bolts in from the slush-muddy yard, happy and smelling like a root cellar that hasn't seen sunlight in years.

You towel her off, but never quite enough: She tracks a whole new set of prints across the tile floor that you want to kick yourself for just having washed.

Winter in her wretched demise, in Connecticut, is a season of complaint. "I'm not going to last through it," you moan to your friend on the phone. "I sprained my wrist chipping the ice off my windshield this morning and now it's 40 degrees."

"Until tonight," your friend replies. "Tonight it's going back down to the teens."

It's enough to set us to shuddering, knowing there's sure to be yet another snowstorm.

In Connecticut, what should not be happening anymore by mid-March, happens blithely still in April and sometimes even in May.

Snow descends like the last of the really big plagues as if to say, hey, here's one more coming at you, and we find ourselves sliding off the

big road again, onto the shoulder, taking an extra hour to go four exits.

And here's the real perversity: We actually congratulate ourselves for having the fortitude to live in Connecticut.

We stay put and don't move, as my brothers who live in Florida suggest I do. For one thing, it's beautiful here in Connecticut, even - or maybe especially - in winter.

Ice and snow there is, but though it gets hot and muggy for a few weeks every year, there is nothing like the endless, merciless heat and humidity that the long summers of the South offer.

And need I say anything at all about our autumns?

Sure, I complain about the hats and mittens, the sweat pants and silk underwear I have to wear to keep warm. But I like getting the hot water bottle ready at night. I like the feel of my chenille throw over my legs when I watch TV.

I don't even mind the bad habits I develop each winter: brandy and cheese and crackers just before bed.

This is not the season for calorie or carb-counting, unless you're off to Florida, which I am not.

It's the season for fortification, I tell myself, maintaining this theory until the salt and sand are back in their bins, the shovel lounges against the wall beside them, and dirt takes its rightful place in the flower beds in my yard.

I look at the calendar on my refrigerator. Soon, I think. Spring's coming.

But not yet. Winter is trudging on undaunted, still the season for appreciating sleeping companions, human or animal, and still the time for blazing fires in my fireplace, for sinking deep, on long afternoons, into the overstuffed chair by my hearth where I dream most deliciously with a mug of hot tea in my hands.

Winter, as she dies, continues to offer these simple retreats. She is still, in her isolating, insulating way, the season of reprieve.

We're well past the holidays now, in the last stretch of no-pressure situations unless you don't appreciate school cancellations or the like.

Parents still must work, though the kids are off. But in Connecticut, there are unofficial holidays for all, when you wake up and find the

weatherman has been right, after all. Even though spring is only weeks away, there's 8 inches of snow on your deck with more on the way and the governor is urging everyone to stay off the road.

See, this is what I call a true reprieve. No problem, governor.

So I can't make it to work, grocery shopping, my dentist appointment. Sorry, the roads are so bad, I just can't chance it.

I send the dog out into the white falling snow and kneel at my hearth to make a fire. Then I hazard a brief trip outside, boots on but no coat, to peek toward the end of my driveway to see about the newspaper.

I am addicted to reading my daily newspaper, but to be reasonable I know there's no likelihood the delivery person will have made it to my house today if I can't make it to work.

Outside, the wind is blowing but it doesn't feel particularly icy. I blink away the soft, spring-fluffy flakes that are flung onto my eyelids.

It's blizzard conditions, everywhere the ground is white, but when I kick the snow away the ground beneath my boots yields easily. Spring is coming.

I slide like a kid a little way down the drive, then stop and peer out. There are no cars to be seen on the road, yet there's my newspaper, wrapped in yellow plastic that's got a tall stack of white on it, waiting for me.

I have to grin. Winter may be on her way out, but in her final hour, she still knows how to show this Connecticut Yankee a very nice time.

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