

*Love Begins in Winter*

As my dressing room gradually emptied, the man with the canary-yellow bow tie asked if he and his wife could take my cello in their car to my hotel, the Chateau Frontenac, where they planned to dine at Jean Souchart's restaurant. His wife said they would be more careful than I could imagine. I thanked them and explained how the music director had already arranged for the cello to be escorted to the hotel "vault" by several members of the museum staff. The couple looked disappointed, and so I walked them to their car. They seemed to want something from me. I wanted to explain that trusting is harder than being trusted.

I love walking. Especially when I have nothing to carry (which is not often). On my way back to the hotel it starts to rain, lightly at first, and then hard, half-frozen drops. On the street that leads to the Chateau Frontenac, I stop walking. The road surface is slick. It reflects the world with a beautiful inaccuracy.

My old geography professor once told his class how the music, paintings, sculptures, and books of the world are mirrors in which people see versions of themselves.

There is something about the rain slipping down the hill that prevents me from moving. People hurry past, going somewhere but nowhere. Cars slow down. The people inside

*Simon Van Booy*

want to see what I am looking at. The sweeping whites of the headlights like strange animals.

When I get back to New York, I'm going to memorize the opening lines of Dante's most famous work. I think it begins, "Midway on our life's journey, I found myself in dark woods . . ."

I think of Horowitz's *Träumerei*. Twenty-five seconds longer than anyone else's. Or did I imagine that? If you haven't heard this piece . . .

It's about childhood.

My parents back in France spend their evenings watching television in the socks I sent them from London. I love my parents and forgive them. Above the couch is a framed watercolor of a mountain lion. If it fell, it would kill them. It's a limited-edition print. There are 199 others in the world.

They will only ever be my parents once. They are the only parents I will ever have in the history of the universe. I wonder if they feel me thinking about them here in Quebec City in the rain—I wonder if they feel me like a small animal gnawing them affectionately.

I continue up the hill. The Chateau Frontenac towers over the city like a benevolent dictator. From the eighteenth floor, you can see the Laurentian Mountains. Montreal is five hours southwest. The castle was built for well-to-do railroad passengers a few decades after the American Civil War. I

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suppose for some Quebecois, it's the biggest building they'll ever see. Lovers come here too and walk the city at dusk. You can see them on the promenade, sharing an umbrella, huddled together, stopping only to kiss and stare down at a cold black river dabbled with patches of streetlight.

When I play, I feel as though I am flying. I circle the auditorium. I am anywhere but inside my body. Without music, I would be a prisoner trapped in a sealed wall.

When I play, I sometimes picture my parents. And then the moment I finish playing, there is an eruption of applause. People cannot wait to give applause because they clap for themselves; they clap because they have been recognized by someone who died long ago in a room that flickered with candlelight.

I want to call my father, but my parents will both be in bed. They'll be annoyed if I call—but grateful tomorrow. My father thinks me eccentric anyway. He tells his friends at the café about me, about how eccentric I am. It's his way of talking about me.

In Noyant, the small French village where I grew up, it is too late to call anyone. I can feel the stillness of the town. The empty streets. My parents are asleep. The glowing numbers of the red alarm clock magnified by a glass set down in front of it. In the glass there are tiny bubbles that rise to the surface in the night. The remnants of supper will be in the refrigerator. There will be a cool skin of moisture

*Simon Van Booy*

on the car outside—a new Renault. My brother bought it for them as a Christmas present. I remember that my mother wanted to go for a drive in her nightgown; my brother was overjoyed with this. My father washed his hands and looked at it through the kitchen window before going outside. He stood next to it and put his hand on the roof. Then he went off to the vegetable patch beyond the far wall of the house and dug for a few forgotten potatoes. My mother took my brother inside and reassured him that we'd all go for a ride after breakfast. My brother has never understood our father. My brother is emotionally literal. Women have always loved him. I miss him. We grew up in a cottage that was part of a small bourgeois estate my father cared for.

The long eighteenth-century manor waits in darkness for its part-time occupants, who are spread across Paris for most of the year like different parts of a machine. They are a lovely family. Though one side is a little solemn, while the other is a little zealous. The house is long and white with many windows. In the attic there is a box of Napoleonic uniforms. In one of the bedrooms, three dozen Agatha Christie Penguin paperbacks. In another, engravings of birds.

Tomorrow I will return to New York, my home for almost a decade now. More concerts at the end of the week. One at the Lotos Club, another at a fund-raiser for Central Park, then Los Angeles—a concert at the Hollywood Bowl—then San Francisco, then Phoenix.

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I love New York but miss the silence of rural Europe. Americans are literal. I think my brother would find a wife here in five minutes.

Bach's Suites for Solo Cello were written as pieces intended to teach but contain a mystery musicians unravel without knowing why; a map that shows the position of other maps. They are as popular as the stock pieces I play by Mozart and Haydn. Bach's Suites for Solo Cello are actually my biggest sellers. Bach and my brother helped buy my small apartment in Brooklyn. My brother doesn't know I know, but he bought thousands of copies of my CD and put them in his employees' Christmas bags. My brother's employees love him passionately. If there were a war on, they'd become his private army. It's amazing how he's done so well in business. He's crushed all competition. He's been on the cover of business magazines worldwide. For reasons known only to my brother and me, he has almost single-handedly made Renault the most popular brand of small car in Europe. I even have one here in New York. Everybody wants to know what it is. They always pronounce the "T". I have a mechanic in Queens. He's from Senegal and also grew up with Renault automobiles. In fact, I park it at his house and he uses it to drive his six kids around. I haven't seen it in almost two years. My brother doesn't know but would approve of the whole situation. My brother and I have the same brown Renault 16s, both from 1978. Perhaps we hold