

ALL SAINTS' DAY

John Woolfrey

WHEN MICHAEL ARRIVED FOR DINNER Sunday evening, it was a perfect Halloween night—dark and gloomy. We settled into my kitchen at the back, leaving the front dark to ward off any candy-crazed monsters who might dare to ring the bell. Later, when Michael opened the front door to let himself out, we gasped. No, there were no monsters jumping and squealing at us; rather, five centimetres of wet, very cheerful snow covered the ground, sticking to tree limbs, car roofs and parking signs. So much for the Halloween look.

“Good thing we did our partying last night,” said Michael.

“Imagine trying to get through this in heels,” I replied.

They had predicted snow, but I thought they meant a few dry flakes swirling out of an inky sky to melt a few seconds later at our feet. “It’ll probably be gone before morning. It’s too early for it to stay,” I said, hopefully.

But the next day when I opened the blinds I was astonished to see the same, sodden “winter wonderland” raging away. The beech tree across the street, its leaves bright yellow for Halloween, now looked foolish coated in snow. The monsters of the night before—now masquerading as schoolchildren, with their multicoloured snowsuits that made them look like the bonbons they’d been gorging on—were beside themselves with glee. The snow was perfect for snowballs and, at recess, snowmen, no doubt. Weary mothers tagged behind them, their faces long with dread for the five or six months of snow and cold to come.

I couldn’t help delighting in it all—there’s always something thrilling about the first snowfall. Besides, surely it wouldn’t stay, would it? But it did mean the end of cycling to work—for a while at least; and that meant using the old BMW: bus, Métro and walking.

As the 129 to Outremont groaned its way up through the Park Avenue slush and past Fletcher’s Field, I looked up from my paper to peer through the windows’ heavy condensation at the white, snow-capped trees. In the bus, a few male Université de Montréal students—about the only passengers—caught my eye. They reminded me that the first snowfall always makes me horny.

I went back to reading my paper, but soon looked up to study a young blond with a fuzzy helmet-strap beard who was frowning at his agenda. What potent lips, I thought. Then I felt foolish. It wasn’t horny that the first snowfall made me, it was romantic. I needed someone to cuddle with.

That night, with no work the next day, and free schnapps with beer at La Queue Dorée, I wondered: Should I stay in on this cold night (the temperature had fallen to minus five), or should I venture out to celebrate the first snowfall with the other bad boys who like to stay up past their bedtimes? Will magic happen, and I’ll meet friends and engage in mind-blowing conversations or

even have a hot time with someone new? Or will it be boring and I'll stand by myself in a corner writing stories in my head.

The ice crunched beneath my combat boots as I headed for the bar. The cold, hard air stung my nostrils and bronchi like Vick's and formed small clouds before me as I breathed out, making me look like the bull I felt like. Once at La Queue, I settled in at a corner of the central bar to watch the crowd (it was thin) and allow the alcohol to slow drown the thoughts that usually spin in my head.

About an hour later, a good-looking, dark-haired guy flashed me a smile from across the bar. I flashed one back. Soon, thanks in no small way to the couple of schnapps-and-beer I'd downed, I was on my way around the bar.

"Hi," we said. Pete was his name. He had a big warm smile and large brown eyes that shone and laughed as thick, curly hair fell down across his forehead. He put his arm around me, I put mine around him, and we caressed each other as we talked about unimportant yet interesting things. He was standing on the footrest of the bar so that his head was higher than mine. I got a kick out of slipping my hand up into the back of a "taller" guy's shirt, and I thought this enactment of his little fantasy was kind of cute.

We left at closing time and went to my place. Pete's lovemaking was as fun as his conversation—it was six before we fell asleep.

The next morning was sunny and, with the snow still on the ground, whiter-than-white bright; but milder, so the snow melted off roofs and cars, and the white street slowly turned a glistening black as passing traffic flattened the slush into nothing.

After breakfast we brought coffee to my bedroom at the front where the sun was pouring in upon the bed. There we sprawled, our legs entwined, as Pete turned the pages of my atlas. He found the island in Greece from where his family had emigrated. "The endings of Greek family names are related to the area from which they came," he said.

The doorbell rang. I disentangled my legs and went to the front hall just off the bedroom to answer. It was Yves, my landlord—something about how Hydro-Québec was charging him at the same time I was paying. As I made him a copy of my bill with the fax machine, he poked his head into the bedroom and said jovially, "*As-tu vu les flocons hier soir ? C'était pas des fantômes ! Tu parles d'une joke ?*" (How about those snowflakes last night! Not exactly ghosts, eh! Some trick!) Pete lowered his eyes and smiled bashfully. Then Yves asked for a shovel, and went back out to scoop the snow off the balcony.

"Do you think I should get off the bed before he comes back in?" Pete asked.

"Of course not. I don't care what he thinks—and besides, he's okay."

"That's really nice of him to shovel your steps. My landlord would never do that."

As Yves made scraping sounds with the shovel, we resumed our study of the atlas. We curled up together, kissed a bit, and closed our eyes as the sun's warmth poured over us. Contented, I snoozed. The saints had given me a first-snowfall romance.

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