

Lime Grove in the Snow

by Alice K. Boatwright

When I took my walk before dinner tonight, it was snowing so lightly that the flakes were almost invisible. I could feel them on my face but only catch sight of them when I passed under a streetlight.

My usual nighttime ramble is around the plaza that runs from Invalides with its gold domed eglise and row of cannons to the river where it is crossed by Pont d'Alexandre III. There is a grove of lime trees, planted in straight rows, black with soot, that is as close to a walk in the woods as I can get so near my apartment.

When I reached the grove I saw that a thin dusting of snow had whitened the ground, and I veered off the sidewalk to walk between the trees. In the city, it feels good to walk with earth under your feet, and I enjoyed seeing my boot prints in the snow. Usually, even on a cold night, there will be a few hardcore petanque players in this park, but tonight I was alone. Me, the trees, and the snow.

Then I noticed that, in fact, I wasn't alone. Up ahead I saw clusters of people standing silently under the trees. They seemed to be just waiting there. More than 100 people lined up in the cold and dark, not moving.

When I saw the truck parked discreetly in the shadows, I understood what was happening. This was Restos du Coeur, a charity that provides hot meals for the poor and homeless. As I drew nearer, I saw that some people were eating quickly, right where they stood, while others waited patiently to be served. There was a dignified resignation in their silence.

I didn't want to seem to be staring at them, so I turned and hurried back across the park and down the dark, wet streets. By the time I reached home, the snow had turned to rain.