

SNOW ANGELS

Lynn and I were driving through Roosevelt Park, listening to a song on the oldies station; suddenly she turned to me: “What are they singing there?” I told her the lyric was: “Are you reelin’ in the years?”

“I always thought it was ‘reelin’ in the eaves.’”

“The *eaves*?”

“Yes, like in an attic.”

I told her that “Reelin’ in the Eaves” was actually a much more compelling title: with its supernatural image of ghosts dancing: reelin’ and a-rockin’ in the walls of a house. When I was a kid I’d heard Sam Cooke’s line “Don’t know much about the French I took” as “Don’t know much about the French-eyed cook” — which to my seven-year-old ears sounded exotically sensual. And when the Rolling Stones sang, “You’ll come a-running back/To me-ee-ee” I genuinely misheard it as “You’ll want a money-back/Guarantee-ee-ee.” Somewhere in the universe, the musical spirits must have been reelin’ in the eaves.

I think those spirits danced again this morning, after yet another snowfall. I rose from bed at 6:45 to the sound of a loud, gas-driven snow blower. I looked out the pale blue windows (with the pained eyes of someone who doesn’t own a loud, gas-driven snow blower) to see a neighbor with a snow blower clearing my front sidewalk. When he finished, he turned the machine down Peltier and cleared the entire perimeter of my house. I couldn’t believe it. I barely knew this guy. And then I remembered he had done this last year as well — I’d run out into the snow with a bottle of wine to thank him. I turned now to Lynn (deep in R.E.M. sleep.) “Do you have any idea how much work this guy just saved me? He’s some kind of saint.”

“Can you turn down the heat?” she murmured as she rolled over.

I dressed. Alpaca scarf. Waterproof snow gloves. Thick-soled boots. I found a dusty bottle of rosé in the pantry. My charitable neighbor, two houses down, was now shoveling the foot of his driveway where the State plows had piled two feet of gray-salted snow. He wore a blue and white ski hat, and he paused when he saw me approaching with the wine.

“Oh, come on. You’re going to make an alcoholic out of me.”

I shook his hand, and though we’d been neighbors for years, I introduced myself by name for the first time. “I’m also Bob,” he said. His accent was Middle European. I thanked him again for the hours of labor he’d spared me.

Later I found myself walking toward town: drainpipes dripping, sewers singing. Clumps of snow fell from the branches around me. The power lines hissed. Two enterprising young men walked the streets with shovels over their shoulders.

I bought a newspaper, a tin of Altoids, a Win-For-Life scratch-off card, and a bottle of castor oil for Lynn's injured foot. On the way home I passed an older woman standing completely bewildered before the new, terrorist-resistant mailbox in front of the post office — which appears to have no slot at all. She was preparing to give up mailing her letter altogether, when I explained to her that, yes, there *was* a tiny slot, but no pull-down drawer. You had to search to find it. I showed her, then I left her happily dropping her PSE&G bill into its depths.

Back home I gave Lynn the lotto ticket. She'd won five dollars, which, she reminded me, had only taken 30 losing tickets to acquire. Later, as she and I walked Nellie, we passed my neighbor Tom who was shoveling another neighbor's sidewalk. I told him it was a hell of nice thing for him to be doing. He told me he wanted to help someone who was out of town. He also told me he was 78. And I left him thinking that generosity of the spirit was like some kind of benevolent virus. It just kept multiplying. Around the corner, still in her immobilizing plastic boot, Lynn pointed out a tree whose main branches had shed their snow, but whose delicate fingers still retained clusters of frost. "Look," she said. "They look like white blossoms!" I looked up, and now I saw it too: a canopy of white snow-blossoms against a bright blue sky. It was a good morning. The sunlight was dazzling. And if I listened carefully, somewhere I thought I could hear the spirits reel in' in the eaves.