



Paris Lost and Found: A Memoir of Love

Scott Dominic Carpenter

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Narrated with Carpenter's characteristic humor, the memoir-in-essays Paris Lost and Found addresses French bureaucracy, scenery, and joie de vivre, but also the distinctive challenges of living between two countries.

Set against the affecting backdrop of his wife Anne's memory loss, American expatriate Scott Dominic Carpenter's elegiac memoir *Paris Lost and Found* exudes fascination with his adopted city, its kitschy tourism, and its local habits.

In the face of Anne's Alzheimer's, which led to an erosion of her vocabulary, shared histories, and a sense of the "souvenirs" that composed their life together, Carpenter uses his characteristic humor to recount the years that the couple lived on Rue Bobillot. Familiar domestic scenes are covered in an upbeat tone: there are meetings with a condo council; there's bewilderment in hardware store aisles. Elsewhere, there's excitement over an unknown interloper in the building's garbage collection room, and a tour that caters to Francophiles derails after a heist occurs at the hotel.

Though some anecdotes are too similar in nature, the book as a whole is impish and fun. Directed by his Midwestern sense of delight, Carpenter adopts the role of an American observer, making keen observations about language and about the fact that human vulnerability makes people more alike than they are different. Still, everyone Carpenter encounters is fair game for an affectionate portrait that speaks to their particular quirks and culture.

The multilayered nature of Paris is a frequent subject. The book covers both the Paris landmarks of popular imagination and the city beyond this sheen. A Petit Écolier (a butter cookie topped in chocolate) is used as a metaphor for mirrored worlds within worlds, and the vagaries of French banking fuel a fleeting contemplation on vulnerability. Elsewhere, gun use in the US is contrasted with French perspectives. In taking notice of the everyday attributes of the setting, the book moves beyond the expected subjects of bureaucracy, scenery, and joie de vivre to address the distinctive challenges of living between two countries.

Anne's health challenges percolate in the background of several sketches—a gentle touch of realism revealing the stark weariness that tinged their beloved city with shadows. In the book's later sections, Carpenter covers the challenges of acting as a caretaker and the aftermath of Anne's death during COVID-19 lockdowns. A subsequent essay, "Adieu," details the Paris Metro and the small kindnesses of strangers who might elsewhere act as "tough as day-old baguettes" but who were united by their proximity; this morphs into a meditation on death and on how memories persist. Anne is not mentioned outright in this essay, but she is all the more present because she's twinned in a young passerby. Through these indirect brushes with memory, the otherwise lighthearted essays accrue depth.

Paris Lost and Found is a nuanced memoir about loss, starting over, and embracing a new home abroad.

KAREN RIGBY (June 25, 2024)

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