



Love Begins in Winter

By Simon Van Booy
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Introduction

On the verge of giving up anchored to dreams that never came true and to people who have long since disappeared from their lives Van Booy's characters walk the streets of these stark and beautiful stories until chance meetings with strangers force them to face responsibility for lives they thought had continued on without them.

Questions for Discussion

1. In the title short story, why do the two main characters hold on to physical things acorns, stones, mittens, the grandfather's broken chair? Do you see these objects as physical burdens or as lovingly preserved souvenirs? What is your most precious possession and why?
2. In *Love Begins in Winter*, the narrator muses that, "The most significant conversations of our lives occur in silence" (42). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
3. When Bruno and Hannah release their kites into the air in *Love Begins in Winter*, how does this simple action reflect how they have lived for the past 20 years?
4. Do you think that the act of the narrator in "Tiger, Tiger" biting her boyfriend at the end of the story is an acceptable regression to her child-like state a playful reinvention and display of her love? Or do you think she has just gone crazy? Do you think they stay together in the end? Why or why not?
5. In "The Missing Statues," discuss the relationship between the two cities of Las Vegas and Rome. Do you think it's strange that anyone would find beauty in a city like Las Vegas?
6. In "The Coming and Going of Strangers," do you agree with Walter's understanding of only experiencing one pure first love? What does this contribute to your discovery that Walter ends up marrying Jane?
7. Also in "The Coming and Going of Strangers," why do you think the farmer stopped to pick up Walter's father and the child? Was it because he was in World War II?
8. Why does George in "The City of Windy Trees" live such an isolated life? Do you think George did the right thing by going to see his unknown daughter Lotta, in Sweden? What would you have done?
9. In George's letter to his sister Helen, he writes "I regret things I haven't done rather than things I have strange eh?" What sorts of things do you think George wishes he'd done? Do you feel the same about your life?
10. In "The City of Windy Trees," all the adults work together to make a child's life happy. Is this true for other children in the book? Would you agree with the idea that children are the most important characters in Van Booy's fiction?
11. When Lotta and George are ice skating in "The City of Windy Tress", George breaks away "to skate clumsily but without falling over" (224). What type of metaphor for parenting is this? Do you find this to be true in your own life if you're a parent, or in the lives of other parents you know?

About the Author

Simon Van Booy was born in London and grew up in rural Wales and Oxford. After playing football in Kentucky, he lived in Paris and Athens. In 2002, he was awarded an MFA and won the H.R. Hays Poetry Prize. His journalism has appeared in magazines and newspapers including the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*. Van Booy is the author of *The Secret Lives of People in Love*, now translated into several languages. He lives in New York City, where he teaches part-time at the School of Visual Arts and at Long Island University. He is also involved in the Rutgers Early College Humanities program (REaCH) for young adults living in underserved communities.