St. Jean Solstice

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Cover Page Footnote
Cars and tour buses are rumbling
outside wide-flung French windows
without screens
and tourists’ voices are filtering through
in an English-dominant Babel.
I smell the smokiness
of meat turning on the spit—
people eating shawarma in pita bread even at midnight—
on the street below.

The couch has a hole in it
and we walk up five flights
of winding wooden steps
but this two-room apartment
with off-white walls
isn’t family
isn’t history
isn’t smothering,
like the smoke that billows upward.

As I hold his hand
I can lean in and smell
the sweet Drakkar Noir cologne
some might call “oriental”
that he wore the day we met
at the Sorbonne
where I was studying Arabic.

He has no money for a ring
but who needs gold or diamonds
when one from the East
and one from the West
vow togetherness
on the St. Jean Solstice
with the Chinese white moon
as our only light?

J’aime Paris au mois de mai
but June is the month of brides.
He doesn’t need to get down on one knee
after I pursued him in three languages
throughout the snowless winter
and lilac and lily-of-the-valley scented spring.

But why, then,
does my heart beat
hummingbird-like
for fear of disgracing the family name?

Why do I not launch forward
in a burst of polyphonic song
on my own road to Damascus?