

A Bit of Warmth

by [Armando Simón](#) (April 2023)



Self-portrait as Inmate at Saint-Lazare prison, Hubert Robert, 1794

It was cold, cold, cold—cold not because of the thin layer of snow on the bare ground, or on the fence, or on the sharp concertina wire atop the fence, but because of the wind, the wind which swept across the prairie and originating in the Arctic Circle, traveling—still freezing—all the way down to this latitude and to this prison. Then, too, it went dark earlier now, in January. The darkness made it colder, or maybe it just seemed colder because of the premature darkness.

The prisoner came back from work with the other prisoners and entered his cellblock. It was also cold inside, though definitely not as cold as outside with the wind. He avoided the Dayroom where his fellow convicts grunted and screamed at the basketball game on the television; if there had been trees inside, they would have been swinging from the branches.

Victor Goss went on to his own cell, undressed, and laid down under the covers in the bunk. He got comfortable. At level with his head when lying down was a very small barred rectangular window and he could see out of it. He saw only darkness in a featureless landscape, with faint, flickering lighting from the camp's widely spaced lampposts barely illuminating the fence, the snow on the ground and the concertina wire which, moving sporadically in response to gusts of wind, hummed in a metallic moan. He could hear the wind when it gusted particularly strong. As desolate as it appeared, and was, it was somehow appealing, and he could stare at that darkness for hours.

He turned on the cheap, small radio in his possession. A wire from the radio to the bars brought in a station from civilization, as he liked to say, a radio station which only played classical music. It was faint tonight, probably due to weather conditions and he had to strain to hear it.

He listened and the piece sounded vaguely familiar. Mozart? Vivaldi? Sibelius? He listened attentively, trying to identify the piece, all the while staring out into the darkness as the wind at times mixed in with the music and as he did so, he felt warm.

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