

## FARWELL

Tonight, a steady drizzle, streetlights smoldering in fog like funnels of light collecting rain. Down Farwell, the balcony windows of the apartment building where my friend Babovitch once lived, reflected across the wet tennis courts, and I wondered if I would ever leave this city. I remembered the first night I walked down Farwell to visit Babo. He was teaching a class in Russian literature that I was taking, and had invited me over. I'd never had a teacher invite me to his home before. "When's a good time?" I asked.

"I can *always* use the company," he answered, scrawling out his address. "There's no phone."

It was a winter night, snowing. His apartment building was the last one on the block where the street dead-ended against the lake. Behind a snow-clotted cyclone fence, the tennis courts were drifted over, and beyond the courts and a small, lakeside park, a white pier extended to a green beacon. Snow had obliterated

the outlines of sidewalks and curbs and that night the pier looked as if it was a continuation of the street, as if Farwell lengthened out into the lake. I walked out toward the beacon. Ice, sculpted by waves and spray, encrusted the pier. The guard cables and beacon tower were sheathed in ice. In the frozen quiet, I could hear the lake rasping in under the floes and feel the pier shudder, and as I walked back toward the apartment building I thought I heard singing.

The baritone voice resonating across the tennis courts seemed to float from a balcony window where a curtain fluttered out as if signalling. I was sure it was Babo's window. Instead of ringing his bell, I stood on the tennis court and tried to make out the song, but the words were indistinct. I formed a snowball out of fresh snow—snow too feathery to be good packing—and lobbed it at the window. It exploded against the pane with a soft *phoom*. I expected Babo to come to the window. Instead, the music stopped. I lobbed another snowball and the bronze light inside the apartment flicked off. Finally, I walked around to the entrance hall and buzzed the bell beside the name Andrei Babovitch, but there was no answer. I was about to give up when I saw his face magnified by the beveled panes of the lobby door. He opened the door and broke into the craggy grin I'd seen possess his face in class when he would read a poem aloud—first in Russian, as if chanting, and then translated into his hesitant, British-accented English.

"So, you," he said.

"Is it a good night for a visit?"

"Definitely. Come in, please. Have tea. And a little shot of something to warm up."

"I thought I guessed which window was yours and threw snowballs to get your attention."

"That was *you!* I thought hooligans had heard Chaliapin moaning about fate and become enraged. Russian opera can have that effect even on those not addicted to rock and roll. I didn't know what to expect next—a brick, maybe—so I turned off the music and laid down on the floor in the dark."

"Sorry," I said, "I wasn't thinking—I don't know why I didn't just ring the bell."

"No, no. It would have been a memorable entrance. I'm sorry I missed it, though if I looked out the window and saw you in the dark I still might have thought it was hooligans," he laughed. "As you see, my nerves aren't what they should be."

The bronze light was back on in his apartment, which seemed furnished in books. Books in various languages lined the walls and were stacked along the floor. His furniture was crates of more books, the stock left from a small Russian bookstore he'd opened then closed after receiving threats and a bomb in the mail. Above his desk, he'd tacked a street map of Odessa, where he'd grown up beside the Black Sea. There were circles of red ink along a few of the streets. I didn't ask that night, but later, when I knew him better, I asked what the red circles marked.

"Good bakeries," he said.

When the university didn't renew his contract, he moved away suddenly. It didn't surprise me. He'd been on the move since deserting to the British during the War. He'd lived in England, and Canada, and said he never knew where else was next, but that sooner or later

staying in one place reminded him that where he belonged no longer existed. He'd lived on Farwell, a street whose name sounded almost like saying goodbye.

Tonight, I jogged down Farwell to the lake, past the puddled tennis courts and the pier with its green beacon, and then along the empty beach. Waves were rushing in and I ran as if being chased, tightroping along the foaming edge of water. My shoes peeled flying clods of footprints from the sand. It was late by the time I reached the building where I lived, the hallways quiet, supper smoke still ringing the lightbulbs. In the dark, my room with its windows raised smelled of wet screens and tangerines.

## CHOPIN IN WINTER

The winter Dzia-Dzia came to live with us in Mrs. Kubiak's building on Eighteenth Street was the winter that Mrs. Kubiak's daughter, Marcy, came home pregnant from college in New York. Marcy had gone there on a music scholarship, the first person in Mrs. Kubiak's family to go to high school, let alone college.

Since she had come home I had seen her only once. I was playing on the landing before our door, and as she came up the stairs we both nodded hi. She didn't look pregnant. She was thin, dressed in a black coat, its silvery fur collar pulled up around her face, her long blonde hair tucked into the collar. I could see the snowflakes on the fur turning to beads of water under the hall light bulb. Her face was pale and her eyes the same startled blue as Mrs. Kubiak's.

She passed me almost without noticing and continued up the next flight of stairs, then paused and, leaning