

West

I. Summer

Moscow, Russia - June 1989

As the evening light faded from Moscow's central train station, Anya imagined the sun that was burning all night long in Saint Petersburg. It would still be light when she arrived in the morning. She had called Ivan--he'd be there to greet her, if she could catch this overnight train. She prayed there were tickets left. Anya had come up with a plan, and she needed to get to Saint Petersburg before she lost the courage to tell him.

She shut her eyes and swayed with the prayer, letting the ticket line jostle her forward to the booth. All around her, people were gathering on the platform for the midnight departure. A loud family with many small children leaned against the ticket booth, playing cards while their mother poured out tea from a thermos. An old woman rolled her *kvas* cart up and down the platform, selling cups of the fermented black bread soda to waiting passengers. A young couple slept slouched against each other on the metal benches.

"Ma'am?" said the ticket teller, startling Anya from her *Ave Maria*.

"Can I get a coach ticket for the overnight to Peter?" she said.

"Tonight?"

"Yes, tonight," said Anya. The teller swiveled around on her fat, little chair, pulling out the seating chart from another part of the booth. Anya thought it was pitiful, the way she was

trapped in that booth all night long, but she didn't have to take so goddamn long scanning the chart.

Anya had set up a new excuse to tell her husband this time--a regional teachers' conference in Saint Petersburg, paid for by the elementary school. Kiril was probably keen to have some time off from her, anyway, to focus on his labeling his rare stones collection, or read all those back-issues of the *Journal of Applied Geophysics* he refused to throw away. He liked to call geology his "little pet project" and Anya his "little pet." He was a creature of habit, who loved quiet, methodical projects. It infuriated her. He suspected nothing of Anya's affair, probably because it wasn't written into his five-year plan.

"No tickets left," said the teller.

"What about first class?" If she didn't catch the train tonight, there would be no use going to Saint Petersburg. She would have to turn right back around for work on Monday morning.

"Nope," the cashier said.

"You didn't even check the paper for first-class," said Anya.

"Because I sold them all," said the teller, already staring past Anya to the next customer, an old man in a denim shirt.

"Bitch," Anya muttered.

"Next."

"Don't make me make a scene," said Anya. The man behind Anya placed his hand on her shoulder. She swung around, ready to make a scene.

"Miss, I can sell my ticket to you," he said, speaking Russian with an American accent. Then to the teller, "You have day tickets left for tomorrow?"

“Yes, that’s fine,” the woman said, scowling. “Lemme see that ticket.” She took Anya’s money and printed them both new tickets. Anya gave the old man five hundred roubles. Her prayer had worked--she would be there in the morning!

“Step aside, girl,” said the teller. “You are not the only customer.”

They stepped away from the booth, and Anya said, in English, “Thank you, thank you! You have no idea how much you’ve helped me. Are you a tourist from America?” She learned that he was a printmaker, born to Ukrainian Jewish parents in New York. He was showing an exhibit in Saint Petersburg this weekend. He lived in Moscow now, but he planned to set up a studio in Peter to use while he was Artist-in-Residence at the Polygraphic Institute next semester. The ticket was no trouble at all, he assured her. He needed more time to pack up his supplies. He had a harsh, loud accent, so different than the soft British pronunciation she’d been taught in college. “I’m Zlatko.” He shook her hand. His hands felt like husks of smaller hands, hardened and leathery. Zlatko was almost triple her age. He was tall and wiry, with sunken cheeks and a bristly little white beard like a worn-out brush.

“Anya,” she said. This was why she loved Moscow--all the foreigners you could meet! She wished they had more time. She wanted to ask him all about America.

“Next time you’re in Moscow, come for tea at our place. My husband and I would love to hear more about your work.” A blatant lie--Kiril had little interest in art, especially not American art. But she needed to make sure Zlatko knew her situation. She wasn’t looking for anything.

“Wow, that’s so nice, well--sure! I’d love to,” he said in English. They exchanged numbers. Anya promised to call and set something up, thinking how she could fabricate a meeting at the teachers’ conference to tell her husband about Zlatko.

“I hope things work out in Peter,” he said in Russian.

“Well,” Anya laughed. “Thank you, comrade,” she said, half-ironically, knowing the joke would be lost on him.

Zlatko left, and she went to call Ivan from the payphone.

As the train rattled north through the night, Anya watched the sky lighten from her top bunk window. The lady on the bunk across snored quietly. Two little boys walked up and down the aisle selling tea in glass mugs. She could have listened to the new *Purple Rain* album on her Walkman, but she felt entranced by the hush of the rocking train. She watched the birches flickering out the window, long and slender like Ivan’s body. She remembered playing in the birch grove at her grandparents’ country-house as a child. Anya would pretend the birch trees were male dance partners at the Kremlin New Year’s Eve ball. In those games, her dress was made of birch bark and wildflowers, her hair done up with pine cones. She was an only child and used to feel it most in the summers, when the light dragged on for hours and hours past bedtime.

When she met Ivan last year, through a former classmate who wrote for the same newspaper, he was the first person to soothe her loneliness. But she was lonelier than she’d ever been during the weeks they spent apart. Anya had been sleepwalking through the past year, with brief moments of alertness in Ivan’s presence. She was perfectly content watching TV in the evenings with her husband, teaching English lessons, gossiping with her mother, chatting with her neighbors as she carried groceries through the courtyard. But with Ivan, she was not content--she was awake.

She imagined him, his dark beard, his soft mouth, until the train lulled her into sleep.

Anya had married her husband five years ago to avoid losing her *propiska*--the citizenship card for her hometown. If Anya had not married Kiril when she did, at nineteen, in her second year of college, she could have been sent anywhere in the USSR upon graduation to pay back her “free” education. If she was sent away, there would be no opportunity to return.

Anya had been scared by her friend’s stories of being sent to small towns in Siberia, where they taught English and French to children who would never need the languages in their eventual jobs at the uranium mines. Anya wanted to be near museums, theaters, tourists, marble train stations, Gorki Park with its endless, shining ice rinks, and the city lights reflected off Moscow River. Most of all, she had wanted to live near her family.

She often read about what happened in other parts of the country--she knew about *perestroika*, and food shortages, and the new tax on potatoes. But she was satisfied with reading about it in the newspapers and scoffing at the injustices from her kitchen table. Anya liked to feel a cut above the average Russian. She wanted to go west and think like a westerner, to vacation in Paris, or at least in Prague. So, with a nudge from Mama, Anya had married a senior accounting student who took her out to see movies on the weekends. She had been sure, at the time, that Kiril shared her values and concerns.

“He’s the best option,” Mama had said. Every university department had its different rules about the *propiska*. English Language and Literature had one of the strictest--seven years of service after graduation to repay the degree. Kiril was done with his department’s term of

service. Now he had his Moscow citizenship card for life, whether or not he was married. Anya had five years to go.

She felt dazed and bleary, walking from the train car into the hectic station. She went to the bathroom to freshen up. She paid five roubles to the elderly bathroom attendant, who passed her a few squares of toilet paper from her basket and grunted, "Go ahead." Anya stood in the foul-smelling, doorless stall and stared at herself in the mirror. She needed concealer--she was pale, papery, with blonde curls and big gray eyes. She changed from the simple, pink dress she had slept in to a tight-fitting, orange top and high-waisted black pants. She slipped on her high-heeled, orange shoes and all of her jewelry--a thick, gold-leafed, chain with a big, metal flower hanging off it, three rings of brightly colored glass, bangles, earrings, and a gold hairpin. She put on lipstick and pulled her top down a little lower. He was going to love her.

Once they had left the station, Ivan put his arm around Anya. He wove her through the crowd on Nevsky Prospect toward the bus stop. She watched their feet walking in pace together and felt his beard graze her shoulders. Anya clung to him, even though it was uncomfortably hot and her hands were sweating. Some of the women they passed on the street wore silk scarves to protect their hair from the bright sun. She wished she had remembered one. They wove through rows of carts selling daisies, potato pies, and dried apricots. Millions of little windows glistened in the pastel apartment buildings.

He spoke in fast, hushed Russian: "I'm so sorry baby, we can't go to my place right now. Ksyusha's having some friends over, but, you know, there's this great exhibit at the Hermitage. I think you'd love it. Would you like to do that instead? Unless you're hungry. Or maybe you want to lie down. Man, I wish it hadn't worked out that way. Maybe I could call Larissa to see if you can lay down for a while at her place?" Anya loved the way he spoke. He seemed constantly flustered, easily pleased, and easily excited. There was something boyish in Ivan's tone, which allowed her to be girlish in return. Her husband was just a few years older than her, but the way he looked at her made her feel like an old woman. Like a favorite, comfortable armchair.

"Ivan, baby, that's totally okay." She touched the dimple in his chin. "I'd like to see the exhibit and have lunch after."

"Perfect! We can take the 144. we won't even have to transfer. I really think you'll like it, I've seen it once before, but I'd love to hear what you think of it. And, honestly, I'm sorry about my place, I know how exhausting that train ride is." Ivan often travelled back and forth for the newspaper, visiting Anya after his interviews were over.

She did not want to go to the museum. Instead she imagined the soft bed where they might lie down together. She had been to Ivan's apartment once, on a Friday afternoon when his wife was still at work. She could picture his mother-in-law's faded floral carpeting, the cross-stitched portraits of his wife's family members, the dark wooden bookshelf lined with revolutionaries, the wooden screen that separated the one bedroom into two. She fantasized about going to that place, wrecking it with her presence, giving Ivan a second set of memories for it.

He spotted the bus before she did--they had to run and flag it down. She held onto his shirt in the morning rush.

They entered the exhibit through the Winter Palace. Anya had been here many times, but she never got tired of its imposing look. It was more of a fortress than an art collection, its massive walls protecting the swirl of tourists in the courtyard from the rest of the city. In the lobby, the yellow chandelier light reflected a million times off marble floors and wooden banisters. She felt small there, protected.

“You look beautiful,” said Ivan. “I hope we don’t run into anyone I know. I want to be alone with you.” He pressed his cheek to her shoulder.

She knew they wouldn’t run into anyone. He was a novice reporter, and he often worked the night copy-editing shift. His few friends were former classmates from the Journalism Institute. But even at university, he had been mostly misunderstood. She could still see the paranoia of being disliked as he walked around the cases of Roman pottery. Ivan slouched his shoulders as he moved and pulled at his dark, wispy beard. He focused steadily on each pot in turn, glancing over to make sure she was doing so, too, that this was what you were supposed to do at an exhibit of such gravity. Anya liked his fear. She thought it led to a certain intimacy between them, as if they were social outcast children who had found a friend for the first time.

She came up behind him and touched the soft inside of his wrist. She spoke quietly in his ear. “Have you been sleeping okay?”

He took her hand. "It's not too bad after night shifts, 'cause I'm so beat the next morning. But on other nights it's hard. So much easier with you."

She put her hand on his back, and he turned around to face her. She leaned in. "It's hard for me, too. I stay up a lot, thinking." Some nights she paced loops around the courtyard of her apartment complex.

"Do I get to hear any of these thoughts?"

"No, they're all secretes," Anya giggled, backing away a few inches. Flirting with him was so easy. She felt light on her feet.

"Of course," he smiled. They walked over to the next room of the exhibit. He kept his eyes on the pots, circling around them, but Anya felt he was circling around her, seeing all the things that had changed--she had bought new shoes, painted her fingernails blue.

"This one's my favorite," said Ivan. The vase he liked showed a crowd of black, silhouetted figures dancing happily away from an attacking army. Anya didn't think much of it, or the rest of the exhibit, but she liked how western it made her feel. And it made her delighted to think of how Kiril would hate looking at Roman pottery, or he'd go on about how the Slavs had superior geology in the pleistocene era, etc. Kiril was so emotionally nationalistic like that--always looking for an argument in everything foreign. But Ivan was cultured, sensitive, artistic. Look how different he was acting.

"Anya," Ivan said, caressing her hand. "I missed you."

She touched her lips lightly against his. "I've wanted you," she said.

They left for his sister's borrowed apartment. She was content that they had done something productive, cultural, something that proved how much they had in common.

Anya's mind raced while Ivan dozed beside her in the hot, sticky bed. The shades were drawn against a dazzling night sun. The walls were covered in sketches that Ivan's sister, Larissa, had done for her classes at the Polygraphic Institute. She was completing her PhD in French art history and practice, so she spent most weekends in her studio. Letting Ivan borrow the apartment was her quiet form of rebellion: Larissa opposed the forced marriages. She was avoiding it herself by remaining a student indefinitely, something Anya didn't have the money for. Anything beyond a bachelor's, you had to pay for yourself, but it meant you could remain unmarried and live wherever you chose. So long as you were a student, the state wouldn't send you out to the hinterlands. Anya wished she had this opportunity, but her family did not have the money to pay the bribe or the Party connections to get the bribe waived. Marriage was her only option, and, because she had only been out of college for two years, a divorce could get her sent away. There was, however, a loophole she had just learned about--a plan.

Through the bedside window, she could hear a group of teenagers in the courtyard below dancing to American pop music from a boombox. Downtown, the nightclubs were probably opening, and the club promoters were covering the streets with glossy pamphlets.

"I don't think I can be with Kiril anymore," she said. She imagined the warm, flabby body of her morose husband that she would have to face on Monday. It just wasn't fair. She was beautiful, and he ignored her. He was always lost in his accounting numbers, his TV shows, the meaningless, quiet rhythms of his life. There was no place for her in it. Anya wanted her husband to circle her the way Ivan did, appreciating every detail.

Ivan turned over and lay an arm across her.

“You know I didn’t want to marry Ksyusha. I had to, but I wish I had stopped myself.”

“What choice did you have?” she said.

“I wish she were you.” If Ivan had not gotten married during his third year of college, he would have been placed at the newspaper in Norilsk, a nickel mining town above the Arctic circle where children had to play under Vitamin D lamps in the winter to avoid disease. “Best to find someone,” his college advisor had said. Ivan had another year left to repay his schooling. If he divorced Ksyusha now, he would lose his *propiska*--his Saint Petersburg citizenship card--and might get sent away. The loophole was simple. She didn’t know why she had not thought of it before. It was right there in the legal code--the only way they could both be granted legal divorces without losing their *propiski*.

She ran her hands up and down Ivan’s body, imagining the baby they could make together. She had to tell him now, before she changed her mind.

“What if I were pregnant?”

“Are you?” He sat up.

“No, but what if I were? Remember Sasha, my friend from work? She had a baby with her boyfriend in the spring, and she got to stay in Moscow and keep her *propiska*.” Anya explained her plan--once the baby was born, the hospital could conduct a DNA test to prove that he was Ivan’s. It was a new procedure but completely safe, safer even than getting your blood drawn. A DNA test proving Ivan’s paternity would allow them to both divorce their partners and marry each other without being sent to other parts of Russia to “repay” their education.

Ivan lay his head on her chest and stayed quiet a long time. They both knew this could change everything. They could leave their spouses and earn the right to live together, in the same city, without fear.

“Let’s have a baby,” he said.

“A baby,” she said.

II. Fall

Three months had passed since they had made the plan in Saint Petersburg. Anya went about her life in Moscow, all the time smiling about the secret humming inside her. The baby. Hers and Ivan's. It made her feel strangely comforted, knowing that someone was accompanying her everywhere she went. It felt like a new love blossoming. Suddenly she saw her city differently--this was the Moscow she'd be raising a child in! These were the foods the child would eat, these were trees the child would play beneath. Anya's hair grew gold and lush (from the pregnancy hormones, her doctor said.) She was hot all the time, choosing to take dinner on the balcony of her apartment while her husband ate in the kitchen. She wasn't showing yet, but she would be very soon. Anya had to tell Kiril before deduced it himself.

Meanwhile, the world around her was changing, tilting in a western direction. New English-language hits by Madonna and Michael Jackson played on the radio in the supermarket, mixed in with Russian pop songs. Anya's students came in to their tutoring sessions having already memorized the lyrics, wanting to discuss the grammatical constructions in *Like a Virgin*. There were revolutions in Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria. Anya felt conflicted about everything all the time. She wanted the country to change, and she wanted her life to change, to open into a mysterious new life. But she wasn't sure how or when that might happen.

Her tutoring services were more in-demand than ever. She worked for a small firm that partnered with elementary schools to provide English classes, which were not part of the standard Soviet curriculum. Some of the fancy elementary schools in the city center were willing

to pay for these English lessons to attract children from prominent families. There were no private schools per se, but there were schools with “free” English lessons.

In the mornings she taught a regular class of fifth-graders, and in the afternoon she travelled around to different high schools in the city, tutoring teenagers who hoped to attend college in the west. She was hired to prepare them for the TOEFL English competency exam, but more often than not, they asked her about life abroad--what was it *really* like? Did Miss Anya think they were more suited to live in New York or LA? She had never been to the United States, but she had read a lot of American literature in college, which she felt made her an expert of sorts.

This fall she had recruited a new group of clients--the well-to-do parents of her teenage students. The parents wanted to learn English, but they were embarrassed to seek out lessons on their own. They would linger in the corner of the classroom after dropping off their teens, fidgeting with their pagers until Anya offered them a seat at the table. Fathers sat twisting and pulling at their beards, sounding out the soft sounds of “aye” and “wee” in gruff voices. They mumbled, moving their mouths as little as possible, as if speaking English loudly and clearly was an affront to their way of life. Sometimes mothers would come, too, running their hands nervously up and down their stockings under the desk.

The parents, unlike the kids, were always embarrassed to admit when they did not know something. But more than that, the parents were ashamed to be predicting a time when they might need English to stay afloat in business, a time they all felt coming in some unconscious way.

Anya set out to make a friend out of Zlatko. In September, she convinced Kiril to host Zlatko for tea at their place, one Saturday afternoon when Kiril's mother was out shopping with her girlfriends. Zlatko arrived in paint-smeared blue jeans. She could not stop staring at them. She wanted a pair so bad. Blue jeans had to be imported, and they cost a fortune, even at the outdoor markets.

"Doesn't even have the decency to put on a clean pair of pants," Kiril muttered to her as she was hanging up Zlatko's jacket.

"Come on in," she said to their guest. He slipped on a pair of Kiril's slippers--many sizes too big for him--and shuffled into the kitchen. "Please, sit," she said. He sat and began tracing the floral patterns on the tablecloth.

"Beautiful handiwork on this," he said. "Did you embroider it?"

"Oh, no, I bought it. My mother did some of the lace work, though," she said.

"Well it's marvelous. I love these colors."

"So," said Kiril. "I am surprised you did not bring your wife to tea, Zlatko Petrovich."

"Please, call me Zlatko," he said, laughing. "In America we mostly use first names. The formal middle name is taking some getting used to."

Kiril nodded slowly. "Sit down," Anya said to him.

Zlatko said: "And to answer your question, I don't have a wife. I am gay."

"Gay?" Kiril asked. She focused on adding spoonfuls of sugar to the crystal bowl and avoided looking at them.

"Homosexual. I am only attracted to men."

“Yes, I know what it means,” said Kiril. She had never met a homosexual before. Though taken aback, she liked the casual way he revealed it. Perhaps in America this was quite normal. She had read James Baldwin in college and thought he was a fine writer.

Anya brought out the tea. Kiril poured their guest a cup first, not looking him in the eye.

“Should we speak English?” Zlatko said in English, looking at her. “I remember on the phone you said you’d like to practice.”

“Oh, Kiril doesn’t speak,” she said in Russian.

“No problem then,” Zlatko said. They were quiet for a moment, quiet enough to hear a bird chirping outside.

“Anya tells me you are an art professor,” Kiril said.

“Yes, I’m teaching at the Polygraphic Institute in Peter now. I just started last week.”

“And you are liking it well?”

“It’s awesome, the kids are awesome, they work so hard at their proj--”

“Why did you come to Russia?” Anya asked, unable to resist the question rising up inside her. “Sorry to interrupt.”

Zlatko laughed. “It’s a bit of a long story,” he said. He explained that he came from a Jewish family that left Russia just after the revolution. They first went to France then settled in the United States. He wanted to come back to explore his parents’ first home, to “see what all the fuss was about.” There was nothing the Soviet government could do to him now, he reasoned--he was an American citizen, so it would be a diplomatic nightmare. “But actually,” he said. “The people here are incredibly nice. It’s just all the other stuff that’s awful.”

Kiril stood up. “I’ll clear the plates,” he said, something he would never do if it was just the two of them.

After Zlatko had left, Kiril turned on the little TV in the kitchen. Anya started preparing dinner. During a commercial break, he said, “Anechka, I don’t like the thought of you spending time with that creepy guy. He just wants to get up your skirt.”

“He’s a homosexual, Kiril.”

“Oh, please. He’s just trying to manipulate you. I’m all for ‘artistic’ types, but this guy’s just a weirdo. You shouldn’t see him again.”

“Just leave me be,” Anya said. She sighed and kept stuffing the red peppers. He turned up the volume on the TV.

The next week, Ivan had a reporting assignment in Moscow. The couple met at *Shokoladnitsa*, the Chocolate Cafe. Anya wanted to try the new drink *mocha*, which she had heard was popular in America. Sometimes, after her tutoring sessions, Anya would linger in the high school computer lab with her friend Sasha from work. They stayed at Moscow Central after hours, dialing up the search engine to track fashion trends overseas. The girlfriends were obsessed with American coffee house culture and the sensational new cafe *Starbucks*. Anya knew just a few people who drank coffee. She herself found it too bitter, but the sweet, chocolatey mocha sounded like it would be more to her liking. She badly wanted to like coffee and to drink it at professional meetings. She saw this a lot in the movies she and Ksyusha

sometimes watched on the weekends, the cardboard box with a screw-top labeled “Cup ‘a Joe.” Strange and exotic.

It was a cool, bright day in early October. Anya and Ivan both wore black leather jackets. Anya was radiant in pale lipstick, her blonde curls brighter than usual, bleached from the summer. Ivan wore a red wool scarf which he was constantly adjusting and fidgeting with. It brought out the red in his eyes, bloodshot from never getting enough sleep.

After they ordered their drinks, Ivan watched Anya sip hers. He ran his hands along her hair and said, “Are we really doing this? I mean, actually, actually--”

“Well, comrade, I am pregnant with your baby. So yes.”

“I’m sorry, Anechka. You’re not hurt I said that, are you? I didn’t mean it like that.”

She laughed her favorite charming laugh, the one that made the baristas peer out from behind the register to watch her. The laugh everyone loved so much. Ivan grinned and leaned in closer. “It’s okay, I’m not hurt,” she said.

“So I’ve been thinking about what we should do when the baby comes,” he said.

“Me too. You go first,” said Anya.

“Well, as soon as we get our divorces, I can move here. I’m thinking, I’m here so much reporting on Kremlin stuff, anyway, it would be easy to convince my boss to transfer me to the Moscow office.”

“We will live with Mama, of course. And she’ll help with the baby once I go back to work. she already said she’d do that whenever my first one comes,” she said.

“Have you told her yet?” he asked. No, Anya hadn’t told her mother. She feared Mama, who was always so practical. She would misunderstand her desires as selfish and naive. Which maybe they were, a little bit, but Anya had never been selfish, and she deserved to be now.

“No. But I will. How’s your drink?”

Ivan sipped his mocha and winced. He pursed his lips in disgust.

“It’s nice, a bit different than I’m used to, you know. A little--”

“Bitter?”

“Yes!” she said. They laughed together, not Anya’s cunning laugh but a real one. She hated it, too, but she didn’t want to seem close-minded for disliking the taste. “They just spoiled some good hot cocoa! And what’s up with this weird sugary foam at the top?”

“You have to promise to tell everyone we loved it,” he said, laughing even harder. She watched the dimples come to life in his face and wished they were at home, at their mythic future home where no one could bother them.

“Deal,” she said. “No one has to know.” Their laughter faded into sighing. They were quiet for a while, stirring their coffee.

“So,” Ivan said. “Can I help with anything?”

“No, not right now, I don’t think. I just have to tell Kiril tonight.”

“I wish I could come with you, baby,” he said. “I have to cover this stupid PR event the city commissioner is holding at town hall.”

“It’s okay. I think it’s best if I tell him myself,” she said. Despite Ivan’s sensitivity, he probably wasn’t beyond machismo. A face-off between the two men in her life seemed like the worst possible situation for Anya right now. This was *her* baby and *her* decision.

“You just call me if you need me,” he said. They chatted a while longer until Ivan had to leave for his next interview. She walked him to the metro station and kissed him goodbye.

Anya could see it all happening. She was there, awake, with him, with that red scarf, but it also felt like she was somewhere far away in a dream, and soon she would wake up from it. They were deciding the details--where they'd live, where the child would attend school--why, then, did the future feel so much like a daydream, like a voice floating without a body?

As she walked home, it began to sleet. She wasn't dressed for the weather, and her shoes soaked through at the heels. She imagined herself with an infant, Ivan holding an umbrella over them both. She imagined returning to a warm, glowing apartment where they could all sit together, drinking cranberry tea. She imagined finally having enough milk in the fridge--adults were not allowed milk rations unless they could show a photo ID of a child under age five who lived with them. She would feed the baby, and they could talk about anything they chose. They could speak freely to each other the whole night long, free to think and act as they pleased, free to chat about anything at all. That's why she loved American movies--all the characters seemed so free to pick and choose what they wanted from life. She wanted that kind of freedom, too. Maybe this baby could bring it to her.

Anya walked into their bedroom to find Kiril bent over at his desk, balancing their family checkbook with great meditative passion. The full cup of tea beside him was cold, and he had

turned off the digital clock face. He said it distracted him from his work. Kiril hadn't noticed her come in, so she put her hand on his shoulder.

"Anya, hi." He set down his pen. "Your mom called earlier. We had a great long talk. She says they're getting a new shipment of asparagus at the grocery in her complex tomorrow, and she wants you to come in the morning."

"Alright. I'll call her back."

"Well, great. Let me just finish this up--let's chat over dinner?"

"Can't we talk now?" she asked. He looked down at the ledger, stopping himself from making another adjustment to the numbers. He turned off the green desk lamp.

"Okay, sure, Anya, what is it?" She looked at him as if for the first time--a strange, backwards *deja vu*. He was a good man. It wasn't his fault she didn't want him, that she wanted something beyond what he could give her.

"Can I sit in your lap?" This would be the last time. Her way of saying goodbye to their friendship.

"Okay." She climbed into his wide lap and lay her head against his thick, muscular neck. His body was enormous compared to hers. She looked down at his clownish, gray sweatpants and bare feet. He was a young man, a strong man, a devoted husband. He would find somebody else. She had planned to act clinical--she'd practiced her cold smile in the dark reflective window of the metro on her way home. But as she sank into Kiril's body, she felt weak and wanted his comfort. She wanted him to tell her everything was alright, that she was still good, that she had always been good.

"I'm just feeling a little lonely," she said.

“I’m sorry,” Kiril said reflexively, starting to rub her back in circles. Kiril was just two years older than her, but he seemed so much more stable, content with the patterns of life Anya found numbing and meaningless. He wanted an average, quiet life. She wanted the seams of the day to break open. He said: “You know how I am. I get so lost in my work stress, and you just have to pull me out of that.”

She regretted saying anything. She didn’t want this conversation to turn into the same one they always had, fighting quietly together while her mother-in-law watched TV in the kitchen. The fights had become their main way of bonding--almost playful, but still closer to work. It was the same script each time: Anya asked for more attention. Kiril needed more space. He would assure her that it wasn’t her fault. But it was.

“Kiril,” she said, climbing out of his lap to sit on the floor. “I’m pregnant.”

“What? But I thought you wanted--I thought you were on the pill?”

“I was, yeah, I guess I just wasn’t keeping track. I must have forgotten a few days.” She was very careful with her birth control, but she had stopped taking it to get pregnant with Ivan. Since then, she hadn’t had sex with Kiril. She thought he would notice, but he hadn’t said anything. This year he hadn’t even seemed interested.

“Well, thank the Lord!” Kiril said. “God must have intervened! We’re having a baby!” He took both her hands in one of his. “Thank the Lord, we’re having a baby.”

Before she could resist, Kiril picked her up and took her into his lap again. He held her tight to his chest, so that Anya couldn’t move, and she was unsure if she wanted to. She knew it was wrong, but she didn’t tell him the rest of the secret. She wanted to pretend what Kiril believed: that everything was going to be alright.

The next Sunday, Kiril insisted the couple go to church together, something they never did outside of Christmas and Easter. Anya saw churchgoing as deeply solitary and serious. She liked to go alone, in the evening, and stay silent the whole ride home to the metro. During the week, she said her prayers every night to the Orthodox icons on her bookshelf. Kiril treated church as a social outing declared by God. He sang and chanted whenever possible, as loudly as possible. He liked to discuss the sermon and the parishioners' gossip at dinner for the entire week--though he was quiet, Kiril loved to get the weekly gossip update from the old ladies who sat at the back of the cathedral, judging younger women for their revealing clothing. Soon into their marriage they had realized the incompatibility and decided to worship separately. But this time Anya owed it to him. Kiril wanted to celebrate, to thank God for their new life. She still had not told him the baby was Ivan's. She hadn't found a good moment amidst all the happiness.

The onion-domed church was dwarfed by the gleaming, high-rise office buildings around it. The cathedral seemed like a relic from a forgotten time, a time she wished she knew more about, before the Soviet Union, before politics, before citizenship, when Russia was one endless forest of birches.

As she walked in, Anya put on a silk scarf to cover her head in the traditional way. She couldn't see the choir in the balcony, but she could hear it from all sides, soft and angelic. The congregants were praying quietly to the many Orthodox icons covering the walls--the miniature faces of the saints wreathed in tiny gold halos. A priest walked around the church, swinging his censer and chanting in Church Slavonic. Kiril kept kissing her hands, over and over, until he left

her to pray in front of an icon of the Virgin Mary. She just stood there with her eyes closed, swaying. She walked up to the altar to light a candle and found Kiril had arrived there first.

“A candle for the baby,” he said, knitting his hands together and pointing them up towards the domed ceiling. “Thanks be to God.”

Even before the sermon began, she knew she had to tell him everything. He deserved the truth, and so did her child. It wasn’t good to live with all this stress. Surely something terrible would come of it.

On the walk home, she explained the truth to Kiril--that she was carrying Ivan’s baby, and she would be getting a divorce as soon as the child was born. She said (in the kindest way possible, she thought) that they both deserved more than each other. Kiril was silent as always, staring straight ahead.

After a long time he said, “Anya, you are my wife. And you are pregnant. So that is my child.”

She sighed.

He said, “That’s how God intended it. That’s how the world is set up. When I married you, I knew this.”

“You’re not the father, Kiril. You’re not.”

“How could you say that, Anya. I thought you were a Christian woman. Clearly you still have so much to learn. But that’s why He gave us this child.”

She was getting lost in his rhetoric. Anya was religious, but how could she know what God wanted? She only knew what she herself wanted, which was to leave this false, awkward

relationship behind. Maybe Kiril was right, maybe she didn't know anything about anything at all.

"I think I'm going to stay with my mom for a little while," she said. They were approaching their apartment block.

"Good girl," said Kiril. "It will give you some time to let your passions settle."

Anya had been bracing herself for a fight, for tears and screaming, but this silent denial was so much worse. "I'll let you know how it goes," was all she could think to say in response.

Anya called her mother to say she'd be arriving in the evening--she was coming over for dinner, and can I stay with you for a while, like old times, Mama?

As she crossed Moscow on the metro, Anya felt like a tourist in her own city. She was carrying her red cloth overnight bag, the same one she took on her weekend trips to Saint Petersburg. She watched everything with big, blank eyes, as if she hadn't been passing these same train stops every day since the very first day of life. Crammed into the corner of the train car by the rush hour crowd, she watched the other women commuters. They all looked so much like her--the same straight, glossy hair, pale skin, lipstick, simple jewelry, trench coats cinched at the waist. Broad, clean, emotionless faces. They all had that same empty look of public transit, trying hard to look at nothing. She wanted to shake these women by the shoulders, shake them into feeling, ask them questions: Do you have a husband? Children? Do you have a job and an apartment? A mother and a mother-in-law? How do you manage to have all of these things at once--what is your secret, miss?

She got off at *Yugo-Zapadnaya* station, the southeastern corner of the city, and caught a minibus taxi. She sat in the back of the van between two men in a loud argument over their predictions of the weekend's soccer game. The teenage girl in the front passenger seat was blaring Russian punk music from her Walkman, trying to tune out the driver's eager descriptions of a woman who had just moved into his apartment complex. So you guys, he yelled to the passengers, what do you think I should do? I never see her with a boyfriend?

Anya passed her 50-ruble note up through the dozens of passengers until it reached the driver. The front seat girl retrieved Anya's change from the cupholder, passing the coins back through the rows of seats. Anya could see her mom's place coming up on the left. She cranked down a window, reached through it, and rapped her knuckles on the metal door of the van.

"Stop!" she yelled. The driver pulled over at the edge of the courtyard, just like every other minibus driver had done for the eighteen years that Anya lived here. She felt a wonderful rush of homecoming. She climbed out, and an old man climbed in, taking her place.

Anya loved the cold evening light of the courtyard. Groups of elderly women sat gossiping on the benches, bundled in sweaters and kerchiefs, watching their grandchildren and great-grandchildren play soccer. Stray dogs lounged in the shade by the dumpsters, and some were curled up at the feet of the old ladies, licking the hands of the children whenever they ran back to their *babushki* for a sip of water. Anya saw her own mother from a distance, stepping out onto the balcony to throw chicken bones down to the stray dogs in the courtyard below. She must be cooking soup.

It seemed that her mother did everything in one motion--boiled water for tea, unfolded the stiff cot, unpacked Anya's suitcase and threw all of her clothes in the tub to wash later.

"Sit," Mama said, pointing to the kitchen. Anya sat alone, stirring sugar into her tea while her mother puttered around in the bedroom. Anya could hear her pushing the towers of dusty books into one corner of the room and pulling the wooden screen divider from its place in the closet. Anya's father had died when she was a child, and now Mama lived alone. Mama did not seem lonely. She had many friends and was a ferocious gossip. Everyone in the neighborhood went to her for advice, and their need for advice was constant. Still, Anya always wondered.

Finally Mama sat down, spicing the soup on the stove from her seat at the kitchen table.

"So," Mama said. "What did you do?"

"I'm pregnant."

"Well, it's about time," said Mama.

"It's not Kiril's baby."

Stirring the pot with her left hand and placing the other on Anya's arm, Mama said, "Well, he doesn't need to know that, Anechka."

"I already told him. Earlier today."

Mama sucked her teeth. "Now why would you do that?"

"It's okay, Mama. It doesn't matter. It'll all work out as soon as the baby's born. You remember Ivan Constantinovich, he works with Tatiana at the newspaper? Remember she brought him and his wife to the New Years party?"

"Okay, okay, enough," Mama poured Anya tea into a chipped cup. It was the same floral-pattern mug Anya used when she was sick with the flu last year. Mama wouldn't let her

‘contaminate’ the other cups; instead she washed it in bleach and boiling water after every cup of tea while Anya slept in the other room watching soap operas. “You need to go make up with your husband. Did he kick you out?”

“No, I left on my own. But I have a plan--you’re not listening to me.”

“Well, what are you doing here, then? You need to go home and make peace with him.”

“I can’t go back now, you don’t understand.” Mama sighed slowly and turned off the stove. The streetlights came on outside, and their yellow light spread through the kitchen. Everything was quiet in the world except for the vulgar slush of thick soup being poured into bowls. Anya’s secret was floating far away from her, out the window, into the city.

“Fine,” Mama said. “How many months are you?”

“Almost three.”

“Okay. Eat.” She slid the borscht across the table to Anya. “You’d better eat up all that bread, I waited a long time in line for it. And you’re eating for two.”

“I know, Mama.”

“Tomorrow after work we’re going to the doctor. I bet you don’t even know about vitamins. It’s my fault, really.”

Anya put a scoop of cold sour cream into the soup and stirred it, turning it the most delicious shade of pink.

The next week she went again to Saint Petersburg, despite Mama’s advice. The leaves of the birches along the side of the road had turned yellow, and the breeze through the train window

was frosty, menacing. In a few short weeks, summer had ended completely. She and Ivan stayed the night together at his sister's apartment. Without the summer sun coming in through the window, the place felt cramped and lonesome. Larissa was on a university field trip. Anya and Ivan tried to ignore her stained bath mat, her crusty baking pans--all the evidence that this was not their home. It made Anya feel childish, like a teenager sneaking out from her mother's house past curfew. She was irrationally angry at Larissa for her grime, scaring herself with the heat of her own feeling. She wished Ivan could hurry up and leave his wife. He begged her for physical intimacy, but all her desire had been eclipsed by the pregnancy. Her body didn't feel the way it used to. Nothing felt the way it used to. She couldn't say why.

They sat on the dirty little futon couch, staring at each other, unsure what to say or do. Ivan pulled out a newspaper. She felt inadequate--they weren't able to entertain each other the way they used to.

Their sleep was fitful, disjointed, their bodies tossing and turning in tides of worry they could not articulate. They woke several times through the night staring at each other in fear. When Anya shut her eyes, images rolled into her mind--images of a tiny, gray baby born too soon, of babies born without eyes, or with stunted legs, or hooked up to small ventilators. Ivan's new father face contorted with worry, no longer handsome, having aged decades overnight in the maternity ward. She imagined herself getting enormous, stretched and puffy like one of those *hochipuri* pies that Georgian ladies sell in the metro station. Once she started showing, would Ivan still want her? He still had not left his wife. Anya hadn't doubted his promises before, but now it seemed like he was stalling. It was only a matter of months. They needed to get ready for the baby.

All this time Ivan was sleeping beside her, shifting and adjusting his body: solid, constant, filled with his own hopes and expectations, fears and doubts. If only Anya knew exactly what those were.

In the morning when she woke up, Ivan was gone. She assumed he had stepped out to buy a pack of cigarettes. It was too early to worry, so she just dozed, feeling the sweetness of the sun coming in through the window onto her face, and the warm covers, and the wonderful feeling of stretching herself across the entire empty bed and sleeping.

She woke again. Anya could see the kitchen from her place in bed. She could see the steam rising from the kettle--he was boiling water for his morning tea.

He came to sit at the foot of her bed, taking Anya's feet in his lap and caressing them. "I'm making varenyiki. With fresh cherries."

"Where did you find fresh cherries?" she asked. It was far too late in the season.

"The Sennoy market. I went while you were sleeping. Some guy just brought in a shipment from Georgia." He grinned. Cherry *varenyiki* were one of Anya's favorite foods. She loved the way Mama made them, so light and sweet, on winter mornings. Sennoy Market was on Moskovsky Prospect, three train stops away. She was touched, thinking about him shuttling across the city underground, and wondered why he had gone through the effort.

"Wow," she said. "Amazing."

Each time Ivan was good like this, she went through a dizzying spiral of positive thoughts. This is the sun my child will feel on their back winter mornings as he wakes up. These are the foods my child will cherish. This is the love my child will feel from her father. The future

lay out like a map in front of Anya, with all the landmarks relating to Ivan or the baby, no longer just to her. With Kiril, she had never seen such a map in her mind. Now she saw it--the baby's first steps, first day of school, Ivan's family gatherings, his office parties, his journalism awards. It made her jealous, thinking how much her life was expanding to fit them into it. Then she remembered that she had chosen this child herself, and she had a renewed sense of ownership over the situation. It was her baby. She was its mother. No one could compete with that.

Ivan led her to the kitchen, where they ate around Larissa's miniature kitchen table in silence. He picked at his food, turning the sweet dumplings around and around in their sauce. She ate like a pig--she was starving--and he watched her. He stroked her cheeks full of half-chewed food, running his hands over the moving shapes. He ran his fingertips along the blonde baby hairs that grew between her eyebrows and on her upper lip. All the time he looked devastated. He held his chin in his hands, twirling and un-twirling the same few hairs in his beard. His eyes were big and sad, like a little boy's.

When Anya was done, he cleared the plates away. "I've been good to you, haven't I, Anechka?" he said.

"Yes." She gave him a weak smile and got up from the table. He came to stand behind her, resting his fingertips on the subtle belly protruding from under her T-shirt. She'd owned the shirt since she was a teenager, and it was too small on her. The pregnancy pulled the fabric upwards to reveal a little naked strip of skin above her waistband. Ivan ran his hands across it, holding her against him.

"Don't go," he said into her shoulder.

Anya laughed. “I’m not going anywhere. But if we keep on this way, I’m going to miss my train.”

“I’ll take you to the station,” he said.

On the train ride home, she replayed the scenes of that morning in her mind. Maybe it was just a difficult, confusing moment in a difficult, confusing pregnancy. Or it might have been something much deeper, a rift emerging between Anya and Ivan that she had never seen before, or never thought to see. Maybe it had just emerged, this rift, and maybe she could close it again. She could bring their relationship back to the way it had been before the pregnancy, to the way she wanted it to be.

Anya walked into the apartment to find her mother adjusting the antenna on the television. The scratchy voice of the news anchor was declaring “instability in East Germany.” Through the stripes of static, she could see sweat gathering on his face and collar. Anya wondered if Ivan would be called in to the office late tonight to work the copy-editing shift for this story. She wondered if Kiril was home alone, watching the same channel, waiting for her return. She didn’t want to see the news, whatever it was.

“Hi, Mama,” Anya said. Mama turned around from the TV, satisfied with her adjustments, and sat down on their yellow corduroy loveseat. She muted the television. Anya stood in the doorway watching the TV images flicker by--thousands of young west Germans gathered in protest at the Berlin Wall, some sitting on top and dangling their legs over into the

communist bloc. East German border guards, young and blonde like the protestors, staring up at the rows of dangling sneakers. The anchor speaking fast into his microphone.

“Anechka, come sit. You look pale. Have you eaten? Oh and I forgot to tell you. Some man left a message on the machine in English. I think it might be one of your students, but he sounded very old.” Anya knew it was Zlatko. They had been meeting every couple of weeks to chat in English. She liked to feel that she was growing professionally. The last time they’d met up, she had told Zlatko to call her at her mom's place because she and Kirill were taking some time apart.

“That’s fine, I’ll check it later,” she said.

“You sound worn out. You need to be eating, baby, we talked about this. No dieting. All those diets are bullshit, anyway, just a way to make women ashamed of ourselves. You have nothing to be ashamed of.”

Anya dropped her bags and sat down beside her mother. “I’m fine, Mama. Just tired.”

“I’ll make tea.”

“Please, no,” Anya said. She leaned over to put her head on Mama’s shoulder. Mama usually shied away from touch, but this time she took Anya under her arm and began stroking her hair.

“What happened, Anechka?”

“Things are changing between me and Ivan.” Anya started to cry. “It’s like we don’t know each other anymore. I don’t know. Maybe I’m misreading the signs.”

Mama sighed and kissed Anya’s forehead. “Did you have a fight?”

“No, that’s the problem. It’s just like. I don’t know. This morning he went across the city to get fresh cherries, but then he wouldn’t even talk to me at breakfast. And he was looking at me in this super sad way, basically tearing up, just looking at me.”

“Hmmm.”

“And he still hasn’t told Ksyusha. It’s like, I told Kiril a month ago, and what has he done?” She started a new round of crying. None of it was her fault--Ivan should be the one crying!

Mama held her, stroking her hair, saying the little shushing sounds she used sometimes to calm the neighbor’s baby. Anya felt her mother’s enormous, strong, womanly body against hers, hardened and strengthened by years of being alone. She was always full of gossip, quick to judge, but she never offered any information about herself. They didn’t speak about the past. Anya wondered what kinds of decisions her mother had to make when she was young. It felt like an amazing gulf of time had gone by in the generation between them.

Mama said, “I think you should go back to Kiril. He’s always treated you right.”

“No,” Anya said, “I can’t,” and she fell asleep in her mother’s arms just like she was a child.

Two days later Anya saw it in the newspapers, the very thing she had expected--the Berlin Wall was coming down. She read the story on the blue soup-stained tablecloth where she had drank her morning tea all her life: “The borders are open at Checkpoint Charlie. East

Germans may enter West Germany at will. Those who plan to travel abroad to the West will be issued exit visas immediately.” Mama looked over at her, reading her expression.

Mama said, “I know, I thought of you when I saw that article. But it’s all theater, baby. They’ll close the borders in a day or two.” She went into the bathroom and closed the door. Anya could hear her spitting toothpaste into the sink.

She put down the newspaper and stepped onto the balcony with her tea. As she exhaled, her breath crystallized over the scene she knew so well--the snowy courtyard, the stray dogs, the playgrounds, the little old ladies sitting on benches, the young people hailing minibus taxis at the corner. Anya looked up at the blue sky above the apartment complex. It was all so ordinary. What had she been expecting? She had wanted the sky to split open and the two halves of it to merge, east meeting west, here becoming there.

III. Winter

Anya didn't see Ivan for two weeks. She carried on with her English lessons as usual. Her tongue turned and turned over the strange words in her mouth, the wonderful new sounds of English, the "w" and "th" sounds that didn't exist in her everyday life. English was an escape for her. She could revel in the language. She wanted to pass this sense of linguistic wonder on to her students--sometimes they got it, and they would bloom with confidence and joy when pronouncing the new words. Most of the time they didn't.

As usual she went home during her lunch break to talk to Ivan on the phone. The past three weekdays he had slept through their lunch hour, exhausted from long night shifts at the paper. Today was his first day back on the nine-to-five. She rushed back to her mom's at noon, her heels clacking against the icy stones in the courtyard, so fast that it sent the old ladies on the benches into a flurry of tongue-clucking and a new round of gossip. "I heard she's having an affair," they whispered. "I heard she's trying to marry the other guy. And so what will happen to her *propiska*? She'll be sent to Siberia, imagine. Nice girl."

Anya clip-clopped into her apartment, poured herself a cup of tea, and waited at the desk she shared with her mother. The phone rang.

"Hello?" Anya sing-songed. She scolded herself for it--this wasn't a time to seem childish. She needed to seem coy, sexy, unaware of the strangeness that had passed between them last week.

"Hello, Anya." A formal voice--the kind he might use in a phone interview with a minor Party official.

“So good to hear your voice. How are things, sweetheart?”

“Not bad. There’s a lot going on in Berlin, as I’m sure you’ve heard. We’re just trying to stay abreast of it all.” Now she did feel like a minor Party official. When had Ivan ever used a term like “stay abreast” in her presence?

“Sounds very busy,” she said. “So I have that meeting with Olga Petrovna this afternoon to discuss maternity leave.”

“Listen, Anya. I don’t have long, but there’s something I’d like to tell you.”

“Okay, shoot,” she said. She cursed herself again for the childish expression, “shoot.” If only she’d known he would talk to her in this strange, formal way, she would have prepared more. She thought he would be tender and vulnerable over the phone, the same way he was in Saint Petersburg last time.

“I’ve set up an account for us at Gosbank in Moscow,” he said, and paused. A kettle was whistling in the background, then it stopped.

“You’re at home?” she asked.

“There’s almost a hundred thousand roubles in there for the baby.”

“Wow,” she said. Ivan was silent for a few breaths, and she could hear all the quiet sounds in the background. She heard a woman’s voice saying, “Go on, now.”

He cleared his throat. “I can’t go through with it. I’ve done a lot of thinking, and--there are too many risks. Things are changing, who knows what this idiot Gorbachev will do next, people are fleeing the country. There’s a lot that isn’t being reported in the papers.”

“I don’t understand,” she said.

“I know,” he said. And then the woman’s voice again, saying his name: “Ivan, go on, now.”

He said: “I just think--you have Kiril, and he wants to be the father to this baby. And he loves you. I think you should go back to him, have your family, and just forget this whole thing. Who knows if, in two or three years, the *propiski* will even matter anymore? We might be doing it all for nothing.”

“What do you mean, doing it all for nothing? We’re doing this to be together.”

“Oh, come on, be honest with yourself. We’re not doing this for each other. We’re doing this for ourselves. This baby you’re having--it’s not because we want to be a family. I see that now. What we have is a great affair, it’s fun, we have a great time. But we can’t keep pretending it’s anything more than that.”

“Oh, my God,” she said.

The woman’s voice in the background: “Tell her about the money.

“Ksyusha and I put enough in the account to cover everything--medical expenses, everything. It’s not our fault, Anya. We just made a mistake, is all. Now we have a chance to fix it.” Ivan said.

“No--it’s not ‘enough to cover everything.’ I am pregnant with *your* child, I’m about to go through *childbirth*, and you’re too much of a coward to admit that you love me.”

“I don’t love you,” he said.

“You liar.”

“I knew you wouldn’t take it well. I’ve said all I have to say. My advice to you, go back to your husband. I’m going back to my wife. Goodbye, Anya.”

The phone clicked off.

Anya sat there for hours, counting the corduroy seams on the yellow couch in the living room. Counting them over and over again, losing track in the middle, starting from the beginning. She called in sick to work. Her boss was furious at the short notice, but Anya couldn't get herself to feel guilty. Soon Mama would be coming home from her shift at the *Kopeika* factory office. She imagined her mother with a perfectly sharpened pencil, drawing with straight, unwavering lines the particulars of every part inside the car, drawing them over and over again, so sure about each mark she made on the paper. Anya wanted to be like that. She wanted to be sure about something for once.

The next day Anya came home again at lunch time, walking through the icy courtyard past the same *babushki*, and dialed Ivan's office number.

"Hello, this is Izvestia Saint Petersburg, Ivan Contaninovich speaking."

"Ivan, it's me."

"Sorry, Anya, I can't talk now."

"I want to pay you a visit. If you're going to break things off, I deserve a proper goodbye, in person. I'm taking the night train tomorrow. Pick me up from the central station at 8 a.m."

"No, I can't do that. I've said all I have to say."

"I will keep calling you until you have more to say. I deserve more than this. Your *son* deserves more than this."

"I'm sorry, Anya, but I'm going to ask you not to contact me again. It's for the best."

“I learned the gender today at the doctor’s. It’s a boy. A healthy baby boy. Don’t you want to see the ultrasound pictures they gave me?”

“Don’t contact me anymore.”

“I will keep calling you until you accept that this is your son. If not for me, then for him. He deserves to know his father.”

“Kiril is his father.”

“I’ll see you Saturday morning,” she said.

“No, Anya, you won’t. Goodbye.” The phone clicked off.

She had her egg salad sandwich with tea, staring at the yellow couch. Twenty minutes later, she called Ivan again. There was a woman’s high-pitched monotone voice on the other end of the line.

“Hello, this Izvestia Saint Petersburg, Raisa speaking.”

“I’m calling for Ivan Constantinovich.”

“He’s not in today,” said Raisa.

“I think he is--I just spoke to him!”

“He’s not in today. I’m taking his calls. Can I leave a message?”

“Tell that dirtbag that he’s a coward, running away from his son like this. And you can tell everyone in the office that Ivan agreed to have a baby with his mistress and at the last moment was too much of a pansy to go through with it or even give her a proper goodbye. And you can tell Ivan’s wife that she is married to--”

“Alright, miss, I’ll give him the message.”

All Anya wanted to do was try and talk some sense into the man. He was just overwhelmed, she thought, and if they could just talk about it, he would come around. She tried calling him again and again that week, and each time, Raisa answered. It was like he had suddenly vanished. But Anya knew he was probably just there in his office, clacking out the news on his electric typewriter. And she was here, pregnant and alone.

After nearly two years of dating, Anya had underestimated the frailty of her connection with Ivan. She didn’t have a mailing address for him, or even a home telephone number. She could only reach him at his *Izvestia* office. For all their big talk of moving in together, she couldn’t remember where he lived with Ksyusha, having only visited it once. The one place she knew that was theirs wasn’t even their own. It was his sister Larissa’s apartment by the Polygraphic Institute, and Anya did not have the home telephone number for her, either. But maybe she could reach Larissa at the university. She dialed the operator, who put her through to the college.

When the secretary answered, Anya said, “Can you put me through to Larissa Constantinovich, please.”

“Sorry, there is no one here by that name.”

“She’s a graduate student in the Art History department, and a teaching assistant. Last semester she taught Foundations of Islamic Art.” Anya remembered this from the books and drawings piled up in Larissa’s bedroom, which she had inspected while Ivan was asleep. They

were amazing--the electrifying blue of the geometric tiles, the strange illuminated Persian miniatures. It had made her wish she could go back to university again.

“Miss Constantinovich is no longer enrolled in our program,” said the secretary.

“Do you know how I might be able to contact her?” asked Anya. “I’m one of her former students.”

“No, we don’t give out contact information for our students.”

“Please?” she asked. “She’s a dear friend.”

“You can leave your name with me, and if she comes back, I’ll let her know.”

“Anya Nikolaevna Shostik.”

“Alright, I have it written here, I’ll call you back if I see her,”

“That’s fine, thank you.” Anya hung up the phone. There was no way to find Ivan. Either she had to keep calling him at the office, or he’d have to come to her.

But no, there had to be someone. She took her addressbook out from her purse and spread it out on the desk, pushing aside Mama’s color-coded drawing of a spark plug. There was no one with any link to Ivan. The friend who had introduced Anya to Ivan moved to Ukraine last year--her husband had been hired to oversee an aluminum mine. She didn’t have numbers for any of Ivan’s family. They had been trying to keep their affair private.

She went through her address book again, skimming over every old classmate and third-cousin. Then she saw Zlatko’s name. Of course. She had forgotten that Zlatko was Artist-in-Residence at the same Polygraphic Institute that Larissa attended, or used to attend. Probably Zlatko had crossed paths with Larissa at some point, and he might know, even just through hearsay, what had happened to her. He might be able to put Anya in touch with someone

else at the Institute, maybe one of Larissa's friends. It was the only lead she had. She had been meaning to call him back anyway and forgotten.

Anya called Zlatko at his home phone number in Saint Petersburg. Of course he didn't pick up--it was the middle of the day--so she left a message in English: "Hello Zlatko, this is Anya. Thank you very much for calling the other day. I am sorry I have not gotten a chance to call back. It has been very busy here. Call me back please at your convenience. I was hoping to chat with you, and also thinking if you could be able to put me in touch with a colleague at the Polygraphic Institute, Larissa Constantinova Levsky. She is a student in art history department and an old friend. Okay, talk to you soon. Bye-bye."

When Anya got home that evening, there was a blinking red light on the answering machine. She played the message: "Anya, hello! I don't know this person Larissa, but I'll ask around. There are many art history students every year and I don't have much contact with them, but I'll let you know if I find her. Feel free to come visit if you're in town. Nice to hear from you again. Sorry I can't do more." Anya sat down at the kitchen table and drank her tea, watching the birches sway outside through the window.

On Friday night Anya went to Saint Petersburg again, dressed in her leather jacket and new maternity acid-wash blue jeans. The pants made her feel hip, young, carefree, like she imagined an American would feel. The next morning as she arrived in 'Peter she walked bleary-eyed down the platform, scanning the crowd for Ivan. Scanning the station for Ivan.

Scanning the front steps of the station for him, in case he was running late. Of course he wasn't there--it was just empty hope. Anya pushed past the rows of commuters in their long fur coats and headed to the bus stop. She didn't cry. She was going to find that man and force him to see what he had lost--the hippest, sharpest, best-dressed, most beautiful woman in the world, and their future together.

It was all horribly familiar. The courtyard in front of Larissa's apartment block, with the bundled old ladies gossiping on the benches, children playing in their bright colored hats and mittens, a man selling fresh fish out of the trunk of a beat-up old car. He had probably bought it early this morning from the wholesale shops to resell it for a higher price in the courtyard. Fresh fish was scarce in the shops, especially on Saturdays. Anya had stood in long lines many times with Ivan, waiting for flounder to make *ukha* with. She missed that, even that. Waiting.

Anya climbed the stairs up to Larissa's apartment and banged on the door. She knocked and knocked and rang the doorbell. Her hands were shaking. No answer. She knocked harder.

A lady peeked out of the apartment next door. A toddler was clinging to her leg, staring up at Anya with big dark eyes.

"What's the problem, miss?" the neighbor asked.

"I'm looking for the girl that lives here. Larissa."

"Didn't you hear?" the neighbor said, then she lowered her voice. "That girl left for France. She got her way into a student visa--she bought the consular some *boxes of chocolates*. Anyway she's gone. I saw her in the elevator with all her suitcases."

Anya sighed.

“Well that’s just how it goes, girl, people are trickling out. She’s not the only one.” The neighbor clucked her tongue. “You want some tea?”

“No, thank you, I better get going,” Anya said. “You’re sure she left?”

“Sorry, girl.” The neighbor led the child back inside and closed the door.

Anya confirmed it with the *babushki* in the courtyard--Larissa had bribed her way out. She was gone to France. “And you’re the girl who was sleeping with her brother, aren’t you?” they said in a flurry of questions. “Well, don’t look so shocked, girl, we all know what’s going on. Is that his baby, too? Ooh-ooh are you in trouble girl. We’ll pray for you. Here, take these pastries, we have plenty more where that came from, you’re so thin. Are you sure that little leather thing is suitable for this weather?” Anya took the poppy-seed pastries wrapped in wax paper they offered from their purses. She thanked the ladies and left them to their chatter. Anya sat on a bench on the other side of the courtyard, where they couldn’t see her, and ate the snacks. She was starving, always starving these days. She missed Ivan. Anya knew he was somewhere in this city, somewhere close enough to touch. Maybe she could go to his office on Monday, but that would mean missing two days of her own job, and for what? Probably his secretary Raisa would turn her away at the door.

She didn’t even know where he lived--how could she have been so stupid. She had trusted him blindly, like a child, and trusted him to follow through on every promise. She couldn’t face Mama, or Kiril, or even herself. And now she had nothing to do but sulk while she waited for the next train back to Moscow. She decided to call Zlatko and see if she could pay

him a visit, if only for the novelty of hanging out with an American. It would take her mind off Ivan.

Zlatko lived in a loft space off Nevsky Prospect, paid for by the university. His apartment was enormous, like a museum. Every object was framed by lots of empty space--the sketches on the shining clean kitchen counter, the red ashtray on the windowsill, the bright silver kettle sitting on the stove. Zlatko said the university sent a maid over to his place every week to straighten up, though he suspected she might be snooping through his things. She usually came on his days off, when he traveled to different parts of the Soviet Union. Zlatko's goal, he said, was to see "the whole damn union."

As they drank tea at his spotless kitchen table, another man came out of the bedroom in a yellow bathrobe. She caught sight of the curling silver hair on his chest before looking away out of modesty.

"Boris, honey, this is Anya," he said in Russian. "Anya, Boris."

"Pleasure to meet you," she said.

"Likewise," said Boris. "May I join you?"

They ordered in take-out food, something she had never done growing up. Zlatko called a Chinese restaurant on the phone, and a man from the restaurant brought food to them in a dozen little wax paper cartons. She had never seen anything like it.

“This is the kind of food Jews in New York eat on Christmas,” Zlatko said, laughing. He touched Boris’s chin and pulled the other man’s face toward his. “Maybe next year you’ll spend the holidays with me in New York.”

Boris smiled. “I’d like that,” he said in a sing-song.

Anya unwrapped the many delicious smelling parcels of colorful food. She didn’t understand this connection between Judaism and Chinese food--she didn’t know any Jews besides Zlatko--but she believed it. There was something magical about the intertwined traditions, something exotic. Before they began eating, Boris unwrapped a cookie folded in half from its plastic packaging and broke it to reveal a paper wedged inside. “You have been blessed with a talent, and soon you will get the recognition you deserve. Hm. Not bad, this one.”

“Don’t listen to him, Anya,” said Zlatko. “He’s biased.”

Boris chuckled. “I just opened a fortune cookie factory. It’s going to be a big trend soon--very western. It’s really catching on in ‘Peter, in some circles.”

“Isn’t that genius? A fortune cookie factory, here in Russia.” said Zlatko, looking at Boris. Who are these people, she wondered. The feeling of foreignness delighted her. It allowed her to forget all the stories that had stacked up to create this moment and to finally enjoy it. Something new.

“So, how is everything at the university?” she asked Zlatko.

“Same old, same old. Talented kids, but they’re too afraid to do anything original, as much as I try to talk them into it.” For some reason, Anya felt offended on their behalf. Surely the students were doing the best they could.

“Why do you say that?”

“It’s like they’re always afraid someone is watching. Which, I guess they might be.”

Zlatko threw his head back and laughed darkly. Boris shook his head, pursing his lips in fake disapproval. Zlatko continued: “I try to tell them that’s the whole point of art, to dismantle! You know what I mean. I’m trying to get them to *criticize*.” Anya did not know what he meant but pretended that she did, nodding vigorously. The homosexuals seemed so free, in a way she had never seen. She wanted to be like them. She wanted to finally choose the person she would like to be with and love him openly, without fear, without the constant threat of change. Kiril had tricked her into thinking their marriage would bring them freedom, but it had not. She was living in her hometown but stuck in an endlessly depressing partnership. Ivan had tricked her into thinking the baby would bring them freedom, but he had abandoned her at the last minute. Now she was less free than ever. She was in awe of these people, intoxicated by their liberty, and irritated at them. Why them? Why not her?

“So,” Zlatko said. “Who is this friend of yours, Larissa?”

“Well,” Anya said, trying to decide how much she should share. “Larissa, she will be the aunt of my son.”

“She is Kiril’s sister?” Zlatko asked, wielding his long wooden chopsticks perfectly to grab a slippery slice of mushroom out of its sauce. Anya watched him and tried to repeat his movements. To Boris, he said: “Kiril is Anya’s husband. A banker.” Boris smiled politely.

“Well, no, she is not,” she said.

“Ahhhh,” Zlatko said. “I see. Power to you, Anya Nikolaevna. You’re not as much of a square as I thought.” He laughed.

“A square? What do you mean?”

“Just joking around! It’s an American expression. I guess it doesn’t translate well into Russian.” Anya laughed.

“Ah, I don’t know what to do now,” she said. “It has all blown up in my face.”

“Ooh, do tell.” said Zlatko. “I love a good tragic love story.”

“Me, too, usually,” Anya said and giggled, relaxing into her chair.

“Don’t pressure the girl, Zlat,” said Boris. And to her: “He’s such a gossip, this guy. Don’t tell him anything you don’t want to.”

“It really is a good story.” she said. “May I speak English?” Boris nodded.

English made it easier to distance herself, to paint herself as the actor in a story of her own making--not just the victim of it, though that’s how it felt now. She tried as best she could to tell them everything in English. She started from the plot to divorce and keep her *propiska*, to the pregnancy and the breakup. Some sentences slipped into Russian. She was a remarkably good storyteller, and, on second thought, remarkably self-aware.

When she was done, Zlatko said, “Well damn. Hold on. I’ll be right back,” and got up to use the bathroom. Anya kicked herself for saying so much. It felt a bit like he had robbed her of her secret and walked away. But she was pregnant with the secret. She could not walk away.

Anya just needed something to happen! She couldn’t go back to her old life, even though she knew her old life would take her back. Kiril would patronize and guilt-trip her, but he would take her back. Mama would be overjoyed. The baby would grow up in Moscow. And there it was, the map in her mind, leading into the next two decades and into the rest of her life. It was a good life. They would all be okay.

Boris said: “Don’t pay him any mind. He’s probably just caught up in his own thoughts.”

“Oh, it’s okay, I’m not offended,” she said, but she was, a little bit.

“I’m sorry about the breakup,” he said.

“It’s okay.”

“You know,” he said, pushing aside his empty wax paper container. “I have an idea for you. Maybe a bit outlandish.”

“What is it?”

He lowered his voice. “You must have noticed that people are leaving,” he said.

“Yes. I know someone who just left for France.”

“Exactly. And your English seems quite good. There is a law in America that any baby born in their country is an American. Zlatko knows all about it. If you have the money to find your way out through Germany, it might be worth going to America, just to have the baby. That way, the child will always have the option of choosing which country to live in--America, France, Spain, Iceland--you can go anywhere in the world with a US passport.”

“Why Iceland?” she asked.

“It’s just an example. Anyway, it seems like perfect timing to me. And you already speak English. It would be easy.” She rested her chin on her hand and stared up at him.

Zlatko returned from the bathroom. His expression had changed into something more serious. He looked more the way Anya expected someone his age to look. “I don’t know if that is good advice, Boris. It would be very hard for her. It would be less trouble to go later, after the baby is born, if that’s what she wants. And it would give her more time to work on her English,” he said. She ignored his patronizing remark--her language was fine. She had passed her university exams top in her class in the English Language and Literature department.

“You mean he would be an American citizen, even though I’m not?” she asked.

Boris looked to Zlatko for confirmation. “Yes,” Zlatko said, sighing. “That’s how it works. But I think it would be more trouble than it’s worth.”

Anya said, “I hadn’t thought of that.”

“I wish my parents had done it,” Boris said. “But of course things were different then, with Stalin, *no one* would have thought of it. But look around at what’s happening in our country. It’s never been easier to leave.”

Zlatko cackled and said to himself: “I’m starting revolutions all over the world. They should have me arrested.”

“But how would I return?” she said to Boris.

Boris looked to Zlatko. Boris said, “It seems like the borders might be different very soon.”

“I should think so,” said Zlatko.

“I don’t know,” said Anya. “I hadn’t thought of it, not really.” But of course she had thought of leaving. Since the moment the *babushki* had told her that Larissa had gone to France, she’d been thinking: why didn’t you take me with you?

When she returned to Moscow, early Saturday morning, she found Mama and Kiril having tea together in Mama’s apartment. They were waiting for her. She was too exhausted to protest. “Come, sit,” said Mama gently, and she did.

Kiril stared at her across the floral tablecloth. His eyes were big, blue and opaque, like a painted wall. She wanted to lay her head down on the table and sleep. Mama slid a cup of black tea over to her and began cutting the lemon.

“You had a safe trip?” Kiril asked.

“Very safe,” Anya said.

“Good,” he said.

“Very good,” she said. The kitchen smelled brightly of lemons, of the sweat gathering under Mama’s arms, and of Kiril’s feet, the way they always smelled when he removed his shoes. She wanted nothing more than to take a shower.

“Here you go, Anechka,” Mama said, dropping two slices of lemon into her tea. Anya watched them touch the bottom of the cup and bob back up to the surface. “You hungry?”

“No, thank you.”

“Fine, then. I invited Kiril here so the two of you could talk. We all know you’re too stubborn to return home on your own, but he is here to offer to take you back. Isn’t that right, Kiril?”

“Yes, exactly,” he said.

Mama said, to Anya: “I have told Kiril all he needs to know about the separation between you and Ivan. I hope you won’t need to discuss it much further. Now, once you rest, you can pack up your things and go.”

Anya took a sip of her tea, fighting back the exhaustion. The winter sunlight through the curtains was too sharp. She wanted to get up and draw them, but her body was too heavy. “You are saying I can’t stay here anymore,” she said.

“No, Anechka,” Mama said. “You have a baby coming. You need to be with your husband. I am much too old for these games, and so are you.”

“What games?”

“It’s time for you to go home,” said Mama.

“This is my home,” she said.

“You are a married woman now. You have another home. This is the way the world works, Anya.”

“Please, Anechka, come back,” Kiril said in his quiet voice, like he was convincing a stray kitten to drink warm milk. Like he and Mama were the long-suffering parents of a wayward child. “I’ve been waiting.”

It would be so easy to go back. She was so tired.

The money was in her Gosbank account, downtown in the main branch with the shining marble floors and emerald green lamps with their golden light spilling out onto important documents. She imagined the cash Ivan had left her for the baby. It was her own--nothing had ever been her own, not really, not ever. Her own life. Her own secret.

That’s what finally allowed Anya to leave, six months pregnant, not knowing when she might be able to legally return. That’s what convinced her she could leave Mama. The idea of a country all her own, white as a cloud, going on for kilometers and kilometers. Waiting for her. Not a man, but an entire country.

She took the money meant for the baby and bribed her way out.

IV. Spring

New York City, 1994

Anya rested her hands on the purse in her lap and watched the city flicker by--skyscraper after skyscraper, colorful storefronts, gray snow, heaps of black trash bags on the street reflecting the bright sun. She closed her eyes. The groan of the bus as it turned the corners sounded like a long, sweet song with no words. It might be the last time she would hear it. She had worked a double at the cleaning service, but her muscles were still full of energy. The lemon scent of the Lysol on her clothes was invigorating. She missed her little boy. The bus chugged up a steep hill and stopped outside an old Baptist church.

She walked through the tiny front garden. It was overgrown with weeds, kept in from the sidewalk by a rotting wooden fence. She opened the grand double-doors of the church. They creaked in a comforting way. Every time she came to pick up Mikhail from HeadStart, she remembered the onion-domed church she had grown up attending. Part of her expected the smell of candles and frankincense when she opened those doors. Instead it was a standard, simple Protestant church, with metal folding chairs set out in rows as pews, and a beautiful little altar of white flowers surrounding a cross. This Sunday would be Protestant Easter, she remembered.

She went down the long, dusty corridor to the HeadStart classroom at the back of the church. It was seven p.m. already, and Misha was one of the last children left in after-school care. The kids were playing toy cars on the sticky linoleum floor. A teenage babysitter sat at the back of the hall, inspecting the split ends in her long hair.

“Mommy!” Misha ran to her and crashed into her thighs.

“Hi, little sunshine,” she said in Russian, bending down to catch him.

“Mommy, can my Power Ranger come on the airplane?” he asked in English.

“Yes, of course,” she replied in Russian.

On the train ride up to the Bronx, Misha sat beside her and played quietly with his Power Ranger action figure. “Boom!” he whispered in English, crashing the toy into the subway pole. “That hurts Power Ranger! I’m gonna get you!” He was only five years old, and his English was already much better than hers. Sometimes he couldn’t remember basic Russian words like “sink” and “bicycle.” He didn’t like many of the foods she had eaten as a child--pickled herring, *solyanka* soup, dried pork sausage. Instead he wanted Pop Tarts and Cheerios. Already, at five years old, her son had a foot in each world.

Anya had gotten a call from Kiril during the New Year’s holidays for the first time since she’d left Russia. He was remarried now, with a one-year-old daughter. He had called to tell her that Mama was in hospice. Anya knew that Mama had been sick, but she was shocked that her illness had worsened so quickly. She’d been saving up money to bring Mama to the United States to live with her, but it was slow-going. She earned six dollars an hour at the cleaning service. Two-thirds of that went to rent.

“You need to be here,” Kiril said. It was a tone she knew well. “She’s in terrible shape.”

But Kiril was right. She took the money he lent her, knowing it would be a one-way ticket. She had overstayed her visa--she was an illegal immigrant now, and if she left the United States, she could not return. When Misha turned eighteen, he could file for her citizenship. But she did not want that hanging over his head his whole life, a step-by-step plan for him, the same kind of plan that Mama and Kiril had made for her.

Anya was not a monster. Mama was dying, and she was her only child. She had to go home.

It was pitch dark by the time she and Misha made it back to their neighborhood. She held his hand as they walked by the bars and restaurants on the main road, and turned at the gas station. Their apartment was in the basement of an old peeling skeleton of a townhouse in Bay Ridge. The owners of the house were Russians, and they had given her a discount.

The place was nearly empty now, except for their suitcases and the furniture her landlord had lent them. She had said all her goodbyes, though there weren't many people to say goodbye to. Misha was her world now. Everyone else passed through it like characters in a movie. She did not actually know them. She asked nothing from them, and they asked nothing from her. She had everything she needed inside herself.

Anya fed Misha takeout Chinese food for dinner, a special treat. She bundled him up in his blue puffy jacket and matching hat. She bent down to be at his level.

"Ready, Mishinka?" she asked in Russian. He looked scared. Misha stepped closer so that he was standing between her legs, pressing his face against her chest. "What's wrong?"

"Mommy," he said in English. "When are we going to come home?"

