

The blue dry-docked sailboat at the side of Airport Road, just north of Caledon East, has a new coat of paint. The last time you drove by it showed marks of needy resolution. Now it looks more like the sunny picture of warm wind, lapping waves and fluttering sails. Your spirit is buoyed for a moment, but you are melancholic. The boat has been sitting there since the first time you made the trip up to Baba's Farm three years ago.

by Daryl Keating

Baba's Farm

Airport Road has this effect on you. It is a get-away artery that runs north from the city. Alongside of it, the rolling hills, forests and farmhouses are a refreshing contrast to the big-city concrete. But the sport utility vehicles speeding up behind you impatiently, waiting to pass between hills, are worrisome. You grip the wheel tightly as they veer into the oncoming traffic. You have not escaped everything.

It is further up Airport Road that you arrive. Stepping out of the car you covet the cool and fresh farm air. It smells of such clarity: four parts impending winter mixed with a two parts wood stove and a two parts chicken-coop. The garden has been turned up and the pumpkins are gone. You imagine for a moment the garden flourishing during the summer months. It is as if there were some kind of secret energy field beneath it recharging. You imagine that only its gardeners Baba and Jadz knew of its existence.

Existence. She was born a twin in what was once Poland but is now Russia. Her father died of alcohol poisoning while her mother was in her third trimester. Her twin sister did not survive birth. Her mother barely survived her delivery. Three months later her mother died of the winter's cold while riding in a horse-drawn carriage.

Stumbling through the front door, you breathe in the warm air meshed with cooking onions. Baba greets you with a strong hug. There are loud helicopter and machine gun noises blaring from the television. Someone has hung tinsel and other plastic Christmas decorations from the beam across the ceiling. Jadz is sitting at the kitchen table eating kilbassa while counting coins piled high beside his plate. He nods at you severely through the door in what is at most vague recognition. You stand at the door sheepishly, nodding your head and kicking off your running shoes.

Baba comments on your stupidity for wearing running shoes when it is so cold outside. She walks back into the kitchen and you follow her and sit down across the table from Jadz. You feel calmed by the atmosphere—the warm

temperature, the old furniture, the white noise of violence coming from the television, Baba's hyperactivity. She is continually moving around the house doing things. You will soon feel lethargic.

Lethargy. After her mother's death, she fell into the care of her four older sisters. Her brother had left home. Her oldest sister, age seventeen, died a few years later after being struck by lightning. A second sister was burned to death in a house fire. The two remaining sisters were not able to look after her. At age six, she was given to a farmer down the road.

There are plants everywhere. In the kitchen. On every coffee table. On the windowsills. On most areas of the floor that are off the beaten track. There are many types that you do not recognize so you ask Baba about them.

"I don't know what they are," she responds. She explains that one was picked up yesterday on Highway 10 on her way to Orangeville. Another came from the garden outside. Another was a gift. You do recognize the ivy. Apparently the whole constellation came from one single plant. It grows everywhere throughout the house as a dominant feature.

Across from you, Jadz concentrates on his possessions. Behind Jadz's spot at the table is a cupboard where he keeps them: his boxes of cookies, his dinner rolls, his combs, his wristwatch, his pill bottles, his handkerchiefs, his resin, his gloves, his knife, his chocolates, his transistor radio. No one else touches these things. No one else sits in his chair.

Jadz fusses with the tuner on his transistor radio. You are startled as he turns the volume up to offset the sound of the television in the other room. Jadz listens briefly to a rendition of local news, then a polka. He gives the visitor no sign that he is pleased with what he hears. "Argh, I don't care," he says. He turns it off with impatience.

Impatience. The farmer down the road allowed her to live in the barn so long as she worked the fields. There she drank milk from the udders of cows when she got hungry at night. There, on cold nights, she soaked her feet in the warmth of the yellow pools beneath them.

