


With a new foreword by the author

A hand holding a rock is visible in the upper right corner of the cover. The hand is rendered in a stylized, almost cartoonish manner, with the fingers curled around a grey, textured rock. The background is a dark red with a subtle, repeating pattern of a house silhouette in a lighter red color.

THE
CHARM
SCHOOL
NELSON
DEMILLE

THE CHARM SCHOOL



“HIGHEST MARKS GO TO *THE CHARM SCHOOL*, WHICH JUST MIGHT BE THE THRILLE OF THE YEAR. It is relentlessly suspenseful, generating excitement on every page and presenting a honest, unflinching portrait of the Soviet Union and its people. *The Charm School* makes the grade.”

—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“A HARROWING JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF TOTALITARIAN DARKNESS . . . a surre mix of heartland illusion and heartless reality. . . . The result is a chilling, compelling, disquieting and ultimately devastating tale of police state savagery and superpower treachery.”

—*Washington Post Book World*

“AN EXCITING, WELL-WRITTEN STORY WITH A LOT MORE ACTION THAN SPY-NOVEL FANS ARE ACCUSTOMED TO . . . a classic good guys-vs.-bad guys confrontation, a slam-ba ending. . . . This story gets high marks in suspense, action, and overall readability.”

—*San Diego Tribune*

“A ROUSING ESPIONAGE ADVENTURE.”

—*Dallas Morning News*

“SO RIVETING THAT HOLLYWOOD PRODUCERS WILL BE BRAWLING FOR THE MOVIE RIGHTS. No one will stop reading or even pause for the last 100 pages.”

—*Boston Herald*

“*THE CHARM SCHOOL* GRABS HOLD OF YOU, DRAGS YOU OFF TO THE SCARIES RUSSIA IMAGINABLE . . . and doesn't let you out until the last page.”

—James Kirkwood, author of *Good Times/Bad Times* and *Some Kind of Hero*

“A FIRST-CLASS THRILLER . . . mixes the wham-bam action of the *Firefox* novels with *Gorky Park*'s gritty insight into Soviet life.”

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“A TOP-RATE THRILLER WITH A WHITE-KNUCKLE ENDING. A must read for anyone interested in the Soviet mind-set.”

—*Dow Jones News/Retrieval*

“HIGHLY ENGAGING SUPER-SUSPENSE.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“STUNNING . . . FASCINATING . . . DeMille has written a story that engages both the mind and the emotions, and done so with a style that makes it a pleasure to read.”

—*West Coast Review of Books*

“AN ABSORBING NOVEL, ONE THAT NO READER WILL SOON FORGET. It looks deeply into East-West relations, and, in the end, what it teaches us about ourselves and Soviet citizens is disquieting and surprising.”

THE CHARM SCHOOL



By the Rivers of Babylon

Cathedral

The Talbot Odyssey

Word of Honor

The Charm School

The Gold Coast

The General's Daughter

Spencerville

Plum Island

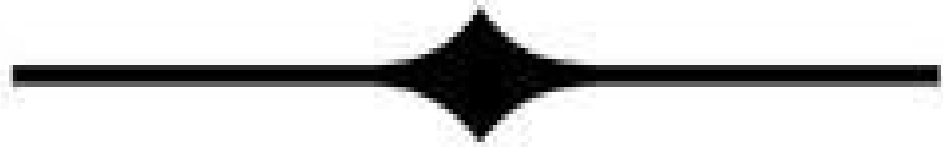
The Lion's Game

a cognizant original v5 release november 24 2010

With Thomas Block

Mayday

NELSON
DEMILLE



THE CHARM
SCHOOL



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ISBN: 978-0-7595-2261-9

A hardcover edition of this book was published in 1988 by Warner Books.

First eBook Edition: April 2001

Visit our Web site at www.HachetteBookGroup.com

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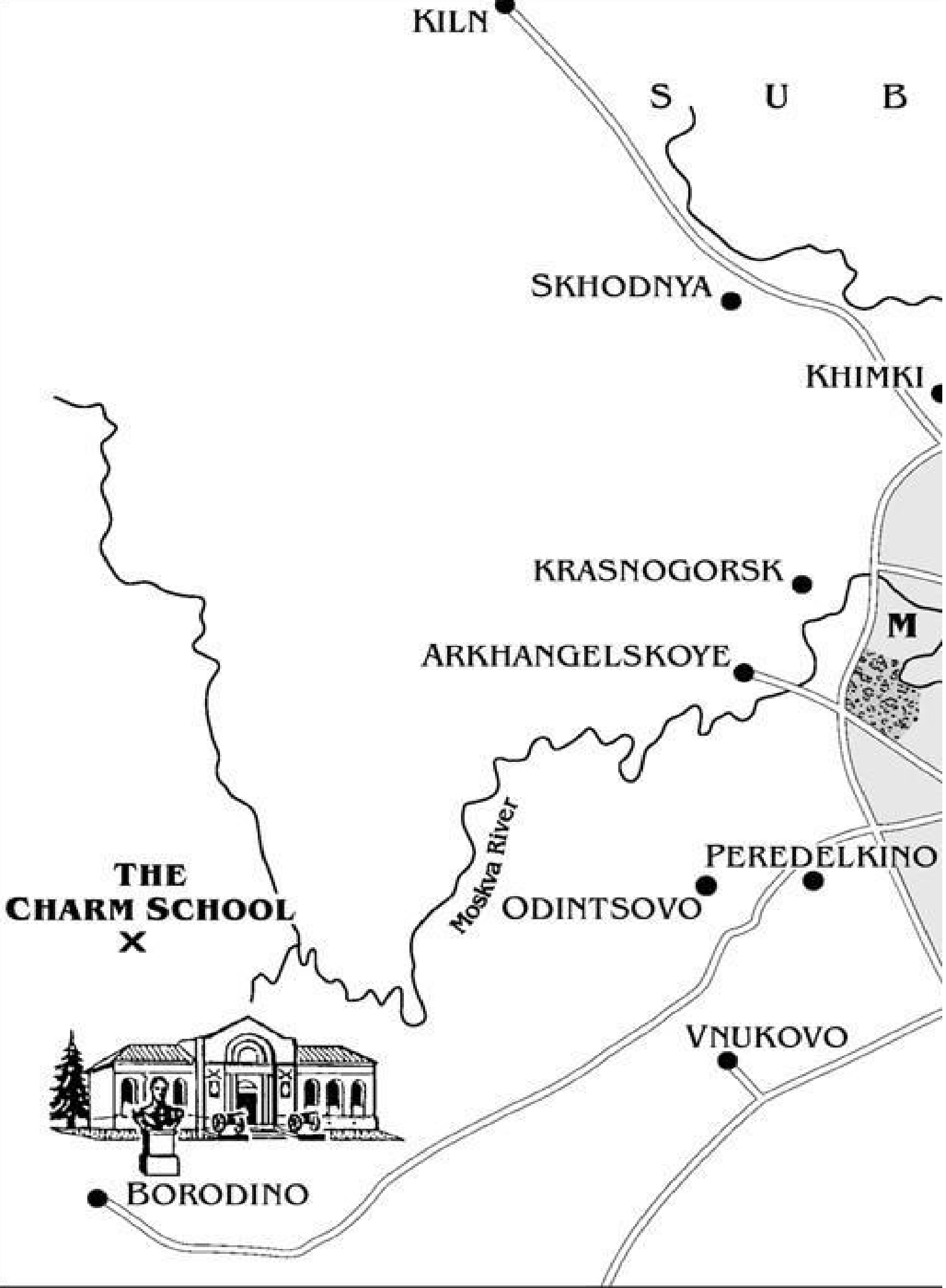
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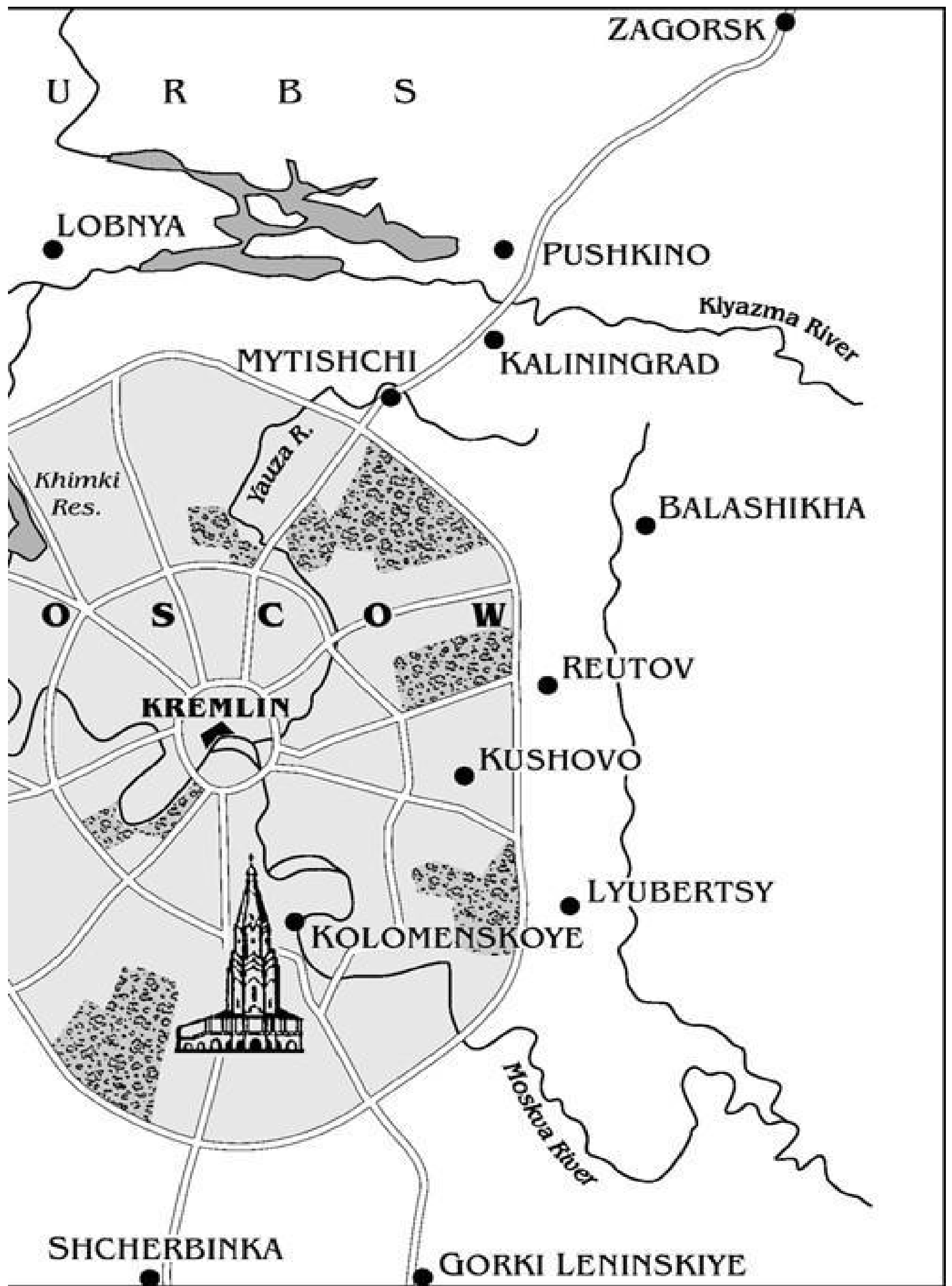
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To the memory of
Joanna Sindel

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my half-blooded and full-blooded Russian friends, Nicholas Ellison, Nans Neiman-Legette, Nicholai Popoff, and Svetlana, my spiritual guides through the labyrinth of the Russian soul. And thanks, too, to Bob Whiting, who taught me to swear in Russian. And special gratitude to Ginny Witte for her devotion to this work and this writer.





AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

On occasion, I find myself agreeing with the *Washington Post*. About *The Charm School*, the *Post* wrote, “Contemporary Cold War fiction doesn’t get much better than this.”

But the Cold War is over, so is *The Charm School* still relevant? That would be like asking if a war novel or historical fiction is relevant. One of the first war novels ever written, *The Iliad*, is still read almost 3,000 years after it first appeared, yet some recent novels about the Vietnam War and the Cold War have passed into oblivion, while others are still read and enjoyed. Obviously the question of relevance is not the right question. The question is, What makes for a good, timeless read? The answer, as we all know, is good writing, believable plot, interesting characters, realistic dialogue, suspense, mystery, romance, the battle between good and evil, and sometimes even a happy ending.

We also know that war spawns hundreds of novels, most of them written after the last shot is fired. But the Cold War, for some reason, has not inspired any major retrospective novels since the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. It’s as though whatever was written contemporaneously, such as *The Charm School* or Le Carré’s novels and Tom Clancy’s earlier books, or the thousands of other East versus West spy novels and nuclear Armageddon thrillers published between 1945 and 1989 are, and will be, the sum total of Cold War literature. The same can be said of motion pictures; with very few exceptions, Hollywood has not touched the subject in any significant way.

To be sure, tomes of nonfiction books, school texts, and film documentaries have been written and produced about the Cold War since it ended, but as an art form, the subject seems dead.

In any case, even if novelists don’t want to write about the Cold War, and movie producers don’t want to deal with the subject, what was written and filmed still has the ability to entertain and educate.

The Charm School is set in the old Soviet Union. The time period is about 1988, and the premise, in a nutshell, is this: American Embassy personnel in Moscow learn of the existence of a Soviet spy school (the Charm School) that trains KGB agents to talk, act, look, and think like Americans. The reluctant instructors at the school are Americans—military pilots shot down and captured over North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. These pilots have all been listed as missing in action and their fates have been unknown for over a decade when the story opens.

I won’t give any more of the plot away, but I will say how I came upon this premise. I was an infantry officer in Vietnam in 1968. In April of that year, I was passing through Hue-Phu Bai Air Base and stopped in the Officer’s Club for a cold beer. The jet jockeys in the bar had rarely seen an infantry officer and I had rarely seen fighter-bomber pilots up close. They were interested in the life of a ground soldier, and I was interested in the life of jet pilots who dodged surface-to-air missiles and antiaircraft fire between beers. Ironically, they thought my job was more dangerous than theirs, and thought they must be suicidal to fly through Missile Alley on the way to Hanoi and Haiphong. In an event, during the conversation, one of the pilots remarked offhandedly about “the guys who were winding up in Moscow.” When I asked him what he meant, he explained, saying something like, “You know, the pilots who were seen bailing out safely and not showing up on POW lists or in Hanoi propaganda films.”

I replied, “The North Vietnamese aren’t necessarily giving out all the names of the guys they capture.”

This pilot replied, “No, because they’re sending some of them to Moscow. That’s the payoff for the Soviets giving them the SAM missiles.”

I recall being somewhat amazed by this statement.

The pilot continued, “The Red Air Force is using these guys to train their pilots in American tactics and in equipment capabilities.”

It made sense and I nodded.

Another pilot added, “Those guys will never come home.” He made a cutting motion across his throat.

This exchange stayed with me and when the controversy concerning American missing in action grew throughout the 1970s and '80s, I made a point of watching for anything that resembled what I heard at Hue-Phu Bai in 1968. But I never saw anything written and never heard anything said about this possibility. Still, it haunted me, and this idea became the central premise of *The Charm School*.

The book was well received when it was published in 1988, and became a bestseller. The publication of the book also added some fuel to the fire of the MIA controversy, raising this new possibility of the Soviets being part of a conspiracy.

I received hundreds of letters asking me where I'd gotten this idea, what further information I had, and if I had any solid proof of what I'd written. Some of these letters were from families of MIAs and they were heartbreaking to read.

I worked for a while with some POW/MIA groups, and without going into agonizing detail, we made little headway in discovering anything concerning the fate of the MIAs. But I, like others, was convinced that there were at least some MIAs being held in the Soviet Union.

Then came the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in the aftermath, there *were* some hints that Americans—not only from Vietnam, but from Korea as well—had been kept prisoner in the Soviet Union. But these sketchy reports from the former Soviet Union did not seem to pan out.

I would have to say that after all this time since the collapse of Russian communism, and the relatively open society that now exists, that if a significant number of U.S. servicemen had been imprisoned or are still imprisoned in the former Soviet Republic, we would have known about it by now. Or would we?

So, once again, is *The Charm School* relevant? I think, yes, if only because it accurately reflected those dark times when we all thought we were on the brink of nuclear annihilation. It is an insight into how we thought about the Evil Empire and how paranoid both sides were about the intentions of the other.

In 1986, I went to the Soviet Union to do research for *The Charm School*. After spending all my life living under this real or imagined threat—air raid drills in grade school, Civil Defense shelters, Dr. Strangelove-type movies, and so forth—I had no idea what to expect.

The reception at Moscow Airport was every bit as bad as I'd expected—too many questions, bad searches, bureaucracy, and general unpleasantness. I felt like I was in a Grade B Cold War movie.

But after about a week in Moscow, I realized that the people and the system were more to be pitied than hated. I remembered an expression I'd heard or read that went something like, “Russia is a Third World country with first-class weapons.” The theoretical danger of a world war was real, but the actual possibility that the Russians were willing to roll the dice seemed somehow remote.

By week two, in Leningrad, I became an instant expert on the Soviet Union and decided—either presciently as my reviewers would later say, or optimistically—that the Soviet Union had about ten years left before it imploded. I even made references to this in my novel, and without giving any page numbers where I said so, you can read for yourself where some of my characters make this prediction. As it turned out, the Soviet Union in 1986 had less than three years left to live. The collapse of communism in the Soviet Republics and eastern Europe sort of surprised me, but I wasn't shocked.

In retrospect, we can all be experts now and say we saw a wave of freedom sweeping the globe in the late 1980s—a new era of global information and communication and economic codependence, and an unacceptable spiraling of weapons costs and an unwillingness of the people on both sides of the Iron

Curtain to die in a needless war.

We can spend the next decade analyzing the reasons for the sudden collapse of the Soviet empire but that may not be as important as trying to figure out where we're all going from here.

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, I'd written only two Cold War novels—*The Charm School* and *The Talbot Odyssey*—and my career and reputation weren't tied closely to the continuance of the Cold War. Yet among some writers and some Cold Warriors, there is a certain nostalgia for the good old days when their services were needed and appreciated.

And maybe, on a certain level, the old Us versus Them thrillers can be enjoyed and appreciated with nostalgia. On another more important level, a book like *The Charm School* can be read and appreciated as a warning that the past is often prologue to the future—because if we forget what we all went through between 1945 and 1989, we are likely to repeat it some time in the not-too-distant future.

In any case, there must be something about this book that appeals to the reader because it's been in continuous print since its publication and its sales have remained strong long past the demise of the system it portrays.

I've taken the opportunity to replace some material that was deleted in the original hardcover edition and also deleted in earlier paperback editions. Most of this material can be found in Chapters 1 and 23.

In Chapter 3, the deleted and replaced material is at the beginning of the chapter and was originally removed because it was felt that the scene gave away too much, too soon. I don't think it does, and the reader can be the judge.

The material in Chapter 23 is an exchange between Colonel Sam Hollis and Lisa Rhodes, both at the American Embassy, and two American tourists, a man and his wife, both Brown University professors favorably disposed toward the Soviet system. Hollis and Rhodes, on the other hand, are on the run from the KGB. The dialogue among these four is amusing in that the American tourists are totally clueless about the predicament that their compatriots are in, and while the tourists are praising life in Russia, Hollis and Rhodes are expecting the KGB to show up and whisk them away. The original editor of *The Charm School* found something about this scene that she didn't like—too political, I think she said. We argued; she won. But I've replaced the scene and again, the reader can be the judge.

When speaking of the old Soviet Union, it seems always appropriate to quote George Orwell in *1984*, and as he said so brilliantly in that book, "Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." What I did *not* do, however, is to *change* anything I'd written in the past in order to make me look more clever about predicting what was to come in 1989. Other than replacing what had been deleted, and making a few grammatical and technical corrections, and the addition of this Author's Foreword, the book in your hands is what I wrote in 1987–88.

I have heard from college instructors that they offer *The Charm School* as optional or required reading in English or Contemporary History classes, and in fact, an English teacher in my local high school assigns it every spring semester. This has caused my son and daughter, who've both taken the class, the extreme embarrassment of having one of their father's books discussed aloud by their peers. They survived the experience and are both now in college where they can avoid a repeat of this trauma by carefully reading the course catalogue for any references to *The Charm School*.

In 1994, I published *Spencerville*, which I describe as a post-Cold War novel. My purpose was to examine the life of a former Cold Warrior, Keith Landry, the book's hero. Landry was a fairly typical product of his age—drafted into the army in the 1960s, fought in Vietnam, stayed in the service, and eventually wound up in the Pentagon doing intelligence work. As the book opens, Landry has been pushed into early retirement because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. His unique occupation is no longer relevant and he finds himself in his Saab on the road to his hometown, Spencerville, in run-

Ohio. He's going home, but home has changed and so has he and so has his country. This is a sort of nostalgic, bittersweet story of love lost and love found, of trying to rediscover roots, and trying to make sense of the past three decades, especially the turbulence of the 1960s.

The book worked the way most good postwar stories work, and I suppose I meant it to be a companion to *The Charm School* the way *The Odyssey* is a companion to *The Iliad*. The story of a returning soldier is obviously not new, but most novelists will tell you honestly that the war story is more interesting than the coming home story. *The Charm School*, then, written in the waning days of the Cold War, may have predicted the end of that era, but for all that any of us knew at the time, history could easily have gone the other way.

But enough about the present and the future—put yourself back in about 1988, pretend that the nuclear missiles are still targeting Moscow and Washington, New York and Leningrad, Peoria and Smolensk, and think about what James Kirkwood, author of *Good Times/Bad Times* and *Some Kind of Hero*, said: “*The Charm School* grabs hold of you, drags you off to the scariest Russia imaginable . . . and doesn't let you out until the last page.”

Welcome to *The Charm School*.

Nelson DeMille
Long Island, New York

Part I

Whenever you are unhappy, go to Russia. Anyone who has come to understand that country will find himself content to live anywhere else.

—**Marquis de Custine**

Russia in 1839

“You are already staying in Smolensk two days, Mr. Fisher?” she asked.

Gregory Fisher was no longer confused or amused by the peculiar syntax and verb tenses of English as it was spoken in this part of the world. “Yes,” he replied, “I’ve been in Smolensk two days.”

“Why don’t I see you when you arrive?”

“You were out. So I saw the police—the militia.”

“Yes?” She leafed through his papers on her desk, a worried look on her face, then brightened. “Ah yes. Good. You are staying here at Tsentralnaya Hotel.”

Fisher regarded the Intourist representative. She was about twenty-five years old, a few years older than he. Not too bad looking. But maybe he’d been on the road too long. “Yes, I stayed at the Tsentralnaya last night.”

She looked at his visa. “Tourism?”

“Right. *Tourizm*.”

She asked, “Occupation?”

Fisher had become impatient with these internal control measures. He felt as if he were making a major border crossing at each town in which he was obliged to stop. He said, “Ex-college student currently unemployed.”

She nodded. “Yes? There is much unemployment in America. And homeless people.”

The Russians, Fisher had learned, were obsessed with America’s problems of unemployment, homeless people, crime, drugs, and race. “I’m voluntarily unemployed.”

“The Soviet constitution itself guarantees each citizen a job, a place to live, and a forty-hour work week. Your constitution does not guarantee this.”

Fisher thought of several responses but said only, “I’ll ask my congressman about that.”

“Yes?”

“Yes.” Fisher stood in the middle of the office with pale yellow walls.

The woman folded her hands and leaned forward. “You are enjoying your visit in Smolensk?”

“Super. Wish I could stay.”

She spread his travel itinerary over her desk, then energetically slapped a big red rubber stamp across the paperwork. “You visit our cultural park?”

“Shot a roll of film there.”

“Yes? Do you visit the Local History Museum on Lenin Street?”

Fisher didn’t want to push his credibility. “No. Missed that. Catch it on the way back.”

“Good.” She eyed him curiously for a few moments. Fisher thought she enjoyed the company. In fact, the whole Smolensk Intourist office had a somewhat forlorn look about it, like a Chamber of Commerce storefront in a small Midwestern town.

“We see not many Americans here.”

“Hard to believe.”

“Not many from the West. Buses from our Socialist brother countries.”

“I’ll spread the word around.”

“Yes?” She tapped her fingers on the desk, then said thoughtfully, “You may travel anywhere.”

“Excuse me?”

“An American is telling me this. Everyone is getting passport. Thirty bucks. Two, three, four weeks.”

“Could take longer. Can’t go to Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, few other places.”

She nodded absently. After a few moments she inquired, “You are interested in socialism?”

Fisher replied, “I am interested in Russia.”

“I am interested in your country.”

“Come on over.”

“Yes. Someday.” She looked down at a printed form and read, “You have the required first aid kit and tool kit in your automobile?”

“Sure do. Same ones I had in Minsk.”

“Good.” She continued, “You must stay on the designated highways. There are no authorized overnight stops between here and Moscow. Night driving in the countryside is forbidden for foreign tourists. You must be within the city of Moscow by nightfall.”

“I know.”

“When you reach Moscow, you must report directly to the Intourist representative at the Hotel Rossiya where you are staying. Before you do this, you may stop only for petrol and to ask directions of the militia.”

“And to use the *tualet*.”

“Well, yes of course.” She glanced at his itinerary. “You are authorized one small detour to Borodino.”

“Yes, I know.”

“But I would advise against that.”

“Why?”

“It is late in the day, Mr. Fisher. You will be hurrying to Moscow before dark. I would advise you already to stay in Smolensk tonight.”

“I am already checking out of my hotel. Yes?”

She didn’t seem to notice his parody of her English and said, “I can arrange for another room here. My job.” She smiled for the first time.

“Thank you. But I’m sure I can make Moscow before dark.”

She shrugged and pushed the paperwork toward him.

“*Spasibo*.” Fisher stuffed it in his shoulder satchel. “*Da svedahnya*,” Greg Fisher said with a wave.

“Drive safely,” she replied, adding, “Be cautious, Mr. Fisher.”

Fisher walked out into the cool air of Smolensk, considering that last cryptic remark. He took a deep breath and approached a crowd of people surrounding his car. He sidled through the throng. “Excuse me, folks. . . .” He unlocked the door of his metallic blue Pontiac Trans Am, smiled, gave a V-sign, slipped inside the car, and closed the door. He started the engine and drove slowly through the parting crowd. “*Da svedahnya*, Smolenskers.”

He proceeded slowly through the center of Smolensk, referring to the map on the seat beside him. Within ten minutes he was back on the Minsk–Moscow highway, heading east toward the Soviet capitol. He saw farm vehicles, trucks, and buses but not a single automobile. It was a windy day, with grey clouds scudding past a weak sun.

Fisher saw that the farther east he drove, the more advanced the autumn became. In contrast to the bustling agricultural activity he’d seen in East Germany and Poland at the same latitudes, the wheat here had been harvested on both sides of the highway, and the occasional fruit orchards were bare.

Greg Fisher thought about things as the landscape rolled by. The restrictions and procedures were not only annoying, he concluded, but a little scary. Yet, he’d been treated well by the Soviet citizens he’d met. He’d written home on a postcard to his parents, “Ironically this is one of the last places where they still like Americans.” And he rather liked them and liked how his car literally stopped traffic and turned heads wherever he went.

The Trans Am had Connecticut plates, had cast aluminum wheels, a rear deck spoiler, and custom pin-striping; the quintessential American muscle car, and he thought that nothing like it had ever been seen on the road to Moscow.

From the backseat of the car came the aroma of fruits and vegetables given him by villagers and peasants wherever he'd stopped. He in turn had given out felt-tip pens, American calendars, disposable razors, and other small luxuries he'd been advised to bring. Greg Fisher felt like an ambassador of goodwill, and he was having a marvelous time.

A stone kilometer post informed him that he was 290 K from Moscow. He looked at the digital dashboard clock: 2:16 P.M.

In his rearview mirror he saw a Red Army convoy gaining on him. The lead vehicle, a dull green staff car, pulled up to his bumper. "Hey," Fisher mumbled, "that's called tailgating."

The car flashed its headlights, but Fisher could see no place to pull off the two-lane road bordered by a drainage ditch. Fisher speeded up. The 5-liter, V-8 engine had tuned-port fuel injection, but the local fuel didn't seem to agree with it, and the engine knocked and backfired. "Damn it."

The staff car was still on his tail. Fisher looked at his speedometer, which showed 110 kph, twenty over the limit.

Suddenly the staff car swung out and pulled alongside him. The driver sounded his horn. The rear window lowered, and an officer in gold braid stared at him. Fisher managed a grin as he eased off the gas pedal. The long convoy of trucks, troop carriers, and cars passed him, soldiers waving and giving him the traditional Red Army "Ooo-rah!"

The convoy disappeared ahead, and Greg Fisher drew a breath. "What the hell am I doing here? That was what his parents wanted to know. They'd given him the car and the vacation as a graduation gift after completing his MBA at Yale. He'd had the car shipped to Le Havre and spent the summer touring Western Europe. Heading into the East Bloc had been his own idea. Unfortunately the visa and auto permits had taken longer than expected, and like Napoleon and Hitler before him, he reflected his Russian incursion was running about a month too late into the bad season.

The landscape, Fisher noticed, had a well-deserved reputation for being monotonous and infinite. And the sky seemed to be a reflection of the terrain: grey and rolling, an unbroken expanse of monotony for the last eight days. He could swear the weather changed from sunshine to gloom at the Polish border.

The excitement of being a tourist in the Soviet Union, he decided, had little to do with the landscape (dull), the people (drab), or the climate (awful). The excitement derived from being where relatively few Westerners went, from being in a country that didn't encourage tourism, where xenophobia was a deep-rooted condition of the national psyche; a nation that was a police state. The ultimate vacation: a dangerous place.

* * *

Gregory Fisher turned on his car radio but couldn't find the Voice of America or the BBC, both of which seemed to come in only at night. He listened for a while to a man talking in a stentorian voice to the accompaniment of martial music, and he could pick out the words "Amerikanets" and "agressiya" being repeated. He snapped off the radio.

The highway had become wider and smoother as he left Tumanovo, but there were no other indications that he was approaching the great metropolis of Moscow. In fact, he thought, there was a singular lack of any visible commercial activity that one would associate with the twentieth century. "I'm having a Big Mac attack."

He put a Russian language tape in the deck, listened, and repeated, “*Ya-plo-kho-syebya-choo*. I feel ill. *Na-shto-zhaloo-yetyes?* What’s the matter with you?”

Fisher listened to the tape as the Trans Am rolled along the blacktop highway. In the fields women gleaned grain left by the reapers.

Ahead he saw the silhouette of a village that was not on his map. He’d seen villages such as this one strung along the highway, and he’d also seen clusters of more modern buildings set back at the end of wide lanes, which he took to be state farms. But no solitary farmhouses. And the villages weren’t exactly picture-postcard quality.

In contrast, throughout Western Europe, every village had been a delight, each turn in the road revealed a new vista of pastoral loveliness. Or so it seemed now. In some superficial ways, he realized, rural Russia was not unlike rural America; there was little that was quaint or historical. No heartland, no castles or chateaux, few messages from the past. What he saw here was functional if inefficient agribusiness, whose headquarters was in Moscow. “I don’t like this,” he said.

Fisher was in the village now. It consisted mostly of log cabins, *izbas*, whose doors, window frames and flower boxes were all of the same blue. “People’s Paint Factory Number Three is overfilling quarts on blue paint number two. Yes?” The entire village stretched along both sides of the highway for half a kilometer or so, like some elongated Kozy Kabin motel in the Adirondacks. He saw a few elderly people and children digging root vegetables from their kitchen gardens in the small fenced-in front yards. An old man was forcing mortar into the chinks between two logs of an *izba* while a group of children were gleefully terrorizing a flock of chickens.

Everyone stopped, turned, and watched as the metallic blue Trans Am rolled by. Fisher gave a cursory wave and began accelerating as soon as he passed the last cabin. He glanced over his right shoulder and saw a glimpse of the sun hanging lower on the southwest horizon.

Some half hour later he turned off the highway onto a smaller parallel route that had once been the principal western road out of Moscow. In a few minutes he found himself on the outskirts of Mozhaisk, 128 kilometers from Moscow, and he slowed to the urban speed limit. His Intourist guidebook informed him this was a thirteenth-century town of old Muscovy, but there weren’t any signs of antiquity evident in the plain concrete and wooden buildings. His map showed a monastery somewhere in the area, and he saw the spire of the Cathedral of St. Nicholas, but he didn’t have the time or the inclination to sightsee. There was a flip side to being an American in a Pontiac Trans Am in deepest, darkest Russia. There were limits to the amount of attention one could comfortably take.

He continued through Mozhaisk, affecting a nonchalance behind the wheel, avoiding the stare of the State motor policeman directing traffic through the only major intersection.

Finally, with the town behind him, he saw what he was looking for, a petrol station, *the* petrol station, on the eastern end of Mozhaisk, marked by a picture of a pump. He pulled onto the immaculate, white concrete and stopped beside a yellow pump. A man in clean blue overalls sat in a chair outside a white concrete-block building reading a book. The man peered over the book. Fisher got out of the car and approached him. “How’s business?” Fisher handed him Intourist coupons for thirty-five liters of 93-octane. “Okay?”

The man nodded. “Oo-kay.”

Fisher went back to his car and began pumping gas. The man followed and looked over his shoulder at the meter. Fisher did not wonder why all petrol stations were self-service if the attendant stood there watching you. Fisher had stopped wondering about such things. He hit thirty-five liters, but the tank wasn’t full, so he squeezed in another four liters before he put the hose back. The attendant was peering inside the Pontiac now and didn’t seem to notice.

Fisher got into his car, started the big engine, and raced the motor. He lowered the electric window and handed the attendant a packet of postcards from New York City. “Everyone is being homeless

there. Yes?"

The attendant flipped slowly through the cards. Fisher put a Bruce Springsteen tape in the deck, popped the clutch, and left six feet of rubber on the white concrete. He made a tight, hard U-turn and accelerated up the road. "Surreal. Really."

He rolled up the windows and lost himself in the music.

Fisher pressed on the gas pedal until he was well past the speed limit. "Haven't *seen* a traffic cop in the last thousand miles. They never *heard* of radar here."

He thought about the Rossiya Hotel in Moscow. That would be his first decent accommodation since Warsaw. "I need a steak and scotch whiskey." He wondered what he was going to do with the fruits and vegetables in the rear seat.

Another thought popped into his mind. "Avoid sexual entanglements." That was what the embassy man in Bonn had told him when he'd gone there to pick up his Soviet visa, and so far he'd avoided it, though not by much in Warsaw. Still, he had fifteen pairs of panty hose and a dozen tubes of lip gloss. "We'll see what shakes out at the Rossiya."

Fisher kept looking for a sign directing him back to the main highway. "The sun has riz, and the sun has set, and here we is in Roosha yet."

Greg Fisher pulled off to the side of the deserted road. A stone kilometer post read 108 K, and an arrow pointed back to the main highway via a one-lane road with crumbling blacktop. An arrow to the left pointed toward a rising road in better condition. The sign was in Cyrillic, but he could make out the word "Borodino." He looked at his dashboard clock: 4:38. Impulsively he accelerated, swinging onto the Borodino road, heading west into the setting sun.

He didn't know what he expected to see at Borodino, but something told him it was a not-to-be-missed opportunity. In June he had stood on the beach at Normandy and had been moved by what had happened there. Similarly, he thought, he would like to see the place where Napoleon and Kutuzov had faced off, where fifty years later Leo Tolstoy had stood and pondered his epic, *War and Peace*. Fisher thought perhaps he owed the Russians at least that before he entered Moscow.

* * *

The road curved gently and rose gradually. Poplars flanked either side, and Fisher found it pleasant. He drove slowly through a set of stone pillars with open iron gates. The road crested a small hill, and he saw spread before him Borodino Field, where Napoleon's *Grande Armée* met the Russian army led by Field Marshal Kutuzov. The road led down to a small parking area beyond which was a white limestone building with a red-tiled roof and a neoclassical portico. On either side of the portico were wings in which were set arched French windows. Two old, muzzle-loading cannons flanked the entranceway. This building, Fisher knew from his Intourist booklet, was the Borodino museum. He rummaged through his tapes and found Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture." He slid in the tape, turned up the volume, and got out of the car, leaving the door open. The overture reverberated over the quiet battlefield, and a flock of wild geese took to the air.

Fisher mounted the steps of the museum and tried the doors, but they were locked. "Typical." He turned and looked out at the grass-covered fields and hillocks where a quarter-million French and Russian soldiers met on a September day in 1812, the French intent on taking Moscow, the Russians on defending it. For fifteen hours, according to his guidebook, the two sides fired at each other, and in the evening the Russians withdrew toward Moscow, and the French were in possession of Borodino Field and the little village of the same name. A hundred thousand men lay dead and wounded.

In the distance Fisher saw the memorial to the French soldiers and officers who fought there

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