



CITIZEN

At the end of every academic year, when the students pack up to leave Hancock College, there's always a bunch of junior faculty members preparing to leave as well. These departures have varying impact on those who stay behind. Least affected are the oldest professors. For several years their attitude has been, "Why bother to get to know the new kids on the block when they'll be gone before you know it?" Others wince; a particular senior assistant professor may have been a rising star in a hot new specialty, might have brought huge grant money to the College. These wincing professors are sometimes jealous; they wish they were up and coming, sought after by other academic institutions.

Personally, the exodus of the junior faculty each year saddens me; I always lose a couple of good friends. We'll stay in touch for a year or two, e-mail each other, text occasionally. Last summer my boyfriend, Daniel, a European historian, moved to New York to teach at Bard. We tried to keep the romance going but long distance relationships are doomed. After a year of intermittent visits and frightening credit card statements, we called it quits. I befriend members of the new academic crop each year but know that the friendships are probably short-lived. And each year, as I head towards my own tenure decision, I become closer to becoming one of *them*, the people who are anchored here forever.

Stefan and Natasha Tetrov were a little more exotic than most new couples in town. She was hired a couple years back as a senior assistant professor in the Soviet Studies program and he was her authentic Russian husband whom, it was rumored, she had married so he could get his green card.

Natasha was just *dying* to be Russian. I laughed when I learned she was from Fort Wayne and that her real name was Nancy Schneider. She had changed it to Natasha when she studied in Kiev during graduate school. She wore an enormous fur hat in the winter along with folksy hand-knitted leg warmers under her dresses. While sipping tea at Bidwell's Cafe, she made a show of reading *Prada*, loudly creasing and re-creasing the newspaper every time she turned a page.

Stefan's specialty was translations of Lithuanian poetry into Russian, and that was far too specialized for little Hancock College. Often adjunct arrangements are made for the faculty spouses, but Stefan was on his own. After their son, Ilia, was born, people just assumed Stefan would stay home with the baby while Natasha would continue to teach full-time and add to her impressive publishing record. I considered it bad luck that we were up for tenure together this year. She was a research star in a sexy subject and I was one more woman teaching French, all but a cliché.

Secretly, I hoped Natasha would leave like so many others had. She irritated me with her Russian posturing which was escalating all the time. She began wearing her hair in braids pinned around the front and back of her head. Her long dour dresses were shapeless sacks of gray and brown, and she wore odd boots with hook and eye fastenings. Her unspoken message proclaimed, "I am a stoical, suffering Russian woman. Look at me with awe and fascination." And, of course, her power-to-the-people-Marxism meshed well with our campus climate of severe political correctness. The students considered her worldly, a role model. There was always a wait list to enroll in her classes whereas I looked out over a sea of empty desks.

I was surprised to find that she didn't turn all of the Hancock faculty off. Usually my opinion on such matters runs mainstream, but Natasha had bewitched everyone. At a particularly catty dinner party, the faculty instead sharpened their knives for Stefan: "She's such a star and he's such a disappointment," Elise Ruppel announced as she refilled everyone's glass of wine. I had inwardly groaned when her husband, Simon, extended the dinner invitation to me, but he's the chair of the French department so it behooves me to show up at his soirées.

"Well," Simon said, wanting to appear a generous host, "Stefan's field *is* rather specialized. Estonian poetry. Hard to make a living out of that."

"I thought it was Armenian poetry," Ned Siddons slurred out. He was already three sheets to the wind but we were pretending not to notice.