

5~ Dot On the Horizon

Dot Farmar and my daughter Liz take an immediate liking to each other. Liz has a knack for quieting the most savage of horses. After taking note of their good and bad habits, physical ailments and idiosyncrasies , she puts the horse in cross ties, circles them, touching them with long smooth strokes. When she gets to their head she rubs their nose and bends the horses' heads down to her height, whispering in their ear, seemingly striking up a bargain with the animal. She now slips a bridle over his head, saddle him up and unclips the cross ties. Once she has mounted him, if he starts balking Lizzie simply leans forward, grabs a hold of the horses ear, and he settles down. It is around redeeming these horses Dot and Liz bond.



Joe

Late afternoons, when I arrive to pick Liz up, Joe, the Shepard greets me like an old friend. I have fallen for him in a big way. He knows it and makes a fool of himself, rubbing ecstatically over my legs while thrusting his head into my hands for a good ear scratch.



Midge in flannel

By late November the renovations on my barn are done and I am finally settled. Although studying for the state real estate exam I am itchy to do something physical. I ask Dot if she needs any help at the barn and am told I'm welcome to help with morning chores. I tell her I'll be over the next morning but first I shop for a wardrobe change purchasing flannel shirts, jeans, warm socks, barn boots, and a jacket.



Farmars Stables

The next morning I drive over to Dot's, my face scrubbed clean of make-up and comfortable in my new clothes. I pull my car in front of the shed and make my way over to the barn finding the stall Dot is working saying I am reporting for duty! Dot leans her pitchfork on the wheelbarrow and calls out to the other women to take a break and come meet a new helper.



Lower Fields

Audrey is a tall and handsome, broad shouldered, red-haired woman who looks like you wouldn't want to mess with her until she flashes her beautiful smile and hear t he laughter in her voice. Nora is blond, short, sturdy but feminine, with a lovely smile, an Australian accent, and a glint to mischief in her eyes. After a few moments Dot says it's time go get back to work and hands me a pitchfork asking if I know how to use one. My answer is to begin throwing soiled hay into a wheelbarrow. Together, with the other women, working like a well-oiled machine, we lay in fresh bedding, fill water buckets from a spigot set up in an ancient bathtub in the back of the barn, fill feed buckets, and finally, throw in some flakes of hay. The stalls are now ready to welcome the horses that are grazing in the fields across the road.

Our chores now done, we gather around Dot's kitchen table for steaming cups of Sanka, sharing our 'kids issues', talking about men, and what to do with them and without them. I am now one of Dot's girls.

Audrey has two young daughters and an absent ex-husband. She was brought up in this area, married, and now divorced. She lives in an old farmhouse heated with a woodstove requiring Audrey to stoke it throughout the cold nights to keep her babes warm. Nora too, is recently divorced. Her son is at a boarding school in this area and she moved up here to be closer to him. Although she doesn't mention her financial status, it is understood she doesn't want for much.

As for Dot, it is apparent she has a soft spot for all of God's creatures but, as I learn, she is much more forgiving of horses than most other creatures. She tells us she never did meet a horse she didn't like. Known far and wide for being a tough horse trader, Dot never passes up the opportunity to rehabilitate a horse headed for the 'killers'. She regulates the horse's feed, doctors them when necessary, and offers them unconditional love, and sometimes she can't help herself from keeping a horse that tugs at her heart.

The Farmer's Stables, as Dot shares, has been in the family for two hundred years, originally breeding and butchering livestock, until the farm fell into economic difficulties. Dot, then single, moved to Connecticut to run a chicken



Ray at the carriage races

farm. It was there she met her husband an "Italian fella with the most gorgeous head of hair you ever did see." By the time her daughter was born she knew she had to divorce him, as "he wasn't ever going to amount to much."

Within a few years Dot returned to this area to run a Standardbred horse farm. It was while she was training Standardbred horses and competing in carriage trials she met the love of her life, Ray. Even though Ray never did bother to get a divorce, he and Dot had been living together for twenty years, sharing their passion for competing in horse and antique buggies events up and down the East

coast. They moved back to the Farmar family's homestead eight years ago. Dot's daughter Julie, now 21, is living back in Connecticut. Dot doesn't say much about Julie except she doesn't see her too often.

Chapter 4: Where I Wandered I Listened

"Beyond myself somewhere, I wait for my arrival" the Balcony, Octavio Paz

Where I Wandered I Listened

Holderness 1978

'Dot Farmar', says the man at the local Blue Seal feed store where I decide is the best place to inquire about who might have a riding facility in these parts. I am fairly desperate to find a horse farm for my younger daughter Lizzie, who hasn't said much since our move. Her silence unnerves me. Although her horse, along with our old life, was left behind, I hope finding a place where she can be with horses will provide her some comfort.

The man behind the counter is bone thin and looks to be in his mid-forties. His baseball cap barely contains his wildly curly black hair, which merges into his bushy black beard. Under his red and black-checkered wool jacket a faded flannel shirt peeps out, tucked

into bibbed jeans, with a sharp crease down each pant leg. Someone cares how this man looks leaving the house for work.

Without ever taking his eyes off the counter separating us, the man in the baseball cap points in the direction I have just come from and tells me my best bet is to try Farmar Stables, up off Mt Prospect.

“Just take a right at Smith Road and keep going, he continues, and you’ll find it, sign on the left before the dooryard.”

The last few days of rain have given way to raw and windy



weather, and although warmly dressed, a slight shiver goes through me as I walk back to the car. Following the directions, I reach the halfway point up Mount Prospect, turn right onto Smith Hill Road, and the tar road gives way to a washboard dirt surface covered in slick, wet leaves. I quickly learn my car fishtails if I drive over 20 miles per hour thus I crawl along until I see a sign with faded lettering and a red arrow underscoring Farmar’s Stables.



I pull into the drive and park

my orange Volvo station wagon next to a perfectly preserved early late 60's Powder Blue Cadillac sedan sitting in front of a long weather beaten shed connecting a two story wooden barn to a white cape-style house. Although no one is in sight I notice an older model green truck, its bed half-filled with sawdust, sitting at the entrance to the barn and figure someone is unloading the sawdust from the truck.

Suddenly, a large black and tan German Shepard runs out of the barn announcing my arrival. He stops at my car, trotting back in forth, leaving me to wonder if I should get out of my car, when he suddenly loses his menacing stance and docilely walks back to the barn, as if he now trusts I am of no importance. I summon up my courage and step out of my car catching a glimpse of my reflection in the Caddy's window. My foundation, rouge, eyeliner, false upper lashes and shiny beige lipstick all look in order. With one last glance I push my oversize leopard print sunglasses up, like a headband, to keep my long streaked blonde hair from falling into my eyes, and turn the collar of my long white fox coat up, to ward off the chill. Leather gloves and boots complete the picture. Not bad, I think, as I walk to the barn.

Tentatively stepping over the threshold I call into the darkness, "Dot, Dot Farmar?".

A hoarse voice call out, "I'm finishing up some chores Honey, be right with you. And don't you mind Joe none, he wouldn't hurt a fly. He'll just keep ya company till I'm through here."

Joe, the German Shepard, now greets me with his tail wagging, swiping the length of his body along my coat whenever I dare try to stop scratching his head. He remains at my side until a sturdy woman appears wearing dark green insulated coverall. She has silvery grey short hair, and wears silver wire-rimmed glasses halfway down her nose. Her glasses magnify her green eyes, clear as a child's. A friendly smile, filled with white perfectly aligned teeth, light up

her face. Joe goes immediately to her side. I am, in the presence of Dot Farmar.

“Can you sit a minute, honey? There’s a young fella here helping me get these shavings into the stalls and he’s anxious to get done and move on over home.”

“Sure”, I say, taking a seat on a well aged wooden grain-feed box whereupon Joe settles himself down at my feet. Together we watch Dot and her helper take one wheelbarrow after another of fresh shavings into the stalls. Next the feed and water bowls are filled. Finally, flakes of hay are pitched into each stall. Dot then walks across the road to the fields where eight horses are patiently standing at the crossbars. She lets down the bars and the horses cross the road in a civil procession, heading into their own stall, eager for their evening meal. Before bolting each stall door closed, Dot goes in and out of the stalls bidding each horse goodnight with a gentle pat on its hindquarter.

With everyone bedded down for the night, Dot and her helper walk out to the truck, exchange a few words, and then he is gone. Dot now turns her attention to me, “Well now, honey, do you have time for a



cup of coffee?”



I follow her through the barn, into the long shed, filled with vintage horse carriages, lanterns, and harnesses, past a woodpile, and up three steps through a door leading into the house. We pass a room I take to be an office before arriving at the kitchen, with a bay window at the sink looking out on paddocks nestled against the base of Mt Prospect. The kitchen is vintage 1950 with its grey speckled linoleum, white porcelain sink, metal cabinetry, appliances, and grey metal Formica dining table and its chairs with grey plastic covered seats.

“Sit wherever you’re comfortable, honey”, Dot says, and I shrug out of my coat, laying it over the back of a chair before sitting down. Dot is at the sink, scrubbing her hands. Then she puts up a battered old teakettle on the stove. Next she sets the table with two white diner style coffee mugs, some tea -spoons and finally giant-size jars of Sanka, Cremora, and sugar. While we wait for the kettle to boil, Dot turns to me, “Well now honey, what can I do fer you?”

I tell her I am newly divorced, and recently moved here from the Boston area with two daughters and a son. We live in the renovated barn on the old Morgan farm on the other side of Mt Prospect.

She doesn’t ask why I chose to move here, and I don’t offer an explanation. What I do tell her is my older daughter has



settled right in, working as a ski instructor on the weekends, thrilled with her new world. My son has easily found his place among the school jocks. It is my middle daughter that concerns me. I tell her Liz had her own horse before our move up here. Caring for him, hanging out at the barn with friends, and riding whenever possible, well, that was her world. I am looking to provide her with a similar experience.

Dot fills the cups from the now steaming kettle and, without a moments hesitation, says, "Can always use an extra pair of hands. School bus comes right by here. You'll have to come get her here around five. Why don't you bring her by tomorrow and we can get acquainted."

Yes, I will, thank you, I say, feeling hopeful Liz and Dot will get along just fine. Our conversation turns to local gossip and when our cups are empty I thank her again for her welcome and for the tea, and slip into my coat. Dot walks me to my car saying, "Goodbye honey. Look for you both tomorrow."

As I open my car door I look back at Dot, who is looking at me, and wonder, who does she see?

