Rostropovich Rushes to Shostakovich’s Side

Madame puts a finger to her lips and

points to the chair where Shostakovich

stares at snow falling on Moscow

while listening to Richter’s recording

of the Bach English Suites. I take a seat

alongside the great Master.

The afternoon darkens, the snow falls,

Richter plays. At one point the Master says

Bach must be played the way snow falls.

Now I see snowflakes rush

past the window like white notes on a black score.

I want to ask the Master why

he had summoned me so urgently,

demanding that I drop everything and rush

across Moscow at the start of a great storm.

But his listening is fierce,

his watching impenetrable, so silently

I sit back and the G minor tinkles

into F, the F into E minor.

Madame brings tea, he doesn’t notice.

The Suites conclude, the tone-arm crackles

across the lp’s inner grooves, and he stands

to leave the room. As she lifts the tray of cold tea,

Madame thanks me for coming.