

Her face is a blur now,
but the eyes were green & I remember her voice:
"Have you ever read Alexander Pushkin?" she asked.
"Oh yeah," I said. "Sure, sure."
& I bought her a glass of Pellegrino's Marsala.

We went north to the mountains & read Pushkin together;
then we went south again & lived on a canal
that reminded her of Petersburg before the revolution.

One night when her Slavic soul barely flickered,
she said: "Amore, you will not understand this ..."

but I did, I did

& then she went home to Sausalito, or some such place
where there were still Russian tea rooms
& I didn't hear from her for years
until somehow she found my number & calls me at 3 A.M.:
"I am living in Venice, California," she says,

"in a motel off the highway. I am divorced,
my daughter works in a whorehouse
& my son is currently on drugs."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I say.

"How is it with you?" she asks.

"I have taken up needlepoint," I say.
"I am very good at butterflies."

"There is this red neon sign," she says,
"right outside my window. It keeps me awake all night."

"Turn to the wall," I tell her.

"The light flashes on the WALL," she says.

"Close your eyes," I suggest.

"That's all very easy for you to say,
isn't it?" she snarls & hangs up

& I decide to request an unlisted number in the morning.

THE NEANDERTHAL MAN

We just came in off a night patrol
& were sitting around the command post at dawn
drinking coffee laced with a little grappa
when our new lieutenant

loosened his Italian silk scarf,
wiped a trickle of blood from his cheek
& said:

Do you fellows know
that this is the very same town
where Lt. Frederic Henry
met that beautiful English nurse
in A Farewell to Arms?

I was only a dumb corporal at the time,
but this news didn't exactly stun me to numbness;
I already knew that the officers
always got the best looking women,

but this Farewell to Arms thing
was something else,
it really had me puzzled:

I thought I had hit
every goddam saloon
in that lousy burg.

THE RAT IN A TRAP

I'm drinking a lousy local Chablis
at this progressive cocktail party
where the white stuff
in the silver bowl
isn't sugar,
you know,

when this bronzed incendiary,
who is also a female advertising exec,
swoops over & froths:
"Darling! What are you into these days?"

"I'm working for REDCOM XXII in Seattle,"
I tell her.

"Wonderful!" she gushes. "Is that one
of those new politically progressive
ecology magazines?"

"No," I say. "It's the naval warfare
Readiness Command."

"Oh, dear," she fizzles. "Whatever do you do there?"

"I'm an administrator," I say,
"in the Recruiting Directorate."