

SAN FRANCISCO 1955

As if from pages of a travelogue
a little bit of Russia sparkles,
birch trees and gypsies.
All day the meat simmers
in its pot of blood resembling
borsch, while women,
bright scarves tied around their heads,
pinch the edges of raised dough
for pirogi, laughing at each other
and making jokes. "Sin, sin, it is
easier on your soul." And studiously
the men part their beards
to look like Grand Duke Nicholas.

Today the tourists from America
will cross Geary Boulevard
hiding their faces with cameras,
with their insatiable appetites
for authenticity. I stay
out of sight in my room, crewcut,
clean shaven, white bucks and levis,
my face pressed against the window.
Against the glass my nose flattens
and my eyes slant. My skin yellows
like isinglass. I remember my cousins
along the Yenisey—the first
crossed boundary, a river wider
than the city that surrounds us.