**Pravda**

Not until after breakfast do I check my phone

and see that I’ve had a call from St. Petersburg,

Russia. There is no message, so I am left to imagine

who, half a world away, reached out to my number

at 3:43 a.m. Have I gotten on the wrong side

of the Russian mafia, who are calling now to collect

interest on that start-up money for the *matryoshka*

doll factory that I have dreamed of since grade

school? Or could it be the principal dancer

for the Mariinsky ballet, who has never recovered

from the night I left her at the Palace Bridge, her tears

adding imperceptibly to the dark and placid Neva?

Probably just a scam. Some so-called *tsarevna*,

descended from Nicholas II, who will pay me

in Fabergé eggs if I fund her return to the throne.

On my walk to the train I try to imagine her

reaching out to this stooped and greying school

teacher, descendant of a long line of unsuccessful

peasant farmers, believing he might actually sign over

his retirement, his 401(k), for a longshot invitation

to the imperial court. When I reverse the call,

I get a recording of a woman’s voice, heavily

accented, lilting and fricative, but after a dozen listens

can make out only “een-tear-net provider,” and later,

translate a single word, repeated: *luchshe* (better)*, luchshe*.