

“Reading *A Farewell to Arms* on Easter Sunday”

by Nicole Yurcaba

-for my father

Federico, while you sat eating cheese
before the mortar fell delivering its shrapnel
into your body, did you contemplate
history's repetitions?
Four and a half decades after your scourging
an Army medic,
finds himself waiting at the tarmac,
guaranteed a place in the Korea-Cold War-Vietnam trifecta,
but unlike you, Federico, he has no Catherine,
so while he awaits orders and a plane
he haphazardly practices useful French:
"Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?"
"Votre meilleur vin, se il vous plait?"
in the same manner as you practiced Italian.
And on your Italian front, Federico, while you blazed hell
with your ambulance, retrieved the dead, the wounded,
the generals sat in their villas, sipping wine and grappa;
and in those later years, during 10,000-man drills,
the young Army medic scrambles with his unit
beneath chemical sprays during desert nuclear disaster drills
while generals and senators watch from protected heights.
Funny, isn't it, Federico, that despite time's onslaught
the sole commutations were the decade's numerals,
the warfront's scenery, the pawns in the warlords' game.