

JUNE 1943

Others had come back long after
the war was over, so I was sure
you had not died, father.
As they marched you through town,
probably you just broke free,
ran. They'd shot another
in your place. One day
you would come,
gaunt, threadbare, to tell stories
from the marshes where you hid.
One day you'd come back,
walking the long road from Russia.

And when you failed me
and didn't come, I asked my mother
to tell me one more time
what had happened,
and I willed myself into the mind
of the Jew who informed on you,
oh my father,
who gave away your hidden guns,
your break-out plans.
I told him of your courage.

When this didn't work, father,
I dreamed I had powers,
that I could pump vodka
into the blood, slow
the Ukrainian policeman
who pulled his gun
when you lunged at the SS trooper.

And when this too failed,
oh father,
I closed the shutters
and turned away the faces
of the people forced
to watch in the square,
so they would not see you fall,
so they need not hear you say,
twice, my mother's name.