

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.