

TITLE OF MANUSCRIPT: WHEN KRUPA PLAYED THOSE DRUMS

FINAL CRESCENT

Think of me on bruise-blue nights when
the moon wanes to a wisp
and you scan the east, wondering.

Think of me as a crocus
cracking through matted leaves.

For I was born on ebbing days
of Adar, when winds blew out-of-tune
and the moon a final crescent.

My soul makes its way through the world
with hesitant footfalls.

Two of my sons were born in the month
Nissan. Prankish as lion cubs,
hearts of honeycomb and voile.

I know my soul more
by what it is not.

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WHEN KRUPA PLAYED THOSE DRUMS

Sometimes I can't think in metaphors.
Rocks are rocks. Tumors are tumors.

Time in close present.
10 tomorrow, CT scan.

I lie in bed. Listen for signs of life.
A cough. A snore.

By 2 AM clack of Dad's walker,
slipper-shuffle to the kitchen
for bourbon on ice.

9 AM He falls. I boost
from the back. He yanks

with still-strong arms
and he's back in his chair.

A victory when we don't
need to call 9-1-1.

Slips on his loafers.
Back in motion. We're off.

5 PM He leans back in his chair
staring at a black TV.

No Jeopardy. No C-Span.
Not even Ella Fitzgerald on the stereo.

*What is it you think about, Dad,
while you sit there with the TV off?*

*I go back to the good years
when I'd just met your Mom*

*and Gene Krupa played those drums
till three in the morning.*

He doesn't ask about
the CT scan; I don't say.

*Krupa, the way
he beat out those heartbeats.*

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OVERHEARD ON THE F TRAIN

My iPod snatched from an unzipped purse,
I'm left to listen, overexposed
to snatches of dialogue unrehearsed.

Ripped from my private universe,
of Dylan, Marley, Billy Joel
when my iPod's snatched from an unzipped purse.

*"Haven't you heard, Karl's cancer's worse,
melanoma misdiagnosed."*
Snatches of dialogue unrehearsed.

*"Leah just lost her job as a nurse
and her crazy ex-husband's out on parole."*
now my iPod's snatched from an unzipped purse

*"My daughter's pregnant with her fourth.
You'd think she'd never heard of birth control."*
Snatches of dialogue unrehearsed.

A random act, what appeared a curse,
scattered totems of lives unposed.
My iPod snatched from an unzipped purse.
Gift of snatches of dialogue unrehearsed.

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BACK AND FORTH

Father hurled words across
the table at Frank and me.
We'd toss back *sardonic*

or *insolent*, flaunting
our cleverness. Little by little,
I stopped relying on words.

Opted for near-silence.
Each word a jagged crystal spit
from the mouth. Starts and stops

like a stutterer's struggle
to let loose a sound. Still,
even now, I'm tongue-tied.

No wonder my work now
is shaping *baba* and *mima*
into words, smoothing

stuttering children's stumbles,
finding the "gorilla voice" in
a boy who only whispers.

At the end of the day, I strain
to hear my own still voice
beside the pair

of black-ring doves calling
back and forth from the cottonwoods
that line the river.

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AFTER

I used to talk real good. I used
to tell the coolest stories, the best jokes.
But now. I'm shut down, trapped
in my own head. Since the stroke,

I know what I want to say but words
get tangled and twisted all up. I think
“coyote” and “crocus” comes out.
“Excited” turns into “extinct.”

My friends don't have time to wait for me
to spit out words. They keep filling in
empty spaces. Half the time, I'd rather
just be by myself – rocking and thinking,

rocking and thinking. I'm a man of Babel,
punished for my pride. Unravelled.