

Airborne

Each breath
 breath
beating breath
sucks
 in
the thin
 air

Exhaustion
floods
the pulse,
 pulse
slow pulse
 of the ex
 hale

A wave of light
of blue,
 of dark
sways
 within my head
 floating right,
floating left
 around
around
 as I
 gasp
for
 air

The Taste of Fear

You want to know what fear
looks like? Then look
into my eyes, or imagine you can
as I sit alone in my home for the 33rd
day, as I read the final post
of a friend looking forward
to the birth of a grandchild,
a friend whose body four days
later is resting in the makeshift
morgue full and overflowing
outside the hospital with the ER
that I do not want to visit, that I
actively work to avoid,
as if *visit* is the right word
anyway for a trip to the ER
when one has COVID. No,
one rushes to the ER, subjects
oneself, plunges into the world
of infection—covering one's face
and holding one's metaphorical
breath—because real breath
is not something anyone
would dare to hold right now—
Instead, I swallow buckets of air,
let it fill my lungs, and release,
counting one...two...three..
four beats. Up to seven if I am
feeling rich.

That fear you cannot see?
I taste it on the long exhale.

Chest X-Ray in the Time of Coronavirus

I could have cried during the x-ray,
the risk was too high.

The technician's instructions were simple
Stand here, back a little– he guided me into place
a stumble, a side step
arms up, above your head – he raised them for me
back straight, chin up – he lifted my drooping head,
a crumple, a reach for help – he offered his hand
Take a breath, let it out – he went behind the wall
a heavy breath, a woozy swoon
Again, and hold – he pressed the button
another breath, a viral wave swooshing
rocking me side, to side
And let it out – he hurried to my side
spine curled inward, body heaving – he grabbed my arm
for the chair, winded collapse – he eased me down

His instinct to help, I know,
but the risk was too high.

Sleepless

The nights, oh, the nights
are interminable.

Every night on repeat,
the false victory upon waking,
crushed as I recheck my sleepy math
and count the short hours...three and a half,
sometimes fewer.

Back to sleep, the effort futile,
My hands tingle and numb,
the back of my head tightens
and pounds with pressure,
fingers of pain curling up,
around my temples,
the pillow too thick, too hot,
my shoulders ensnared
under twisted covers,
my feet boil and kick free
as I flail for panicked
comfort.

Relief is a tease that comes in halting
bursts, sixty, ninety minutes at a time,
that carry me to dreaded dawn.

Darkness and oxygen run low in tandem,
as the pressure in my head grows fierce,
pounding, churning. I squeeze my eyes shut
against the light, cradle my skull in my hands,
beg for belated sleep to disrupt the throb and nausea.

The nights, oh, the nights are interminable
But the mornings, they are worse.

Jigsaw

I pieced together my home
state today, in a map of New England
broken into a thousand pieces before me.

I found my unmarked town
on Buzzards Bay, located Hyannis,
Falmouth, New Bedford—long ago rivals
in high school track, popped Woods Hole
and schooners and islands into place,
laid out the Whaling Museum's mighty blue
recalled from so many school trips,
crooked the arm of the Cape
and made a fist of Provincetown.

From my quarantined living room
in New Jersey, I could have traveled
anywhere as I put together a world
by my back window, yet I chose
to go home.