

Shortage

there was not enough toilet paper
not enough disinfectant wipes
not enough gloves or masks

there was not enough foresight,
not enough honesty,
not enough trust

there were not enough ICU beds,
nor enough ventilators,
not enough medical personnel to handle the demands

there was not enough leadership,
not enough caution,
or cooperation, or humility

there was not enough testing,
not enough equipment,
not even enough space in the morgue

there was not a single good way
oh God, from a distance—
to say good-bye

Flamingoes

I slept in the next room,
waking through the night
to bring you water,

settle the white blanket
over your shoulder.
What could I do, really,

but witness your pain
or your brief escapes from it?
During my own quick

dives into darkness, dreams
came to me as flashes of light
illuminating a summer storm.

I dreamed a flock of flamingoes,
birds the color of cherry blossoms.
A fluster of them landing

across the bay on still waters,
everything quiet but for the rustle
of wings, the opalescent air crowded

with out-flung wings, long necks
shaped like question marks.
The cloud of them settled

into pearly waters and it was dawn.
Then the dream was gone,
Hartford's dull air

blushed toward me through dusty
blinds; my gritty eyes opened and shut,
opened—I heard you stirring,

rose to go to you, and I could swear
the soft sound of wings
surrounded us.

Home

Built from brick, from stucco, from logs
planed smooth or not. We fashion it from stone,
from blocks of ice, animal skins. From bamboo or sod,
from the bark of elm trees. It is high above the city.
It is nestled among trees. Dug into red hills.

Home is the skin we grew into and out of. A baby's cry,
a man's rattling snore. It's arguments and fevers,
rituals and ribbons. A song that Mother sang
late at night. Home is a tattered box, red
and heart-shaped, one that remembers a dozen sweets.

Photographs of ancestors, the bent pages of books,
milk stains and window glass streaked with rain.
Some nights dreams wander around home like ghosts
picking up grapefruits, squeezing them a little, putting them down.
And if you have left, *Come home*, say the ghosts, *come home*.

If You Called It a Miracle

If a thousand small birds, each made entirely of light,
landed on the lake in a twittering unstillness,
unable to settle, their wings of light fluttering,
their bodies of light looking, looking, for just the best place--
If the thousand birds made entirely of light
stayed on the surface of the lake, but not one of them
settled in place, too filled with excitement
to rest calmly, it would look just like this breezy afternoon
this ordinary day of sunlight
leaping in little flames across the water,
 although we'd be amazed
to see such a sight, a thousand small birds, each
made entirely of light, landing here, on this ordinary lake,
in an unstillness exactly like the wonder
that would leap up incredulous inside us,
small flames scorching our awareness.

What You're Made Of

All the small things you've cupped
in your hands, the mouse you let loose
in the beer garden, the ceramic dish
of bean dip carried to a party.

Even the dollar bill
filched from your mother's red purse,
guilt that crippled you.

The strange tickle of a wooly bear,
that caterpillar whose narrow bands
bristly brown, foretold a winter far more harsh
than you had planned.

And the nineteen names you scrawled
in a green spiral notebook—
boys you liked and the other ones

whose breath or braggadocio
turned you away. How many times
did your fingertips hover
above the ruled page

as inked names turned into rivers
of daydream, drama, doubt?
Today a dollar bill reminds you

even George Washington lied.
He and the boy with the dent
in his chin have died, but like
your mother's red purse

they inhabit you,
a little creased, dusted with bits of tobacco,
frayed, almost forgiving.

