

before the birds come home

Ella Engel-Snow

a woman huddles
over children a bear
in a shtetl bobeshi
how many coughs
from the edge she
finds a note
half empty, half
congested
with grief
lists her tsuris:

1. food for tomorrow
2. the men will return
3. everything, my grandchildren
4. a virus
5. we'll die before the dunlins come home
6. there's nowhere to bury us
7. something about god

hundreds of hundreds of miles of wing flaps
I strangle the fever
wilted over my own knees
almost the end
of a long island
my shadow folded into maps
close enough
to hear salt waves clap
swamp of birdsong
I list my worries:

1. hindath¹
2. the men will come
3. my grandmother
4. a virus
5. we'll die before the geese come home
6. I'm already dead
7. something about god

¹Hindath (hin-dath) adj

1. to be existentially hindered by linear thought