

before the birds come home

by Ella Engel-Snow

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

- food for tomorrow
- the men will return
- everything, my grandchildren
- a virus
- we'll die before the dunlins come home
- there's nowhere to bury us
- 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:

- hindath
- the men will come
- my grandmother
- a virus

- we'll die before the geese come home
- I'm already dead
- something about god

Hindath (hin-dath)

adj

1. to be existentially hindered by linear thought