

Marcia Chicca

### Wild Grey Birds

He imagines his lungs as iron cages  
housing a flock of wild grey birds  
whose rattling keeps him up at night,  
clutching tightly at his wrinkled sheet,  
or wakes him in the dim light of dawn  
with the stench of mucus on his tongue.

Manuela sends him cartons from Brazil.  
He imagines his lungs as blue orbs,  
cell-spangled and dotted with stars.  
The stars we can see are already dead,  
checked off, defunct, sleeping with the fishes  
because he never learned Portuguese.

The grey bird of death is a young girl,  
Brazilian, with lips soft as iron cages.  
She carves little notes in his throat  
(*"Manuelita sente falta de você"*)  
which he will never understand.

Pet cells divide in his lungs.  
Manuela is Portuguese for cancer.  
He imagines his lungs as iron cages,  
cells stroking the feathers of a wild grey bird.

## **How can they see him smile**

How can they see him smile  
but not hear my bones snapping in his teeth?

Maybe they hear it, but it's soft like a prayer  
and all they can do is fall silent  
and wait,

the way I listen for God  
in every man I meet.