

SAM SAX

Miasma

of course when the plague came
those who could
left the city

the wealthy
burdened their horses
with precious stones
& dead flowers.
—left their houses
bolted & prayed for

while gone
they burdened their children
with stories of a homeland
before it'd fallen
into the teeth of rats

with the doctors gone
anyone who wanted
could treat the sick
how they wanted

wear a bird mask
dark cloak & a cane
to prod the abrasions
deviling across
the sufferings' backs

it's an old story, one world
ends & a man gets rich
selling the copper wire
in the walls

another flips a quarter
& buys the flooded
neighborhood

another patents a medicine
old as the earth

it was once believed illness
was a punishment
from god

now we have machines
that show the small crow-
shaped tumors growing
in my grandmother's brain

now my uncle can have
an eradiated vein planted
just above his heart

a doctor pads his white
coat with bones until it flares
into wings

when the children
returned to their city

they found their houses
filled with birds, birds,
birds