

Flight

PAINTINGS BY

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Last fall I went out for a run and, after a couple hundred yards, realized that something was very wrong; I thought I was about to faint. I sat down for half an hour right there. When I got up and went to the doctor, he said I'd had a heart attack somewhere along the way. One of my arteries was almost completely blocked. One stent later I felt renewed, but I also had a sobering sense of the delicacy of life. The idea of disappearing from the earth unsettled me.

Meanwhile, many birds once common in our woods had become rare — the eastern towhee, the flicker, the brown thrasher, the sparrow hawk. I'd hardly seen any of them for years. Across the United States, bird populations have been declining because of deforestation, lack of habitat and food, narrowing migration corridors. Birds die from our pesticides; they ingest lead shot, bottle caps, and plastics we throw out of our car windows and over boat rails.

The themes of personal and bird vulnerability merged in those days, when helplessness and despair returned constantly for my consideration. I thought I might not have a lot of time left, and felt the same way for birds. My paint put the two stories together.

— M. B.







