

ALBERTO RÍOS

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## Citizens of a Great Country

It happens so quickly: pneumonia denationalizes us.  
Coughing and sickness and rashes recategorize us.

We become, in the moment, the ill, not the Ecuadorians,  
The wounded, not the Dutch. We are the afflicted,

The balded, the debrided, the tested, the corridor-wheeled  
Where once we were Swedish and Belizian and Scots.

A cough comes from the jungle of the lungs without passport,  
Without permissions. An ache leaps over the fence of the ribs

Landing hard as it falls back and stays for the moment  
Being a heart. But it rallies, tries again to escape, and again falls hard.

We try to calm it—weary heart—to soothe its worry.  
We give it a drink of water, but we call it something else.

That heart was born in a body, not a country. The lungs  
Take in the air of the earth, wherever it has come from, wherever

It is going, air the quiet cousin of wind and breeze and sigh.  
Sickness shows us the border that is skin, that is touch.

The illnesses, the attacks, the spreadings, the smaller rashes,  
The bones broken, the sadnesses felt and worn as if shoes—

We are made of them, finally, as we try to sleep, to reach  
The place that night with all its stars has shown us,

All its stars as all of us, and all our cities, and all our countries,  
All our histories and all our families, every one.

The country of us is large. We ourselves are its border  
Wherever we are, whoever we are, safe as we try and want to be.