

Flamingos et al

by [Peter Cooley](#) in the [October 2023](#) issue

*When I say “I,” it is a supposed person.*

—Emily Dickinson

Emily, I am writing this poem to be another—  
my aged neighbor, kneeling at her flower bed  
her prayer the lantana she’s gold-transplanting.  
Or the person of the flamingos, New Orleans zoo,  
I took in yesterday, the pink sunset  
their preening feathers pinked, our pinkness  
the whole flock of us, on spindle legs,  
our bodies tower rooms, our necks descending,  
condescending to drink the black pools at our feet.  
Why be who I am when the world  
claims me, the willow by the river  
taking my name as I pass, the shaking  
a willows’ kind of fluted benediction—  
I suppose at my last breath I’ll come back  
to stand in my soul, naked, dispossessed—