



Reaching V

# Reaching V



*Kate Marshall Flaherty*



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**Goose, Plummeting**





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## Apocalypse of Bees

Some summers there were no frogs,  
other summers, no snakes.

One year there were no bees,  
and Dad had the bright idea  
of us kids pinching the pistils  
from zucchini flowers  
and squeezing them into their stamens.

Even the strawberries  
came out weird and misshapen.  
The pumpkins looked like lopsided tumours.  
The cucumbers were mere nubbins,  
too small even for pickling.  
And no butter squash at all.

At the time, I resented doing bees' work.  
I didn't want the prick-hot sun stinging my neck  
the pollen-like snuff ragging my nose, nor  
deer flies biting tiny chunks from my scalp.  
I was not in the mood for flitting  
from flower to flower in our parched garden.

Once again the bees are disappearing.

Today I read in the pallid paper  
they are two-thirds gone  
in Niagara Region vineyards.  
Now there will be less table wine  
with fewer bees to pollinate the grape blossoms.  
Will we get shrivelled vegetables and puckered produce  
with spindled swarms of bees to fertilize them?



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## National Geographic Bookcase

In this dank wood cabinet I smell basement dust.  
In the mildewed near-blackness I hear  
the gentle squeak of door hinges  
as I press my back to the bookshelf wall,

the yellow gloss  
of a hundred National Geographic spines  
luminous in the dark oak library.

Here I can close the doors to sighs,  
sibling-noises and disconnected upstairs sounds.

Here I can think in the dim and silent sanctuary  
and pore over the images:

An anaconda, fat as my waist, half submerged in water —  
Aztec coins in a clay pot on sand — a nubile dancer

with a collar of bracelets propping up her long neck —  
kerchiefed Roma children skipping in a circle on  
cobblestone —

an eagle's wingspan  
over a bald mountain.

These are my friends, who won't talk back,  
who won't exclude me from secrets,  
won't tattle-tale  
or shush up when I arrive.

My fascinating photogenic comrades  
always wait where I left them  
sitting on mats in a forest clearing,  
leaning from stone hut windows,  
smiling at me  
with faces tipped towards the sun.

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## Dark Waters

My husband and the boys  
are jumping off Hot Rocks in cannon ball tucks.  
They shout savage sounds as they coil  
and spring, hands clasping their knees.

Mom and I watch from our perch  
on the warm quartz slope of the Bay  
as they arc and splash into wakes from motor boats,  
their wide eyes and open mouths making us laugh  
as droplets reach us from each plunge.

It has been a cool sunless summer so far.  
My partner's pike-belly body  
seems pale in the root beer water.  
He lolls languorously, like a mollusk unshelled,  
smiling as he tilts his wet face to the rare-appearing sun.

What a contrast to the downtown dark suits,  
the pinched-faces of Bay Street.  
I look out over the sunny Sound,  
notice one translucent crawfish caught in a crack of rock.

## Goose, Plummeting

Look

and you might see the farmer,  
his pails set down, gazing up  
at the arrowhead flight-pattern of geese —  
the precision-point leader heading  
two lines in his wake.

The farmer rubs his muscles,  
tight from the pull of pails, and marvels  
at the grace of wings, communal flight.  
His shoulders drop as he watches the perfect point  
glide through the sky.  
He thinks the word *wedge*.

A random shot  
rips the silence,  
then he witnesses the spiralling down —

one goose plummeting from its place  
like ripped tar paper,  
a ragged Valkyrie  
descending  
before the bird smacks the stubbled field.

A second goose pulls  
from formation, spears  
down to the mark.

Now the taste of storm is in the air.

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It leads the farmer to the field  
with a crate, water, his wife's wool blanket  
for the grounded goose.

Her mate tenderly strokes  
her splayed wing  
with his beak.

The farmer cradles the wounded goose  
in a sling of blanket  
and carries her to the barn.  
He looks back to nod at her partner,  
who follows at a distance, blinking his bead eyes.

In a depression of hay,  
her life-mate leans his curved neck onto her breast.

It will be only a day  
until the she-geese expires.

After a night of nuzzling her dead body,  
the goose flies away at dawn  
to catch the draft of another V.

But years later the farmer still tells his wife:

“Every November  
I swear that goose  
pecks for a moment  
at my barn window.”

## Reaching V

On this train, snow  
wings past the window,  
near strangers murmur,  
and the Canada geese fly out of formation —  
gone from my sight  
by the time they reach V.

Which is home for them?

North or South?

Recalling this rest in their flight skein,  
I think of you, Bev.  
How illness plucks us  
out of V-point,  
scatters the pattern,  
calls us to fall back  
and rest on the draft, the current  
of wings, to letting  
each other take the lead  
that cuts the harsh air.

Dis-ease sends us to places of glass.  
The enclosed hospital sunroom  
where clear winds pierce dull clouds,  
doubt curls the window with frost.  
We look through the pane at the world  
you would not re-enter as Bev.  
You, the earth angel with swift feet.

You dream of riding the wind  
and cry into my shoulder  
on visits when words cannot lift your spirits.



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Like the geese, we head home —  
    faith the wedge that points the way —  
leaning on lift,  
trusting in our wingspan,  
    listening in the silence of air  
for the honk and the sweep  
    of our feathers  
    reaching V.



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## About The Author

Kate Marshall Flaherty is published in journals such as *Descant*, *CV2*, *Freefall*, and *Windsor Review*. She was short-listed for Nimrod's Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize, the Malahat Review Long Poem and *Descant's* Best Canadian Poem. She lives in Toronto with her husband and three spirited children, where she guides yoga/retreats/writing workshops. Poetry is her lifeline.

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## Credits

“Goose, Plummeting”, “Triptych for One Loon” and “Practicing Like Water” are to be made into film at Poetry Storehouse, as part of *Verse in Motion*.

“Drumming, For Nelson Mandela” was first published in *Modern Morsels*, McGraw-Hill 2011.

“How to Slice a Mango” and “Skin” first appeared in *Crave It: Food Anthology* by Red Claw Press, 2011.

“On Locky, Leaning Closer” first appeared in *Malahat Review*, 2011 and was short-listed for the *Malahat Review* Poetry Contest, 2011.

“Apocalypse of Bees” first appeared in *Descant*, as Honourable Mention in the Winston Collins Poetry prize, 2011.

“Skrimhold of Reve and other poems” was shortlisted in *Malahat Review’s* Long Poem Prize, 2011.

“Goose, Plummeting” won Honourable Mention in the Merton Poetry of the Sacred Contest, 2011.

“Photograph” first appeared in *Descant: Prison Issue*, 2011.

“Lining up Ducks” won Honourable Mention in the Robert Frost Poetry Contest, 2010.

“White Sheets”, “Next of Kin” and “Practicing Like Water” first appeared in *Saranac Review*, 2010.

“Far Away” was also shortlisted in the *Descant* Winston Collins Poetry Prize, 2010 and then appeared in *Dream Catcher: Canadian Poetry Issue*, 2009.

“What is Bagged in the Shed” was entitled “As A Child” and won Honourable Mention for CV2’s Two-Day Poem Contest, 2008.

“When the Kids are Fed” won first prize in *THIS Magazine’s* Great Canadian Literary Hunt, 2008.