Reaching V
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Reaching V

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I
Goose, Plummeting
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?
My brain hums with scary thoughts
of shrunken fruit, shifting weather patterns,
a buzz of freakish storms —
May snow, bike rides at Christmas,
acid rain carving weird grooves into the Earth.

Eerie how this pattern homes in —
lonely honey makers in their empty hives,
busy workers, blue-dotted queens,
and pollinators
vanishing —

bumbling into a new climate,
droning into silence.

---

Skin

In St Lucia the sun warms mango flesh,
its lush pungent fruit
mingling with hyacinth and seasalt.

My daughter’s first word in Creole: tété.
She demands “Tay-tay!”
as she reaches for my breast
tumbling out of a sweaty sundress
like a melon spilling
from a market bag.

And all the women on the transport,
their natty braids in grids on their scalps,
pat my baby’s soft blonde-tipped head
as if checking mangoes for ripeness.

Belly-laughing
with roosters trilling on their laps
at a white child speaking Patois.

Laughing deeper sweet juices, saying,
grose tété, bebe, mwe matche wool!*
while they hold their own
jostling breasts and breadfruit from town.

And my own provision
in a raffia bag on the rumble seat —
a tin of soft candle to spread on her chest
with camphor for a cold,
one woman telling me:
feed the child ripe mango,
like healin’ sunshine ...
Palm trees blur past the steamy windows.

*Just peel back the skin for mashin’ the sunshine.*

---

**How to Slice a Mango**

_for cousin Ann_

How to slice a mango
is something I learned
from my father’s first cousin, the one
with piano-player’s hands
and a Japanese surname with four syllables,
Yasuhara, like _origami_.

She folds notes into books she mails to me
and writes letters about sitting silent
and holding the light
at Quaker House meetings,
about her travels in Asia, about concerts
and the refugee boys she teaches.

When I ate her mango salad
with lime and a drizzle of sesame oil
at the Grand Haven beach house last summer,
the mango’s peach-musk
fed a crowd of sun-parched cousins.

I asked her how she cut
the mango into tiny matchsticks.
But since the mangos were already cut
she had to show me how to do it
with words —
how to slice off both soft cheeks
and score them with a sharp knife
grazing the fibrous heart —
how to fold them gently inside out,
push up and pluck the juicy green-orange flesh.

_Big boobs, baby, lucky you!_
Waiting Room

I notice the pauses in my breaths
while I wait here and sense them
resting in this space
alighting like moths to a warm bulb.

They intuit the resting places
in waiting rooms
in decrepit corridors
in hospitals where someone has something
important to say.

They unfurl in the silent hallways
and hover above bed rests
where they interpret dreams.

Even when the body has begun to cease
spirits stay and wait.
II

Next of Kin
I almost didn’t write this poem

scrabbling as I was for a piece of paper
or any scrap to write on before the name slipped
into folds of brain,
like a sliver of soap in the bath.

I almost didn’t write this poem
but a yellow corner
of parking ticket was enough to jot the name:
Mariana (the tiny islands off India
that are shrinking as the oceans slowly rise.)

A sari’d woman said they will hold a Scuba Summit there —
men and women in wet suits under water
so members would know the feel
of silently submerging,
groping for breath,
vanishing.

(I get the bends just thinking about it.)

Watermarks on a map
erasing the name of a country.

I almost didn’t write this poem
because the ticket was too small
for all the pencilled words
that spiralled into the margins.
I wrote smaller and smaller
’til I almost gave up.
I printed my name and address on the petition
wondering what words can do
to save the lowest land mass on earth.

But then a thought bubbled up:
I almost didn’t write this poem,
whose last word is

Mariana.

---

**Next of Kin**

Moghur the Neanderthal medicine man
throws powder into the fire:
in the blue-bursts of flame
he sees far into a tunnel of smoke.

Chimpanzees share stick ladders
for ants to climb onto their tongues:
one chimp waves a stick in the air,
conducting a jungle symphony.

Cocoa the gorilla coddles
a kitten to her breast:
she puckers her lips softly
as if mouthing words.

And somewhere rests
a soft dark ape palm
hacked off and thrown
into a boneyard of ashtrays and elephant tusks.

Washo has been taught sign language.
He has learned to press his thumb
into his upper lip to make the *M* sound —
mama, me, mine.
The once-fired molten lava
now a stone heart.

You might feel the urge to run,
get out of the pose —
breathe and stay  breathe and stay
this instinct to flee the colossal

Huge heavy moisture-sucking mountain,
you stand firm and imposing.
I drop my jaw at your strict scowl.

Release the cleave of your tongue
from the roof of your mouth —
soften the clench of fear.

Root the feet from fleeing the giant

Mount Rundle,
you stand in storms,
weather the centuries
of abusing sky, crack
but not split in the harsh rays.
You remain firm,
your stable base unmoving.

Breathe in mountain air —
drink in the posture of mountain
remain erect  still
the gale of restlessness
will pass, a cloud

Whale Medicine Card

Her blow hole
a fountain of seafroth:
water and breath.

Birthing calves in icy brine,
mother’s milk in salt sea foam —
a cold blast of tears.
And her song
and their song
and our songs ...

echoes lapping.
The liquid sonar of history in waves.

Jonah in her belly.
Noah’s ark, her rib’s replica.
Mother Earth’s librarian.
Mu is calling us land-dwellers
back to ancient ways.
Mammalia
who slipped into liquid
and still had breath.

She is calling to me —
signalling to me in dreams
the blue shoals of ancient waters.

Doubts jettison through the blow-hole —
infinitesimal droplets into space.

*Tadasana (ta-DA-sa-na): In hatha yoga, this asana or posture
is a standing pose, tall and grounded like a mountain, with feet
rooted in the earth and head high in the air.
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.
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.
“How to Slice a Mango” and “Skin” first appeared in Crave It: Food Anthology by Red Claw Press, 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.
“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.