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Gooseworld

Marella Hoffman
Royal Anthropological Institute, UK

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Gooseworld

Suddenly an eye catches them in the sky:
straight above us, bony unidentifiable birds

throwing themselves on the wind but barely moving,
going too slow, ready to fall on us, darkening out the

sun. Larger than you could hold in your arms,
thirty-one of them, too heavy-looking for air,

wings fringed black against the upward light.
Tipping half an inch to the right,

lifting a wing tight,
navigating with taut neck and back-tensed feet.

They climb the thermals studiously -
intensity in bird-form.

They pick their route through the obstructing air
testing their weight the way you would

cross thin ice.

Ignoring us, their long straining heads see nothing

but the somewhere they are pointed at,
some not-yet-there place seared into whatever

shared mind has driven them wingflap after wingflap
a thousand miles up the curve of the globe

gasping the stink of some intoxicating season
worth migrating for, risking all for, pant after pant.

We are a drop in their ocean, not worth glancing down at
compared to the destination they hunger for.

Their dark unjabbering drove goes over silent
except for the whizz of a breeze

funnelled through feathers to stay afloat.
They are a cathedral of flying uncertainty

and an ungainly directionless benediction
drifts down off them like unknown rain.

There is nothing you can do with it, nothing to say.
We stare open-mouthed up into a

genuine wonder and when they are gone,
though tongue-tied, we stand blessed.

MARELLA HOFFMAN is a Fellow of London's *Royal Anthropological Institute* (UK). She has written several books on socio-political issues. She uses ethnographic oral history to build bridges between communities, government agencies and sustainable public policies. Her projects explore the politics of place, migrations and the way narratives shape ecological, political and economic decisions. Her most recent book, *Hidden gold - Using contemporary oral history to improve public policy*, will be published by Routledge in 2017. She has published multilingual poetry and her visual art has been exhibited in France and England, as well as being used to illustrate books. For information on her work, visit www.marellahoffman.com