

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

Karla Linn Merrifield  
**The Snowbird Gene**

Today, driven by instinct,  
Maine lobsters move offshore  
as their genetic code taps  
out the primal message:  
*It's winter, time to go deep.*

While moles and mice  
are yet afoot, Oregon's marmots  
have already replied, *Aye, sir,*  
to their commanding genome officer:  
*We obey, we burrow.*

The chromosome prophets of iconic  
Alaskan bears have boldly foretold  
*Thou shalt hibernate in caves*  
*in Denali shadows, and lo,*  
even *Ursus horribilis* doth bow.

And, this morning, I too submit  
to the gods that go by the names  
Deoxyribo, Nucleic and Acid.  
Like the Canada geese above New York,  
I, human, I, animal, flee south.

*for Elizabeth Miller*

**Watershed Moment**

Crossing wetlands  
on parkway bridges,  
I travel distances  
in time in June  
to the Ice Age,  
its retreating glaciers  
that scared the landscape  
creating Long Pond,  
shaping Braddock Bay,  
the lakes of Durand Eastman Park.  
Did those swans first get their feet  
wet in the Pleistocene?  
Did geese pause in migration  
parsing summers to come  
as cold set free this inland sea  
named Ontario? As if through  
a geologic trick, I arrive  
on Solstice Eve at the warm  
watershed of grief  
with tears for my brother unfrozen,  
then dried by dragonfly wings.

# Indian Summer

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minutes,  
the intimacies of insect and wild flower,  
because this morning is,  
indeed,  
so soft.

(Credit: First published as the October poem in the 2007 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Bookmark Series by Writers & Books, Rochester, NY, and later reprinted in *The Etowah River Psalms* by Karla Linn Merrifield, FootHills Publishing, 2009)

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### The Vagabond Naturalist's Confession

#### I.

I was traipsing  
Ontario's Lake Erie shores  
and northernmost woodlands  
of Carolinian species.  
Through forest, on beach, I marched,  
stalking the monarch butterfly migration,  
seeking firsthand in the field  
the marvel of evolution  
in dragonfly wings,  
bagging the bugs in slo-mo video.  
I captured tiny trophies  
for the record book  
that is my wildlife life list,  
and a few exotic lines of poetry.

#### II.

But while I was away,  
I missed it.  
My backyard hummers  
had departed, likely in a buzzy huff—  
(*Think of it— jilted for insects!*)  
There'd be no kicking back,  
no *Thank you, m'am*.  
Against autumnal odds,  
I left their feeder filled.  
Three days untouched.  
I give in. I'm sure of it now.  
I've missed them. I wasn't home  
to wish my birds bon voyage.

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### Mercy Flight

Migrants crack open  
not sleep but my waking pleas  
for relief, my flooded        longing.  
Their echelons inundate  
this morning's golden firmament  
of fire, of light.

Yes, flocks of those heavenly dragons  
speak loudly, listen calmly  
as they travel south from the tundra  
to winter's ease,  
to others' easing.

They shall fill the bayou skies,  
replace all ranks of rain,  
flying on fair nameless winds.

What people remain will lift up  
their eyes to the guiltless blue,  
the most innocent clouds:  
Aid has arrived  
on the wings of geese;  
a joyful noise  
is heard throughout  
the land when  
compassion out of Canada  
comes trumpeting.

They will take refuge  
on a slow eddy with fellow refugees;  
both shall feed again on abundant rice.

(Credit: First published in the anthology *Beyond Katrina*, Arts & Healthcare Press, Arts Council of Central Louisiana, 2005, and later reprinted in *Dawn of Migration and Other Audubon Dreams* by Karla Linn Merrifield, RochesterInk Publications in cooperation with the Genesee Valley Audubon Society, 2007)

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### Dawn of Migration

golden groundfog grown molten  
in strong slant of sunlight  
millions of particles   moisture  
air liquid   trees dampened

emerging as from under water  
north of the road   some fields already  
tumbled into clods   thick brown  
others awaiting harvest   corn  
yet marching toward  
the brow of northern horizons  
foreshortened by tassels  
embraced in mist

it's Beaufort scale 0   calm  
winds less than 1 mile per hour  
smoke rises vertically  
as does groundfog   as does mist  
in September calm   a moment's reprieve  
in the farmed land

on such a morning   geese arrive  
clamorous to browse the stubble  
staying only long enough   to glean  
a second parcel   staying until  
bare trees wave them away

(Credit: First published in *Dawn of Migration and Other Aububon Dreams* by Karla Linn Merrifield, RochesterInk Publications in cooperation with the Genesee Valley Audubon Society, 2007)