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Poem - 'Finger-Wing'

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Yvonne Reddick

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FINGER-WING

I

Chevron cirrus.

I squint north –
spun cloudwrack keeled
like a goosewinging boat.

I blow on my fists,
feel the scrunched membranes
that mesh my fingers
and remember how *pterodactyl*
means *finger-wing*.
Where are the flocks?

II

The sludgy hulk of a decomposing pigeon flopped from the roof. Skin
tented grey over breastbone.

My Mémé was bird-bone hollow, all ribstrakes and wing-scaffold, skin
slouched over a V of sternum. Shallow breath-râles, knuckly birdleg fingers.
Her English evaporated as blood-nests nursed her tumor. The remains: ‘J’ ai
ces ... hallucinations’ of water, pools, my father webbing through air, his
hands in outspread sheaves of primaries.

Plume-cinder ash when we burned Mémé. The south-easterly hush-hushed it
north.

(I interred the pigeon’s slimy reek in a skip – *le fruit de vos entrailles est
béni.*)

III

A speck sharpens into focus
as a wishbone V.
Coasting the leader’s slipstream,

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they pant each second,
their heartbeats must blur –
how do they snatch breath to call?
The names of their nest-sites
freeze air as I speak them:
Spitsbergen. Hvannalindir.

Touchdown of lipgloss feet
on saurian legs, skidding aquaplane,
a spurt of green-water wake.
Parched beaks dapping
in algal marshland.
Runnels of mere pour
off watermarked necks.

I wondered if anyone returned
from those brumal altitudes –
here are pink-footed geese
crying *hark hark*.

Finger-Wing by Yvonne Reddick won Third Prize in the Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition (November 2014)

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