

FLYAWAY

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A community unfolded, of activists, welfarists and everyday people—with one simple request: Please do not slaughter the geese. But somewhere within the Missouri Department of Conservation, black words glutted pages. The Canada Geese Problem ascended in a wave of scientific facts, figures and studies, filed under “N” for Nuisance.



A Eulogy For Canada Geese

Meanwhile, a Mother and her Babies swam single-file with Dad at the end to shield the line. Quiet upon the water at dawn. A sublime silhouette. They'd traveled miles unknown, across blue abandon, to settle in this place. A sketch in the sky, with distinct blank spaces for those who'd perished along the way. Their blueprint for survival: Fly as one. Live as one. Bond for life.

They'd descended upon rigorously cultivated squares of green. Inhabiting pastoral golf courses, fastidious lawns, invented lakes—where suburban warriors defended their turf. “We didn't purchase this piece of bliss to battle the poop and the noise. You don't understand,” they complained to news cameras, “We've had enough. These birds have to go.”

The solution? Roundup the geese. Separate families. Drop earthbound goslings into a wildlife area to fend against hunters and predators. Kill the adults. But don't do it here! Ship them 700 miles away, so we don't have to watch. Send their remains to the needy, so we don't have to mourn. Let our noble task go unnoticed, so we can return to our gardens and sow living seeds over the soil where we murdered others.

But along came the protesters—young, old, babies and children. They invaded neighborhoods with their signs and pleas: Don't orphan these babies. Don't slaughter the geese. Modify their habitat. Addle their eggs. Control them with border collies. Hire a pooper-scooper. The media reported: Killing creates a void. More will migrate in. Is the answer to categorically kill upon demand?

In the end, they went uncelebrated in an ambush at daybreak. At 4:00 am, on Thursday, June 21, field biologists silently hiked over wet grass. Flyaway, I prayed. Just flyaway. But they could not. Flightless and molting, their feathers fell in a bed of gentle petals as they slept unaware.

The humans assembled in a ring, to deliberately force trapped birds into their net. Together, the geese lurched unavoidably in a tangle of wings, beaks, honks and screeches. Terrified, but still as one. What next? Loaded on to trucks, some containers held babies. Others imprisoned adults bound for the slaughterhouse.

Someone must have heard their cries, desperate and loud, as they were wrenched apart. Someone must have peered through a kitchen curtain to witness their struggle.



By first light, not a single goose remained. Residents rose to eat harried breakfasts and send kids to school. Someone later walked by the water, which now barely rippled without its geese. In one spot, thousands of feathers littered the grass in a soundless memorial.

Not one bird left. Only feathers.

Flyaway, I'd prayed. But in the end they could not.