

ELIZABETH WILLIS

*Golden Book of Birds*

The pleasure of order  
dissolves

into the pleasure  
of the mess

If you see something

it's not a gift  
it's a request

To know  
who is with you

in the current

The least sand-  
piper

the greater  
yellowlegs

To be continuous  
is inhuman

It is inhuman  
to be a specimen

to locate  
your picture

in someone else's  
book

The common  
snipe

the chimney  
swift: black-

and white-throated  
The ovenbird

says *teacher*  
*teacher*

The easiest song  
is not "America"

The pine grosbeak  
is really pink

really a finch

I fix upon  
the wood duck

as if it were a button  
and I an open velvet mouth

One  
and more than one

Aggregate is  
a kind of stone

that describes itself  
Slate-colored junco

A mind can cut through  
almost anything

A god with whom  
you'll never win

Bobolink, meadowlark

You have to  
hide your love away

like the hulk  
or a flying nun

A capital letter  
on the highest thing

An open secret  
is neither one

This is what you see

flying over California  
in a habit

Protestors surrounding  
the police

who are trying  
to surround them

This is how  
the crow flies

This is where I kick  
what I need out of reach

while I scroll  
for a song

The flourishing  
bowerbird

builds its  
enlightenment

A screech owl has  
no nest in particular

of paper  
or of brush

Struck by lightning

a man's heart  
becomes a new thing

a proper location  
for a needle and thread

Even a girl can make  
a house or a coffin

out of cardboard  
and string

a nail, a piece of cork

Who can think  
of immortality

The whip-poor-will  
zippering

its evening dress

The passage  
not the outcome

Magpie, kingfisher

As seen from outer space  
the greatest poem

looks like nothing  
at all

The part of living  
that is forgiveness

is not continuous

I don't want  
to hate the cowbird

Even Charlton Heston  
saying Sweet Jesus

while he contemplates  
the stars

among the falconers  
of the Magreb

where we may or may not be  
on location at this time

flying in the shadow  
that is "only the beginning"

Here I am passing  
a semi full of chickens

This is me buying  
an expensive machine

then trying to teach it

with my voice  
how to be human

on our way  
to the doctor

by the king of glory  
church

I miss you  
as if I'm talking

to the moon's sweet  
bitterness

to the tree on fire

beneath the central  
flyway

I know it's  
out there

sleepless

as a pigeon  
or a dove