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*The most unfortunate sort of misfortune
is once to have been happy. —Boethius*

It was like being a bird in high feather.
One day, for no reason I can recollect,
we began to gather twigs and mud,
learned to fetch and tuck,
then sat on a cup of our weavings
and laid eggs one at a time,
month after month, year upon year.
Three decades passed like thirty
pensive taps on the inside of a shell.

The children hatched singing,
impossibly beautiful, so well attended,
so rare and rarely appreciated.
Though large birds circled, rasped,
fainted, we held our space and sang.

But the brain of a bird is small,
there is room for only one emotion.
For a long time I was blithe, then one day
storms slashed down to break the nests
and split us into nattering factions.
I became a sad, low bird, my breath short,
tail drooped, plumage blasted and dull.
The other birds tried to forget me.

That year just before first snow fell,
I woke to find the flock had risen into
evening zephyrs and flown away,
leaving me with memories of perfidy,
and the whole, long winter to be endured.

Now I have grown hoary
like an old, bleached aviary—
dizzy as if I might warp
and fall apart at any moment.
The only useful thing I learned
through those milder, sunlit years
was that earth is indifferent.
Despite its pleasing illusions
of birth and work and flight, it never
regarded me as more important
than haunted deer in the flurries,
than furry scats of coyotes,
stripped trees, or mice that stitch
the drifts with nervous tracks.