

2015

Golden Book of Birds

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Recommended Citation

Willis, Elizabeth. "Golden Book of Birds." *The Iowa Review* 45.3 (2015): 81-86. Web.
Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview/vol45/iss3/13>

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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